

MEDITATIONS & READINGS

ST. ALPHONSUS

VOLUME I – PART I

ADVENT CHRISTMAS EPIPHANY

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MEDITATIONS & READINGS
FOR EVERY DAY OF THE YEAR

VOLUME I.—PART I.
ADVENT CHRISTMAS EPIPHANY

Edited by Rev. J. B. Coyle, C.S.S.R.

VISITS TO THE MOST BLESSED SACRAMENT and TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY, with Prayers for Mass, Preparation for Communion, Thanksgiving, etc. By ST. ALPHONSUS. From 2/6 to 5/-.

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Meditations and Readings

FOR
EVERY DAY OF THE YEAR

Selected from the Spiritual Writings of
SAINT ALPHONSUS

VOLUME I.—PART I.

Edited by
JOHN BAPT. COYLE, C.S.S.R.

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SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS

J.M.J.A.T.

SANT' ALFONSO — VIA MERULANA.
ROMA,

23rd October, 1923.

MY DEAR FATHER COYLE,

I am very glad to hear that you have the first part of your "Meditations and Readings for every Day of the Year from the Writings of St. Alphonsus" ready for publication, and I wish this and the succeeding Volumes every success. It is difficult to exaggerate the value of these "Meditations and Readings" as is seen from the following statements of two Popes:

His Holiness Pope Pius IX., in speaking of the writings of St. Alphonsus, wrote: "The works of this most holy and learned man, written with extraordinary tender piety and devotion, breathes in every page a great love for Jesus Christ and great confidence in His mercy and merits. They also inspire their readers with the most ardent devotion to the Virgin Mother of God and to the Saints, and they inflame the hearts of men with the desire of receiving the Sacraments, as well as furnish a most abundant supply of excellent admonitions, counsels and directions to those who labour for the salvation of souls."

Pope Benedict XV. also wrote recently, on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of the Doctorate of St. Alphonsus, that the excellence and utility of his teaching are becoming every day more apparent, and that his writings are helpful, not only to Theologians and Professors of the Sacred Sciences, but also to the faithful of every condition of life, to whom he points out the way to solid virtue, and smoothes for them the way to the highest Christian perfection. His Holiness adds that the Saint's one great ambition in all his writings was to make known to all men the infinite amiability of Jesus Christ.

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ings to all. To all—to priests and to their flocks; to Catholics in the world as to those who have forsaken it to consecrate themselves to God in Religion; to fathers and mothers of families, that the reading of these holy pages in the domestic circle may make “the infinite amiability of Jesus Christ” better known, and so help “to restore all things in Christ” in our Christian homes. Lastly and especially, to the young I offer this volume in which St. Alphonsus speaks so beautifully of the tender love of the Heart of the Child Jesus for souls, of the boundless generosity of our Saviour, of the pressing claims of His love upon us, so that all may be inspired to consecrate the love of their young hearts to Jesus Christ. “Oh, how God longs to see hearts wholly His,” writes St. Alphonsus in these Meditations, “and how dearly He loves them! Who knows but the Infant Redeemer may now succeed in wounding and making a prize of some hearts which He has been long pursuing and hitherto has been unable to wound and capture! Devout souls, if Jesus gains possession of us, we shall gain possession of Jesus. The advantage is all on our side.

“O happy thou, most holy Virgin Mary, thou wert wholly and always God’s own—all fair, all pure, and without spot! O my hope, obtain for me the strength to be grateful and faithful to God till death. Amen.”

May this prayer be heard in favour of all who use this book, and may these Meditations and Readings and devout affections of St. Alphonsus—“prayers fragrant with seraphic love,” as Pope Benedict XV. styled them—reach the hearts of all, wound them and take them captive for Our Lord Jesus Christ.

J. B. C., C.S.S.R.

ST. JOSEPH’S, DUNDALK.

Feast of St. Alphonsus, August 2nd, 1923.

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MEDITATIONS AND READINGS

First Sunday of Advent

Morning Meditation.

THE DAY OF THE LAST JUDGMENT.

That day is a day of wrath . . . a day of calamity and misery.—Soph. i. 15.

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

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

I.

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

(D515)

that *Sequence for the Dead*, sung, *Dies iræ, dies illa*, was so struck with the anticipation of Judgment that he left the world and embraced the Religious life.

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

II.

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

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

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

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

Spiritual Reading.*

THE NATIONS IN THE VALLEY OF JOSAPHAT.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But, behold! the heavens are opened—the Angels come to assist at the General Judgment, carrying, as St. Thomas says, the Standard of the Cross and the other instruments of the Passion of the Redeemer. The same may be inferred from the Twenty-fourth Chapter of St. Matthew: *And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn*.—(xxiv., 30). Sinners shall weep at the sight of the Cross; for, as St. Chrysostom says, the nails will complain of them—the Wounds and the Cross of Jesus Christ will speak against them.

Most holy Mary, the Queen of Saints and Angels, shall come to assist at the Last Judgment; and lastly, the

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

Evening Meditation.

THE GOODNESS OF GOD IN THE WORK OF THE REDEMPTION.

I.

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

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

All were spiritually blind, living in the midst of darkness and the shadow of death.

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

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

II.

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

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

Monday—First Week of Advent

Morning Meditation.

GOD DISHONoured BY SIN.

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

I.

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

Of this the Almighty complains by the Prophet Ezechiel, when He says: *They violated me among my*

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

II.

Lord, who is like to thee?—(Ps. xxxiv., 10). And what good things, O God, can be comparable to Thee, O infinite Goodness? And how could I have turned my back upon Thee, to give myself to those vile things which sin held out to me? *Thou hast forsaken me, saith the Lord, thou hast gone backward.*—(Jer. xv., 5). God complains and says: Ungrateful soul, thou hast forsaken Me! I would never have forsaken thee hadst not thou first turned thy back upon Me! *Thou hast gone backward.* O God, with what consternation will these words fill the soul of the sinner when he shall stand to be judged before the divine tribunal! O Jesus, Thy precious Blood is my hope. Thou hast promised to hear him who prays to Thee. I ask Thee not for the goods of this world; I ask Thee for the pardon of the sins I have committed against Thee, and for which I am sorry above every other evil. I ask Thee for perseverance in Thy grace until the end of my life. I ask Thee for the gift of Thy holy love; my soul is enamoured of Thy goodness: hear me, O Lord. Only grant that I may love Thee both here and hereafter, and

as to all things else, do with me as Thou pleasest. My Lord and my only Good, suffer me not to be any more separated from Thee! Mary, Mother of God, do thou also listen to me, and obtain for me that I may ever belong to God, and that God may be my inheritance for ever.

Spiritual Readings.

THE JUDGMENT AND THE SENTENCE.

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

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

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

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

Then sinners will not be able to hide themselves; but, with insufferable pain, they will be compelled to appear in judgment. “To lie hid,” says St. Anselm, “will be impossible—to appear will be intolerable.” The devils will perform their office as accusers, and, as St. Augustine says, will say to the Judge: *Most just God, declare him to be ours, who was unwilling to be yours.* The witnesses against the wicked shall be: first, their own conscience—*Their conscience bearing witness to them*—(Ib. ii., 15); secondly, the very walls of the house in which they sinned shall cry out against them—*The stone shall cry out of the wall*—(Hab. ii., 11); thirdly, the Judge Himself will say—*I am the judge and the witness.*—(Jer. xxix., 28). Hence, according to Saint Augustine, “He who is now the witness of your life shall be the judge of your cause.” To Christians particularly He will say: *Woe to thee, Corozain, woe to thee, Bethsaida; for if in Tyre and Sidon had been wrought the miracles that have been wrought in you, they had long ago done penance in sackcloth and ashes.*—(Matt. xi., 21). Christians, He will say, if the graces which I have bestowed on you had been given to the Turks or to the Pagans, they would have done penance for their sins; but you have ceased to sin only with your death. He shall then manifest to all men their most hidden crimes. *I will discover thy shame to thy face.*—(Nah. iii., 5). He shall expose to view all their secret impurities, injustices and cruelties. *I will set all thy abominations against thee.*—(Ezech. vii., 8).

Each of the damned shall carry his sins written on his forehead.

What excuses can save the wicked on that day? Ah! they can offer no excuses. *All iniquity shall stop her mouth.*—(Ps. cvi., 42). Their very sins will close the mouth of the reprobate, so that they will not have courage to excuse themselves. They shall pronounce their own condemnation.

The Sentence of the Judge.

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

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

After this Sentence, the wicked shall, according to St. Ephrem, be compelled to take leave for ever of their relatives, of Paradise, of the Saints, and of Mary the divine Mother. "Farewell, ye just! Farewell, O Cross! Farewell, O Paradise! Farewell, fathers and brothers: we shall never see you again! Farewell, O Mary, Mother of God!" Then a great pit shall open in the middle of the valley: the unhappy damned shall be cast into it, and shall see those gates shut which shall never again be opened. O accursed sin! to what a miserable end will you one day conduct so many souls redeemed by the Blood of Jesus Christ. O unhappy souls! for whom is

prepared such a melancholy end. But let us have confidence, for Jesus Christ is now a Father, and not a Judge. He is ready to pardon all who repent. *For us men and for our salvation, He came down from Heaven and was made man.*

Evening Meditation.

JESUS CHARGED WITH THE SINS OF THE WHOLE WORLD.

I.

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

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

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

My beloved Jesus, I, who have offended Thee, am not worthy of Thy favours, but through the merit of that pain which Thou didst suffer, and which Thou didst offer up to God at the sight of my sins, and to satisfy divine justice for them, give me a share in that light by which Thou didst see their malice, and in that hatred with

which Thou didst then abominate them. O Lord! Thou hast indeed died to save me; but Thy death will not save me if I do not, on my part, detest every evil, and have true sorrow for the sins I have committed against Thee. But even this sorrow must be given me by Thee. Thou givest it to him that asks it of Thee. I ask it of Thee through the merits of all the sufferings Thou didst endure on this earth; give me sorrow for my sins, but a sorrow that will correspond to my transgressions.

II.

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

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

O Eternal God, supreme and infinite Good! I, a miserable worm, have dared to lose respect for Thee, and to despise Thy grace; I detest above every evil and abhor the injustice I have committed against Thee; I repent of all with my whole heart, not so much on account of hell, which I have deserved, as because I have offended Thy infinite Goodness. I hope for pardon from Thee through the merits of Jesus Christ; and I hope also to obtain, together with Thy pardon, the grace of loving Thee. I love Thee, O God, Who art worthy of infinite love, and I will always repeat to Thee, I love Thee, I love Thee, I love Thee! And as Thy beloved St.

Catherine of Genoa said to Thee, while she stood in spirit at the foot of Thy crucified Image, so will I also say to Thee now that I am standing at Thy feet: "My Lord, no more sins, no more sins! No, for Thou indeed dost not deserve to be offended, O my Jesus, but Thou only deservest to be loved. My Blessed Redeemer, help me. My Mother Mary, assist me, I pray thee; I only ask of thee to obtain for me that I may love God during the time that is left me in this life.

Tuesday—First Week of Advent

Morning Meditation.

THE GREAT AFFAIR OF SALVATION.

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

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

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

I.

The affair of our eternal salvation is of all affairs the most important. But how comes it that men use all diligence to succeed in the affairs of this world, leave no means untried to obtain a desirable situation, to gain a lawsuit, or to bring about a marriage; reject no counsels, neglect no measures by which to secure their object; neither eat nor sleep, and yet do nothing to gain eternal salvation—nothing to gain it, but everything to forfeit it.

as though *Hell*, *Heaven*, and *Eternity* were not Articles of Faith, but only fables and lies?

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

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

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

II.

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

O God, make me sensible of the great wrong I have done Thee in offending Thee and renouncing Thee for the love of creatures. I am sorry with my whole heart for having despised Thee, my sovereign Good; do not reject me now that I return to Thee. I love Thee above all things, and for the future I will renounce all things rather than lose Thy grace. Through the love which Thou hast

shown me in dying for me, succour me with Thy help, and do not abandon me. O Mary, Mother of God, be thou my advocate.

Spiritual Reading.

MENTAL PRAYER.

I.—ITS IMPORTANCE.

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

In the second place, without Mental Prayer we have no strength to resist temptation and practise virtue. St. Teresa used to say that when a man leaves off Mental Prayer, the devil has no need of carrying him to hell, for he throws himself into it of his own accord. And the reason is, that without Meditation there is no prayer. God is most willing to give us His graces; but St. Gregory says that before giving them He desires to be asked, and, as it were, compelled to give them through our prayers. But without Meditation there is no light: we walk in darkness, and walking in darkness, we do not see the

danger we are in, we do not make use of the means to avoid it, or pray to God to help us, and so we are lost. Cardinal Bellarmine declared it to be morally impossible for a Christian who does not meditate to persevere in the grace of God: whereas he who makes his Meditation every day can scarcely fall into sin—and if unhappily he should fall occasionally, by continuing his prayer he will return immediately to God. It was said by a servant of God that “Mental Prayer and mortal sin cannot exist together.”

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

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

Resolve, then, to make every day, either in the morning or in the evening—but it is better in the morning—half an hour’s Meditation. In to-morrow’s “Spiritual Reading” you will see briefly explained an easy method of making this Prayer. For the rest it is sufficient that during the time you should recollect yourself by reading

some book of Meditation—either this one or one of the many others—and from time to time excite some good affection or some aspiration as will be explained in the Method. Above all I beg you never to leave off Mental Prayer, which you should practise at least once a day, although you may be in great aridity and feel great weariness in performing it. *If you do not discontinue it you will certainly be saved.*

Evening Meditation.

THE LOVE OF GOD FOR MEN.

I.

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

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

O Eternal God! who could ever have given us this treasure of infinite value, but Thou, Who art a God of infinite love? O my Creator, what more couldst Thou have done to give us confidence in Thy mercy, and to

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

II.

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

And this gift which God has made us of His Son is a gift to each one of us; for He hath given Him entirely to each of us, as if He had given Him to each one alone, so that every one of us may say: Jesus is all mine; His body is mine; His blood is mine; His life is mine; His sorrows, His death, His merits, are all mine. Wherefore

St. Paul said: *He loved me and delivered himself for me.*—(Gal. ii., 20). And every one may say the same thing: "My Redeemer has loved me; and for the love that He bore me He has given Himself entirely to me."

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

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

Wednesday—First Week of Advent

Morning Meditation.

THE GREAT THOUGHT OF ETERNITY.

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

He who builds a house for himself takes great pains to make it commodious, airy and handsome, and says: "I labour and give myself a great deal of trouble about this house, because I shall have to live in it all my life." And yet how little is the *House of Eternity* thought of!

I.

Thus did St. Augustine designate the thought of eternity: "The Great Thought"—*Magna Cogitatio*. It was this thought that induced so many solitaries to retire into deserts; so many Religious, even kings and

queens, to shut themselves up in cloisters; and so many Martyrs to sacrifice their lives in the midst of torments, in order to acquire a happy eternity in Heaven, and to avoid a miserable eternity in hell. The Blessed John of Avila converted a certain lady with these two words: "Reflect," said he to her, "on these two words: *Ever and Never*." A certain monk went down into a grave that he might meditate continually on Eternity, and constantly repeated, "O Eternity! Eternity!"

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

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

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

II.

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

To obtain salvation we must tremble at the thought of being lost, and tremble not so much at the thought of hell, as of sin, which alone can send us thither. He who dreads sin avoids dangerous occasions, frequently recommends himself to God, and has recourse to the means of keeping himself in the state of grace. He who acts thus will be saved; but for him who lives not in this manner

it is morally impossible to be saved. Let us attend to that saying of St. Bernard: "We cannot be too secure where Eternity is at stake."

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

Spiritual Reading.

MENTAL PRAYER.

II.—ITS END AND OBJECT.

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

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

2. *We must meditate in order to obtain from God, by prayer, the graces that are necessary in order to enable us to advance on the way of salvation, to avoid sin, and to take the means that will lead us to perfection.* The best fruit, then, that comes from Meditation is the exercise of prayer. Almighty God, ordinarily speaking, does not give grace to any but to those who pray. St.

Gregory writes : " God desires to be entreated, He desires to be constrained, He desires to be, as it were, conquered by importunity." At times, in order to obtain graces of special value, it is not enough simply to pray; we must pray urgently, and, as it were, compel God, by our prayers, to give them. It is true that at all times the Lord is ready to hear us; but at the time of Meditation, when we are most truly in converse with God, He is most bountiful in giving us His aid.

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

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

prayers for sinners let us also add prayers for the Holy Souls in Purgatory.

8. *We must apply ourselves to Meditation, not for the sake of spiritual consolations, but chiefly in order to learn what is the will of God concerning us. Speak, Lord, said Samuel to God, for thy servant heareth.*—(1 Kings iii., 9). Lord, make me know what Thou wilt, that I may do it. Some persons continue Meditation as long as consolations continue; but when these cease, they leave off Meditation. It is true that God is accustomed to comfort His beloved souls at the time of Meditation, and to give them some foretaste of the delights He prepares in Heaven for those who love Him. These are things which lovers of the world do not comprehend; they who have no taste except for earthly delights despise those that are celestial. Oh, if they were wise, how surely would they leave such pleasures to recollect themselves and speak alone with God! Meditation is nothing more than converse between the soul and God; the soul pours forth to Him its affections, its desires, its fears, its requests; and God speaks to the heart, causing it to know His goodness, and the love which He bears it, and what it must do to please Him. *I will lead her into solitude and speak to her heart.*—(Osee, ii., 14).

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

Evening Meditation.

**THE WORD WAS MADE MAN IN THE FULNESS
OF TIME.**

I.

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

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

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

O Divine Word, become Man for me, though I behold Thee thus humbled and become a little Infant in the womb of Mary, yet I confess and acknowledge Thee for my Lord and King, but a King of Love. My dearest Saviour, since Thou hast come down upon earth and clothed Thyself with our miserable flesh, in order to reign over our hearts, I beseech Thee come and establish Thy reign in my heart also, which was once, alas, ruled over by Thine enemies, but is now, I hope, Thine, as I desire that it may be always Thine, and that from this

day forth Thou mayst be its only Lord: *Rule thou in the midst of thy enemies.*—(Ps. cix., 2). Other kings reign by the strength of arms, but Thou comest to reign by the power of Thy love; and therefore Thou dost not come with regal pomp, or clothed in purple and gold, or adorned with sceptre and crown, or surrounded by armies of soldiers. Thou comest into the world to be born in a stable—poor, forsaken, placed in a manger on a little straw, because thus Thou wouldst begin to reign in our hearts.

II.

It is called *fulness*, on account of the fulness of grace which the Son of God came to communicate to men by the Redemption of the world. Behold the Angel who is sent as ambassador into the town of Nazareth to announce to the Virgin Mary the coming of the Word, Who desires to become incarnate in her womb. The Angel salutes her, calls her *full of grace* and *blessed among women.*—(Luke, i., 28). The humble Virgin, chosen to be the Mother of the Son of God, is troubled at these praises on account of her great humility: but the Angel encourages her, and tells her that she has *found grace with God*; that is to say, that grace which brought peace between God and man, and the reparation of the ruin caused by sin. He then tells her that she must give her Son the Name of Saviour: *Thou shalt call his name Jesus.*—(Ib. 31), and that this her Son is the very Son of God, Who is to redeem the world, and thus to reign over the hearts of men. Behold, at last Mary consents to be the Mother of such a Son: *Be it done unto me according to thy word.*—(Ib. 38). And the Eternal Word takes flesh and becomes Man: *And the Word was made flesh.*—(Jo. i., 14).

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

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

Thursday—First Week of Advent

Morning Meditation.

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

Under thee shall the moth be strewed and worms shall be thy covering.—(Is. xiv., 11).

The moment the soul leaves the body it shall go into eternity and the body shall return to dust. The same lot awaits all, nobleman and peasant, prince and vassal. *Thou shalt take away their breath, and they shall return to their dust.*—(Ps. ciii., 20).

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

I.

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

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

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

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

O Jesus, my Redeemer, I thank Thee for not having taken me out of life when I was Thy enemy. For how many years have I deserved to be in hell! Had I died on such a day or such a night, what would be my lot for all eternity? Lord, I thank Thee! I accept my death in satisfaction for my sins and I accept it in the manner in which Thou wilt be pleased to send it. But since Thou hast borne with me till now, wait for me a little longer. *Suffer me, therefore, that I may lament my sorrow a little.*—(Job x., 20). Give me time to bewail my offences before Thou dost judge me. I will no longer resist Thy

calls. Who knows but the words I have just read may be the last call for me ! Behold the penitent traitor who has recourse to Thee. *A contrite and humble heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.*—(Ps. l., 19).

II.

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

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

O God cast me not away from Thy face ! For Thy mercy’s sake cast me not away ! Thou hast said : *Him that cometh to me I will not cast out.*—(Jo. vi., 37). It is true that I have outraged Thee more than others, because I have been more favoured with Thy lights and graces. But the Blood which Thou hast shed

for me gives me courage and pardon if I repent. My Sovereign Good, I am sorry with my whole heart for having offended Thee. Pardon me and give me grace to love Thee for the future. I have offended Thee enough ! The rest of my life I wish to spend in weeping unceasingly over the insults I have offered Thee and in loving with my whole heart a God worthy of infinite love. O Mary, my hope, pray to Jesus for me.

Spiritual Reading.

MENTAL PRAYER.

III.—ITS PLACE AND TIME.

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

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

the midst of these affairs she preserved a place of retirement in her heart, which she called her cell, and there ceased not to converse with God alone.

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

But the best place for making Mental Prayer is the church; for Jesus Christ especially delights in the Meditation that is made before the Blessed Sacrament, since there it appears that He bestows light and grace most abundantly upon those who visit Him. He has left Himself in this Sacrament, not only to be the food of souls that receive Him in Holy Communion, but also to be found at all times by every one who seeks Him. Devout pilgrims go to the Holy House of Loreto, where Jesus Christ dwelt during His life; and to Jerusalem, where He died on the Cross; but how much greater ought our devotion to be when we find Him before us in the Tabernacle, in which this Lord Himself dwells in person, Who lived on earth, and died for us on Calvary! It is not permitted in the world for persons of all ranks to speak alone with kings; but with Jesus Christ, the King of kings, both nobles and plebeians, rich and poor, can converse at their will, setting before Him their wants, and seeking His grace; and in the Tabernacle Jesus gives audience to all, hears all, and comforts all.

THE TIME.

We have to consider two things, namely:—

- (1) The time of day most suitable for Mental Prayer; and
- (2) The time to be spent in making it.

(1) According to St. Bonaventure, the morning and the evening are the two parts of the day which, ordinarily speaking, are the fittest for Meditation. But, according to St. Gregory of Nyssa, the morning is the most

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

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

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

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

sufficient to attain a high degree of perfection; for beginners, however, this would be sufficient.*

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

Mental Prayer is tedious to those who are attached to the world, but not to those who love God only. Ah! conversation with God is not painful or tedious to those who truly love Him. *His conversation has no bitterness, His company produces not tediousness, but joy and gladness*—(Wis. viii., 16). "Mental Prayer," says St. John Climacus, "is nothing else than a familiar conversation and union with God." "In prayer," as St. Chrysostom says, "the soul converses with God, and God with the soul." No, the life of holy persons who love prayer, and fly from earthly amusements, is not a life of bitterness. If you do not believe me, *Taste and see that the Lord is sweet*. Try it, and you shall see how sweet the Lord is to those who leave all things in order to converse with Him alone. But the end which we ought to propose to ourselves in going to Meditation should be, as has been said several times, not spiritual consolation, but to learn from Our Lord what He wishes from us, and to divest ourselves of all self-love. "To prepare yourself for prayer," says St. John Climacus, "put off your own will." To prepare ourselves well for Meditation, we must renounce self-will, and say to God: *Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth*. Lord, tell me what Thou wishest me to do; I am willing to do it. And it is necessary to say this with a resolute will, for without this disposition the Lord will not speak to us.

* Pope Benedict XIV. grants to all the faithful who make mental prayer devoutly for half an hour, or at least for a *quarter of an hour*, every day for a month, a *Plenary Indulgence* when truly penitent, after Confession and Communion, they devoutly pray for the intentions of the Church. This indulgence is applicable to the souls in Purgatory.

Evening Meditation.

THE ABASEMENT OF JESUS.

I.

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

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

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

My beloved Jesus, Thou art the Sovereign Lord of Heaven and earth; but for the love of me Thou hast made Thyself a servant even of the executioners who tore Thy flesh, pierced Thy head, and finally left Thee nailed on the Cross to die of sorrow. I adore Thee as my God and Lord, and I am ashamed to appear before Thee, when I remember how often for the sake of some miserable pleasure, I have broken Thy holy bonds, and have told Thee to Thy face that I would not serve Thee. Ah,

Thou mayst justly reproach me : *Thou hast burst my bands, and thou saidst : I will not serve.*—(Jer. ii., 20). But still, O my Saviour, Thy merits, and Thy goodness which cannot despise a heart that repents and humbles itself, give me courage to hope for pardon : *A contrite and humble heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.*—(Is. l., 19).

II.

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

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

I confess, my Jesus, that I have offended Thee greatly; I confess that I deserve a thousand hells for the sins I have committed against Thee; chastise me as Thou seeest fit, but do not deprive me of Thy grace and love. I repent above every other evil of having despised Thee. I love Thee with my whole heart. I propose from this

day forth to desire to serve Thee and love Thee alone. I pray Thee bind me by Thy merits with chains of Thy holy love, and never suffer me to break those blessed chains again. I love Thee above everything, O my Deliverer; and I would prefer being Thy servant to being master of the whole world. And of what avail would all the world be to him who lives deprived of Thy grace? "My sweetest Jesus, permit me not to separate myself from Thee." This grace I ask of Thee, and I intend always to ask it, and I beg of Thee to grant me this day the grace to repeat continually to the end of my life the prayer: My Jesus, grant that I may never again separate myself from Thy love. I ask this favour of thee also, O Mary, my Mother: Help me by thy intercession that I may never separate myself again from my God.

Friday—First Week of Advent

Morning Meditation.

THE UNHAPPY LIFE OF THE SINNER.

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

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

I.

In this life all men seek after peace. The merchant, the soldier, the man who goes to law—all labour with the hope of making a fortune and of thus finding peace by worldly lucre, by a more exalted post, by gaining the law-suit. But poor worldlings seek from the world the peace that the world cannot give. God alone can give

peace, as the Holy Church proclaims in the following words: "Give to Thy servants that peace which the world cannot give." No; the world, with all its goods, cannot content the heart of man; for he was created, not for them, but for God alone: hence God alone can make him happy and content. Brute animals, that have been made for sensual delights, find peace in earthly goods: give to an ox a bundle of hay, and to a dog a piece of flesh, and they are content, they desire nothing more. But the soul, which has been created for no other end than to love God, and to live in union with Him, shall never be able to find peace or happiness in sensual enjoyments; God alone can make her perfectly content.

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

Ah, my God, what now remains of all the offences I have offered to Thee, but pains, bitterness, and merits for hell? I am not sorry for the pain and remorse which I now feel; on the contrary they console me, because they are the gift of Thy grace, and make me hope that,

since Thou inspirest these sentiments, Thou wishest to pardon me. What displeases me is the pain I have given Thee, my Redeemer, Who has loved me so tenderly. I deserved, O my Lord, to be abandoned by Thee, but instead of abandoning me, I see that Thou dost offer me pardon, and that Thou art the first to ask for a reconciliation. O my Jesus, I wish to make peace with Thee and I desire Thy grace more than any earthly good.

II.

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

I am sorry, O infinite Goodness! for having offended Thee; I would wish to die of sorrow for my offences. Ah! through the love which Thou didst entertain for me when Thou didst expire on the Cross, pardon me, receive me into Thy Heart, and change my heart, so that henceforth I may please Thee as much as I have hitherto

offended Thee. I now renounce, for Thy sake, all the pleasures that the world can give me, and I resolve to forfeit my life rather than lose Thy grace. Tell me what I must do in order to please Thee; I wish to do it. What pleasures, what honours, what riches, can I seek? I wish only for Thee, my God, my joy, my glory, my treasure, my life, my love, my All! Give me the grace to love Thee, and then do with me what Thou pleasest. Mary, my Mother and my hope, take me under thy protection and obtain for me the grace to belong entirely to God. Amen.

Spiritual Reading.

MENTAL PRAYER.

IV.—METHOD OF MAKING IT.

Mental Prayer consists of three parts :

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

The Preparation.

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

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

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

In the Preparation there should be three Acts :

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

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

The Meditation Proper.

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

When you make Meditation in private you may always use a book, and stop when you find yourself most touched. St. Francis de Sales says that in this we should be as the bees that stop on a flower as long as they find any honey in it, and then pass to another. We should stop at those passages in which the soul finds nourishment. St. Teresa used a book for seventeen years in this way. She would first read a little, then meditate for a short while on what she had read, in imitation of the dove that first drinks and then raises its eyes to heaven.

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

1. *Affections*—When you reflect on the point of the Meditation just read, and feel any pious sentiment, raise your heart to God and offer Him an Act of *humility*, of *confidence*, *love*, *sorrow*, *gratitude*, *resignation*, *thanksgiving*, and so on. The Acts of *Love* and *Contrition* are the golden chain that binds the soul to God. An Act of *perfect Charity* is sufficient for the remission of all our sins. And among the Acts of Love towards God there is

none more perfect than the taking delight in the infinite joy of God.

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

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

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

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

The Conclusion.

The Conclusion consists of three acts :

1. *Thanking God for the lights received, etc.;*
2. *Making a firm purpose to keep our resolutions;*

3. *Asking God, for the sake of Jesus and Mary, to give us the grace to be faithful to our resolutions.*

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

A WORD ABOUT DISTRACTIONS AND DRYNESS IN PRAYER.

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

2. As for *Dryness of Spirit*, the greatest pain of souls in Meditation is to find themselves sometimes without a feeling of devotion, weary of Prayer, and without any sensible desire of loving God. And with this is often joined the fear of being in the wrath of God through their sins, on account of which the Lord has abandoned them; and being in this gloomy darkness they know not any way of escaping from it, for it seems to them that every way is closed against them. Let the devout soul, then, continue steadfast in Meditation, and not leave off as the devil will suggest. At such a time let it unite its desolation to that which Jesus Christ suffered on the Cross. Let it repeat: *My Jesus, mercy! Lord, have mercy on me! Have pity on me! Leave me not, O Jesus!* Pray, and doubt not that God will hear you and grant your petitions.

Evening Meditation.

JESUS ENLIGHTENS THE WORLD AND
GLORIFIES GOD.

I.

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

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

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

My eternal God, I have dishonoured Thee by so often preferring my will to Thine, and my vile and miserable pleasures to Thy holy grace. What hope of pardon would there be for me, if Thou hadst not given me Jesus Christ, our Saviour, that He might be the Hope of us miserable sinners? *He is a propitiation for our sins.*—(I Jo. ii., 2). Yes; for Jesus Christ, in sacrificing His life in satisfaction for the injuries we have done Thee, has given more honour to Thee than we have dishonoured by our sins. Receive me, therefore, O my Father, for the love of Jesus Christ.

I repent, O infinite Goodness, of having outraged Thee: *Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, I am not now worthy to be called thy son.*—(Luke xv., 21). I am not worthy of forgiveness; but Jesus Christ is worthy to be heard favourably by Thee. He prayed once for me on the Cross: *Father, forgive;* and even now in Heaven He is constantly begging Thee to receive me as a son: *We have an advocate, Jesus Christ, who ever intercedes for us.*—(Rom. vii., 34). Receive an ungrateful son, who once forsook Thee, but now returns resolved to desire to love Thee.

II.

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

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

Yes, my Father, I love Thee and I will always love Thee. O my Father, now that I know well the love Thou hast borne me, and the patience which Thou hast shown me for so many years, I resolve no longer to live without loving Thee. Give me a great love so that I may

constantly lament the displeasure I have given Thee, Who art so good a Father; cause me ever to burn with love towards Thee, Who art so loving a Father towards me. My Father, I love Thee, I love Thee, I love Thee! O Mary! God is my Father, and thou art my Mother. Thou canst do all things with God; help me; obtain for me holy perseverance and His holy love.

Saturday—First Week of Advent

Morning Meditation.

THE POWER OF MARY'S INTERCESSION.

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

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

I.

St. Bernard tells us that Mary has received a twofold fulness of grace. The first was in the Incarnation of the Word Who was made Man in her most holy womb; the second in that fulness of grace which we receive from God by means of her prayers. So that whatever good we have from God is received through the intercession of Mary! If the prayers of the Saints are so powerful with God, how great must be the power of those of His Mother. The former are the prayers of *servants*, the latter the prayers of a *Mother*! The prayers of Mary have the force of a command with Jesus Christ. Hence it is impossible for

the Son not to grant a grace for which the Mother asks. "Rejoice, rejoice, O Mary," says St. Methodius, "thou hast thy Son for a debtor. We are all debtors to Him, but He is a debtor to thee alone." Blessed, then, is the person for whom Mary prays!

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

II.

Jesus rejoices when His most beloved Mother prays to Him, that He may have the pleasure of granting her all she asks. One day St. Bridget heard Jesus speak to Mary and say: "O Mother, thou well knowest that I cannot do otherwise than grant thy prayers; therefore, ask of Me what thou wilt. Since thou, when on earth, didst deny me nothing, it is becoming, now that I am in Heaven, that I should deny thee nothing that thou asketh of Me." Mary has only to speak and her Divine Son grants her all she asks. Let us, therefore, pray to His Divine Mother without ceasing, if we wish to secure our eternal salvation, and let us address her in the words of St. Andrew of Crete: "We beseech thee, therefore, O holy Virgin, to grant us the help of thy prayers with God; prayers that are more precious than all the treasures of the world; prayers that obtain for us a very great abundance of graces; prayers that confound all enemies, and triumph over their strength."

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

Spiritual Reading.

THE VALUE OF SPIRITUAL READING.

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

We cannot always have access to a Spiritual Father for counsel in our actions, and particularly in our doubts; but reading will abundantly supply his place by giving us light and direction to escape the illusions of the devil and of our own self-love, and at the same time to submit to the Divine Will. St. Athanasius used to say that no one is found devoted to the service of God who does not practise Spiritual Reading. Hence all the Founders of Religious Orders have strongly recommended this holy exercise to their Religious. But above all the Apostle, St. Paul, prescribed Spiritual Reading to Timothy. *Attend unto reading.*—(Tim. iv., 5). Mark the word attend, which signifies that although Timothy, being a Bishop, was greatly occupied with the care of his flock, still the Apostle wished him to attend to the reading of holy books, not in a passing way and for a short time, but regularly and for a considerable time.

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

As the reading of bad books fills the mind with worldly and poisonous sentiments, so pious reading fills the soul with holy thoughts and good desires. He that keeps the mind filled with devout thoughts, such as spiritual maxims, examples of the virtuous actions of the Saints, will, not only during prayer, but at other times also, be

accompanied by these thoughts, and by them be kept almost continually united to God. St. Bernard explains this by a beautiful similitude in his exposition of the words *seek and you shall find*—(Matt. vii., 7), when he says: “*Seek* by reading books of devotion, *and you shall find* in Meditation; for reading, as it were, puts the food in the mouth, which is afterwards masticated by Meditation.”

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

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

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

Saints have, by the reading of a spiritual book, been induced to forsake the world and to give themselves to God! St. Augustine, St. Ignatius, St. John Colombini, and many more. "My God," exclaims St. Augustine, "the examples of Thy servants, when I meditated on them, consumed my tepidity and inflamed me with Thy holy love."

But to draw great fruit from Spiritual Reading:

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

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

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

(4) When you receive any special light in your reading, or any instruction that penetrates the heart, it will be very useful to stop, and to raise the mind to God by making a good resolution, or a good act, or a fervent prayer. And at the end of your reading select some sentiment of devotion excited by what you have read and carry it away with you as a flower from a Garden of Delights.

Evening Meditation.

THE SON OF GOD WAS LADEN WITH ALL OUR INIQUITIES

I.

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

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

blasphemies, with all the impurities, with all the sacrileges, and all the other crimes of men; and in this way become, for the love of us, the object of Divine malediction, on account of the sins for which He had bound Himself to satisfy the Divine Justice.

O my innocent Lord, Mirror without spot, Love of the Eternal Father! Ah, no, chastisements and maledictions were not due to Thee; but they were due to me, a miserable sinner. Nevertheless, Thou wouldst show to the world this excess of love, by sacrificing Thy life to obtain pardon and salvation for us, paying by Thy sufferings the penalties which we had deserved. May all creatures praise and bless Thy infinite mercy and goodness! I thank Thee on behalf of all men, but especially for myself; because as I have offended Thee more than others, so Thou hast suffered the pains which Thou didst endure, more for me than for others. I curse a thousand times those sinful pleasures of mine, which have cost Thee so much suffering. But since Thou hast paid the price of my ransom, oh, let not the Blood which Thou hast shed for me be lost to me. I am sorry that I have despised Thee, O my Love; but, oh, give me more sorrow.

II.

Jesus loaded Himself with as many maledictions as there ever have been, or ever will be mortal sins committed by all mankind. And in this state He presented Himself to His Father when He came into the world. Yes, even from the commencement of His life, he presented Himself as a criminal and a debtor for all our misdeeds, and as such was condemned by His Father to die upon a Cross as a malefactor, and accursed. *God hath condemned sin in the flesh.*—(Rom. viii., 3). Oh, if the Eternal Father had been capable of feeling grief, what anguish would He not have endured, at seeing Himself obliged to treat as a criminal, and the most monstrous criminal in the world, this innocent Son, His beloved One, Who was so worthy of all His love! *Behold the Man!* said Pilate, when he showed Jesus to the Jews, in order to move them to pity for this innocent One

so cruelly treated. *Behold the Man!* the Eternal Father seems to say to us all, showing Him to us in the stable of Bethlehem:—“This poor Infant, Whom you behold, O men, laid in a manger for beasts, and lying upon straw, is My beloved Son, Who has come to take upon Himself your sins and your sorrows! Love Him, then, because He is most worthy of your love, and you are under the greatest obligations to love Him.”

Make me know the evil I have committed in offending Thee, my Redeemer and my God, Who hast suffered so much to oblige me to love Thee! I love Thee, O infinite Goodness, but I desire to love Thee more; I desire to love Thee as much as Thou deservest to be loved. Make Thyself loved, O my Jesus, make Thyself loved by me and by all men; for well dost Thou deserve to be loved. Enlighten, I pray Thee, the minds of those sinners who will not know Thee, or will not love Thee; make them comprehend how much Thou hast done for love of them, and the desire Thou hast for their salvation. Most holy Mary, pray for me and for all sinners; obtain for us light and grace to love thy Son, Who has loved us so much.

Second Sunday of Advent

Morning Meditation.

THE ADVANTAGES OF TRIBULATIONS.

What things never were written were written for our learning, that through patience and the comfort of the scriptures we might have hope.—(Epistle of Sunday. Rom. xv., 4—13).

In tribulations God enriches His beloved souls with the greatest graces. It is in his chains that St. John comes to the knowledge of the works of Jesus Christ. *Let us*

believe that these scourges of the Lord, with which we are chastised have happened for our amendment and not for our destruction.—(Judith, viii., 27).

I.

By tribulation we atone for the sins we have committed much better than by voluntary works of penance. "Be assured," says St. Augustine, "that God is a physician, and that tribulation is a salutary medicine." Oh, how great is the efficacy of tribulation in healing the wounds caused by our sins! Hence the same Saint rebukes the sinner who complains of God for sending him tribulations. "Why," he says, "do you complain? What you suffer is a remedy, not a punishment." Job called those men happy whom God corrects by tribulation; because He heals them with the very hands by which He strikes and wounds them. *Blessed is the man whom God correcteth . . . For he woundeth and cureth. He striketh, and his hand shall heal.*—(Job v., 17). Hence, St. Paul gloried in his tribulations: *We glory also in tribulations.*—(Rom. v., 8).

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

My Jesus, I have hitherto offended Thee grievously by resisting Thy holy Will. This gives me greater pain than if I had suffered every other evil. I repent of it and I am sorry for it with my whole heart. I deserve chastisement: I do not refuse it: I accept it. Preserve me only from the chastisement of being deprived of Thy love,

and then do with me what Thou pleasest. I love Thee, my dear Redeemer! I love Thee, my God! And because I love Thee, I wish to do whatever Thou wishest. Amen.

II.

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

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

O Will of God, Thou art my love! O Blood of Jesus, Thou art my hope! I hope to be from this day forward always united to Thy Divine Will. It shall be my guide, my desire, my love, my hope. *Thy Will be*

done! My Jesus, through Thy merits grant me the grace always to repeat: *Thy Will be done! Thy Will be done!*

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

Spiritual Reading.

THE POVERTY OF THE INFANT JESUS

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

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

What! a God become poor? And why? Let us understand the reason. The riches of this world can be nothing but dust and mire; but it is mire that so

completely blinds men that they can no longer see which are the true riches. Before the coming of Jesus Christ, the world was full of darkness because it was full of sin: *All flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth.*—(Gen. vi., 12). Mankind had corrupted the law and reason, so that, living like brutes, intent only on acquiring the riches and pleasures of this world, men cared no more for the riches of eternity. But the divine mercy ordained that the very Son of God Himself should come down to enlighten these blind creatures: *To them that dwell in the region of the shadow of death light is risen.*—(Is. ix., 2).

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

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

For this end was it decreed by God that the Edict of Cæsar should come forth; namely, that His Son should

not only be born poor, but the poorest of men, causing Him to be born away from His own house, in a cave which was inhabited by animals. Other poor people, who are born in their own houses, have certainly more comforts in the way of clothes, of fire, and the assistance of persons who lend their aid, even if it is out of compassion. What son of a poor mother was ever born in a stable? In a stable beasts only are born. St. Luke relates how it happened. The time being come that Mary was to be delivered, Joseph goes to seek some lodging for her in Bethlehem. He goes about and enquires at every house, and he finds none. He tries to find one in an inn, but neither there does he find any: *There was no room for them in the inn.*—(Luke ii., 7). So that Mary is obliged to take shelter and bring forth her Son in that cave.

When the sons of princes are born, they have warm rooms prepared for them, adorned with hangings, silver cradles, the finest clothes, and they are waited on by the highest nobles and ladies in the kingdom. The King of Heaven, instead of a warm and beautiful room, has nothing but a cold grotto, whose only ornament is the grass that grows there; instead of a bed of feathers, He has nothing but a little hard, sharp straw; instead of fine garments He has but a few poor, rough, cold and damp rags: "The Creator of Angels," writes St. Peter Damien, "is not said to have been clad in purple, but to have been wrapped in rags. Let worldly pride blush at the resplendent humility of the Saviour." Instead of a fire, and of the attendance of great people. He has but the warm breath and the company of two animals; finally, in place of the silver cradle, He must lie in a vile manger. "What is this," said St. Gregory of Nyssa, "the King of kings, Who fills Heaven and earth with His presence finds no better place in which to be born than a stable for beasts! He Who encompasses all things in His embrace is laid in the manger of brute cattle." Yes, this King of kings for our sake wished to be poor and the poorest of all. Even the children of the poor have milk enough provided for

them, but Jesus Christ wished to be poor even in this; for the milk of Mary was miraculous, and she received it not naturally, but from Heaven, as the Holy Church teaches us: "The Virgin gave Him milk from a breast filled from Heaven." And God, in order to comply with the desire of His Son, Who wished to be poor in everything, did not provide Mary with milk in abundance, but only with as much as would barely suffice to sustain the life of her Son; whence the same Holy Church says: "He was fed on a little milk."

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

Evening Meditation.

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

I.

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

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

With reason therefore does the Apostle call this work of love *exceeding charity*; too much love; yes, indeed, for man could never have had hope to receive life in such a loving manner if God had not found this means of redeeming him: *Having obtained eternal redemption.*—(Heb. ix., 12). All men were therefore dead—there was no remedy for them. But the Son of God, through the

bowels of His mercy has come down from Heaven, *the Orient from on high*, and has given us life. Justly, therefore, does the Apostle call Jesus Christ our Life: *When Christ shall appear, who is your life.*—(Col. iii., 4).

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

II.

Behold, our Redeemer clothed with flesh and become an Infant, says: *I have come that they may have life, and may have it more abundantly.*—(Jo. x., 10). For this end He accepted death, that He might give us life. It is but reasonable, therefore, that we should live only to God, Who has condescended to die for us: *Christ died, that they who live may not live to themselves, but unto him who died for them.*—(2 Cor. v., 15). It is reasonable that Jesus Christ should be the only Sovereign of our hearts since He has spent His blood and His life to gain them to Himself: *To this end Christ died and rose again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.*—(Rom. xiv., 9). O my God! who would be so ungrateful a wretch as to believe it an Article of Faith that God died to secure his love, and yet refuse to love Him, and, renouncing His friendship, choose voluntarily to make himself a slave of hell?

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

Monday—Second Week of Advent

Morning Meditation.

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE RELIGIOUS STATE.—I.

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

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

I.

To understand the importance of our eternal salvation it is enough to have Faith and to consider we have only one soul, and if that is lost, all is lost were a man even master of the whole world. *What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his soul?*—(Matt. xvi., 26). This great maxim of the Gospel has induced many youths to shut themselves up in cloisters, others to live in deserts, and others to give up their lives for Jesus Christ. For, said they, what does it profit us to possess the whole world, and all the goods of this world, in this present life, which must soon finish, and then be damned and be miserable in the life to come, which will never end? All those rich men, all those princes and emperors, who are now in hell—what have they now of all they enjoyed in this life but greater torment and a greater despair? Miserable beings! they lament now and say: *All those things are passed away*

like a shadow.—(Wis. v., 9). For them all is passed like a shadow, like a dream, and that lamentation which is their lot has lasted already many years, and will last throughout all eternity. *The fashion of this world passeth away.*—(1 Cor. vii., 51). This world is a scene which lasts but a short time; happy he who plays in this scene that part which will afterwards make him happy in the life which will never end. When he shall then be contented, honoured, and a prince in Paradise, so long as God shall be God, little will he care for having been in this world—poor, despised and in tribulation. For this end alone God has placed us on this earth, and keeps us here in life, not to acquire transitory but eternal goods: *The end is life everlasting.*

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

II

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

unhappy death, which will be the beginning of eternal death and endless misery. Then it is they will open their eyes; but it will be only to lament over their own foolishness.

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

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

Spiritual Reading.

COUNSELS CONCERNING A RELIGIOUS VOCATION.

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

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

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

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

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

(Is. 65:1)

D.

that you would take counsel and not from me, and would begin a web and not by my spirit.—(Is. xxx., 1).

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

Father Lanciaus tells us there was in the Roman College a youth of great talents. While he was making the Religious Exercises, he asked his confessor whether it was a sin not to correspond to a Vocation to the

Religious life. The confessor replied that in itself it was not a grievous sin, because a call to perfection is a counsel and not a precept, but he would expose his salvation to great danger as had happened to many who, not following their Vocation, were in the end, lost. He did not obey the call. He went to study in Macerata, where he soon began to omit prayer and Holy Communion, and finally gave himself up to a bad life. Soon after, coming one night from the house of a wicked woman, he was mortally wounded by a rival. Some priests ran to his assistance, but he had expired before they arrived, just in front of the college. By this circumstance God wished to show that this chastisement came upon him for having neglected his Vocation.

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

How many similar examples are there not to be found in books! And how many unhappy youths shall we not see damned on the Day of Judgment for not having followed their Vocation! Such are rebels against the divine light, as the Holy Ghost says: *They have been rebellious to the light, they have not known his ways.*—(Job xxiv., 18), and they will be justly punished by losing the light; and because they would not walk in the way shown them by the Lord, they shall walk without light in that chosen by their own caprice, and perish. *Behold I will declare my spirit to you.*—(Prov. i., 28). Behold the Call of God—but because they fail to follow it, God adds: *Because I called you and you refused . . . you have despised all my counsel . . . I also will laugh in your destruction, and I will mock when that shall come upon you which you feared. Then shall you call upon me, and I will not hear: they shall rise in the morning and shall not find me. Because they have hated instruction and received not the fear of the Lord, nor consented to my counsel, but despised all my reproof.*—(Ib. i., 24, 26,

28, 80). And this signifies that God will not hear the prayers of him who has neglected to obey His voice. St. Augustine says: "They who have despised the will of God which invited them, shall feel the will of God when it becomes its own avenger."

Evening Meditation.

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

I.

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

Consider that the Eternal Word is that God Who is so infinitely happy in Himself that His happiness cannot be greater than it is, nor could the salvation of all mankind have added anything to it; nor could the loss of souls have diminished it; and yet He has done and suffered so much to save us miserable worms that if His beatitude, as St. Thomas says, had depended on that of man, He could not have done or suffered more: "As if without him He could not be happy." And, indeed, if Jesus Christ could not have been happy without redeeming us, how could He have humbled Himself more than He has done, in taking upon Himself our infirmities, the miseries of infancy, the troubles of human life, and a death so barbarous and ignominious?

None but God was capable of loving to so great an excess such wretched sinners as we are, and who are so unworthy of being loved. A devout author says: "If Jesus Christ had permitted us to ask of Him to give us the greatest proof of His love, who would have ventured to ask of Him that He should become a Child like unto us, that He should clothe Himself with all our miseries, and make Himself of all men the most poor, the most despised, and the most ill-treated, even to being put to death by the hands of executioners, and in the greatest

torments upon an infamous gibbet, cursed and forsaken by all, even by His own Father, Who abandoned His Son that He might not abandon us in our ruin?"

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

My Jesus, I should, indeed, do great injustice to Thy mercy and Thy love, if, after Thou hast given me so many proofs of the love Thou bearest me, and the desire Thou hast to save me, I should still distrust Thy mercy and Thy love. My beloved Redeemer, I am a poor sinner; but Thou hast said that Thou didst come to seek sinners: *I am not come to call the just, but sinners.—* (Matt. ix., 18). I am a poor infirm creature—Thou camest to cure the infirm, and Thou didst say: *They that are whole need not the physician, but they that are sick.—* (Luke v., 81). I was lost through my sins, but Thou didst come to save the lost: *The son of man is come to save that which was lost.—* (Matt. xviii., 11). What, then, can I fear, if I am willing to amend my life and to become Thine? I have only myself and my own weakness to fear; but my own weakness and poverty ought to increase my confidence in Thee, Who hast declared Thyself to be the refuge of the destitute: *The Lord is become a refuge for the poor.—* (Ps. ix., 10).

II.

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

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

Tuesday—Second Week of Advent

Morning Meditation.

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE RELIGIOUS STATE.—II

Consider the happy death of a Religious.

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

I

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

O my Lord Jesus Christ! Who, in order to obtain a happy death for me, hast chosen so bitter a death for Thyself—since Thou hast loved me to such an extent as to have chosen me to follow more closely Thy holy life, to have me thus more intimately united with Thy loving Heart, bind me, I beseech Thee, wholly to Thee with the sweet cords of Thy love, that I may no more separate myself from Thee. O my beloved Redeemer! I wish to be grateful to Thee, and to correspond with Thy grace, but I fear my weakness may render me unfaithful. O my Jesus! do not permit this. Let me die rather than abandon Thee, or forget the peculiar affection Thou hast shown me.

II.

When, then, hell tempts you about your Vocation, think of the hour of death, and set before your eyes that all-important moment upon which eternity depends. Thus you will overcome all temptations; you will be faithful to God; and certainly you will not repent of it at the point of death, but will give thanks to the Lord, and die contented. Gerard, brother of St. Bernard, died singing at the very thought of dying in the House of God. Father Suarez, of the Society of Jesus, felt at his death so great consolation and sweetness at dying in Religion that he said: "I never thought it would be so sweet to die." Another good Religious, of the same Society, laughed when at the point of death; and being asked why he laughed, answered: "And why should I not laugh? Has not Jesus Christ Himself promised Paradise to him who leaves everything for His sake? Was it not He Who said: *Everyone that has left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife or children or lands for my name's sake, shall receive a hundred-fold, and shall possess life-everlasting?*"—(Matt. xix., 29). I have left all for God; God is faithful, He cannot fail in His promises; and so," he said, "why should I not rejoice and laugh, seeing myself assured of Paradise?" A certain Lay-brother, who died some years ago, was asked,

at his death, what he desired most? He answered: "I desire nothing but to die and to be united with God."

Father Januarius Sarnelli, a short time before his death, when conversing with God, was heard saying: "O Lord, Thou knowest that all I have done and all I have thought, has been for Thy glory; now I wish to go to see Thee face to face, if it please Thee so." And then, desiring his departure, he said: "Courage, I wish to enter into a sweet agony." He then began to converse affectionately with God, and shortly after placidly expired. There was a smile on his lips, and from his body came a sweet odour, which, as many attested, remained for several days in the room in which he had died.*

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

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

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

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

Spiritual Reading.

COUNSELS CONCERNING A RELIGIOUS
VOCATION.

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

Whenever, therefore, God calls us to a more perfect state, he who does not wish to expose his eternal salvation to great risk must then obey, and obey promptly. Otherwise he will hear from Jesus Christ the reproach of that young man who, when invited to follow Him, said: *I will follow thee, Lord, but let me first take my leave of them that are at my house.*—(Luke ix., 61). Upon which, Jesus told him he was not fit for Paradise: *No man putting his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God.*—(Ib. 62). The lights which God gives are transient, not permanent gifts. Hence St. Thomas Aquinas says that the call of God to a more perfect state must be obeyed *as quickly as possible—quanto citius*. He proposes in his *Summa* the question whether it would be praiseworthy to enter Religion without having asked the counsel of many and without long deliberation. He answers in the *affirmative*, saying that counsel and deliberation are necessary *in doubtful matters*, but not in this, which is *certainly good*, because Jesus Christ has counselled it in the Gospel, and the Religious State embraces most of the Counsels of Jesus Christ. What a wonderful thing! When there is question of entering Religion to lead a more perfect life, and one more free from the dangers of the world, men of the world will say that it is necessary to deliberate a long time before putting such a resolution into execution, in order to ascertain whether the Vocation comes from God or from the devil! But they do not

talk thus when it is a question of accepting a place in the Magistracy, or a Bishopric, and so on, where there are so many dangers of losing one's soul. Then these men of the world do not say that many proofs are required that it is a true call from God.

But the Saints do not speak thus. St. Thomas says that even should a Vocation to Religion come from the devil, we should follow it as a good counsel, though coming from an enemy. St. John Chrysostom, as quoted by the same St. Thomas, says that God, when He gives such Vocations, wills that we should not delay, even for a moment, to follow them. Christ requires from us such an obedience that we should not delay an instant. And why this? Because, as God is much pleased to see a soul prompt in obeying Him, He opens His hand and fills that soul with His blessings. On the contrary, He is displeased with tardiness in obeying Him; He shuts His hand and withdraws His lights. Hence, the soul will follow its Vocation with difficulty, and will easily abandon it. Therefore, St. John Chrysostom says that when the devil cannot bring one to give up his resolution of consecrating himself to God, he at least seeks to make him defer the execution of it, and esteems it a great gain if he can obtain the delay of one day, or even of an hour. And why? Because a day later, or even an hour later, other occasions presenting themselves, it will be less difficult for him to obtain still greater delay, until he who has been called, finding himself more feeble and less assisted by grace, gives way altogether and loses his Vocation. Therefore, St. Jerome gives to those who are called to quit the world this advice: "Make haste, I beseech you, and cut rather than *untie* the cable by which your barque is bound fast to the land." The Saint wished to say that as a man who should find himself in a boat on the point of sinking would seek to cut the rope rather than to untie it, so he who finds himself in the midst of the world ought to seek to get out of it as quickly as possible, in order to free himself from the danger which is so great in the world, of losing his soul.

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

Nor ought we to care much from what quarter the first movement comes. The Lord uses many means to call His servants. Sometimes He makes use of a sermon, at other times of the reading of good books. Some, as St. Anthony and St. Francis, have been called by hearing the words of the Gospel; others by means of afflictions and troubles that came upon them in the world, and which suggested to them the motive for leaving it. These persons, although they come to God only because they are disgusted with the world or have lost its favour, nevertheless, because they give themselves to Him with their whole will, become sometimes greater Saints than those who entered Religion with a more apparent Vocation. Father Platus relates that a nobleman, riding one day on a fine horse, and striving to make a great display in order to please some ladies whom he saw, was thrown from the horse into the mire from which

he rose besmeared and covered with mud. He was so full of confusion at this accident that at the same moment he resolved to become a Religious, saying: "Traacherous world, thou hast mocked me, but I will mock thee. Thou hast played me a game, I will play thee another; for I will have no more peace with thee, and from this hour I resolve to forsake thee and to become a friar." And, in fact, he became a Religious and lived a holy life in Religion.

Evening Meditation.

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

I.

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

Thus does the Prophet Isaias designate our Lord Jesus Christ—the man of sorrows. Yes, because this Man was created on purpose to suffer, and from His infancy began to endure the greatest sorrows that any man had ever suffered. The first man, Adam, enjoyed for some time upon this earth the delights of the earthly Paradise; but the second Adam, Jesus Christ, did not pass a moment of His life without sorrows and anguish; for even as a Child He was afflicted by the foresight of all the sufferings and ignominy that He would have to endure during His life, and especially at His death, when He was to close that life immersed in a tempest of sorrow and opprobrium, as David had predicted: *I am come into the depth of the sea, and a tempest hath overwhelmed me.*—(Ps. lxxviii., 8).

My sweetest Redeemer, when shall I begin to be grateful to Thy infinite goodness? When shall I begin to acknowledge the love that Thou hast borne me, and the sorrows Thou hast endured for me? Hitherto,

instead of love and gratitude, I have returned Thee offences and contempt; shall I then continue to live always ungrateful to Thee, my God, Who hast spared nothing to acquire my love? No, my Jesus, it shall not be so. During the days that may yet remain to me I will be grateful to Thee; and Thou wilt, I trust, help me to be so. If I have offended Thee, Thy sufferings and Thy death are my hope. Thou hast promised to forgive the penitent. I repent with my whole soul of having despised Thee. Fulfil, therefore, Thy promise, my Beloved, and forgive me. O dearest Infant, I behold Thee in the manger already nailed to Thy Cross, which is constantly present to Thee, and which Thou dost already accept for me. O my crucified Babe, I thank Thee for it, and I love Thee.

II

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

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

Stretched upon this straw, O my Jesus, suffering already for me, and preparing Thyself even now to die for the love of me, Thou dost command and invite me to love Thee: *Love the Lord thy God.* And I desire nothing more than to love Thee. Since, therefore, Thou wilt that I should love Thee, give me all the love that Thou requirest of me; love for Thee is Thy gift, and the very greatest gift Thou canst make to a soul. Accept, O my Jesus! for Thy lover a sinner who has so greatly offended Thee. Thou didst come from Heaven to seek the lost sheep; do Thou, therefore, seek me, and I will seek none other but Thee. Thou desirest my soul, and my soul desires nothing but Thee. Thou lovest him that loves Thee, and sayest: *I love those that love me.*—(Prov. viii., 17). I love Thee, do Thou also love me; and if Thou lovest me, bind me to Thy love; but bind me so that I may never again be able to disengage myself from Thee. Mary, my Mother, do thou help me. Let it be thy glory also to see thy Son loved by a miserable sinner, who has hitherto so greatly offended Him.

Wednesday—Second Week of Advent

Morning Meditation.

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE RELIGIOUS STATE.—III.

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

The grace of Vocation is a very rare grace which God grants only to a few. But the greater the grace, the greater will be the indignation of the Lord against him

who does not correspond with it. He is the Lord. When He calls He wishes to be obeyed, and obeyed promptly.

I.

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

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

O Lord, Thou hast shown me such an excess of bounty as to choose me from among so many others, to serve Thee in Thy own House with Thy most beloved servants. I know how great is that grace, and how unworthy of it I have been. Behold, I am now willing to correspond to so great a love. I will obey Thee. Since Thou hast been so liberal towards me as to call me when I did not seek Thee, and when I was so ungrateful, permit not that I should offer Thee that greater excess of ingratitude as to embrace again my enemy, the world, in which heretofore I have so oftentimes forfeited Thy grace and my eternal salvation, and thus to forsake Thee, Who hast shed Thy Blood and given Thy life for my sake. Since

Thou hast called me, give me also the strength to correspond to the call. Already have I promised to obey Thee. I promise it again, but without the grace of perseverance I cannot be faithful to Thee. This perseverance I ask from Thee, and through Thy own merits it is that I wish it and hope to obtain it.

II.

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

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

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

Spiritual Reading.

**COUNSELS CONCERNING A RELIGIOUS
VOCATION.**

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

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

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

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

-A.—*Secrecy*

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

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

It was, indeed, the opinion of Luther, as Bellarmine relates, that children entering Religion without the consent of their parents commit a sin. For, said he, children are bound to obey their parents in all things. But this opinion has generally been rejected by Councils and the Holy Fathers. The Tenth Council of Toledo expressly declares that it is lawful for children to become Religious without the consent of their parents, provided they have attained the age of fourteen years. Here are the words of the Council: "It shall not be lawful for parents to put their children in a Religious Order after they have attained their fourteenth year. After this age, it shall be lawful for children to take upon themselves the yoke of Religious observance, whether it be with the consent of their parents, or only the wish of their own hearts." The same is taught by St. Ambrose, St. Jerome, St. Augustine, St. Bernard, St. Thomas, and others, with St. John Chrysostom who writes: "When parents stand in the way of spiritual good, they ought not even to be recognised."

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

It is certain that in the choice of a state of life, children are not bound to obey their parents. This is the common teaching of Doctors, with St. Thomas, who says: "Servants are not bound to obey their masters, or children their parents, with regard to contracting matrimony, preserving virginity, and such like things." Nevertheless, with regard to the state of marriage, Father Pinamonti, in his Treatise on *Religious Vocation*, rightly holds the opinion of Sanchez, Comminchio, and

others, who teach that a child is bound to take counsel of his parents, because in such matters they have more experience than the young, and generally do their duty. But, speaking of Religious Vocation, he adds that a child is not bound at all to take counsel of his parents, because in this matter they have no experience, and through interest, are commonly changed into enemies, as St. Thomas also remarks when speaking of Religious Vocation. "Frequently," he says "our friends according to the flesh are opposed to our spiritual good." For fathers often prefer that their children should be damned with them rather than be saved away from them. Hence, St. Bernard exclaims: "O hard father, O cruel mother, whose consolation is the death of their son; who wish rather that I perish with them than reign without them!"

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

St. Cyril, commenting on what Jesus Christ said to the youth mentioned above: *No man putting his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God* (Luke ix., 61), says that he who asks for time to confer with his parents in reference to his Vocation is exactly the one who is declared by our Lord to be unfit for Heaven. "He looks back who seeks for delay that he may be able to confer with his parents." Hence, St. Thomas absolutely advises those who are called to Religion, to abstain from deliberating on their Vocation with their relatives: "From this deliberation, the relatives of the flesh are before all to be excluded; for it

is said: *Treat thy cause with thy friend*—(Prov. xxv., 9). Now our relatives are in this affair not our friends, but our enemies, according to the saying of our Lord: *A man's enemies are they of his own household.*—(Matt. x., 36)."

Evening Meditation.

GRANDEUR OF THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION.

I.

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

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

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

fountain of health to wash out all our sins, and a Sacrifice of infinite value to appease the justice of the Father, Who was justly angered with men.

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

II.

And who, then, are these men ? Miserable, ungrateful, and rebellious creatures ! And yet for these God becomes Man ; subjects Himself to human miseries ; suffers and dies to save these unworthy sinners ; *He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross.*—(Phil. ii., 8). O holy Faith ! If Faith did not assure us of it, who would believe that a God of infinite majesty should abase Himself so far as to become a worm like us, in order to save us at the cost of so much suffering and disgrace, and of so cruel and shameful a death ?

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

By Thy grace I now feel great sorrow for the offences I have committed against Thee ; I feel within me an ardent desire of loving Thee ; I feel fully resolved to lose everything rather than Thy friendship ; I feel a love

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

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

Thursday—Second Week of Advent

Morning Meditation.

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE RELIGIOUS STATE.—IV.

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

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

I.

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

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

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

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

II.

We know well, as we have considered above, that to this most unhappy lot he exposes himself, who, in order to follow his own caprice, turns a deaf ear to the call of God.

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

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

Spiritual Reading.

**COUNSELS CONCERNING A RELIGIOUS
VOCATION**

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

Secrecy (continued).

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

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

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

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

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

We read in the Life of Father Paul Segneri, the Younger, that his mother, though a matron much given to prayer, left, nevertheless, no means untried to prevent her son from entering the Religious state to which he was called. We also read in the life of Mgr. Cavalieri, Bishop of Troja, that his father, although a man of great piety, used every means to prevent his son from entering the Congregation of Pious Workers (which, notwithstanding, he afterwards did), and even went so far as to bring against him a lawsuit in the Ecclesiastical Court. And how many other fathers, even though they were men of piety and prayer, have not in such cases been seen to change, and to become possessed, as it were, by the devil! For under no other circumstances does hell seem to employ more formidable arms than when there is a question of preventing those who are called to the Religious state from executing their resolution.*

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

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

Evening Meditation.

JESUS SUFFERS DURING HIS WHOLE LIFE.

I.

My sorrow is continually before me.—(Ps. xxxvii., 18). Consider that all the sufferings and ignominy that Jesus endured in His life and death were present to Him from the first moment of His life: *My sorrow is continually before me*; and even from His childhood He began to offer them in satisfaction for our sins, beginning even then to fulfil His office as Redeemer. He revealed to one of His servants that from the commencement of His life even unto His death He suffered continually; and suffered so much for each of our sins that if He had had as many lives as there are men, He would as many times have died of sorrow, if God had not preserved His life that He might suffer more.

Oh, what a martyrdom did not the loving Heart of Jesus constantly endure in beholding all the sins of men! He beheld every single fault. Even whilst He was in the womb of Mary every particular sin passed in review before Jesus, and each sin afflicted Him immeasurably. St. Thomas says that this sorrow which Jesus Christ felt at the knowledge of the injury done to His Father, and of the evil that sin would occasion to the souls that He loved, surpassed the sorrows of all the contrite sinners that ever existed, even of those who died of pure sorrow; because no sinner ever loved God and his own soul as much as Jesus loved His Father and our souls.

Behold, my Jesus, at Thy feet, the ungrateful sinner, the persecutor who kept Thee in continual affliction during all Thy life. But I will say to Thee with Isaias: *But thou hast delivered my soul that it should not perish; thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back.*—(Is. xxxviii., 17). I have offended Thee. I have wounded Thee by so many sins; but Thou hast not refused to take upon Thy shoulders all my offences. I have voluntarily cast my soul into the fire of hell every time that I have consented

to offend Thee gravely; and Thou, at the cost of Thy own Blood, hast continually liberated me and prevented me from being entirely lost. My beloved Redeemer, I thank Thee.

II.

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

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

Jesus. My Mother, do thou also forgive me, and obtain for me the grace to be faithful to thee, now that I hope my Jesus has returned into my soul.

Friday—Second Week of Advent

Morning Meditation.

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE RELIGIOUS

STATE.—V.

Consider the immense glory that Religious will enjoy in Heaven.

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

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

I.

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

that heavenly city this is the gate.” And he said that, therefore, “ Religious have a great sign of predestination.”

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

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

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

Is it possible, O my God and my true Lover ! that Thou so much desirest my good, and to be loved by me, and that I, miserable that I am, desire so little to love and to please Thee ? For what end hast Thou favoured me with so many graces, and taken me out of the world ? O my Jesus ! I understand Thee. Thou lovest me much,

Thou wilt have me love Thee much, and be all Thine, in this life and in the next. Thou wishest that my love should not be divided with creatures, but wilt have it be wholly for Thyself, the only Good, the only lovely One, and worthy of infinite love. Ah! my Lord, my Treasure, my Love, my All! Yes, I pant and truly desire to love Thee, and to love no other but Thee.

II.

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

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

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

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

Spiritual Readings.

COUNSELS CONCERNING A RELIGIOUS VOCATION.

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

B.—*Prayer.*

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

Let him not omit also to make every day a Visit to the Most Holy Sacrament, and to the Most Blessed Virgin

Mary, in order to obtain the grace of perseverance in his Vocation, and let him not omit to receive Holy Communion three times, or at least, twice a week.

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

It is, moreover, necessary that all his prayers to Jesus and Mary, and especially those after Communion and in the Visits, be directed to obtain perseverance. In these prayers and Communions let him always renew the offering of himself to God, saying: "Behold, O Lord! I am no longer mine own. I am Thine. Already have I given myself to Thee, and now I renew this my offering of my whole self. Accept of me and give me strength to be faithful to Thee and to retire as quickly as possible into Thy House."

C.—*Recollection.*

In the third place, it is necessary to be recollected. This will not be possible unless he withdraws from worldly reunions and secular amusements. And, indeed, as long as we are in the world, what suffices to cause the loss of Vocation? A mere nothing. One day of dissipation, a word from a friend, a passion not mortified, a little attachment, some groundless fear, some slothfulness not overcome—any one of these suffices to bring to nought all one's good resolutions of retiring from the world, and of giving oneself entirely to God. Wherefore, he who is called to Religion ought to keep perfectly

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

recollected, detaching himself from everything of this world. His occupation while waiting should be prayer and frequenting the Sacraments; and he should pass his time at home or in church. Let him who will not act thus, but who distracts himself by pastimes, be persuaded that he will undoubtedly lose his Vocation. He will, indeed, feel remorse for not following his Vocation, but he certainly will not follow it. Oh, how many by neglecting these precautions have lost their Vocation, and afterwards their souls!

A PRAYER FOR PERSEVERANCE.

(To be said often and fervently.)

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

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

Make me live always burning with Thy love, and when my end shall have at length come, let me give forth my last breath in an ardent act of love to Thee. O Mary

Immaculate, do thou obtain for me this grace. My hope is in thy powerful intercession. Help me to forsake the world. Come to my rescue now. Succour me and obtain for me the grace to overcome myself and to become a Saint. Amen.

Evening Meditation.

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

I.

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

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

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

My beloved Redeemer, I am also one of those ungrateful wretches who have repaid Thy immense love, Thy sorrows, and Thy death, with offences and contempt. O

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

II.

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

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

I give Thee thanks, my Saviour, because I see that Thy mercy has already changed my heart. I hate, above

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

Saturday—Second Week of Advent

Morning Meditation.

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

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

I.

Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline thine ear; and forget thy people and thy father's house.—(Ps. xlv., 11). The holy Virgin obeyed this divine call with prompt

itude and with generosity. From the first moment that the heavenly child was sanctified in her mother's womb, which was at the instant of her Immaculate Conception, she received the perfect use of reason and she began to merit. And immediately, as an Angel revealed to St. Bridget, our Queen determined to sacrifice her will to God, and to give Him all her love for the whole of her life.

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

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

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

present myself to thee, and in union with thee I renounce all creatures and devote myself entirely to the love of my Creator. Do thou help my weakness by thy powerful intercession.

II.

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

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

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

O happy Virgin Mary, who didst begin so soon to serve God, and who didst always serve Him so faithfully! Ah, cast a look on me who have returned to Him with such tardiness, after so many years lost in the love of creatures. Obtain for me the grace to give God at least the remainder of my life, be it long or short. Teach me,

O Lady, what I should now do to belong entirely to God, and thus to repair the time I have lost. Thou hast already done so much for me, finish the work of my salvation. Do not abandon me till thou seest me safe at thy feet in Paradise. Amen.

Spiritual Reading.

COUNSELS CONCERNING A RELIGIOUS VOCATION.

VI.—DISPOSITIONS REQUIRED FOR ENTERING RELIGION.

He who is called by God to a Religious Institute in which regular observance reigns should understand that the end of every such Institute is that its members walk in the footsteps and imitate as exactly as possible the example of the most holy life of Jesus Christ—a life entirely detached and mortified, full of sufferings and humiliations. I have said *an Institute in which regular observance reigns*, for it would be better, perhaps, to remain in the world than to enter a Religious Institute that is relaxed.* He, then, who resolves to enter such a Religious Institute must, at the same time, resolve to enter in order to suffer and deny himself in everything, as Jesus Christ has Himself declared to those who wish to follow Him perfectly: *If any man will come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me*. He must be firm in his resolution to suffer, and to suffer much, so that afterwards he may not give way to temptations, when, having entered Religion, he feels pressed down under the hardships and privations of the poor and mortified life which is led in Religion.

There are many who, on entering a fervent Community, do not take the proper means of finding peace therein, and of becoming Saints, because they only place before their eyes the advantages of Community life, such as the

* "Si Institutum relaxatum est, melius erit alicui, ordinarie loquendo, quod in seculo remaneat." (Homo Apost.: Tract. Dit. 89).

solitude, the quiet, the freedom from the troubles caused by relatives, from strife and other disagreeable matters, and from the cares consequent on being obliged to think of one's lodging, food, and clothing.

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

It is true that in the spiritual life one has to suffer, but, as St. Teresa says, when one resolves to suffer the pain ceases. Nay, the pains themselves turn into joy. “My daughter,” so the Lord said one day to St. Bridget, “the treasure-house of My graces seems to be surrounded with thorns; but for him who overcomes the first prickles, all is changed into sweetness.” And then those delights which God gives to His beloved souls in their prayers, in their Communions, in their solitude; those fights, those holy arduours and that intimate union with God, that quiet of conscience, that blessed hope of eternal life—ah, who can understand them, if he does not experience them? “One drop of the consolations of God,” says St. Teresa, “is worth more than all the consolations and the

delights of the world.” Our most gracious God knows well how, even in this valley of tears, to give him who suffers something for His sake, a foretaste of the glory of the Blessed; for in this is truly verified that which David says: *Thou who feignest labour in commandment.*—(Ps. xciii., 20). In the spiritual life, God, when announcing pains, tediousness, death, seems to feign labour, but, in fact, there is no labour; for the spiritual life brings to them who entirely give themselves to God that peace which, St. Paul says, *surpasseth all understanding.*—(Phil. iv., 7). It surpasses all the pleasures of the world and of worldings. Hence we see a Religious more content in a poor cell than all the monarchs in their royal palaces. *O taste, and see that the Lord is sweet.*—(Ps. xxxiii., 9). He who has not made the trial cannot understand it.

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

Evening Meditation.

THE GREATEST SORROW OF JESUS.

I.

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

Jesus Christ revealed to the Venerable Agatha of the Cross that whilst He was in His Mother's womb, that which afflicted Him more than any other sorrow was the

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

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

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

II.

And this same sorrow tormented the Infant Jesus in the womb of Mary, the foresight of such a prodigality of

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

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

The Bird Sunday of Advent

Mornings Meditation.

THE JOY OF JESUS' COMING.

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

Take comfort, take comfort, O men, saith the Lord, by the mouth of Isaias: *Be comforted; be comforted, my people, saith your God. Speak ye to the heart of Jerusalem and call to her; for her evil is come to an end; her iniquity is forgiven.*—(Is. xl, 1). God hath discovered a way of saving man, while at the same time His Justice and His Mercy shall both be satisfied. *Justice and Peace have kissed.*—(Ps. lxxxiv., 11).

I.

Speaking of the coming of the Redeemer, Isaias made this prediction: *The land that was desolate and impassable shall be glad, and the wilderness shall rejoice and shall flourish like the lily.*—(Is. xxxv., 1). The Prophet had been speaking of the pagans (among whom were our own unfortunate ancestors) who were living in heathendom, as in a desert land void of a single man that knew or worshipped the true God, but peopled only with those who were slaves of the devil—a land *desolate and impassable*, because there was no path of salvation known to those wretched people. He foretold that the world, though so miserable then, would yet rejoice at the coming of the Messias and would see itself filled with followers of the true God, strengthened by His grace against all the enemies of their salvation; and that

the whole land would blossom as the lily by purity of morals and the sweet odour of all virtues. Wherefore Isaias proceeds to say: *Say to the faint hearted: Take courage and fear not! God himself will come and save you!*—(Ibid. 4).

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

Oh, happy me, if from this day forward I shall be able always to say with the Sacred Spouse: *My beloved to me and I to him!*—(Cant. ii., 16). My God, my Beloved has given Himself all to me. It is but reasonable for me to give myself all to my God, and to say: *What have I in heaven and besides thee what do I desire on earth!*—(Ps. lxxii., 26). Oh, my beloved Infant, my dear Redeemer, since Thou hast come down from Heaven to give Thyself to me what else shall I care for or seek in Heaven or on earth besides Thee, Who art my Sovereign Good, my only Treasure, the Paradise of souls! Be Thou, then, the sole Lord of my heart and do Thou possess it wholly. May my heart obey Thee alone! May my soul love Thee alone and mayst Thou alone be its portion! Amen.

II.

You have no grounds for being sad any more, says St. Leo, on account of the sentence of death fulminated against you, now that Life itself is born for you; "nor is there any lawful room for sadness when it is the Birthday of Life." And St. Augustine exclaims: "O sweet day for penitents! To-day sin is taken away and shall the sinner despair!" Speed on then with gladness, O ye souls that love God and hope in God, speed on your way with gladness! What if Adam's sin and still more

our own sins, have wrought sad ruin on us? Let us understand that Jesus Christ, by the Redemption, has infinitely more than repaired our ruin. *Where sin abounded, grace did more abound.*—(Rom. v., 20).

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

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

O sweet Infant, give me Thy love and then do with me what Thou wilt. I was once a slave of hell, but now that I am free from those unhappy chains, I consecrate myself entirely to Thee. I give Thee my body, my goods, my life, my soul, my will and my liberty. I desire

no longer to belong to myself, but only to Thee, my only Good! Ah, bind my heart to Thy feet, that it may no more stray from Thee! O most holy Mary, obtain for me the grace of living united to thy Son by the blessed chains of love. He grants all that thou askest. Pray to Him! Pray to Him for me! This is my hope. Amen.

Spiritual Readings.

"THE WAY OF THE LORD."

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

- 1.—*To put away confidence in self.*
- 2.—*To have confidence in God.*

1.—WE MUST PUT AWAY ALL SELF-CONFIDENCE.

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

Miserable the man who trusts to himself in the way of God! St. Peter experienced the sad effects of self-

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

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

On rising from bed, St. Philip Neri used to say every morning : "O Lord, keep Thy hand this day over Philip; if Thou do not, Philip will betray Thee." And one day, as he walked through the city reflecting on his own misery, he frequently said : "I despair, I despair." A certain Religious who heard him, believing that the Saint was really tempted to despair, corrected him, and

encouraged him to hope in the divine mercy. But the Saint replied : "I despair of myself, but I trust in God." Hence, during this life, in which we are exposed to so many dangers of losing God, it is necessary for us to live always in great diffidence of ourselves, and full of confidence in God.

II.—WE MUST HAVE GREAT CONFIDENCE IN GOD.

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

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

But, says the Prophet Isaias, *they that hope in the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall take wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint.*—(Is. xl., 31). They who place their confidence in God shall renew their strength; they shall lay aside their own weakness, and shall acquire the strength of God; they shall fly like eagles in the way of the Lord, without fatigue and without ever failing. David says, that *Mercy shall encompass him that hopeth*

in the Lord.—(Ps. xxi., 10). He who hopes in the Lord shall be encompassed by His mercy, so that he shall never be abandoned by it.

St. Cyprian says that the divine mercy is an inexhaustible fountain. They who bring vessels of the greatest confidence, draw from it the greatest graces. Hence, the Royal Prophet has said: *Let thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us, as we have hoped in thee.*—(Ps. xxxii., 22). Whenever the devil terrifies us by placing before our eyes the great difficulty of persevering in the grace of God in spite of all the dangers and sinful occasions of this life, let us, without answering him, raise our eyes to God, and hope that in His goodness He will certainly send us help to resist every attack. *I have lifted up my eyes to the mountains, from whence help shall come to me.*—(Ps. cxx., 2). And when the enemy represents to us our weakness, let us say with the Apostle: *I can do all things in him who strengtheneth me.*—(Phil. iv., 13). Of myself I can do nothing; but I trust in God, that by His grace I shall be able to do all things.

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

Evening Meditation.

THE LOVE OF JESUS FOR US IN BECOMING MAN.

I.

The charity of Christ presseth us.—(2 Cor. v., 14). It was not enough, says St. Augustine, for the Divine Love to have made us to His own Image in creating the first man, Adam, but He must

also Himself be made to our image in redeeming us. Adam partook of the forbidden fruit, beguiled by the serpent which suggested to Eve that if she ate of that fruit she should become like to God, acquiring the knowledge of good and evil; and therefore the Lord then said: *Behold, Adam is become one of us!*—(Gen. iii., 2). God said this ironically, and to upbraid Adam for his vast presumption. But after the Incarnation of the Word we can truly say: "Behold, God has become one of us!"

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

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

Let us say with St. Augustine: "O Fire, ever burning, inflame me." O Word Incarnate, Thou wert made Man to enkindle divine love in our hearts: and how couldst Thou have met with such a want of gratitude in the

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

II.

O God! did not Faith assure us of it, who could ever believe that a God, for love of such a worm as man is, should Himself become a worm like him? A devout author says: Suppose, by chance, that, passing on your way, you should have crushed to death a worm in your path; and then some one, observing your compassion for the poor reptile, should say to you: 'Well, now, if you would restore that dead worm to life, you must first yourself become a worm like it, and then must shed all your blood, and make a bath of it in which to wash the worm, and it shall revive'—what would you reply? you would surely say: 'And what matters it to me whether the worm be alive or dead, if I should have to purchase its life by my own death?' And the more would you say so if it was not a harmless worm, but an ungrateful asp, which, in return for all your benefits, had made an attempt upon your life. But even should your love for that reptile reach so far as to induce you to suffer death in order to restore it to life, what would men say then? And what would not that serpent do for you whose death had saved it, supposing it were capable of reason? But this much has Jesus Christ done for you, most vile worm; and you, with the blackest ingratitude,

have tried oftentimes to take away His life; and your sins would have done so, were Jesus liable to die again. How much viler are you in the sight of God than is a worm in your own sight! What difference would it make to God had you remained dead and forever reprobate in your sins, as you well deserved? Nevertheless, this God had such a love for you that, to release you from eternal death, He first became a worm like you; and then, to save you, would lavish upon you His Heart's Blood, even to the last drop, and endure the death which you had justly deserved. Yes, all this is of Faith: *And the Word was made flesh.*—(Jo. i., 14). *He hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.*—(Apoc. i., 5).

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

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

Monday—Third Week of Advent

Morning Meditation.

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE RELIGIOUS STATE.—VI.

Consider the peace that God gives to good Religious.

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

I.

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

Peace of the soul is of greater value than all the kingdoms of the world. And what avails it to have dominion over the whole world without interior peace? Better is it to be the poorest peasant in the land and content, than to be the lord of the whole world, and to live a discontented life. But who can give this peace? The world? Oh no, peace is a blessing that is obtained only from God. "O God!" the Church prays, "give to Thy servants that peace which the world cannot give." He is called *the God of all consolation*—(2 Cor. i., 3). But if God be the sole Giver of peace, to whom, think you, will He give that peace if not to those who leave all, and

detach themselves from all creatures, in order to give themselves entirely to their Creator? And therefore we see good Religious shut up in their cells, mortified, despised and poor, yet living a more contented life than the great ones of the world, with all the riches, the pomps, and diversions they enjoy.

St. Scholastica said that if men knew the peace good Religious enjoy, the whole world would become a monastery; and St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi said that if men knew it they would scale the walls in order to get into the monasteries. The human heart having been created for an infinite Good, finite creatures cannot content it. God alone, Who is an Infinite Good can content it: *Delight in the Lord and he will give thee the request of thy heart.*—(Ps. xxxvi., 4). Oh no; a good Religious united with God envies none of the princes of the world who possess kingdoms, riches and honours. "Let the rich," he will say with St. Paulinus, "have their riches, the kings have their kingdoms, to me Christ is my kingdom and my glory." He will see lovers of the world foolishly glory in pomp and vanity; but he, seeking to detach himself more from earthly things, and to unite himself more closely to God, will live contented in this life, and may well say: *Some trust in chariots, and some in horses, but we call upon the name of the Lord, our God.*—(Ps. xix., 8).

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

II.

St. Teresa used to say that one drop of heavenly consolation is worth more than all the delights of the world. Father Charles of Lorraine, having become a Religious, said that God, by one moment of the happiness

that He gave him to feel in Religion, superabundantly paid him for all he had left for God. Hence his jubilation was sometimes so great that, when alone in his cell, he could not help dancing for very joy. The Blessed Seraphino of Ascoli, a Capuchin Lay-brother, said that he would not exchange a foot length of his cord for all the kingdoms of the world.

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

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

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

Spiritual Reading.

COUNSELS CONCERNING A RELIGIOUS VOCATION.

VII.—DETACHMENT.

I.—From Comforts.

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

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

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

II.—From Relations.

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

youths shall we see lost who, in order to please their parents, and by not detaching themselves from them, have lost their Vocation and afterwards their souls! Hence, Jesus declares to us: *If any man hate not his father and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life, he cannot be my disciple*.—(Luke, xiv., 26). Let him, then, who wishes to enter a Religious Institute of perfect observance, and to become a true disciple of Jesus Christ, resolve to detach himself from his parents.

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

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

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

thought of succouring them. Finally, God in His mercy, took the temptation from me."

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

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

Evening Meditation.

JESUS IS THE FOUNTAIN OF GRACE.

I.

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

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

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

The second Fountain is that of Peace and Consolation in our tribulations: *Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will console thee.—(Ps. xlix., 15). He that thirsteth, let him come to me, says Jesus.—(Jo. vii., 37).* He that thirsteth for true consolations even in this world, let him come to me, for I will satisfy him. He that once tastes the sweetness of My love will forever disdain all the delights of the world: *But he that shall drink of the water that I will give him shall not thirst forever—(Jo. iv., 13).* And thoroughly contented will he be when he shall enter into the kingdom of the blessed, for the water of My grace shall raise him from earth to Heaven. It will become in him a fountain of water springing up into life everlasting.—(Ibid. 14). The peace which God gives to souls that love Him is not the peace that the world promises from sensual pleasures, which leave behind more bitterness than peace: the peace which God bestows exceeds all the delights of the senses: Peace which surpasseth all understanding. Blessed are those who long for this divine fountain. *Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice.—(Matt. v., 6).*

O my sweet and dearest Saviour, how much do I not owe Thee? How much hast Thou not obliged me to love Thee, since Thou hast done for me what no servant

would have done for his master, no son for his father. If Thou, therefore, hast loved me more than any other, it is just that I should love Thee above all others. I could wish to die of sorrow at the thought that Thou hast suffered so much for me, and that Thou even didst accept for my sake the most painful and ignominious death that a man could endure, and yet I have so often despised Thy friendship. But Thy merits are my hope.

II.

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

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

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

Tuesday—Third Week of Advent

Morning Meditation.

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE RELIGIOUS STATE.—VII.

Consider the harm done to Religious by tepidity.

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

I.

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

St. Ignatius of Loyola, seeing that a Lay-brother of the Society had become lukewarm in the service of God, called him one day and said to him: "Tell me, my brother, why did you come into Religion?" He answered: "To serve God." "O my brother!" replied the Saint, "what have you said? If you had answered that you had come to serve a Cardinal, or a prince of this earth,

you would be more excusable; but you say that you came to serve God, and is it thus you serve Him?" Father Nieremberg says that some are called by God to be saved as Saints, and that if they do not take care to live as Saints, but thinking to be saved as imperfect Christians, they will not be saved at all. And St. Augustine says that such are, in most cases, abandoned by God: "God is accustomed to abandon negligent souls." And how does He abandon them? By permitting them from lighter faults, which they see and do not amend, to fall into grievous ones, lose divine grace and their Vocation. St. Teresa of Jesus saw the place prepared for her in hell, had she not detached herself from an earthly, though not a grievously sinful affection. *He that contemneth small things shall fall by little and little.*

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

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

II.

Father Louis de Ponte said: "I have committed many faults, but I have never made peace with them." Miserable is the Religious who, being called to perfection, makes peace with his defects. As long as we detest our imperfections, there is hope that we may become Saints; but when we commit faults and make little of them, then, says St. Bernard, the hope of becoming Saints is lost. *He who soweth sparingly shall also reap sparingly*—(2 Cor. ix, 6). Ordinary graces do not suffice to make one a Saint; extraordinary ones are necessary. But how shall God be liberal with His favours to one who acts sparingly and with reserve in his love for Him?

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

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

Spiritual Reading.

COUNSELS CONCERNING A RELIGIOUS VOCATION.

VIII.—DETACHMENT (*continued*).

III.—*From Self-Esteem.*

He who enters Religion *must be entirely detached from all self-esteem*. There are many who leave their home, their comforts, their relations, but arrive bringing with them a certain esteem for themselves: such attachment would be the worst of all. Here is the greatest sacrifice we have to offer to God, namely the giving up, not only of our goods, our pleasures, our home, but of our own selves to Him. This is that denial of self which Jesus recommended more than anything else to His followers. And in order to deny himself, a man must tread under foot all self-esteem, by desiring and embracing every imaginable contempt that he may meet with in Religion; as, for instance, seeing others, whom perhaps he thinks less deserving, preferred to himself, or himself considered unfit to be employed, or only employed in lower or more laborious occupations. It must be understood that in the House of God those charges are the highest and the most honourable that are imposed by obedience. God forbid that any one should seek for or aspire to any office or charge of pre-eminence. This would be a strange thing in Religion, and would mark a Religious as proud and ambitious, and as such he should receive a penance, and be mortified especially on this very point. Better would it be, perhaps, that a Religious Order were destroyed than there should enter in that accursed pest of ambition which, when it enters, disfigures the most perfect Communities, and the most beautiful works of God.

On the contrary, he ought to feel interiorly consoled who sees himself made fun of and despised by his

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

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

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

In short, he will gain little in Religion and lose much who cannot quietly put up with contempt and contra-

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

Evening Meditation.

JESUS THE CHARITABLE PHYSICIAN OF OUR SOULS

I.

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

Your Physician shall come, says the Prophet, to cure the infirm; and He will come swiftly like the bird that flies, and like the sun, which, on rising above the horizon, instantly sends its light to the other pole. But behold

Him, He is already come. Let us console ourselves, and return thanks to Him.

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

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

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

II.

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

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

O my Love, I repent of having offended Thee. Thou hast led a life of such tribulations and hast died such a bitter death to prove to me the love which Thou bearest me! I would fain show Thee also how much I love Thee,

but what can I do—I am so infirm, so miserable and so weak? O God of my soul Thou art Omnipotent; Thou canst cure me and make me holy. Oh, kindle in me a great desire of pleasing Thee. I renounce all my satisfactions to please Thee my Redeemer, Who dost deserve to be pleased at all cost. O Sovereign Good, I esteem Thee and love Thee above every good; make me love Thee with all my heart, and always implore Thy love. Hitherto I have offended Thee, and have not loved Thee, because I have not sought Thy love. I now beg this love of Thee, and the grace always to ask it of Thee. Hear me, by the merits of Thy Passion.

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

Wednesday—Third Week of Advent

Morning Meditation.

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE RELIGIOUS STATE.—VIII.

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

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

I.

*One is my dove, my perfect one.—(Cant. vi., 8).
God loves all who love Him. I love them that*

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

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

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

II.

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

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

St. Teresa, appearing after her death, revealed to one of her nuns that God loves a soul that, as a spouse, gives herself entirely to Him, more than a thousand who are tepid and imperfect. The choir of Seraphim is completed from these generous souls belonging entirely to God. The Lord Himself says that He loves a soul that tends to perfection so much that He seems not to love any other: *One is my dove, my perfect one is but one.*—(Cant. vi., 8). Hence Blessed Giles exhorts us: "One for one—una uni," by which he wishes to say that this one soul of ours we ought to give wholly, undivided, to that One Who alone deserves all love, on Whom depends all our good, and Who loves us more than all others love us. "Leave all and you shall find all," says Thomas à Kempis. Leave all for God and in God you will find all. "O soul!" concludes St. Bernard, "be alone, that you may keep yourself for Him alone." Keep yourself alone, give no part of your affections to creatures, that you may belong alone to Him Who alone deserves an infinite love, and Whom alone you ought to love.

What have I in heaven, and besides Thee, what do I desire on earth? . . . Thou art the God of my heart, and the God that is my portion forever.—(Ps. lxxii., 25). I

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

Spiritual Reading.

COUNSELS CONCERNING A RELIGIOUS
VOCATION.

IX.—DETACHMENT (continued).

IV.—From Self-Will.

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

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

It is, then, evident that in this is the greatest merit before God. It is the only sure way of pleasing God in all things, because then each one can say what Jesus our Saviour said: *I do always the things that please Him.*

—(Jo. viii., 29). He who in Religion lives without any will of his own may say and hope that in all he does, he pleases God; whether he studies or prays, or hears confessions; whether he goes to the refectory or to recreation, or to rest; for in Religion there is scarcely a step made, or a breath drawn, but in obedience to the Rule, or to Superiors.

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

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

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

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

obedience will have it so, without either excusing himself or being disquieted, being well persuaded of that of which St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi was so confident when she said that "all the things which are done through obedience are so many prayers."

Evening Meditation.

GOD HAS GIVEN HIS ONLY SON TO SAVE US.

I.

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

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

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

II.

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

Here consider that the Divine Father, in sending His Son to be our Redeemer and Mediator between Himself and man, has in a certain sense bound Himself to forgive us and love us, on account of the Covenant He made to receive us into His favour, provided His Son satisfied

His Divine justice for us. On the other hand, the Divine Word, having accepted the decree of His Father, Who, by sending Him to redeem us, has given Him to us, has also bound Himself to love us; not, indeed, for our own merits, but in order to fulfil the merciful will of His Father.

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

Thursday—Third Week of Advent

Morning Meditation.

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE RELIGIOUS

STATE.—IX.

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

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

I.

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

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

St. Bernard asserts that we acquire perfection in proportion to the desire for it which we preserve in our hearts. St. Teresa said that God loves generous souls that have great desires; for which reason the Saint exhorted all, saying: "Let our thoughts be high, for thence will come our good. We must not have weak desires, but have confidence in God by which we shall, little by little, attain that perfection to which, by God's grace, the Saints attained." It was thus the Saints gained, in a short time, a great degree of perfection, and were able to do great things for God: *Being made perfect in a short space, he fulfilled a long time.*—(Wis. iv., 13). St. Aloysius Gonzaga attained in a few years (he was only twenty-three when he died) such a degree of sanctity that St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi, beholding him in spirit in Heaven, said it seemed to her, in a certain way, that there was no Saint in Heaven who enjoyed greater glory than Aloysius. She understood at the same time that he had arrived at so high a degree by the great desire he had to love God as much as He deserved, and that, seeing this beyond his power, the holy youth had suffered on earth a martyrdom of love.

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

II.

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

and now they are unable to do it. Courage, then, make haste, for there is no time to lose; what can be done to-day we may not be able to do to-morrow. St. Bernardine of Sienna used to say that one moment of time is of as great value as God Himself, for at each moment we may gain God, His divine grace, and higher degrees of merit.

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

Spiritual Reading.

COUNSELS CONCERNING A RELIGIOUS
VOCATION.X.—THE TRIALS WHICH WE MUST EXPECT TO HAVE
IN THE RELIGIOUS LIFE.

When, then, a person has actually entered Religion, however genuine his Vocation may be, and though he may have conquered all his passions and his earthly affections, let him not imagine that he will be exempt from other temptations and trials, which God Himself will send him, such as tediousness, darkness, various fears, in order to establish him more firmly in his Vocation. We must remember that even the Saints, who loved their Vocation most, have sometimes suffered great darkness with regard to it, and that it seemed to them that they were deceived, and would not be able to save

themselves in that state. So it happened with St. Teresa, St. John of the Cross, St. Jane Frances de Chantal. But by recommending themselves to God, that darkness was dissipated, and they recovered their peace of mind. Thus the Lord tests His most beloved children, as it was said to Tobias : *Because thou wast acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptation should prove thee.*—(Tob. xii., 13). And in the Book of Deuteronomy, *The Lord, your God, trieth you, that it may appear whether you love him or not.*—(Deut. xiii., 3). Let each one, therefore, prepare himself to suffer in Religion this obscurity. It will sometimes appear to him that he cannot bear the observance of the Order, that he will have no more peace of mind, or will not even be able to save himself. But, most of all, he must be on his guard when the temptation presents specious scruples or pretexts of greater spiritual good, in order to make him abandon his Vocation.

There are two principal remedies for such temptations :

First Remedy: To have Recourse to God.

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

Until we have passed through this storm, which for the most part comes to all, let no one of us think himself secure. Let us be persuaded, however, that in this time of temptation it is vain to expect to feel fervour, or a clearness of reason sufficient to tranquillise ourselves; for

in the midst of the darkness we see nothing but confusion. At such a time we can only cry out : *O Lord, help me! O Lord, help me!* We should also have frequent recourse to Most Holy Mary, who is the Mother of perseverance. Let us confide in that divine promise : *Ask and you shall receive.* It is certain that he who, with the help of divine grace, is victorious in such a combat finds afterwards a double calm and peace in his Vocation.

Second Remedy: To have Recourse to the Superiors.

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

And let it be understood that in Religion these temptations against Vocation are the most pernicious that hell can raise against a subject, for, should he give way, the devil, with one stroke, will have gained many victories; for when a subject has lost his Vocation and left Religion, what good will he be able to do in the service of God? The enemy, it is true, will make him believe that out of Religion he will enjoy greater peace and be able to do more good; nevertheless, let him hold for certain that as soon as he has left the House of God he will feel such remorse that he will nevermore enjoy peace of conscience. And God grant that such a remorse may not torment him for all eternity in hell, into which, as has already been said, he who through his own fault loses his Vocation, may so easily fall. He will be so lukewarm

and discouraged in doing good that he will not even have the strength to raise his eyes to Heaven. In such a state he will easily give up prayer altogether, because as often as he begins it he will feel a hell of remorse, hearing his conscience reproach him and saying: "What hast thou done? Thou hast abandoned God; thou hast lost thy Vocation; and for what? To follow thine own caprice; to please thy parents." Let him be certain that he will have to feel this remorse through his whole life, and still more so at the hour of his death, when, in sight of eternity, instead of dying in the House of God, and in the midst of his Brethren in Religion, he will die out of Religion, perhaps in his own house, in the midst of his relatives, to please whom he has displeased God. A Religious should ever beseech God to let him die rather than permit so great a misfortune to befall him, the torments of which he will better understand at the point of death, because then there will be no remedy for the error. For him, then, who is tempted against his Vocation, the best Meditation he can make while it lasts, is to reflect what torment the remorse of having lost his Vocation, and of having to die out of Religion, through his own caprice, through his own fault, will cause him at the hour of his death.

Evening Meditation.

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

I.

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

Consider how, after so many centuries, after so many prayers and sighs, the Messias Whom the holy Patriarchs and Prophets were not worthy to see, for Whom the nations sighed, the desire of the eternal hills, our Saviour,

is come! He is already born and has given Himself entirely to us. *A child is born to us, and a son is given to us*—(Is. ix., 6).

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

"A child gives easily," says St. Bernard; children readily give anything that is asked of them. Jesus came into the world as a Child, in order to show Himself ready and willing to give us all good gifts: *In whom are hid all treasures.*—(Col. ii., 8). *The Father hath given all things into his hands.*—(Jo. iii., 35). If we wish for light, He is come on purpose to enlighten us. If we wish for strength to resist our enemies, He is come to give us comfort. If we wish for pardon and salvation, He is come to pardon and save us. If, in short, we desire the sovereign gift of Divine love, He is come to inflame our hearts with it; and, above all, for this very purpose, He has become a Child, and has chosen to show Himself to us worthy of our love, in proportion as He was poor and humble, in order to take away from us all fear, and to gain our affections. "Thus," says St. Peter Chrysologus, "should He come Who willed to drive away fear, and seek for love."

O my amiable Jesus, Whom I have treated with so much contempt, Thou hast descended from Heaven to rescue us from hell, and to give Thyself entirely to us—how can we, then, have so often despised Thee and turned our backs upon Thee? O God! men are so grateful to their fellow-creatures, that if anyone makes them a gift, if any one comes from a distance to pay them a visit, if anyone shows them a mark of affection, they cannot forget it, and feel themselves obliged to make him a return. And yet they are so ungrateful towards Thee, Who art their God, and so amiable, and Who for their love didst not refuse Thy Blood and Thy

life. But, alas ! I have behaved worse than others towards Thee, because more loved by Thee, and yet I have been more ungrateful towards Thee. Ah, if Thou hadst bestowed the graces given to me on a heretic, on an idolater, he would have become a Saint ! And yet I have only offended Thee ! O Jesus, mercy !

II.

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

Forget, O Lord, I pray Thee, the injuries I have done Thee. But Thou hast already said that when a sinner repents, Thou forgettest all the outrages Thou hast received from him : *All his iniquities I will not remember.* — (Ezech. xviii., 22). If in times past I have not loved Thee, in future I will do nothing but love Thee, Thou hast given Thyself all to me, I will give Thee my entire will. With this will I love Thee, love Thee, love Thee ; and I repeat it, I love Thee, I love Thee, I love Thee. While I live I will constantly say this ; and thus shall I die, saying with my last breath those sweet words : " My God, I love Thee. " And in the meantime, O my Lord, my only Good, my only Love, I intend to prefer Thy Will to every pleasure of my own. Let the whole world offer itself to me, I will refuse, for I will never cease to love Him Who has loved me so much. I will never again offend Him Who deserves from me an infinite love. Do Thou, O my Jesus, strengthen this my desire with Thy grace. Mary, my Queen, I acknowledge that all the

graces that I have received from God are due to thy intercession. Cease not to intercede for me. Obtain for me perseverance, thou who art the Mother of perseverance.

Friday—Third Week of Advent

Morning Meditation.

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE RELIGIOUS STATE.—X.

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

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

I.

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

Moses and Elias, on Mount Thabor, speaking of His death, as it is related in the Gospel, called it an

“excess”: *They spoke of his decease* (the Latin word is “excessus,” which also means “excess”) *that he should accomplish in Jerusalem.*—(Luke ix., 31). Yes, says St. Bonaventure, it is with reason the death of Jesus Christ was called an “excess,” for it was an excess of suffering and of love—*Excessus doloris, excessus amoris.* So much so that it would be impossible to believe it, if it had not already happened. It was truly an excess of love, adds St. Augustine, for to this end the Son of God wished to come on earth, to live a life so laborious and to die a death so bitter, namely, that He might make known to man how much He loved him. “Therefore Christ came, that man should know how much God loved him.”

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

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

from all, to give myself to Thee. I put away from me the love of all creatures in order to consecrate myself entirely to Thy love.

II.

That Jesus Christ should die on the Cross for our sakes seemed to St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi to be “foolishness.” Hence she said Jesus was foolish with love: “O my Jesus, Thou art foolish with love!” So, also, the Gentiles, as St. Paul attests, on hearing the death of Jesus Christ preached to them, considered it a folly that no one could believe. *We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews indeed a stumbling-block, and unto the Gentiles foolishness.*—(1 Cor. i., 23). How is it possible, they said, that a God Who is in Himself most happy and is dependant on none, should die for the love of man, His own servant?

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

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

towards us. *That they also who live may not now live to themselves, but unto him who died for them.*—(1b. v., 15).

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

Spiritual Reading.

COUNSELS CONCERNING A RELIGIOUS VOCATION.

XI.—CONCLUSION.

Finally, let him who wishes to enter Religion resolve to become a Saint, and to suffer every exterior and interior pain in order to be faithful to God, and not to lose his Vocation. And if he be not thus resolved, I exhort him not to deceive the Superiors and himself, and not to enter at all, for this is a sign that he is not called, or, which is a still greater evil, that he has not the will to correspond as he ought, with the grace of his Vocation. Hence, with so bad a disposition, it is better to remain in the world, there to dispose himself better, so as to give himself entirely to God, and to suffer all for Him. Otherwise he will do an injury both to himself and to Religion, for he will leave for the least cause, and then, besides being discredited before the world, he will be guilty before God of a still further infidelity to his Vocation, and will lose all hope of being able to take a single step in the way of God. God alone knows into what other misfortunes and sins he may fall.

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

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

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

Let us always recommend ourselves to our most loving Redeemer, hidden in the Blessed Sacrament, and to the Blessed Virgin, for Religious must profess a most special love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and for His Immaculate Mother Mary. Let us have great confidence. Jesus Christ has chosen us to be princes of His court, and all Religious Orders, and each member of them, are indeed objects of His special care. *The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear?*—(Ps. xxvi., 1).

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

Evening Meditation.

**JESUS OFFERED HIMSELF FOR OUR SALVATION
FROM THE BEGINNING.**

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

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

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

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

II.

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

O my Jesus, now I love Thee above all things, and I will love none but Thee. In pity help me, through the

merit of all those sufferings which from Thy infancy Thou hast endured for me. Eternal Father, for the sake of Jesus Christ accept my love. If I have provoked Thee let the tears of the Infant Jesus, Who is praying for me, appease Thy wrath : *Look on the face of thy Christ.*—(Ps. lxxxiii., 10). I do not deserve favours, but this Thy innocent Son deserves them, and offers Thee a life of sufferings, in order that Thou mayst be merciful to me. And thou, O Mother of mercy, Mary, cease not to intercede for me. Thou knowest how much I confide in thee ; and I well know that thou dost not forsake him that has recourse to thee.

Saturday—Third Week of Advent

Morning Meditation.

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE RELIGIOUS

STATE.—XI.

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

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

I.

If it be true, and most true, indeed, it is, that, as St. Peter Damian teaches, the divine Mother, most holy Mary, loves all men with such an affection that, after God, there is not, nor can there be, any one who surpasses or equals her in her love : “ She loves us with an invincible

love ” : how much must we think this great Queen loves Religious, who have consecrated their liberty, their life, and their all to the love of Jesus Christ ? She well sees that the life of Religious is more conformable to her own life, and to that of her divine Son ; she sees them often occupied in praising her, and continually attentive to honour her by their Novenas, Visits, Rosaries, Fasts, etc. She beholds them often at her feet, intent on invoking her aid, asking graces of her, and graces all conformed to her holy desires ; that is, the grace of perseverance in the divine service, of strength in their temptations, of detachment from this world, and of love of God. Ah, how can we doubt that she employs all her power and mercy for the benefit of Religious, and especially of those who belong to this holy Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, in which, as it is well known, we make a special profession of honouring the Virgin Mother by Visits, by mortifications on Saturdays and during her Novenas, etc., and by everywhere promoting devotion to her by sermons and Novenas !

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

II.

She, the great Mistress is grateful : *I love those who love me.*—(Prov. viii., 17). Yes, she is so grateful that, as St. Andrew of Crète says, “ To him who does her the least service she is accustomed to return great favours.” To those who love her, and who promote her honour among others, she graciously promises to save them from sin : *Those that work by me shall not sin.*

She also promises them Paradise : *Those that explain me shall have life everlasting.*—(Office of the B. V. Mary).

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

My most beloved, most lovely, amiable, and most loving Queen, I thank my Lord and thee, and will always thank thee, who hast not only drawn me out of the world, but also called me to live in this Congregation, in which a special devotion to thee is practised. Accept of me, then, my Mother, to serve thee. Among so many of thy beloved children, disdain not to let me serve thee also, miserable though I be. Thou after God shall always be my hope and my love. In all my wants, in all my tribulations and temptations I will have recourse to thee; thou shalt be my refuge and my consolation. I will not that any one except God and thee should comfort me in my combats, in the sadness and the tediousness of this life. For thy service I renounce the kingdoms of the whole world! My kingdom on earth shall be to serve, bless, and love thee, O my most lovely Mistress, "whom to serve is to reign" as St. Anselm says. Thou art the Mother of perseverance; obtain for me to be faithful unto death. By so doing I hope, and firmly hope, one day to come where thou reignest, to praise and bless thee forever, and never more to depart from thy feet. "Jesus and Mary," I will say with thy loving servant, Alphonsus Rodriguez, "my sweetest Loves, let me suffer for You, let me die for You, let me be all Yours, and in nothing my own."

Spiritual Reading.

ON DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

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

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

That every one may be persuaded how important it is, both for his own good and that of others, to promote devotion towards Mary, it is useful to know what Theologians say on the subject.

St. Bonaventure says that those who make a point of announcing to others the glories of Mary, are certain of Heaven; and this opinion is confirmed by Richard of

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

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

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

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

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

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

Evening Meditation.

JESUS A PRISONER IN THE WOMB OF MARY.

I.

I am become as a man without help, free among the dead.—(Ps. lxxxvii., 5, 6).

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

Forget not the kindness of thy surety.—(Eccclus. xxix., 19). Yes, my Jesus, the Prophet has reason to warn me not to forget the immense favour in that Thou the innocent One, Thou, O my God! hast chosen to satisfy for my sins by Thy sufferings and Thy death. But after all this kindness I have forgotten Thy favours and Thy love, and I have had the boldness to turn my back upon Thee, as if Thou hadst not been my Lord, and the Lord Who has loved me so much. But if in times past I have forgotten Thy mercies, O my dear Redeemer! I will in future never forget them again. Thy sufferings and

death shall be the constant subjects of my thoughts, because they will always recall to my mind the love that Thou hast borne me. Cursed be the days in which, forgetting what Thou hast suffered for me, I have made so bad a use of my liberty. Thou hast given it to me to love Thee, and I have used it to despise Thee. But I now consecrate entirely to Thee this liberty which Thou hast given me.

II.

The womb of Mary was, therefore, to our Redeemer, a voluntary prison, because it was a prison of love. But it was also not an unjust prison: He was, indeed, innocent Himself, but He had offered Himself to pay our debts and to satisfy for our crimes. It was, therefore, only reasonable for the divine justice to keep Him thus imprisoned, and so begin to exact from Him the satisfaction due.

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

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

tell Him to make me holy. Help me, my Mother, for the sake of the favour and honour Jesus Christ conferred upon thee by dwelling within thee for nine months.

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Morning Meditation.

THE SALVATION OF THE LORD.

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

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

I.

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

the same holy Doctor, that man might know how much God loves him.

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

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

II.

Tell me, O Christian, what more could Jesus Christ have done to win Thy love? If the Son of God had engaged to rescue from death His own Father, what lower humiliation could He have stooped to than to assume human flesh and to lay down His life in sacrifice for His salvation? Nay, I say more, had Jesus Christ been a mere man instead of One of the Divine Persons, and wished to gain by some token of affection the love of His God, what more could He have done than He has done for thee? If a servant of thine had given for thy love his very life-blood would he not have riveted thy heart to him, and obliged thee to love him out of mere gratitude? And how comes it that Jesus Christ, though He has laid down His very life for thee, has still failed to win thy love?

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

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

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

Spiritual Reading.

JOSEPH AND MARY AT BETHLEHEM

Octavius Augustus, the Emperor of Rome, wishing to know the strength of his empire, decreed that there be a

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

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

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

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

These poor travellers, then, seeing themselves repulsed on every side, leave the city to try and find some place of refuge without its walls. They walk on in the dark; they go round about and examine, till at last they see a grotto, which was cut out of stone in the mountain under the city. Barradas, Bede, and Brocardus say that the place where Jesus Christ was born was a rock that had been excavated under the walls of Bethlehem, divided off from the city, and like a cavern, which served as a stable for cattle. When they came to it Mary said to Joseph: "There is no occasion to go any farther; let us go into this cave and remain here." "What!" replied Joseph, "my spouse, dost thou not see that this cave is quite exposed; that it is cold and damp, and that water is running down on all sides? Dost thou not see that it is no lodging for men, but it is a shed for beasts? How canst thou stop here all night and be delivered here?" Then Mary said: "It is nevertheless true that this stable is the royal palace in which the Eternal Son of God desires to be born on earth."

Oh, what must the Angels have said when they saw the divine Mother enter into this cave to bring forth her Son! The sons of princes are born in rooms adorned with gold; they have cradles enriched with precious stones, fine clothes, a retinue of the first lords of the kingdom; and has the King of Heaven nothing but a cold stable, without a fire, to be born in, some poor swaddling clothes to cover Him, a little straw for His bed, and a vile manger in which to lie? "Where is the palace," asks St. Bernard, "where is the throne?" Where, says the Saint, is the court, where is the royal palace for this King of Heaven? for I see nothing but two animals to keep Him company, and a manger for cattle, where He must be laid. O happy grotto, that witnessed the birth of the Divine Word! Happy manger to have had the honour of receiving the Lord of Heaven! Happy straw which served as a bed to Him Who sits on the shoulders of the Seraphim! Ah, when we think of the birth of Jesus Christ, and of the manner in which it took place, we ought all to be inflamed with

love; and when we hear the names of cave, manger, straw, milk, tears, in reference to the birth of our Redeemer, these names ought to be so many incitements to our love, and arrows to wound our hearts. Yes, still happier are those souls who love this amiable Lord with fervour and tenderness, and who receive Him in Holy Communion into hearts burning with love. Oh, with what desire and pleasure does not Jesus Christ enter into and repose in a heart that loves Him!

Evening Meditation.

THE ETERNAL WORD BECOMES LITTLE.

I.

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

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

Although the Jews, by so many signs and wonders, had a certain knowledge of the true God, they were not, however, satisfied; they wished to behold Him face to face. God found means to comply even with this desire of men; He became Man, to make Himself visible to them. "Knowing," says St. Peter Chrysologus, "that mortals felt an anguish of desire to see Him, God chose this method of making Himself visible to them." And to render Himself still more attractive in our eyes, He would make His first appearance as a little Child, that thus He might be the more charming and irresistible;

He showed Himself an Infant, that He might make Himself more acceptable in our eyes. "Yes," adds St. Cyril of Alexandria, "He abased Himself to the humble condition of a little Child in order to make Himself more agreeable to our hearts." "For our advantage was this emptying made." For this, indeed, was the form most suitable to win our love.

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

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

II

In order to force us to love Him God would not commission others, but chose to come Himself in person to be made Man and to redeem us. St. John Chrysostom makes a beautiful reflection on these words of the Apostle: *For nowhere doth he take hold of the angels, but of the seed of Abraham he taketh hold.*—(Heb. ii., 16). Why, asks the Saint, did he not say *received*, but

* rather *taketh hold*? Why did not St. Paul simply say that God assumed human flesh? Why would he affirm with marked emphasis that He took it, as it were, by force, according to the strict meaning of the Latin *apprehendit*? He answers that he spoke thus, making use of the metaphor of those who give chase to those who are fleeing away. By this he would convey the idea that God always longed to be loved by man, but man turned his back upon Him, and cared not even to know of His love; therefore God came from Heaven, and took human flesh, to make Himself known in this way, and to make Himself loved, as it were, by force by ungrateful man who fled from Him.

For this, then, did the Eternal Word become Man; for this He, moreover, became an Infant. He could, indeed, have appeared upon this earth as a full-grown Man, as the first man, Adam, appeared. No, the Son of God wished to present Himself under the form of a sweet little Child, that thus He might the more readily and the more forcibly draw to Himself the love of man. Little children of themselves are loved at once; to see them and to love them is the same thing. Ah, my dear Jesus, it is true that in time past I did not know Thee. Heedless of Thy love I sought only my own gratification, making no account whatever of Thee or of Thy friendship. But now I am conscious of the evil I have done. I am sorry for it and I grieve over it with my whole heart. I love Thee, Jesus, and that so dearly that even if I knew that all mankind were about to rebel against Thee and forsake Thee, yet would I not leave Thee though it should cost me a thousand lives. Accept, O Jesus, of my poor heart to love Thee. There was a time when it cared not for Thee, but now it is enamoured of Thy goodness, O Divine Infant. O Mary, O great Mother of the Word Incarnate, neither do thou abandon me. Thou art the Mother of perseverance and the stewardess of divine grace. Help me, then, and help me always. With thy aid, O my hope, I trust to be faithful to my God for ever. Amen.

Monday—Fourth Week of Advent

Morning Meditation.

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE RELIGIOUS STATE.—XII.

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

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

I.

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

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

next, unveiled in Paradise. "O solitude," it may be said of every Religious house, "in which God familiarly speaks and converses with His friends!";

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

II.

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

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

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

Spiritual Reading.

ENCOURAGEMENT TO NOVICES TO PERSEVERE IN THEIR VOCATION.

There are two graces clearly distinct one from the other—the grace of Vocation and the grace of Perseverance in one's Vocation. Many who have received a Vocation from God have afterwards, through their own fault, rendered themselves unworthy to receive the grace of Perseverance. *He is not crowned except he strive lawfully.*—(2 Tim. ii., 5). No one will receive the grace of Perseverance and the crown which God has prepared for him, who does not do what in him lies to

fight and conquer his enemies : *Hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.*—(Apoc. iii., 11). My dear young friend, you who, by so special a favour, have been called by Our Lord to follow Him, hear how He exhorts and encourages you : “ Be careful, My son, to preserve the grace which you have received from Me, and tremble lest you should lose it and another gain the crown which is prepared for you.”

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

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

I.—TENDERNESS FOR PARENTS AND FRIENDS.

First, he tempts them by tenderness for their parents. To resist this it is necessary to reflect on the declaration of Jesus Christ : *He who loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.*—(Matt. x., 37). And He declares that He came not to send peace, but division. *I came not to send peace, but the sword ; for I came to set*

a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother.—(Matt. x., 34, 35). And why this great desire to separate relations from each other ? Because Our Lord well knew the injury that comes from such intercourse, and that in the affairs of eternal salvation, especially where there is question of a Religious Vocation, there are no greater enemies than relations ; and this Our Lord declared, saying : *A man's enemies shall be of his own household.*—(Matt. x., 36). O how many unhappy youths, through affection for their relations, have first lost their Vocations, and then, as so easily happens, their own souls. History is full of such sad instances. I will tell you of some. Father Jerome Piatii relates of a novice who was visited by a relation who said to him : “ Listen to me ; I only speak because I love you, and I beg you to reflect that your constitution is not fitted to undergo the labours and studies of the Religious life ; by remaining in the world you can please God better, especially by giving to the poor a large share of the riches with which He has blessed you. If you persist in your undertaking you will repent of it, for, in the end, with shame, you will be obliged to quit the Community, seeing yourself made porter or cook on account of your little talent and poor health. Therefore it is wiser to do at once that which you will be at last obliged to do.” The poor young man, thus perverted, left the monastery, but many days had not elapsed before he fell into all kinds of vices ; and in a quarrel with some of his rivals, he, together with the relation who had perverted him, was so severely wounded that within a short time they both died on the same day ; and, what is still worse, the unfortunate novice expired without confession, of which he must have stood in so great need. We read in the *Life of St. Camillus of Lellis* that a young man, who was received into his Community in Naples, was persecuted by his father. At first he resisted with courage. He had to go to Rome on business, and there, in an interview with his father, he yielded to the temptation. On dismissing him the Saint predicted that

he would come to an evil end and die by the hand of justice. This was verified. The young man married, and later, in a fit of jealousy, murdered his wife and two servants. He was apprehended and brought to justice, and although his father expended his whole fortune to save the life of his unhappy son, he was beheaded in the market place of Naples, nine years after his departure from the monastery.

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

Hearken, O daughter, and see and incline thine ear, and forget thy people and thy father's house.—(Ps. xlv., 11). Hearken then to what God says to you, and know that if you desert Him for the love of your relations, great will be your sorrow and remorse at the hour of death. You will then remember the House of God which you abandoned, and behold around your death-bed brothers and nephews in tears, who, at a time when you need spiritual help, will press you to leave them your goods, and not one will speak to you of God; they will even try to delude you, not to increase your pain by the thought of death; they will hold out vain hopes of recovery, and thus you will die without preparation. Contrast with this the joy and peace you will feel in dying in Religion, where you will have the happiness of seeing around you your brethren, whose prayers will assist you to fix your hopes in Heaven, and who, instead of deceiving you, will aid you to expire in peace and joy. Reflect also, that though it be true that your parents have loved you for many years with some tenderness, God loved you long before, and with far greater love. Your parents have loved for twenty or thirty years or more, but God has loved you from all eternity. *I have loved thee with an everlasting love.*—(Jer. xxxi., 3). Your parents have, it is true, been at some expense for your welfare and suffered on your account, but Jesus Christ shed all His Blood and gave His life for you.

When, therefore, your tenderness for your parents urges you to be grateful to them and not to displease them, remember that much greater gratitude is due to God, Who has done more for you and loved you more than all others. Say, then, to yourself: "Relations, if I leave you, it is for God, Who merits my love more and loves me better than you." And by such words as these you will vanquish this terrible temptation of your kindred, which has caused the ruin of so many in this world and in the next.

Evening Meditation.

THE LOVE THAT GOD HAS SHOWN US IN BECOMING MAN.

I.

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

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

Our first parent, Adam, having sinned and rebelled against God, was driven out of Paradise and condemned to everlasting death with all his descendants. But behold the Son of God, Who, seeing man thus lost, in order to deliver him from death offers to take upon Himself human flesh, and to die condemned as a malefactor upon the Cross. But, my Son, we may suppose the Father saying to Him, consider what a life of humiliation and suffering Thou wilt have to lead upon earth. Thou wilt have to be born in a cold cave, and to be laid in a manger for beasts. Thou wilt have to fly as an Infant into Egypt to escape from the hands of Herod. On Thy return from Egypt Thou wilt have to live in a shop as a humble servant, poor and despised. And, finally, worn out by sufferings, Thou wilt have to

give up Thy life upon a Cross, insulted and forsaken by all.—Father, all this matters not, replies the Son; I am content with enduring all, provided man is saved.

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

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

II.

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

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

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

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

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

Tuesday—Fourth Week of Advent

Morning Meditation.

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE RELIGIOUS STATE.—XIII.

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

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

I.

The Apostle says that the Eternal Father predestines to the kingdom of Heaven those only who live conform-

always carry it with constancy and love. I regret that in the past I have abandoned Thee, to follow my lusts and the vanities of the world; but now I am resolved to leave Thee no more. Bind me to Thy Cross, and if through weakness I sometimes resist, draw me by the sweet bonds of Thy love. Suffer it not that I ever leave Thee again.

II.

St. Francis of Assisi renounced in favour of his father the whole of his inheritance, and even his garments, and, thus poor and mortified, consecrated himself to Jesus Christ. Nor was it different with St. Francis Borgia and St. Aloysius Gonzaga, one being Duke of Gandia, the other of Castiglione. Both left all their riches, their estates, their vassals, their country, their home, their parents, and went to live a poor life in Religion.

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

At present worldlings think these to be fools, but in the Valley of Josaphat they shall know that they themselves have been the fools; and when they see the Saints on their thrones crowned by God they shall say, lamenting and in despair: *These are they whom we had sometime in derision . . . we fools esteemed their life madness, and their end without honour. Behold, how they are numbered among the children of God, and their lot is among the saints!*—(Wis. v., 8, 4, 5).

Yes, my Jesus, I renounce all the satisfactions of the world; the only satisfaction I seek is to love Thee, and to suffer as Thou pleasest. I hope thus to come one day to be united to Thee in Thy kingdom by the bond

ably to the life of the Incarnate Word. *Whom he foreknew, he also predestinated to be made conformable to the image of his son.*—(Rom. viii., 29). How happy, then, and secure of Paradise should not Religious be, seeing that God has called them to a state of life which, of all other states, is most like the life of Jesus Christ.

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

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

Ah! my Master and my Redeemer, Jesus, I am, then, of the number of those fortunate ones whom Thou hast called to follow Thee. O my Lord! I thank Thee for this. I leave all; would that I had more to leave, that I might draw near to Thee, my King and my God, Who, for the love of me, and to give me courage by Thy example, didst choose for Thyself a life so poor and so painful. Walk on, O Lord, I will follow Thee. Choose Thou for me what cross Thou wilt, and help me. I will

of eternal love, there to see Thee and to love Thee without fear of ever being separated from Thee. I love Thee, O my God, my All, and will always love Thee. Thou art my hope, O Most Holy Mary, thou, the most conformed to Jesus, art now the most powerful to obtain this grace. Be thou my protectress!

Spiritual Reading.

ENCOURAGEMENT TO NOVICES.

II.—ANXIETY CONCERNING HEALTH.

Another temptation with which the devil is wont to attack a novice, is too much anxiety about his health. The deceiver thus insinuates himself into the mind of the novice: "Do you not perceive that by leading such a life you will ruin your health, and then you will be no use either to the world or to God." The novice must repel this temptation by confidence in Our Lord, for He Who has given him a Vocation will also give him health to follow it. If he has entered into the House of God solely to please Him, as we suppose he has, let him console himself by saying: "I concealed nothing concerning the state of my health from my Superiors, and they received me and have not yet dismissed me; it is then the will of God that I should remain here, and if it be His will that I should suffer and even die in His House what does it signify? How many anchorets have gone to suffer for Him in forests and caverns! How many Martyrs have run with joy to give their lives for Him! If, then, it be His will that I should lose my health or my life for His love, I am content; I desire nothing else, I can desire nothing better." Thus will the fervent Religious speak who desires to become a Saint. If a novice is not fervent during his novitiate, it is certain that he will never be so in after life.

III. THE INCONVENIENCES OF COMMUNITY LIFE.

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

He must remember that he has not come to the House of God to make himself comfortable, but to become a Saint; and how can he become a Saint? Is it by comfort and pleasure? No; but by sufferings, and by dying to his own disorderly affections and appetites. St. Teresa says, that "to expect that God will admit to His love those who are fond of their own ease, is a great mistake." And in another place: "Souls who truly love God cannot ask for repose." He, therefore, who is not firmly resolved to suffer and to bear everything for the love of God, will never become a Saint. No; he will never become a Saint, nor even enjoy true peace. And why? Do you, perhaps, imagine that true peace is to be found in the enjoyment of worldly goods or sensual pleasures, or perhaps you fancy that the high-born rich, who abound in these things, have arrived at it? They are most miserable, they are nourished upon gall. *All is vanity and affliction of spirit.*—(Eccles. i., 14). It was thus that Solomon described earthly goods, which he had fully enjoyed. When a man places his affections upon these things, the more he has the more he desires, and he is never at rest; but when he places all his happiness in God, in Him he finds perfect peace. *Delight in the Lord, says David, and he will give thee the requests of thy heart.*—(Ps. xxxiv., 4). Father Charles of Lorraine, brother to the Duke of Lorraine, became a Religious, and when alone in his poor cell he felt so great an interior peace that he danced for joy. Blessed Seraphim, a Capuchin, said that he would not give a foot length of his cord for all the wealth and dignities of the earth; and St. Teresa would often

encourage others under difficulties by saying : " When a soul is resolved to suffer, the suffering ceases."

IV.—DISCOURAGEMENT IN ARIDITIES.

But here we must take notice of an error by which the devil tempts a novice when he feels this affliction of spirit. " Do you not see," he says to him, " that you have not found peace here? You have lost devotion, everything is wearisome—prayer, spiritual reading, Communion, even recreation. These are signs that God does not wish you to remain in Religion." Oh, what a terrible and dangerous temptation this is for a new and inexperienced novice! In order to overcome it he must first consider the true nature of peace of soul whilst on earth, which is a place of trial, and therefore must be one of pain. This peace does not consist, as we have already seen, in the enjoyment of the good things of this world. It does not consist even in spiritual delights, for these do not increase our merit, or make us more dear to God. True peace is to be found only in conformity of our will to the will of God, and the peace we ought to desire is that of having our will perfectly united to the Divine will, even in our darkness and desolation. O, how dear to God is the soul that faithfully perseveres in Spiritual Reading, Meditation, Communion, and other pious exercises solely to please Him, without feeling any sensible consolation! O, the great merit of good works when performed purely for God's sake, without looking for reward here below! The Venerable Father Anthony Torres wrote to a person in spiritual desolation : " When we carry the Cross of Jesus without consolation, our soul runs, nay, flies towards perfection." When a novice is in a state of aridity he should say to God : " O Lord, if it is Thy will that I should remain in desolation and deprived of all comfort, I desire to be in that state as long as it pleases Thee; I will never leave Thee; behold me ready to endure these troubles during my whole life, and even for all eternity, if Thou wilt it. For me it is enough to know that it is Thy will." It is thus a novice who really desires to love God will speak;

but let him be certain that such sufferings will not last for ever. By such insinuations the devil seeks to destroy his confidence, causing him to believe that his desolation will last for ever, that it will bring him to despair, and that at length he will be unable to endure it. These terrible storms, however, which the enemy is able to raise in the soul when it is in darkness and desolation, will not endure for ever. *To him that overcometh I will give a hidden manna*, says Our Lord.—(Apoc. ii., 17). Yes, those who pass through such tempests of aridity and desolation with patience, and overcome such temptations, shall be consoled by the Lord Himself, Who will give them to taste a hidden manna—that interior peace which, according to St. Paul, *surpasseth all understanding*.—(Phil. iv., 7). This one thought—I am doing the will of God, I am pleasing God—gives a peace far superior to all the joys, pastimes, feasting, honours and dignities of the world. God cannot fail in the promise He has made to those who have left all things for His love. *And every one that hath left house, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake shall receive an hundredfold here, and shall possess life everlasting*.—(Matt. xix., 29). He promises them Paradise in the next world and an hundred-fold in this. And what is this hundred-fold? It is the testimony of a good conscience, which immeasurably surpasses all the pleasures of this life.

Evening Meditation.

JESUS HAS DONE AND SUFFERED EVERYTHING
TO SAVE US.

I.

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

The Son of God being true God is infinitely happy; and yet, as St. Thomas says, He has done and suffered

as much for man as if He could not be happy without him. If Jesus Christ had been obliged to earn for Himself upon this earth His Eternal Beatitude, what could He have done more than to burden Himself with all our weaknesses, and assume all our infirmities, and then end His life with a death so severe and ignominious? But no, He was innocent, He was holy, and was in Himself blessed; whatever He did and suffered was all to gain for us divine grace and Paradise, which we had lost. Miserable is he who does not love Thee, my Jesus, and does not pass his life enamoured of so much goodness.

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

II.

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

My beloved Redeemer, I beseech Thee to bestow upon me the graces which Thou hast merited for me by Thy death. I love Thee, and am sorry for having offended Thee. Oh, take my soul into Thy hands; I will not let the devil have dominion over it any more; I desire that

it may be entirely Thine, since Thou hast bought it with Thy Blood. Thou alone lovest me, and Thee alone will I love. Deliver me from the misery of living without Thy love, and then chastise me as Thou wiltest. O Mary, my refuge, the death of Jesus and thy intercession are my hope.

Wednesday—Fourth Week of Advent

Morning Meditation.

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE RELIGIOUS STATE.—XIV.

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

Our Redeemer did not impose on St. Peter penance, prayers, or other things, but only that he should endeavour to save His sheep. *Simon, son of John, lovest thou me? . . . Feed my sheep.*—(Jo. xxi, 17). Yes, O my Lord, I will serve Thee with all my strength in this great work.

I.

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

* Although St. Alphonsus in this Consideration had especially in view the Congregation of Missionaries which he founded, yet what he says here is for all Religions of both sexes, and indeed for all who serve God.—EDITOR.
(D 515)

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

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

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

II.

What greater glory can a man have than to be, as St. Paul says, a co-operator with God in this great work of

the salvation of souls? He who loves the Lord ardently is not content to be alone in loving Him, he would draw all to His love, saying with David: *O magnify the Lord with me, and let us extol his name together.*—(Ps. xxxiii., 4). Hence St. Augustine exhorts all those who love God to "draw 11 men to His love."

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

Behold, O Jesus, I offer Thee all my labours and my blood, and even my life in order to obey Thee. Nor do I in this seek to gratify my own inclination, or to gain the applause and esteem of men; I desire nothing but to see Thee loved by all as Thou deservest. I prize my happy lot, and call myself fortunate, that Thou hast chosen me for this great work, in which, I now protest that I renounce all the praise of men and all self-satisfaction, and seek only Thy glory. To Thee be all the honour and satisfaction, and to me only the discomfort, the blame, and the reproach. Accept, O Lord, this offering which I, a miserable sinner, who wish to love Thee and to see Thee loved by others, make of myself to Thee, and give me strength to do what I desire.

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

Spiritual Reading.

ENCOURAGEMENT TO NOVICES.

V.—DOUBTS ABOUT THE VOCATION ITSELF.

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

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

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

Another temptation which the evil spirit employs with those who, before entering Religion, led a spiritual life,

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

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

Evening Meditation.

JESUS COMES TO LEAD AN AFFLICTED LIFE.

I.

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

In creating man in the beginning, God did not place him on earth to suffer, but put him into the *paradise of pleasure*.—(Gen. ii., 15). He put man in a place of delight in order that he might pass thence to Heaven where he would enjoy for all eternity the glory of the blessed. But by sin man unhappily made himself unworthy of his earthly Paradise, and closed against himself the gates of the Heavenly Paradise, wilfully condemning himself to death and to everlasting misery. But what did the Son of God do to rescue man from such a state of misery? From being blessed and most happy as He was He chose to be afflicted and tormented. Our Redeemer could, indeed, have rescued us from the hands of our enemies without suffering. He could have come on earth and continued in His happiness, leading a life full of joys, and receiving the honour due to Him as King and Lord of all. One drop of His Blood, a single tear of His offered to God would have redeemed the world, and a countless number of worlds, on account of the Infinite dignity of His Person. But no!—having joy set before Him, He endured the Cross. He renounced all pleasures and honours and made choice on

earth of a life full of toil and ignominy. “What was sufficient for Redemption,” says St. John Chrysostom, “was not sufficient for love.”

Yes, because this Man was born on purpose to suffer, therefore He took to Himself a body particularly adapted for suffering. As the Apostle tells us, He said to His Eternal Father as He came into this world: *Sacrifice and oblation Thou wouldst not, but a body thou hast fitted to me.*—(Heb. x., 5). Thou hast given Me a body as I requested of Thee, delicate, sensitive, and made for suffering. I gladly accept this body and offer it to Thee; because by suffering in this body all the pains which will accompany Me through life and finally cause My death upon the Cross, I shall propitiate Thee on behalf of the human race, and gain for Myself the love of men.

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

II.

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

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

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

Thursday—Fourth Week of Advent

Morning Meditation.

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE RELIGIOUS STATE.—XV.

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

Our Most Holy Redeemer willed to be called a Lamb that He might show us how meek and humble He

Himself was, and that His disciples might learn from Him to be likewise meek and humble of heart.—(Matt. xi., 29). The Holy Ghost says: *That which is agreeable to him is faith and meekness.*—(Ecclus. i., 34, 35).

I.

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

St. Francis said that many make their perfection consist in exterior mortifications, and, after all, are not able to bear one injurious word. "Not understanding," he added, "how much greater gain is made by patiently bearing injuries." How many persons, as St. Bernard remarks, are all sweetness when nothing is said or done contrary to their inclination, but show their want of meekness when anything crosses them! And if one should ever be a Superior, let him believe that a single reprimand made with meekness will profit his subjects more than a thousand made with severity. "The meek are useful to themselves and to others," as St. John Chrysostom teaches. In short, as the same Saint said, the greatest sign of a virtuous soul is to see it preserve itself in meekness on occasions of contradiction. A meek heart is the delight of the Heart of God. *That which is agreeable to him is faith and meekness.*

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

II.

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

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

Brother Juniper, a disciple of St. Francis, when an injury was done to him, held up his cowl, as if expecting to receive pearls from Heaven. The Saints have ever been more desirous of injuries than worldlings are covetous of applause and honours. And of what use is a Religious who does not know how to bear contempt for God's sake? He is always proud; humble only in name, and a hypocrite whom divine grace will repulse, as the Holy Ghost says: *God resisteth the proud, but to the humble he giveth grace.*—(1 Peter v., 5).

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

Spiritual Reading.

ENCOURAGEMENT TO NOVICES.

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

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

And what good can a man do in his own country? Jesus Christ Himself when asked to preach and do good

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

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

to an active Order, who will assure me that the thought of leaving it is an inspiration, and not a temptation?"

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

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

Evening Meditation.

THE SORROW THAT THE INGRATITUDE OF MEN HAS CAUSED JESUS.

I.

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

During the holy time of Christmas St. Francis of Assisi went about the highways and woods, weeping and

sighing with inconsolable lamentations. When asked the reason he answered: "How can I help weeping when I see that Love is not loved? I see a God become as it were foolish for the love of man, and man so ungrateful to this God!" Now, if this ingratitude of men so afflicted the heart of St. Francis, let us consider how much more it must have afflicted the Heart of Jesus Christ Himself. Scarcely was He conceived in the womb of Mary than He saw the cruel ingratitude He was to receive from men. He had descended from Heaven to enkindle the fire of Divine love, and this desire alone had brought Him down to this earth, to suffer here the greatest sorrows and ignominies: *I am come to cast fire on the earth; and what will I, but that it be kindled?*—Luke xii., 49). And then He beheld the awful sins which men would commit after having seen so many proofs of His love. It was this, says St. Bernardine of Sienna, which made Him feel an infinite grief.

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

II.

Even amongst us it is an insufferable sorrow for one man to see himself treated with ingratitude by another; for, as the Blessed Simon of Cassia observes, ingratitude often afflicts the soul more than any pain afflicts the body: "Ingratitude often causes more bitter sorrow in the soul than pain causes in the body." What sorrow, then, must our ingratitude have caused Jesus, Who was our God, when He saw that His benefits and His love would be repaid by offences and injuries? *And they repaid me evil for good, and hatred for my love.*—(Ps. cviii., 5). But even at the present day it seems as if Jesus Christ is going about complaining: *I am become a stranger to my brethren.*—(Ps. lxxviii. 9). For He sees that many neither love nor know Him, as if He had not done them any good, nor had suffered anything for love of them. O God, what value do so many Christians even now set upon the love of Jesus Christ? Our Blessed Redeemer once appeared to Blessed Henry Suso in the form of a pilgrim who went begging from door to door for a lodging, but every one drove Him away with insults and injuries. How many, alas! are like those of whom Job speaks: *Who said to God: Depart from us . . . whereas he had filled their houses with good things.*—(Job xxii., 17). We have hitherto joined these ungrateful wretches; but shall we continue always like them? No; for that amiable Infant does not deserve it, Who came from Heaven to suffer and die for us in order that we might love Him.

No, my Redeemer and my Father, I am no longer worthy to be Thy son, having so often renounced Thy love; but Thou, by Thy merits, dost make me worthy. I thank Thee, O my Father. I thank Thee, and I love Thee. Ah, the thought alone of the patience with which Thou hast borne with me for so many years, and of the favours Thou hast conferred upon me after the many injuries that I have done Thee, ought to make me live constantly on fire with Thy love. Come, then, my Jesus, for I will not drive Thee away any more, come and dwell in my poor heart. I love

Thee and will always love Thee; but do Thou inflame my heart more and more by the remembrance of the love Thou hast borne me. O Mary, my Queen and my Mother, help me, pray to Jesus for me; make me live during the remainder of my life, grateful to that God Who has loved me so much, even though I have so greatly offended Him.

Friday—Fourth Week of Advent

Morning Meditation.

JESUS WISHES TO BE LOVED.

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

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

I.

God conferred so many blessings on men in order to draw them to love Him; but these ungrateful men not only did not love Him, but they would not even acknowledge Him as their Lord. Only in one corner of the earth, in Judea, was He recognized as God by His chosen people; and by them He was more feared than loved. He, however, Who wished to be more loved than feared by us, became Man like unto us, chose a poor, suffering obscure life, and a painful and ignominious death. And why? To draw our hearts to Himself. If Jesus Christ had not redeemed us, He would have been no less great or less happy; but He determined to procure our salvation at the cost of so many labours and sufferings,

as if His happiness depended on ours. He might have redeemed us without suffering; but no—He willed to free us from eternal death by His own death; and though He was able to save us in a thousand ways, He chose the most humiliating and painful way of dying through pure suffering on the Cross, to purchase the love of us, ungrateful worms of the earth. And what, indeed, was the cause of His miserable Birth and His most sorrowful death, if not the love He had for us?

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

II.

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

Thus did the holy Prophets desire for so many years the coming of the Saviour. The same Prophet Isaiah said: *Oh, that thou wouldst rend the heavens, and wouldst come down: the mountains would melt away at thy presence . . . the waters would burn with fire.*—(Is. lxiv., 1, 2). Lord, he said, when men shall see that Thou didst come on earth out of love for them, the mountains shall be made smooth, that is, men in serving Thee will conquer all the difficulties that at first appeared to them insuperable obstacles. The waters shall burn with fire, and the coldest hearts will feel themselves burning with Thy love, at the sight of Thee made Man; and how well has this been verified in many happy souls!—in St. Teresa, in St. Philip Neri, St. Francis Xavier, who even in this life were consumed by this holy fire. But how many such are there? Alas! but too few.

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

Spiritual Reading.

ENCOURAGEMENT TO NOVICES.

VIII.—ON THE MEANS OF PERSEVERING IN THE RELIGIOUS STATE.

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

increases, on the other, the Divine light diminishes; and thus it will not be difficult for the enemy to succeed in making him give up his Vocation.

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

3.—The third means is *Prayer*, that is, *recourse to God*, that *He may give you the grace of Perseverance*, a grace which, according to St. Augustine, can only be obtained by prayer. But let that novice who has received from God the gift of Vocation, and is tempted to abandon it, take care when he prays to Our Lord, not to say: “Lord, show me what I ought to do; enlighten me;—because God has already given him light by calling him to His holy House, and if he only asks for this grace, the devil, who can easily change himself into an angel of light, may deceive him and make him believe that the thought of leaving Religion is an effect of divine light. His prayer should rather be: “O Lord, Thou hast given me a Vocation, give me also strength to persevere in it.” A certain young man was called by God to the Religious state, and his Vocation being approved by his director, after many trials he joined a Religious Community. His parents did all in their power against him, and succeeded in prevailing upon him to go to another place, that he might more thoroughly examine his Vocation; unfortunately, instead of returning to the Community, he went home, satisfying his parents by this step, but displeasing God.

When I asked him how it happened that he committed such an error, he replied, that he had prayed to God in these words: *Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.*—(1 Kings iii., 9). And afterwards he adopted the resolution of returning to his family. I said to him: “O my son, you were mistaken in your prayer. Your Vocation was certain, being confirmed by so many evident signs; you should not have said: *Loquere, Domine, for God had already spoken, but: Confirma hoc, Deus, quod operatus es in me.*—(Ps. lxxvii., 26).—(Give me, O Lord, strength to execute Thy will, which Thou hast made known to me). You omitted to do this, and, therefore, you lost your Vocation.” Let the misfortune of this young man serve as an admonition to others. Again, let not the novice endeavour to tranquillise his mind by the light of his own reason in such times of temptation, for they are indeed seasons of darkness and confusion; let him simply offer himself anew to God, saying: “O my God, I give myself to Thee, I will never leave Thee, help me lest I become unfaithful to Thee.” By repeating these words whenever the temptation returns, and, as I have already said, by making his state known to his Superior, he will certainly be victorious. He should recommend himself particularly at such times, to Mary, the Mother of Perseverance.

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

Finally, I entreat you, my brother, whenever you are tempted concerning your Vocation, to reflect on these two points. First, that the grace of Vocation which God has given you, He has not given to many of your companions, some, perhaps, more deserving than you: *He hath not done in like manner to every nation.*—(Ps.

clvii., 19). Therefore you should fear to be so ungrateful as to turn your back upon Him, for by so doing you would greatly endanger your eternal salvation. And rest assured that you will not have peace, but will be tormented, even to your dying day, with remorse because of your infidelity.

Secondly, if the temptation should present itself to your mind, that if you remain in Religion you will fall into despair and repent of it, and have to render an account to God for it, or things like those we have already spoken of; call to your thoughts the hour of death: you will not then regret that you followed your Vocation, but you will be filled with peace and contentment, instead of the anguish and remorse which would have followed on your having abandoned it. Keep this thought before your mind, and you will not lose your Vocation; you will enjoy in life, and at death, that peace, and hereafter that crown of glory, which God has prepared for His faithful servants.

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

My God, how can I ever thank Thee enough for having called me so lovingly to Thy family? How have I merited this grace after having committed so many offences against Thee? How many of my companions are left in the world amidst so many dangers of losing their souls, and in occasions of sin! and I am admitted to Thy House, and to the company of so many of Thy dear servants, and to so great an abundance of all things necessary for my sanctification! I hope one day O Lord, to testify my gratitude to Thee in Heaven, by singing eternally Thy mercies to me. Meanwhile I am all Thine, and desire to be so for ever. I will remain faithful and will never leave Thee, even had I to lay down my life, nay, a thousand lives, for Thy sake. I here dedicate myself to Thy will without reserve. Do with me whatever Thou pleasest. Let me live desolate, infirm, despised, if such be Thy pleasure. It is enough

that I obey and please Thee. I desire only the grace to love Thee with all my strength, and to remain faithful to Thee till death. Most Holy Mary, my dear Mother, it is you who have obtained from God the so great graces which I have received, pardon of my sins, my Religious Vocation, and the strength to follow it; accomplish your work and obtain for me Perseverance unto death. This is my hope : so may it be !

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

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

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

Observe modesty when alone, as well as in the presence of others. Lay not your hand upon any person, nor look steadfastly in his face; keep your eyes continually cast down, especially in the church, at table, during recreation, and when abroad.

Observe silence, except when there is need to speak for the glory of God, or for your own or your neighbour's benefit. Be careful particularly during the time of recreation, not to raise your voice too loud. Avoid disputing or talking about your birth, talents, or riches; about eating, hunting, sports, war, or on the means of acquiring honours, riches, and such secular subjects, but endeavour to introduce pious conversation upon the vanity of honours, riches and pleasures of the world, on the love we owe to Jesus and Mary, on the happiness of the Saints, and on the means of advancing in perfection.

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

Desire nothing but what God wills.

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

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

My God, I desire nothing but Thee,

Show me Thy will and I will accomplish it.

Do with me what Thou wilt.

I desire, O God, whatever Thou wiltest.

My Jesus, I love Thee, I love Thee.

I renounce all; Thou alone are sufficient for me.

My God and my all.

Jesus our love, and Mary our hope.

O good Jesus, mayst Thou be ever praised.

My life was Thy death, Thy death is my life.

Evening Meditation.

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

I.

The grace of God our Saviour hath appeared to all men instructing us that . . . we should live . . . godly in this world, looking at the blessed hope and coming of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.—(Titus ii., 11).

Consider that by the grace that is said to have appeared is meant the tender love of Jesus Christ towards men—a love we have not merited, and which, therefore, is called a "grace." This love was, however, always the same in God, but did not always appear. It was at first promised in many prophecies and fore-shadowed by many figures; but at the Birth of the Redeemer this Divine love appeared and manifested

itself by the Eternal Word showing Himself to man as an Infant, lying on straw, crying and shivering with cold; beginning thus to make satisfaction for us for the penalties we have deserved, and so making known to us the affection which He bore us, by giving up His life for us: *In this we have known the charity of God, because he hath laid down his life for us.*—(1 Jo. iii., 16). Therefore the love of our God appeared to all men.

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

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

II.

But let us endeavour not to be of the number of those unhappy souls who are ignorant and ungrateful. If in times past we have shut our eyes to the light, thinking little of the love of Jesus Christ, let us try, during the days that remain to us in this life, to have ever before our eyes the sufferings and death of our Redeemer, in order to love Him Who has loved us so much: *Looking*

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

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

December the Twenty-Fourth

Morning Meditation.

JESUS COMES TO CAST FIRE UPON THE EARTH.

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

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

I.

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

I am come to cast fire upon the earth; so spoke Jesus Christ. Before the coming of the Messias, who loved God upon the earth? Some worshipped the sun, some the brutes, some the very stones, and others again even viler creatures still. A few years after the Redeemer was born God was more loved by men than He had been before from the creation of man. Ah, truly every man at the sight of a God clothed in flesh, and choosing to lead a life of such hardship, and to suffer a death of such ignominy, ought to be enkindled with love towards a God so loving! *Oh, that thou wouldst rend the heavens and wouldst come down; the mountains would melt away at thy presence . . . the waters would burn with*

fire.—(Is. lxiv., 1). Oh, surely Thou wouldst enkindle such a furnace in the human heart that even the most frozen souls would catch the flame of Thy blessed love! And, in fact, after the Incarnation of the Son of God, how brilliantly has the fire of divine love burnt in loving souls! How many youths, how many of those nobly born, and how many monarchs even, have left wealth, honours, and even kingdoms, to seek the desert or the cloister, that there, in poverty and obscure seclusion, they might the more unreservedly give themselves up to the love of their Saviour! How many Martyrs have gone rejoicing, making merry on their way to torments and death! How many tender young virgins have refused the proffered hands of the great ones of the world in order to go and die for Jesus Christ and so repay in some measure the affection of a God Who stooped down to take human flesh and to die for the love of them!

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

II.

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

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

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

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

Ah, how comes it that we are so ungrateful towards God, the same God Who has bestowed His whole self upon us, Who has descended from Heaven to earth, has become an Infant to save us and to be loved by us? Come, let us love the Babe of Bethlehem! Let us love Jesus Christ Who, in the midst of such sufferings, has sought to attach our hearts to Him.

O my sweet, amiable and holy Child, Thou art at a loss what more to do in order to make Thyself loved by men! And how is it that Thou shouldst have encountered such ingratitude from the majority of men! I see that few, indeed, know Thee, and fewer still love Thee! Ah, my Jesus, I too desire to be reckoned among this small number. But Thou knowest my weakness. Thou knowest my past treasons. For pity's sake do not

abandon me, or I shall fall away even worse than before. O Mary, my Mother, thou art the *Mother of fair love*—(Ezech. xxiv., 24), do thou obtain for me the grace to love my God. I hope it of thee.

Spiritual Reading.

JESUS COMES TO CALL SINNERS.

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

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

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

A tear of repentance, one act of heart-felt contrition, is enough to appease the Infant Jesus. "You know the tempers of children," St. Thomas of Villanova goes on to say, "a single tear pacifies them, the offence is

forgotten. Approach, then, to Him while He is a little One, while He would seem to have forgotten His majesty." He has put off His divine majesty, and appears as a Child to inspire us with more courage to approach His feet.

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

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

"Be of good cheer, then, O sinners," says St. Leo, "the Birthday of the Lord is the Birthday of peace and

joy." *The Prince of peace*—(Is. ix., 6), was He called by Isaías. Jesus Christ is a Prince, not of vengeance on sinners, but of mercy and of peace, constituting Himself the Mediator betwixt God and sinners. If our sins, says St. Augustine, are too much for us, God does not despise His own Blood. If we cannot ourselves make due atonement to the justice of God, at least the Eternal Father knows not how to disregard the Blood of Jesus Christ, Who makes payment for us.

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

This is what St. Anselm advises us to do: he says that Jesus Christ Himself, from His earnest desire not to have us perish, animates each one of us who finds himself guilty before God with these words: O sinner, do not lose heart; if by thy sins thou hast unhappily become the slave of hell, and hast not the means to free

thyself, act thus : take Me, offer Me for thyself to the Eternal Father, and so thou shalt escape death, thou shalt be in safety. What can be conceived more full of mercy than what the Son says to us : Take Me, and redeem thyself. This was, moreover, exactly what the divine Mother taught Sister Frances Farnese. She gave the Infant Jesus into her arms, and said to her : "Here is my Son for you; be careful to make His merits your gain by frequently offering Him to His heavenly Father."

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

Evening Meditation.

JOSEPH GOES TO BETHLEHEM WITH HIS HOLY SPOUSE.

I.

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

God had decreed that His Son should be born, not in the house of Joseph, but in a cave and stable for animals, in the poorest and most painful way that a

child can be born; and therefore He so disposed events that Cæsar should publish an Edict that every one should go and enrol himself in the city whence he drew his origin. When Joseph heard this order he was much agitated as to whether he should leave or take with him the Virgin Mother, as she was now near childbirth. My spouse and my lady, said he to her, on the one hand I should not wish to leave you alone; on the other, if I take you, I am afflicted at the thought that you will have to suffer much during this long journey, and in such severe weather. My poverty will not permit me to conduct you with that comfort which you require. But Mary answers him, and encourages him with these words : My Joseph, do not fear; I shall go with you; the Lord will assist us. She knew, by divine inspiration, and also because she was well versed in the prophecy of Micheas, that the Divine Infant was to be born in Bethlehem. She therefore takes the swathing bands, and the other poor garments already prepared, and departs with Joseph. *And Joseph also went up . . . to be enrolled with Mary.*

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

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II.

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

My soul has become enamoured of Thee, O my amiable Infant-God. I love Thee, my sweet Saviour; and since Thou hast come upon earth to save me and to dispense to me Thy graces, this one grace only do I ask of Thee: never permit me to separate myself from Thee again. Unite me, bind me to Thyself, enchain me with the sweet cords of Thy holy love. O my Redeemer and my God, who wilt, then, have the heart to leave Thee, and to live without Thee, deprived of Thy grace? Most holy Mary, I come to accompany thee on this journey; and thou, O my Mother, cease not to accompany me in the journey I am making to eternity. Assist me always, but especially when I shall find myself at the end of my life, and near that moment on which will depend either

my remaining always with thee to love Jesus in Paradise, or my being for ever separated from thee and hating Jesus in hell. My Queen, save me by thy intercession; and let my salvation be in loving thee and Jesus for ever, in time and in eternity. Thou art my hope; I hope for all from thee.

Christmas Day

Morning Meditation.

“THIS DAY IS BORN TO YOU A SAVIOUR.”

Behold I bring you good tidings of great joy that shall be to all the people, for this day is born to you a Saviour.
—(Luke ii., 10, 11).

Arise, all ye nobles and peasants! Mary invites all—rich and poor, just and sinners, to enter the Cave of Bethlehem to adore, and to kiss the feet of, her new-born Son. Come then, all ye devout souls—come in and see the Creator of Heaven and earth on a little hay under the form of a little Infant; the power of God, as it were, annihilated, and the wisdom of God become mad, through excess of love! I come, then, dear Jesus, to kiss Thy feet and offer Thee my heart.

I.

Behold I bring you good tidings of great joy . . . This day is born to you a Saviour! And what tidings could be a greater joy to a race of poor exiles condemned to death, than to be told that their Saviour was come, not only to deliver them from death, but to obtain for them liberty to return to their own country? And this is what the Angels announce to you: *A Saviour is born to you!* Jesus Christ is born to you to deliver you from

everlasting death, and to open Heaven to you, our true country from which we were banished because of our sins.

No sooner had Mary entered the cavern than she began to pray; and the hour of her delivery being come, behold she sees a great light, and feels in her heart a heavenly joy. She casts down her eyes—and, O God, what does she see? An Infant so tender and beautiful that He fills her with love! But He trembles and cries and stretches out His arms to show that He desires that she should take Him up into her bosom. “I stretched forth My hands to seek the caresses of My Mother,” as Jesus said to St. Brigid. Mary calls Joseph. “Come Joseph, come and see, for the Son of God is now born.” The old man entered, and prostrating himself, wept for joy.

Mary, holding Him to her bosom, adores Him as her God, kissing His face as her Child. She then hastily seeks to cover Him and wraps Him up in swaddling clothes. But, O God, how hard and rough these clothes are! They are the clothes of the poor, and they are cold and damp, and in that cave there is no fire to warm them.

Let us arise and enter, the door is open. There are no satellites to say that this is not the hour. The Cave is open and without guards or doors, so that all may go in when they please to seek Him and to speak to Him, and even to embrace their Infant King if they love and desire Him.

Lord, I should not have dared to approach Thee seeing myself so deformed by sin; but since Thou, my Jesus, dost invite me so courteously, and dost call me so lovingly, I will not refuse. After having so many times turned my back upon Thee I will not add a fresh insult by refusing, out of distrust, this affectionate, this loving invitation. It is true my heart offended Thee at one time, but now it is penitent. I confess that I have been a traitor, cruel and ungrateful, that it is I who have caused Thee to suffer so much and made Thee shed so many tears in the stable of Bethlehem, but Thy tears are my hope. I am a sinner, it is true, and I do not

deserve to be pardoned, but I come before Thee, Who being God hast become a little Child to obtain pardon for me. Eternal Father, if I deserve hell, look upon the tears of Thy innocent Son. He asks Thee to pardon me this night, a night of joy, of pardon and salvation.

II.

Let every soul, then, enter the Cave of Bethlehem. Behold and see that tender Infant, Who is weeping as He lies in the manger on that miserable straw. See how beautiful He is: look at the light which He sends forth, and the love which He breathes; those eyes send out arrows which wound the hearts that desire Him; the very stable, the very straw cry out, says St. Bernard, and tell you to love Him Who loves you; to love God Who is infinite Love, and Who came down from Heaven, and made Himself a little Child, and became poor, to make you understand the love He bears you, and to gain your love by His sufferings.

Come and say to Him: “Ah, beautiful Infant! tell me whose Child art Thou?” He replies: “My Mother is this pure and lovely Virgin who is standing by Me.” “And Who is Thy Father?” “My Father,” He says, “is God.” “How is this? Thou art the Son of God, and art so poor; and why? Who will acknowledge Thee in such a condition? Who will respect Thee?” “Ah,” replies Jesus, “holy Faith will make known Who I am, and will make Me loved by those whose souls I come to redeem and to inflame with My love.” I am not come, says He, to make Myself feared, but to make Myself loved; and therefore I wished to show Myself to you for the first time as a poor and humble Infant, that, seeing to what My love for you has reduced Me, you might love Me the more. But tell me, my sweet Infant, why dost Thou turn Thine eyes on every side? What art Thou looking for? I hear Thee sigh; tell me wherefore are these sighs? O God! I see Thee weep; tell me wherefore dost Thou weep? Yes, replies Jesus, I turn My eyes around; for I am seeking for some soul that desires Me. I sigh out of desire to see Myself near to a heart

that burns for Me, as I burn with love for it. But I weep; and it is because I see but few souls, who seek Me and wish to love Me.

Come, then, O all ye devout souls. Jesus invites you to come and kiss His feet this night. The shepherds who came to visit Him in the stable of Bethlehem brought their gifts; you must also bring your gifts. What will you bring Him? The most acceptable present you can bring Him is that of a contrite and loving heart.

O Jesus, Thou must know that I am poor and that I have nothing to give Thee. I have nothing but my penitent heart. This I now offer Thee. Yes, O Infant, I repent of ever having offended Thee, and I hope for pardon from Thee. But the forgiveness of my sins alone is not sufficient for me. On this night Thou dost grant great spiritual graces; I also desire that Thou shouldst bestow a great grace on me—it is, the grace to love Thee. Now that I am about to approach Thy feet, inflame me wholly with Thy holy love, and bind me to Thee; but bind me so effectually that I may never more be separated from Thee. I love Thee, O my God, Who didst become a little Child for my sake; but I love Thee very little; I desire to love Thee very much, and Thou hast to enable me to do it. I come, then, to kiss Thy feet, and I offer Thee my heart; I leave it in Thy hands; I will have it no longer; do Thou change it and keep it forever; do not give it back to me again; for if Thou dost, I fear lest it should betray Thee afresh.

Most holy Mary, thou who art the Mother of this great Son, but who art also my Mother, it is to thee that I consecrate my poor heart; present it to Jesus and He will not refuse to receive it when presented by thee. Do thou, then, present it, and beg Him to accept it.

Spiritual Reading.

THE ETERNAL WORD, BEING GREAT, BECOMES LITTLE.

Plato says that love is the "loadstone of love." Hence the Proverb: "If you wish to be loved, love." But, my Jesus, this rule, this Proverb holds good for others, holds good for all, but not for Thee! Thou art at a loss what further to do to show men the love Thou bearest them! And yet how many are there that love Thee? Alas, the greatest number, we may say nearly all, not only do not love Thee—they offend Thee and despise Thee!

And shall we stand in the ranks of these heartless wretches? God has not deserved this at our hands—that God, so good, so tender to us, Who, being great, has thought it fit to make Himself little in order to be loved by us.

To understand the immense love of God towards men in becoming Man and a feeble Child for our love, it would be necessary to comprehend His greatness. But what mind of man or Angel can conceive the Infinite greatness of God?

St. Ambrose says that to say God is greater than the heavens, than all kings, all Saints, all Angels, is to do an injury to God; just as it would be an injury to a prince to say that he was greater than a blade of grass, or a little fly. God is Greatness itself, and all greatness together is but the smallest atom of the greatness of God.

David, contemplating the divine greatness, and seeing that he could not and never would be able to comprehend it, could only say: *O Lord, who is like to thee?*—(Ps. xxxiv., 10). O Lord, what greatness shall ever be found like Thine? And how in truth could David ever be able to comprehend it, since his understanding was

but finite, and God's greatness infinite? *Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and of his greatness there is no end.*—(Ps. cxliv., 8). *Do I not fill heaven and earth, saith the Lord.*—(Jer. xxiii., 24). Thus all of us, according to our mode of understanding, are nothing but so many miserable little fishes, living in this immense ocean of the essence of God: *In him we live and move and have our being.*—(Acts xvii., 28).

What are we then in respect to God? And what are all men, all monarchs of earth, and even all Saints and all Angels of Heaven, compared with the infinite greatness of God? We are all like, or even smaller than, a grain of sand in comparison with the rest of the earth: *Behold, says the Prophet Isaias, the Gentiles are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the smallest grain of a balance; behold, the islands are as a little dust. . . . All nations are before him as if they had no being at all.*—(Is. xl., 15, 17).

Now this God so great has become a little Infant; and for whom? *A child is born to us*—(Is. ix., 6): for us He is born. And wherefore? St. Ambrose gives us the answer: "He is a little One, that you may be a perfect man; He is bound in swaddling-clothes, that you may be unbound from the fetters of death; He is on earth, that you may be in Heaven."

Behold, then, Immensity Whom the heavens cannot contain, become an Infant: see Him imprisoned in poor rags, and laid in a narrow, vile manger on a bundle of straw, which was at once His only bed and pillow. "See," says St. Bernard—"see Power ruled, Wisdom instructed, Virtue sustained. God taking milk and weeping, yet comforting the afflicted!" A God Almighty so tightly wrapped in swathing-bands that He cannot stir! A God Who knows all things made mute and speechless! A God Who rules Heaven and earth needing to be carried in the arms! A God Who feeds all men and animals, Himself having need of a little milk to support Him! A God Who consoles the afflicted and is the joy of Paradise, Himself weeps and moans and has to be comforted by a creature!

For this, then, did the Eternal Word become Man. For this, moreover, He became an Infant. Little children are loved. To see them is to love them.

St. Peter Chrysologus writes: "How should our Lord come, Who wished to drive away fear and to seek love? What breast so savage as not to soften before such a Childhood as this? What hardness will it not subdue; what love does it not claim? Thus, therefore, He wished to be born Who willed to be loved and not feared." The Saint would say that if our Redeemer had come in order to be feared and respected by men, He should have come as a full grown Man and with royal dignity, but because He came to gain our love He chose to come and to show Himself as an Infant, and the poorest of infants, born in a cold stable between two animals, laid in a manger on straw, without clothing or fire to warm His shivering little limbs: "thus would He be born Who willed to be loved and not feared." Ah, my Lord! what was it that drew Thee from Heaven to be born in a stable? It was love, the love Thou bearest towards men. What took Thee from the right hand of Thy Father, where Thou sittest, and placed Thee in a manger? What snatched Thee from Thy throne above the stars, and made Thee to lie on a little straw? What changed Thy position from amidst the Angels, to be placed betwixt two beasts? It was all the work of love; Thou inflamest the Seraphim, and dost Thou not shiver with cold? Thou supportest the heavens, and must Thou be now carried in the arms? Thou providest food for men and beasts, and now dost Thou crave a little milk to sustain Thy life? Thou makest the Seraphim happy, and now dost Thou weep and moan? What has reduced Thee to such misery? Love has done it: "Thus would He be born Who willed to be loved and not feared."

Love, then, love, O souls, exclaims St. Bernard, love now this little Child, for He is exceedingly to be loved. "Great is the Lord, and exceedingly to be praised. The Lord is little, and exceedingly to be loved." Yes, says the Saint, this God, existing from eternity, is worthy of all praise and reverence for His greatness, as David has

sung: *Great is the Lord and exceedingly to be praised.*—(Ps. cxliv., 8). But now that we behold Him become a little Infant, needing milk, and unable to move Himself, trembling with cold, moaning and weeping, looking for some one to take and warm and comfort Him; ah, now indeed does He become the most cherished One of our hearts! “The Lord is little, and exceedingly to be loved!”

We ought to adore Him as our God, but our love ought to keep pace with our reverence towards a God so amiable, so loving.

St. Bonaventure reminds us that “a child finds its delights with other children, with flowers, and to be in the arms.” The Saint’s meaning is, that if we would please this divine Infant, we too must become children, simple and humble; we must bring to Him flowers of virtue, of meekness, of mortification, of charity; we must clasp Him in the arms of our love.

And, O man, adds St. Bernard, what more do you wait to see before you will give yourself wholly to God? See with what labour, with what ardent love, your Jesus has come down from Heaven to seek you. Hearken, how, though scarcely yet born, His wailings call to you as if He would say: O soul, it is thee I am seeking! For thee and to obtain thy love, I am come from Heaven to earth. “Having scarcely quitted the Virgin’s womb,” says the Saint, “He calls thy beloved soul after the manner of infants: *A! A! anima mea, anima mea, te quaero!* Ah! Ah! my soul, my soul, I am seeking Thee! For thee I am making this pilgrimage!”

O God, even the very brutes, if we do them a kindness, if we give them some trifle, are so grateful for it; they come near us, they do our bidding after their own fashion, and they show gladness at our approach. And how comes it, then, that we are so ungrateful towards God, the same God Who has bestowed His whole Self upon us, Who has descended from Heaven to earth, and has become an Infant to save us and to be loved by us.

Come, let us love the Babe of Bethlehem! is the enraptured cry of St. Francis. Let us love Jesus Christ

Who has sought in the midst of such sufferings to attach our hearts to Him.

Evening Meditation.

THE BIRTH OF JESUS IN BETHLEHEM.

I.

The birth of Jesus Christ brought universal joy to the whole world. He was the Redeemer Who had been desired and sighed after for so many years; and therefore He was called the Desired of the nations, and the Desire of the eternal hills. Behold Him already come, and born in a little cave. Let us consider that this day the Angel announces to us also the same great joy that he announced to the shepherds: *Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, that shall be to all the people; for this day is born to you a Saviour.*—(Luke ii., 10).

What rejoicing there is in a country when the heir is born to a king! But surely we ought to keep still greater festival when we see the Son of God born and come down from Heaven to visit us, urged to this by the tenderness of His mercy: *Through the bowels of the mercy of our God, in which the Orient from on high hath visited us.*—(Luke i., 78). We were lost; and behold Him Who came to save us: *He came down from Heaven for our salvation.*—(Symb. Nic.). Behold the Shepherd Who came to save His sheep from death by giving His life for their sake: *I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd giveth his life for his sheep.*—(John x., 11). Behold the Lamb of God, Who came to sacrifice Himself, to obtain for us the divine favour, and to become our Deliverer, our Life, our Light, and even our Food in the most Holy Sacrament!

I have gone astray like a sheep that is lost; seek thy servant.—(Is. ix., 6). O Lord I am that sheep which, by following after my own pleasures and caprices, have

miserably lost myself; but Thou, Who art at once the Shepherd and divine Lamb, art He Who came down from Heaven to save me by sacrificing Thyself as a victim on the Cross in satisfaction for my sins. *Behold, the Lamb of God; behold him who taketh away the sins of the world.*—(Ps. cxviii., 176). If, therefore, I desire to amend my life, what need I fear? Why should I not confide entirely in Thee, O my Saviour, Who wert born on purpose to save me? *Behold, God is my saviour; I will put my trust in him, and will not fear.*—(Is. xii., 2). What greater proof couldst Thou give me of Thy mercy, O my dearest Redeemer, to inspire me with confidence, than to give me Thyself? O my dear Infant, how grieved I am that I have offended Thee! I have made Thee weep in the stable of Bethlehem. But since Thou art come to seek me, I throw myself at Thy feet; and although I behold Thee afflicted and humbled, lying upon straw in the manger, I acknowledge Thee for my supreme King and Sovereign. I feel that Thy tender infant-cries invite me to love Thee, and demand my heart. Behold, my Jesus, I present it to-day at Thy feet; change it and inflame it, O Thou Who didst come into the world to inflame the hearts of men with Thy holy love.

II.

St. Maximus says that for this reason amongst others, Christ chose to be laid in the manger where the animals were fed, to make us understand that He had become Man also to make Himself our Food: "In the manger, where the food of animals is placed, He allowed His limbs to be laid, thereby showing that His own body would be the eternal Food of men." Besides this, He is born every day in the Blessed Sacrament in the hands of the Priest at holy Mass; the Altar is the Crib, and there we go to feed ourselves on His flesh. Some one might desire to have the holy Infant in his arms, as the aged Simeon had; but Faith teaches us that, when we receive Communion, the same Jesus Who was in the manger of Bethlehem is not only in our arms, but in our

breasts. He was born for this purpose, to give Himself entirely to us: *A child is born to us, a son is given to us.*—(Is. ix., 6).

I hear Thee, O my Jesus, say to me in Thy manger: *Love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart.*—(Is. xii., 2). And I will answer: Ah, my Jesus, if I do not love Thee, Who art my Lord and my God, whom shall I love? Thou callest Thyself mine, because Thou wert born in order to give Thyself entirely to me; and shall I refuse to be Thine? No, my beloved Lord, I give myself entirely to Thee; and I love Thee with my whole heart. I love Thee, I love Thee, I love Thee, O sovereign Good, the one only Love of my soul. I beseech Thee accept me this day, and do not permit me evermore to cease to love Thee. O Mary, my Queen, I pray thee, through that consolation which thou didst enjoy the first time thou didst behold thy new-born Son and didst give Him thy first kiss, beseech Him to accept me for His servant, and to enchain me forever to Himself by the gift of His holy love.

December the Twenty-Sixth

Morning Meditation.

"THE REDEMPTION OF HIS PEOPLE."

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel because he hath visited and wrought the redemption of his people.—(Luke i., 68).

Heretofore we were all slaves of hell. But what has the Eternal Word and Sovereign Lord done to free us from this slavery? Ah, who would have believed it if holy Faith did not assure us of it? Who could ever have conceived it? But holy Faith tells us and assures us that this Supreme and Sovereign Lord, *being in the form of God, emptied himself, taking the form of a servant*—to release us from the slavery of our deadly foe.

I.

Almighty God is Lord of all that is, or that can be, in this world, and yet He did not rule over the hearts of mankind that was groaning under the miserable tyranny of the devil. Before the coming of Jesus Christ this tyrant was lord, and even made himself worshipped by men as a god, with incense and sacrifices, not only of animals, but even of their own children and of their very lives. And he, their enemy and tyrant, what return did he make them? How did he treat them? He tortured their bodies with the most barbarous cruelty, he blinded their minds, and by a path of pain and misery conducted them unto everlasting torments. It was this tyrant that the Divine Word came to overthrow, and thereby to release mankind from his wretched thralldom, in order that unfortunate creatures, freed from the darkness of death, rescued from the bondage of this savage monster, and enlightened as to what was the true Way of Salvation, might serve their real and lawful Master, Who loved them as a Father and, from being slaves of Satan, wished to make them His own beloved children: *That being delivered from the hands of our enemies, we might serve him without fear.*—(Luke, i., 74). Our Saviour came, then, to release us from the slavery of this deadly foe; but how?—in what manner did He release us? Let us learn from St. Paul what He did: *Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal to God, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men.*—(Phil. ii., 6).

O my Jesus, Thou hast been pleased to become a servant for love of me, and in order to release me from the chains of hell; and not only the servant of Thy Father but of men and of executioners, even to the laying down of Thy life! And I, for the love of some wretched, poisonous pleasure, have so often forsaken Thy service, and have become the slave of the devil! A thousand times over I curse those moments in which, by a wicked abuse of my free will, I despised Thy grace, O Infinite Majesty. In pity pardon me, and bind me to Thyself with

those delightful chains of love with which Thou keepest Thy chosen souls in closest contact with Thee. I love Thee, O Incarnate Word! I love Thee, O my Sovereign Good! O, never suffer me to be separated from Thee again.

II.

Our Saviour Jesus was, says the Apostle St. Paul, the only-begotten Son of God, equal to His Father, eternal as His Father, almighty as His Father, immense, most wise, most happy, and sovereign Lord of Heaven and earth, of Angels and of men, no less than His Father; but for love of man He stooped to the lowly form of a servant, clothing Himself in human flesh, and likening Himself to men; and since sin had made them vassals of the devil, He came in the form of man to redeem them, offering His sufferings and death in satisfaction to the divine justice for the punishment due to them. Ah! who would have believed it, if holy Faith did not assure us of it? Who could ever have hoped for it? Who could ever have conceived it? But Faith tells us that this supreme and sovereign Lord *emptied himself, taking the form of a servant.*

From His tenderest childhood, the Redeemer, by becoming a servant, was eager to begin and wrench from the devil that dominion which he had over man, according to the prophecy of Isaiah: *Call his name—Hasten to take away the spoils: Make haste to take away the prey.*—(Is. viii., 8). “That is,” as St. Jerome explains it, “suffer the devil to reign no longer.” Behold Jesus, scarcely born, says the Venerable Bede, before He is registered in the Census of Cæsar, and for our liberation “is Himself inscribed in the list of servitude.” Observe how, in token of His servitude, He begins to pay off our debts by His sufferings; how He allows Himself to be wrapped in swaddling clothes (a type of the cords which should bind Him at a later day, to be led to death by cruel executioners). “God suffers Himself,” says a certain author, “to be bound up in swaddling-bands, because He had come to release the world from its debts.”

I beseech Thee, O my Jesus, by all the sufferings of Thy life and death, do not suffer me ever more to leave Thee! Suffer me not to be separated from Thee! Suffer me not to be separated from Thee!

O Mary, my refuge, thou hast hitherto been my sweet advocate, for it is thou who didst prevail on God still to wait for me and to pardon me with so much mercy. Succour me now, and obtain for me the grace to die, and to die a thousand times, rather than ever again to lose the grace of God. Amen.

Spiritual Reading.

ON THE ADVANTAGES OF THE RELIGIOUS STATE.

Well may the words addressed by Moses to God in regard to the children of Israel, after their delivery from the tyranny of Pharaoh, and the bondage of Egypt, be applied to Religious: *In thy mercy thou hast been a leader to the people which thou hast redeemed, and in thy strength, thou hast carried them to thy holy habitation.*—(Exod. xv., 18). As the Hebrews, compared with the Egyptians, were, in the Old Law, the beloved people of God, so are Religious, contrasted with seculars, in the New Law. And as the Hebrews went forth from Egypt, a land of labour and slavery, where God was not known, so Religious retire from the world, which gives to its servants no other recompense than pains and bitterness, and in which God is but little known. Finally, as the Hebrews in the desert were guided by a pillar of fire to the Land of Promise, so Religious are conducted by the light of the Holy Ghost into the sanctuary of Religion, which is like the Promised Land of Heaven. In Heaven there is no thirst for earthly riches, or for sensual pleasures, or of doing one's own will; in the cloister, by means of the holy Vows of Obedience, Poverty, and Chastity, these pernicious desires are effectually excluded.

In Heaven, to praise God is the constant occupation of the Saints, and in Religion, it is the same, since every act of the Community is referred to the glory of His Name. "You praise God," says St. Augustine, "by the discharge of every duty; you praise Him when you eat or drink; you praise Him when you rest or sleep." Religious praise the Lord by regulating the affairs of the monastery, by assisting in the sacristy, or at the grate; they praise God when they go to table; and they praise Him when they retire to rest and sleep; in a word they praise God in everything they do. Lastly, in Heaven the Saints enjoy continual peace; because they find in God the Source of every good; and, in Religion, where God alone is sought, is found that peace which surpasses all understanding, and contentment which the world cannot give. Well, then, might St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi say, that Religious should have a high esteem and veneration for their state; since, *after Baptism, a Vocation to Religion is the greatest grace which God can bestow.*

You should, therefore, hold the Religious state in higher esteem than all the dignities and kingdoms of the earth. In that state you are preserved from sins, which you would commit in the world; there you are constantly occupied in holy exercises; there you have every day opportunities of meriting eternal joys; there you are the spouse of Jesus Christ, and, after this short life, He will make you to reign in the eternal kingdom of His glory. How is it that this grace is yours in preference to so many others more worthy than you? Black, indeed, must be your ingratitude if you do not, with all the love of your heart, thank God every day for the great grace of your Vocation. No one has described the advantages of the Religious state better than St. Bernard. The holy Doctor asks: "Is not the Religious state holy, in which a man lives more purely, falls more rarely, rises more speedily, walks more cautiously, is bedewed with grace more frequently, rests more securely, dies more confidently, is purified more quickly, and rewarded more abundantly?" Let us examine these advantages one by

one, and see the great treasures which each of them contains.

I.—VIVIT PURIUS—A RELIGIOUS LIVES MORE PURELY

All the works of Religious, considered in themselves, are most pure and acceptable before God. This great purity consists in doing what we do solely to please God. Hence, our actions will be agreeable to God in proportion to their conformity to His holy will, and to their freedom from self-will. The actions of a secular, however holy and fervent they may be, partake more of self-will than those of Religious. Seculars pray, receive Holy Communion, hear Mass, make Spiritual Reading, take the *discipline*, and recite the Divine Office when they please. But a Religious performs these duties at a time prescribed by obedience—that is, when God wills them, for it is God Himself speaks through obedience. Hence, a Religious, who obeys his Rule and superiors, merits, not only by his prayers and other spiritual duties, but also by his labours, his recreations, his attendance at the door, his meals, his amusements, and his repose. For, in doing these things, not through self-will, but by obedience, he does in each the holy will of God, and by each gains merit.

Oh! how often does not self-will vitiate the most holy actions! Alas! to how many, on the day of judgment, when they shall ask, in the words of Isaiah, the reward of their labours—*Why have we fasted, and thou hast not regarded?—have we humbled our souls, and thou hast not taken notice?—to how many, I say, will not our Lord answer—What pretence! Reward for you! Behold in the day of your fast your own will was found.*—(Is. lviii. 3). Have you not, in doing your own will, already received the recompense of your toil? Have you not, in all your works, sought your own pleasure rather than Mine? Abbot Gilbert says that the smallest work of a Religious is more meritorious than the greatest action of a secular. St. Bernard asserts that if a person in the world did the fourth part of what is ordinarily done by Religious, he would be venerated as a saint. And has

not experience shown, that the virtues of many, whose sanctity shone resplendent in the world, faded away before the bright example of the fervent souls, whom, on entering Religion, they found in the cloister? A Religious, then, because in all his actions he does the will of God, can truly say that he belongs entirely to Him. The Venerable Mother Mary of Jesus, Foundress of the Convent of Tolouse, used to say that she entertained a high esteem for her Vocation—first, because a Religious enjoys the society of Jesus Christ, Who, in the Blessed Sacrament, dwells with her in the same house; and secondly, because a Religious, having by the vow of obedience sacrificed her own will and her whole being to God, belongs unreservedly to Him.

Evening Meditation.

JESUS IS BORN AN INFANT.

I.

Consider that the first sign which the Angel gave to the shepherds, by which to discover the new-born Messias, was, that they would find Him in the form of an Infant: *You shall find the infant wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger.*—(Luke ii., 12). The littleness of infants is a great attraction for love; but a still greater attraction must the littleness of the Infant Jesus be to us, Who, being the incomprehensible God, has made Himself small for the love of us. For our sake He has become a little Child.

Adam came into the world at a full age; but the Eternal Word chose to appear as an Infant—a *child is born to us*—that He might thus attract our hearts to Himself with greater force. So would He be born Who would be loved. He came into the world not to inspire terror, but to be loved; and for this reason He preferred to show Himself at His first appearance, as a tender,

weak Infant. "Our Lord is great, and greatly to be praised," says St. Peter Chrysologus. My Lord is great, and therefore He deserves highly to be praised on account of His Infinite Majesty. But when the Saint considered Him as a little Child in the stable of Bethlehem, he exclaimed with tenderness: "My Lord is a little Child and greatly to be loved." My great and supreme God has made Himself little for me, and deserves my love.

Ah, how is it possible that any one can reflect with faith on a God become a little Child, crying and weeping on the straw in a cave, and yet not love Him, and invite all men to love Him, as did St. Francis of Assisi, who said: "Let us love the Child of Bethlehem, let us love the Child of Bethlehem." He is an Infant; He does not speak, He only cries; but, O my God, are not these cries all voices of love, with which He invites us to love Him, and demands our hearts!

Eternal Father, I, a miserable sinner, worthy of hell, have nothing of my own to offer Thee in satisfaction for my sins; I offer Thee the tears, the sufferings, the blood, the death of this Infant, Who is Thy Son; and through them I implore pity from Thee. If I had not this Son to offer Thee, I should be lost; there would be no longer any hope for me; but Thou hast given Him to me for this purpose, in order that, in offering Thee His merits, I might have a good hope of my salvation. My ingratitude, O Lord, is great; but Thy mercy is still greater. And what greater mercy could I hope for from Thee, than that Thou shouldst give me Thy own Son for my Redeemer, and as the Victim for my sins. For the love, therefore, of Jesus Christ, forgive me all the offences that I have committed against Thee, of which I repent with my whole heart, because by them I have offended Thee, O infinite Goodness. And for the sake of Jesus Christ I ask of Thee holy perseverance.

II.

Let us consider, moreover, that infants also gain our affection because we consider them innocent; but all other infants are born with the infection of original sin.

Jesus was born an Infant, but He was born holy—*holy, innocent, undefiled*.—(Heb. vii., 26). My beloved, says the holy Spouse, is all ruddy with love, and all white with innocence, without a spot of any sin: *My beloved is white and ruddy, chosen out of thousands*.—(Cant. v., 10). In this Infant did the Eternal Father find His delight, because, as St. Gregory says, "in Him alone He found no fault."

Let us miserable sinners comfort ourselves, because this Divine Infant has come down from Heaven to communicate His Innocence to us by means of His Passion. His merits, if we only knew how to apply them to ourselves, can change us from sinners into innocents and saints: in these merits let us place all our confidence; through them let us continually ask for graces from the Eternal Father, and we shall obtain everything.

O my God, if I should again offend Thee, after Thou hast waited for me with so much patience, after Thou hast assisted me with so much light, and forgiven me with so much love—I should indeed deserve a special hell for myself. O my Father, do not forsake me, I pray Thee. I tremble when I think of the number of times I have betrayed Thee; how many times I have promised to love Thee, and then have again turned my back upon Thee? O my Creator, let me not have to lament the misfortune of seeing myself again deprived of Thy favour. Permit me not to be separated from Thee! Permit me not to be separated from Thee! I repeat it, and will repeat it to my very last breath; and do Thou always give me the grace to repeat to Thee this prayer: Permit me not to be separated from Thee! My Jesus, my dearest Infant, enchain me with Thy love. I love Thee and will always love Thee. Permit me not to be ever again separated from Thy love. I love thee, too, my Mother; oh, do thou also love me. And if thou lovest me, this is the favour I beg thee to obtain for me—that I may never cease to love my God.

December the Twenty-~~Seventh~~

Morning Meditation.

AND WITH HIM THERE IS PLENTIFUL REDEMPTION.—(Ps. cxxix., 7).

Great had been the sin of man, but greater, the Apostle says, has been the gift of Redemption. *Not as the offence so also the gift.*—(Rom. v., 15). It was not only sufficient, but *superabundant*. *And with him plentiful redemption.* I love Thee, O infinite Goodness! I love Thee, O most lovable God!

I.

Be comforted, be comforted, my people, saith your God. Speak ye to the heart of Jerusalem . . . for her evil is come to an end.—(Is. xl., 1, 2). The reason is, God Himself has discovered a way of saving man, while at the same time His justice and His mercy shall both be satisfied. *Justice and peace have kissed.*—(Ps. lxxxiv., 11). The Son of God has Himself become Man, has taken the form of a sinner. *He appeared to take away our sins,* says St. John—(1 Jo. iii., 5). He presented Himself before His heavenly Father and offered Himself to pay for mankind; and then the Father sent Him on earth to take the appearance of sinful man, and to be made in all things like to sinners: *God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh.*—(Rom. viii., 3). And St. Paul adds: *And of sin condemned sin in the flesh.*—(Ibid.).

God, therefore, in order to save mankind, and at the same time to satisfy the claims of His Justice, was pleased to condemn His own Son to a painful life, and a shameful death. And can this be true? Jesus Christ Himself affirms it: *God so loved the world as to give his only-begotten Son.*—(Jo. iii., 16). What! a God

condescends to love men, miserable worms, who have been rebellious and ungrateful towards Him; and to love them to such an extent as to give His only-begotten Son, One Whom He loved as much as Himself! Not a servant, not an Angel, not an Archangel, did He give, but His own Son! He gave Him to us lowly, poor, despised; He gave Him into the hands of slaves, to be treated as a miscreant, even to be put to death, covered with shame, on an infamous gibbet. O grace! O the strength of the love of God! exclaims St. Bernard.

O my Redeemer and my God, and who am I that Thou shouldst have loved me, and still continuest to love me so much! What hast Thou ever received from me that has obliged Thee so to love me? What, except slights and provocations, which were a reason for Thee to abandon me, and to banish me for ever from Thy face! But, O Lord, I accept of every penalty except this! Pardon me, O my beloved Infant, for I am sorry with my whole heart. O Mary, my Mother, thou art my hope and the refuge of sinners.

II.

Say to the faint-hearted: Take courage and fear not . . . God Himself will come and will save you.—(Is. xxxv., 4). Be no longer in despair, O poor sinners! What fear can you have that you will not be pardoned when the Son of God comes down from Heaven to save you? If you cannot by your own works appease an offended God, behold One Who can appease Him! This very Infant Whom you now see reposing on straw, and weeping—He with His tears, propitiates Him. You have no grounds for being sad any more, says St. Leo, on account of the sentence of death fulminated against you, now that Life Itself is born for you—“nor is there any lawful reason for sadness when it is the Birthday of Life.” And St. Augustine: “O sweet day for penitents! To-day sin is taken away, and shall the sinner despair?” If you are unable to render due satisfaction to the divine justice, look on Jesus Who does penance for you. Already does He commence to do it in this little Cave, and He will

persevere in doing penance all His life and finally bring it to an end only on the Cross to which, according to St. Paul, He affixed the decree of your condemnation cancelling it in His own Blood : *Blotting out the handwriting of the decree that was against us, which was contrary to us. And he hath taken the same out of the way, fastening it to the cross.*—(Coloss. ii., 14).

Pardon me, O my beloved Infant, for I am sorry with my whole heart for every single displeasure I have given Thee. O Redeemer, and Redeemer again and again of my soul ! my soul is now enamoured of Thee and loves Thee. Thou hast loved me above measure, so that, overcome by Thy love, I could no longer resist its winning appeals. I love Thee, then, O Infinite Goodness ! I love Thee, O most lovable God ! Do Thou never cease to enkindle more and more in my heart the flames and fiery darts of love. For Thy own glory cause Thyself to be greatly loved by one who has greatly offended Thee. O Mary, assist a poor sinner who desires to prove faithful to God. Help me to love Him and to love Him exceedingly.

Spiritual Readings.

ON THE ADVANTAGES OF THE RELIGIOUS STATE.

II.—CADIT RARIUS—THE RELIGIOUS FALLS MORE RARELY.

Religious are certainly less exposed to the danger of sin than seculars. Almighty God represented the world to St. Anthony, and before him to St. John the Evangelist, as a place full of snares. Hence, the holy Apostle said that in the world there is nothing but the *concupiscence of the flesh*, that is, carnal pleasures; the *pride of life*, or worldly honours, which swell the heart with pride. In Religion these poisoned sources of sin

are cut off by the holy vows; for by the Vow of Chastity a Religious bids adieu to the pleasures of sense; by the Vow of Poverty the desire of riches is eradicated, and by the Vow of Obedience the ambition of empty honours is extinguished.

It is, indeed, possible for a Christian to live in the world detached from its goods; but he who handles pitch, as the saying is, easily blackens his hands. *The whole world*, says St. John, *is seated in wickedness.*—(1 Jo. v., 19). St. Ambrose, in his comment on this passage, says that they who remain in the world live under the miserable despotism of sin. The atmosphere of the world is noxious and pestilential for the soul, and he who breathes it easily catches some spiritual infirmity. Human respect, bad example, and evil conversations, are powerful incitements to earthly attachments, and to estrangement of the soul from God. Every one knows that the damnation of numberless souls is attributable to the occasions of sin so common in the world. From these occasions Religious who live in the retirement of the cloister are far removed. Hence St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi was accustomed to embrace the walls of her convent, saying: "O blessed walls! O blessed walls! from how many dangers do you not preserve me!" Hence, also, blessed Mary Magdalen Orsini, whenever she saw a Religious laugh, used to say: "Laugh and rejoice, dear sister, for you have reason to be happy, being far away from the dangers of the world."

III.—SURGIT VELOCITUS—A RELIGIOUS RISES MORE SPEEDILY

If a Religious should be so unfortunate as to fall into sin, he has, at least, the most efficacious helps to rise again. His Rule, which obliges him to frequent the holy Sacrament of Penance; his meditations, in which he is reminded of the Eternal Truths; the good example of his companions, and the reproofs of his superiors, are powerful helps to rise from his fallen state. *Woe*, says the Holy Ghost, *to him that is alone; for when he falleth he hath none to lift him up.*—(Eccles. iv., 10). If a secular forsake the path of virtue, he seldom finds a friend to

admonish and correct him, and therefore he easily remains in his fallen state; but in Religion, *if one falls he shall be supported by the other*.—(Ibid.). If a Religious commits a fault, his companions assist him to correct and repair it. “He,” says St. Thomas, “is assisted by his companions to rise again.”

III.—INCREDIT CAUTIUS—A RELIGIOUS WALKS MORE CAUTIOUSLY.

How much greater are the spiritual advantages enjoyed by Religious than those of the first princes or monarchs of the earth. Kings, indeed, abound in riches, honours, and pleasures; they have soldiers and lords to serve them, but they have no one who will dare to correct their faults, or to point out their duties. All abstain from alluding to their defects, through fear of incurring their displeasure; and to secure their esteem many even go so far as to applaud their vices. But, should a Religious go astray, he has many eyes upon him to correct him. His superiors and companions in Religion will not fail to admonish him and to point out his danger; and even the good example of his brother will remind him continually of the transgression into which he has fallen. Surely a Christian, who believes that *eternal life is the one thing necessary*, should set a higher value upon these helps to salvation than upon all the dignities and kingdoms of the earth.

As the world presents to seculars innumerable obstacles to virtue, so the cloister holds out to Religious continual preventatives against sin. In Religion the great care which is taken to prevent light faults is a strong bulwark against the commission of grievous transgressions. If a Religious resists temptations to venial sin, he merits by that resistance additional strength to conquer temptations to mortal sin; but if, through frailty, he sometimes yields to them, all is not lost—the evil is easily repaired. Even then the enemy does not get possession of his soul; at most he only succeeds in taking some unimportant outpost, from which he may be easily driven; while, by such defects, the Religious is taught the necessity of

greater vigilance and of stronger defences against future attacks. He is convinced of his own weakness, and being humbled and rendered diffident of his own strength, he recurs more frequently and with more confidence to Jesus Christ and His holy Mother. Thus, from these falls, the Religious sustains no injury, since, as soon as he is humbled before the Lord, God stretches forth His all-powerful arm to raise him up. *When he shall fall he shall not be bruised, for the Lord putteth his hand under him*.—(Ps. xxxvi., 24). Such victories over his weakness contribute in some way to inspire greater diffidence in himself, and greater confidence in God. Blessed Egidius, of the Order of St. Francis, used to say that one degree of grace in Religion is better than ten in the world; because in Religion it is easy to profit by grace, and hard to lose it; while in the world, grace fructifies with difficulty, and is easily lost.

Evening Meditation.

JESUS IN SWATHING-BANDS.

I.

Imagine that you see Mary, having now brought forth her Son, take Him reverently in her arms, adore Him as her God, and then wrap Him up in swathing-bands: *she wrapped him up in swaddling-clothes*.—(Luke ii., 7). The Holy Church says the same: “His tender limbs in swathing-bands the Virgin Mother binds.” Behold the Infant Jesus, Who obediently offers His little hands and feet, and allows Himself to be swathed. Consider how every time the Holy Infant allowed Himself to be swathed He thought of the cords with which He would one day be led captive in the Garden, and of those also which would bind Him to the pillar, and of the nails which would fasten Him to the Cross; and, thinking of these things, He willingly allowed Himself to be bound, in order to deliver our souls from the chains of hell.

Bound, then, in these swaddling-clothes, and turning to us, Jesus invites us to unite ourselves closely to Him with the sweet bonds of love. And turning to His Eternal Father, He says: My Father, men have abused their liberty, and, rebelling against Thee, have made themselves the slaves of sin; but I, to make satisfaction for their disobedience, am willing to be bound and confined in swathing bands. Bound with these, I offer Thee my liberty, in order that man may be delivered from the slavery of the devil. I accept these bands; they are dear to Me, because they represent the cords with which, from this moment, I offer Myself to be one day bound and led to death for the salvation of men.

And what fear can I have of Thy chastisements, O my beloved Infant, now that I see Thee in these swathing-bands, depriving Thyself, so to say, of the power of raising Thy hand to punish me? Thou dost give me to understand by these bands that Thou wilt not chastise me, if I will loose myself from the chains of my vices, and bind myself to Thee. Yes, my Jesus, I resolve to free myself. I repent with all my heart of having separated myself from Thee, by abusing that liberty which Thou hast given me. Thou dost offer me another and a nobler liberty; a liberty which delivers me from the chains of the devil, and places me among the children of God.

II.

His bands are a healthful binding.—(Ecclus. vi., 31). The wounds of Jesus were the healthful binding to heal the wounds of our souls. Therefore, O my Jesus, Thou didst will to be wrapped in swathing-bands for the love of me. "O Love, how great is thy bond, which could bind a God!" O Divine Love, Thou alone couldst make my God Thy Prisoner. And shall I then, O Lord, refuse to have myself bound by Thy holy love? Shall I for the future, be so unfaithful as to loose myself from Thy sweet and amiable chains? And for what? To make myself a slave of hell? O my Lord, Thou remainest bound in this manger for the love of me; I desire always to remain bound to Thee. St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi

used to say that the bands which we ought to take are a firm resolution of uniting ourselves closely to God by means of love; detaching ourselves at the same time from all affection for any thing that is not God. For this reason also it seems that our loving Jesus has allowed Himself to be, as it were, bound and a Prisoner in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar, under the sacramental species, that He might see His beloved souls made also prisoners of His love.

Thou hast given Thyself up to be imprisoned in these bands for the love of me; I will be a prisoner of Thy immense love. O blessed chains, O beautiful emblems of salvation, which unite souls to God, bind also my poor heart! But bind it so fast, that it may never in future be able to disengage itself from the love of this sovereign Good. My Jesus, I love Thee; I bind myself to Thee; I give Thee my whole heart, my whole will. No, I will never leave Thee again, my beloved Lord. O my Saviour, Who, to pay my debts, didst will not only to be wrapped by Mary in swathing-bands, but even to be bound as a criminal by the executioners, and thus bound, go through the streets of Jerusalem, to be led to death as an innocent lamb to slaughter; O Thou Who didst will to be nailed to the Cross, and didst not come down from it until Thou hadst given up Thy life upon it—permit me not, I beseech Thee, ever to separate myself again from Thee, so as to see myself once more deprived of Thy grace and of Thy love. O Mary, who didst bind in swathing-bands this Thy innocent Son, bind me also, a miserable sinner, I pray thee; bind me to Jesus, so that I may never again leave His feet; that bound to Him I may always live and die thus bound, in order that I may have the happiness to enter into that blessed country, where I shall no longer have the power, and no longer the fear, of separating myself from His holy love.

Feast of the Holy Innocents (December 28th).

Morning Meditation.

GOD HAS MADE HIMSELF OURS.

Tell me, cruel Herod, why dost thou command so many innocent babes to be murdered and sacrificed to thy ambition of reigning? Art thou perchance afraid that the Messias just born may rob thee of thy kingdom? This King Who is now born has come, not to vanquish by fighting, but to subdue the hearts of men by suffering and dying for their love.

I.

The cruel Herod commanded the innocent babes to be murdered, and sacrificed to his ambition, afraid, perchance, that the new-born Messias would rob him of his kingdom. "Why art thou so troubled, Herod?" asks St. Fulgentius. "This King Who is born has come, not to vanquish kings by fighting, but to subdue them by dying." This King is come to reign in the hearts of men by suffering and dying for their love. "He has come," continues the Saint, "not, therefore, that He might combat alive, but that He might triumph slain." Leave Herod aside, O devout souls, and let us come to ourselves. Why, then, did the Son of God come upon earth? Was it to give Himself to us? Yes. Isaias assures us of it: *A child is born to us and a son is given to us.* The love which this loving Saviour bears us, and the desire which He has to be loved by us has induced Him to do this. Being His own He has become ours! This God over Whom none can rule, has, so to speak, yielded Himself Captive to love. Love has gained the victory over Him, and, from being His own, has placed Him

in our possession. "He is born Who belonged to Himself," says St. Bernard. He Who appertained wholly to Himself chose to be born for us and to become ours; love triumphs over God! God so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son! And behold Him already arrived from Heaven in a stable, as a Child—born for us and given to us. *A child is born to us and a son is given to us.*—(Is. xi., 6). This is precisely what the Angel signified when addressing the shepherds: *To-day is born to you a Saviour.*—(Luke ii., 11). As much as to say: O ye men, go to the Cave of Bethlehem; there adore the Infant Whom you will find lying in the straw in a manger and shivering with cold. Know that He is your God, Who would not consent to send any one else to save you, but would come Himself that He might gain for Himself all your love.

Oh, my beloved Infant, my dear Redeemer, since Thou hast come down from Heaven to give Thyself to me what else shall I care to seek in Heaven or on earth besides Thee? Be Thou the sole Lord of my heart; do Thou possess it wholly. May my soul love Thee alone and seek to please Thee alone!

II.

In divers ways had God already striven to win the hearts of men: at one time with benefits, at another, with threats, and again with promises; but He had still fallen short of His aim. His infinite love, says St. Augustine, made Him devise the plan of giving Himself entirely to us by the Incarnation of the Word, in order thus to oblige us to love Him with our whole hearts. "Then Love found out the plan of delivering up Itself!" He could have sent an Angel, a Seraph, to redeem man. But would have to divide his heart by partly loving his Creator, and partly loving this redeemer, God, Who wished to possess the entire heart and the entire love of man, "wished therefore to be," as says a pious author, "both our Creator and Redeemer Himself."

And not only has Jesus Christ given Himself to all men in general, but He has wished, moreover, to give Himself to each one in particular. This it was caused St. Paul to say : *He loved me and delivered Himself for me.*—(Gal. ii., 20). So that, dear child of God, if there had been no others in the world beside yourself, the Redeemer would have come for the sake of you alone, and would have given His Blood and His life for you.

My God, my Beloved, has given Himself all to me; it is but reasonable for me to give myself all to my God. Let others strive after and enjoy, if enjoyment can ever be found apart from Thee, the goods and fortunes of this world. Thee alone do I desire, Who art my fortune, my riches, my peace, my hope in this life and in eternity. Behold, then, my heart, I give it wholly to Thee. It is no longer mine own, but Thine.

O happy thou, most holy Virgin Mary; thou wert wholly and always God's own—all fair, all pure and without spot. I have not belonged to God in the past, but now I wish to be His, and to be His entirely. O my hope, obtain me strength to be grateful and faithful to Him till death! Amen. This is my hope. So may it be.

Spiritual Reading.

ON THE ADVANTAGES OF THE RELIGIOUS STATE.

V.—IRRORATUR FREQUENTIVS—A RELIGIOUS IS BEDEWEED MORE FREQUENTLY.

O God, with what interior light, with what spiritual delights and sweetness of love does not Jesus refresh the good Religious at prayer or Communion, or in presence of the Blessed Sacrament, or in the cell before the Crucifix! Christians in the world are like plants in a barren land, on which little of the dew of Heaven falls, and from that little the soil, for want of proper cultivation, seldom derives fertility. Poor seculars! they desire

to devote more time to prayer, to receive the Holy Eucharist, and to hear the word of God more frequently; they long for a little solitude, to be more recollected and more closely united to God. But temporal affairs, human ties, visits of friends, the restraints of the world, place these means of sanctification almost beyond their reach. Religious are, on the contrary, like trees planted in a fruitful soil, which is continually and abundantly watered by the dews of Heaven. In the cloister the Lord continually comforts and animates His faithful servants by infusing interior lights and consolations during the time of meditation, sermons, and spiritual reading, and by means of the good example of their companions. Well, then, might Mother Catherine of Jesus, of the Holy Order of St. Teresa, say, when reminded of the labours she had endured in the foundation of a convent: "God has rewarded me abundantly by permitting me to spend one hour as a Religious in the house of His holy Mother."

VI.—QUIESCIT SECURIUS—A RELIGIOUS RESTS MORE SECURELY.

Worldly goods can never satisfy the cravings of the human soul. The brute creation, being destined only for this world, is content with the goods of the earth; but being made for God, man can never enjoy happiness except in the possession of God. The experience of ages proves this truth; for if the goods of this life could content the heart of man, kings and princes who abound in riches, honours, and pleasures of the senses, would have days of perfect bliss. But history and experience attest that they are the most unhappy and discontented of men, and that riches and dignities are always the fertile source of fears, of troubles, and of bitterness. The Emperor Theodosius entered one day, unknown, into the cell of a solitary, and after some conversation, said: "Father, do you know who I am? I am the Emperor Theodosius." He then added: "Oh, how happy are you, who lead here on earth a life of contentment, free from the cares and woes of the world. I am a sovereign of the earth, but, be assured, Father, that I never dine in peace."

(D 515)

But how can the world, a place of treachery, of jealousies, of fears and tumult, give peace to man? In the world, indeed, there are certain wretched pleasures which afflict rather than content the soul; which delight the senses for a moment, but leave lasting anguish and remorse behind. Hence the more exalted and honourable the rank and station a man holds in the world, the greater is his uneasiness and discontent; for earthly dignities, in proportion to their greatness, are accompanied with cares and contradictions. We may, then, conclude that the world, in which the heart-rending passions of ambition, avarice, and the love of pleasure, exercise a cruel tyranny over the heart, must be a place, not of ease and happiness, but of inquietude and torture. Its goods can never be possessed to the full extent of our wishes; and when enjoyed, instead of bringing peace to the soul, they fill it with bitterness. Hence, whosoever is satisfied with earthly goods, is saturated with wormwood and poison.

Happy, then, the Religious who loves God, and recognises the favour bestowed on him in being called from the world and being placed in Religion, where, conquering by holy mortification his rebellious passions, and practising continued self-denial, he enjoys that peace, which, according to the Apostle, exceeds all the delights of sensual gratification. *The peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding.*—(Phil. iv., 7). Find me, if you can, among those seculars on whom fortune has lavished her choicest gifts, or even among the first princes or kings of the earth, a soul more happy or content than a Religious divested of every worldly affection, and intent only on pleasing God. He is not rendered unhappy by poverty, for he preferred it to all the riches of the earth—he has voluntarily chosen it, and rejoices in its privations; nor by the mortification of the senses, for he entered Religion to die to the world and to himself; nor by the restraints of obedience, for he knows that the renunciation of self-will is the most acceptable sacrifice he could offer to God. He is not afflicted at his humiliation, because it was to be despised that he came into the house of God.

I have chosen to be an object in the house of my God, rather than dwell in the tabernacle of sinners.—(Ps. lxxxiii., 11). Retirement is to him rather a source of consolation than of sorrow; because it frees him from the cares and dangers of the world. To serve the Community, to be treated with contempt, or to be afflicted with infirmities, does not trouble the tranquility of his soul, because he knows that all this makes him more dear to Jesus Christ. Finally, the observance of his Rule does not trouble a Religious, because the labours and burdens which it imposes, if heavy, are only the weight of wings which are necessary to fly to and be united with his God. Oh! how happy and delightful is the state of a Religious, whose heart is not divided, and who can say with St. Francis: "My God and my All!"

Evening Meditation.

JESUS TAKING MILK.

I.

As soon as Jesus was swathed, He looked for and took milk from the breast of Mary. The Spouse in the Canticles desired to see her little brother taking milk from his mother: *Who shall give thee to me for my brother, sucking the breasts of my mother.*—(Cant. vii., 1). This Spouse desired, but did not see Him; but we are they who have had the happiness of seeing the Son of God made Man, and become our Brother, taking milk at the breast of Mary. Oh, what a spectacle must it not have been to Paradise to see the Divine Word become an Infant, sucking milk from a Virgin who was His own creature! He, then, Who feeds all men and all animals upon the earth, is become so weak and so poor, that He requires a little milk to sustain His life! Sister Paula, the Camaldolese, in contemplating a little image of Jesus taking milk, felt herself at once inflamed with a tender love for God. Jesus took but little of this milk, and

took it but seldom in the day. It was revealed to Sister Mary Anne, a Franciscan, that Mary only gave Him milk three times in the day. O milk most precious to us, to be changed into blood in the veins of Jesus Christ, and afterwards to be made by Him a bath of salvation in which to cleanse our souls!

O my sweet and most amiable Infant, Thou art the Bread of Heaven which sustains the Angels; Thou dost provide all creatures with food; and yet how art Thou reduced to the necessity of begging a little milk to preserve Thy life! O Divine Love, how hast Thou been able to make a God so poor as to be in want of a little food? But I now understand Thee, O my Jesus; Thou didst take milk from Mary in this Cave, to offer it afterwards to God changed into blood, as a sacrifice on the Cross, and in satisfaction for our sins. Give, O Mary, give all the milk thou canst to this Son, because every drop has to serve to wash away the sins from my soul, and to nourish it afterwards in Holy Communion.

II.

Let us consider also that Jesus took milk in order to nourish the Body which He wished to leave us as food in the Holy Communion. Therefore, my little Redeemer, whilst Thou dost take milk, Thou art thinking of me; Thou art thinking of changing this milk into blood, to be shed afterwards at Thy death, and with that price ransom my soul, and feed it in the Most Holy Sacrament which is the saving milk with which Thou preservest our souls in the life of grace: "Christ is your milk," says St. Augustine. O beloved Infant, O my Jesus, let me also exclaim with the woman in the Gospel: *Blessed is the womb that bore thee, and the paps that gave thee suck.*—(Luke xi., 27). Blessed art thou, O Mother of God, who hadst the happiness to give milk to the Incarnate Word! Oh, permit me, in company with thy divine Son, to take from thee the milk of a tender and loving devotion to the infancy of Jesus and to thyself, my dearest Mother. And I thank Thee, O Divine Infant, Who didst allow Thyself to be in need of milk, in order

to prove to me the great love Thou bearest me. It is precisely this that our Lord gave St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi to understand—that He had reduced Himself to the necessity of taking milk, in order to make us comprehend the love that He has for redeemed souls.

O my Redeemer, how can any one who believes what Thou hast done and suffered to save us, refuse to love Thee? And I, how could I know this, and yet be so ungrateful to Thee? But Thy goodness is my hope; and this makes me know that if I wish for Thy grace, it is mine. I repent, O sovereign Good, of having offended Thee, and I love Thee above everything. Or rather, I love nothing; I love and will love Thee alone; Thou art, and shalt always be, my only Good, my only Love. My dear Redeemer, give me, I pray Thee, a tender devotion to Thy holy Infancy, such as Thou hast given to so many souls, who, meditating on Thee as an Infant, and forgetting all else, seem unable to think of anything but of loving Thee. It is true that they are innocent, and I am a sinner; but Thou didst become a Child to make Thyself loved even by sinners. I have been such; but now I love Thee with my whole heart, and I desire nothing but Thy love. O Mary, give me a little of that tender love with which thou didst give milk to the Infant Jesus.

December the Twenty-Ninth

Morning Meditation.

“THE CHOSEN ARROW.”

He hath made me a chosen arrow; in his quiver he hath hidden me—(Is. xlix., 2).

Cardinal Hugo remarks that as the hunter keeps in reserve the best arrow for the last shot in order to make sure of his prey, “so was Jesus Christ reserved in the

bosom of His Father until the fulness of time should come, and He was sent to wound the hearts of the faithful."

I.

St. Augustine says that God, in order to captivate the love of men, has cast several darts of love into their hearts. "God knows how to discharge His arrows at love: He sends the arrow that He may make a lover." What are these arrows? They are all the creatures that we see around us; for God has created them all for man, that man may love Him; hence the same Saint says: "Heaven and earth and all things tell me to love Thee." It seemed to the Saint that the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the plains, the seas and the rivers, spoke to him and said: *Augustine, love God, because God has created us for thee that thou mightest love Him.* When St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi held in her hand a beautiful fruit or flower, she declared that the fruit or flower was a dart to her heart which wounded her with the love of God. St. Teresa said that all the fair things we see, the lakes, the rivers, the flowers, the fruits, the birds—all upbraid us with our ingratitude to God, for all are tokens of the love He bears us. It is related of a pious hermit that, walking in the country, he fancied the herbs and flowers reproached him with his ingratitude; so that as he went along he struck them gently with his staff, saying to them: "Be silent! I understand you! No more! You upbraid me with my ingratitude, for God has created you in such beauty for my sake, that I may love Him, and I love Him not! Oh, be silent, I understand! Enough! Enough!"

Thus then, all these creatures were so many darts of love to the hearts of men. But God was not satisfied with these darts only; they were not enough to gain Him the love of men. *He hath made me a chosen arrow; in His quiver He hath hidden me.* So, among all His gifts, did God keep Jesus in reserve till the fulness of time should come, and then He sent Him as a last Arrow to wound with love the hearts of men. *Thy arrows are sharp;*

under thee, people shall fall.—(Ps. xlv., 6). Ah, how many wounded hearts do I behold burning with love before the manger of Bethlehem! How many at the foot of the Cross of Calvary! How many before the Holy Presence of the Blessed Sacrament on our altars!

Ah, my Lord, tell me, is there anything else left for Thee to devise in order to make Thyself loved? Make His inventions known among the people, as Isaias cried out. O Redeemed souls, go and publish everywhere the loving devices of this loving God which He has thought out and executed to make Himself loved by men!

II.

St. Peter Chrysologus says our Redeemer took many various forms to attract the love of men. "For our sake He showed Himself under different forms Who remains in the form of His majesty." The unchangeable God would appear now as a Child in a stable, now as a Boy in the workshop, now as Criminal on a scaffold, and now as Bread on the Altar! In these varying figures Jesus chose to exhibit Himself to us; but whatever the character He assumed, it was always the character of a Lover.

Oh, how God longs to see, and how dearly He loves, a heart that is wholly His! Ah, what delicate and loving caresses does He not bestow; what good things, what delights, what glory does God not prepare in Paradise for a heart that is wholly His! The Venerable Father John Leonard de Lettera, a Dominican, one day beheld Jesus Christ under the appearance of a hunter traversing the forest of this earth with an arrow in His hand. The servant of God asked Him wherefore He was thus engaged. Jesus answered that He was seeking after hearts. Who knows whether now in these days the Infant Redeemer will have the success to hit and make a prize of some hearts after which He has been pursuing for a long time, and hitherto has been unable to wound and capture!

Devout souls, if Jesus gains us, we shall also gain Jesus. The advantage of such an exchange is all on our side.

“ Teresa !” said the Lord one day to this Saint, “ up to this time, you have not been all Mine. Now that you are all Mine, be assured that I am all yours.” Love is the bond which binds the Lover with the loved one, says St. Augustine. God has every wish to embrace us and unite us to Himself, but it is also necessary for us to strive and unite ourselves to God.

My dear Jesus, inflame me with Thy holy love, since for this end Thou didst come upon the earth. Lord, I have hitherto been ungrateful and blind. Now that I see Thee trembling with cold on the straw, crying and weeping for me—O my Infant God, how can I live without loving Thee ! O Mary, great Mother of this great Son, and most beloved by Him, pray to Him for me.

Spiritual Reading.

ON THE ADVANTAGES OF THE RELIGIOUS STATE.

VI.—A RELIGIOUS RESTS MORE SECURELY (*continued*).

It is true that, even in the cloister, there are some discontented souls; and why, I ask? Because they do not live as Religious ought to live. To be a good Religious, and to be content, are one and the same thing. Of necessity, therefore, does the happiness of a Religious consist in a constant and perfect union of his will with the will of God. Whosoever is not thus united with Him cannot be happy; for God will not infuse His consolations into a soul that resists His holy will. Hence, I am accustomed to say, that a Religious in the cloister enjoys a foretaste of Paradise, or suffers an anticipation of hell. For what is hell? It is to be separated from God, to be forced against the inclinations of nature, to do the will of others, to be distrusted, despised, reproved, chastised, to be in a place out of which there is no escape—in a word, it is to be in continual torture without a single moment's peace. Such is the miserable condition of a bad

Religious; and therefore he suffers on earth an anticipation of the torments of hell. On the other hand, what is Paradise? The happiness of Paradise consists in freedom from the cares and afflictions of the world; in conversation with the Saints; in a perfect union with God, and in the enjoyment of continual peace. A perfect Religious possesses all these blessings, and therefore receives in this life a foretaste of Paradise.

It is, indeed, true that fervent Religious have their crosses to carry here below, for this life is a state of merit, and consequently of suffering. The inconveniences of common life are burdensome; the reproofs of superiors, and the refusal of permissions galling; the mortification of the senses painful; self-love complains at the contradiction and contempt one meets with. But to a Religious who desires to belong entirely to God, all these occasions of suffering are so many sources of consolation and delight; for he knows that by embracing pain, he offers a sweet odour to God. St. Bonaventure says that the love of God is like honey, which sweetens every bitter. The Venerable Cæsar de Bustis addressed a nephew who had entered Religion in the following words: “ My dear nephew, when you look up at the heavens think of Paradise; when you see the world, reflect on hell, where the damned endure eternal torments without a moment's enjoyment; when you behold your monastery, remember purgatory, where many just souls suffer in peace and with a certainty of eternal life.” And what more delightful than to suffer—if suffering it can be called—with a tranquil conscience, to suffer for Jesus, and with an assurance that one day every pain will become a gem in an everlasting crown? Ah! the brightest jewels in the diadems of the Saints are the sufferings which they endured in this life with patience and resignation.

God is faithful to His promises, and bountiful beyond measure. He knows how to remunerate His servants, even in this life, by interior sweetness, for the pains which they patiently suffer for His sake. Experience shows that Religious who seek consolation and happiness from creatures are always discontented, whilst they who

MEDITATIONS AND READINGS

practise the greatest mortifications enjoy continual peace. Let us, then, be persuaded that neither pleasures of sense, nor honours, nor riches, nor the world with all its goods, can make us happy. God alone can content the heart of man. Whoever finds Him, possesses all things. Hence St. Scholastica says, that if men knew the peace which Religious enjoy in retirement, the entire world would become one great convent; and St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi used to say that men would abandon the delights of the world, and force their way into Religion. Hence St. Laurence Justinian says that "God has designedly concealed the happiness of the Religious state, because it were known, all would relinquish the world and fly into Religion."

The very solitude, silence and tranquillity of the cloister gives to the soul that loves God a foretaste of Paradise. Father Charles of Lorraine, a Jesuit of royal extraction, used to say that the peace which he enjoyed during a single moment in his cell repaid him well for the sacrifice he had made in quitting the world. Such was the happiness which he sometimes experienced in his cell, that he would dance for very joy. Arnolf, a Cistercian, comparing the riches and honours of the court which he had left, with the consolations which he found in Religion, exclaimed: "O Jesus, true indeed is Thy promise, offering a hundred-fold to him who leaves all things for Thy sake!" St. Bernard's monks, who led lives of great penance and austerities, received in their solitude such spiritual delights, that they were afraid they should obtain in this life the reward of their labours. Let it be your care to unite yourself closely to God; to embrace with peace the crosses He sends you; to love what is most perfect; and, when necessary, to do violence to yourself. But to have the necessary strength you must pray continually; pray in your meditations, in your Communion, in your Visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and especially when you are tempted by the devil; thus you will be amongst those fervent souls who are more happy and content than all the princes and kings and emperors of the earth.

Beg of God to give you the spirit of a perfect Religious; that spirit which impels the soul to act, not according to the dictates of nature, but according to the inspirations of grace, or from the sole motive of pleasing God. This is to be a true Religious. What use is it to wear the habit of a Religious if in heart and soul you be a secular, and live according to the maxims of the world? Whosoever profanes the garb of Religion by a worldly spirit and a worldly life, has an apostate heart. "To maintain," says St. Bernard, "a secular spirit under the habit of Religion is apostasy of heart." The spirit of a Religious requires an exact obedience to the Rules, and to the orders of the superiors, together with great zeal for the interests of Religion. There are some who wish to become Saints, but only according to their own caprice; that is, by long silence, prayer, and spiritual reading, without taking part in any of the offices of the Community. Hence, if they are appointed porters, or given any occupations that keep them from their devotions, they become impatient, complain, and sometimes obstinately refuse to obey, saying that such offices are to them occasions of sin. Oh! such is not the spirit of a Religious; surely what is conformable to the will of God cannot hurt the soul. The Religious spirit requires a total detachment from the world, great love of prayer, silence, and recollection, an ardent zeal for exact observance, a deep abhorrence of sensual indulgence, intense charity towards all men, and finally, a love of God capable of subduing and ruling all the passions. Such is the spirit of a perfect Religious. Whosoever does not possess this spirit, should, at least desire it and earnestly beg God's assistance to obtain it. In a word, the spirit of a Religious supposes a total disengagement of the heart from everything which is not God, and a perfect consecration of the soul to Him, and to Him alone.

Evening Meditation.

JESUS LYING ON STRAW.

I.

Jesus is born in the stable of Bethlehem. His poor Mother has neither wool nor down to make a bed for the tender Infant. What does she do, then? She gathers together a handful of straw into the manger, and puts Him to lie upon it: *And she laid him in the manger.*—(Luke ii., 7). But, O my God, how hard and painful is this bed for an infant just born; the limbs of a babe are so delicate, and especially the limbs of Jesus, which were formed by the Holy Spirit with a special delicacy, in order that they might be the more sensible to suffering. *A body thou hast fitted to me.*—(Heb. x., 5).

Wherefore the hardness of such a bed must have caused Him excessive pain—pain and shame; for what child, even of the lowest of the people, is ever laid on straw as soon as he is born? Straw is a bed fit only for beasts; and yet the Son of God had none other on earth than a bed of miserable straw! St. Francis of Assisi, one day, as he sat at table, heard these words of the Gospel: *And laid him in a manger*; and he exclaimed: “What? My Lord was laid on the straw, and shall I continue to sit?” And so he arose from his seat, threw himself on the ground, and there finished his scanty meal, mingling with it tears of tenderness as he contemplated the sufferings that the Infant Jesus endured whilst He lay on the straw.

O Lover of souls, O my loving Redeemer! is not, then, the sorrowful Passion that awaits Thee, and the bitter death that is prepared for Thee on the Cross, sufficient, but that Thou must, even from the commencement of Thy life, even from Thy Infancy, begin to suffer? Yes, because even as an Infant Thou wouldst begin to be my Redeemer, and to satisfy the divine justice for my sins. Thou didst chose a bed of straw to deliver me from the fire of hell, into which I have so many times deserved

to be cast. Thou didst cry and mourn on this bed of straw to obtain for me pardon from Thy Father. Oh, how these Thy tears afflict me, and yet console me! They afflict me from compassion at seeing Thee, an innocent Babe, suffering so much for sins not Thy own; they console me, because Thy sufferings assure me of my salvation, and of Thy immense love for me.

II.

But why did Mary, who had so earnestly desired the birth of this Son—why did she, who loved Him so much, allow Him to lie and suffer on this hard bed, instead of keeping Him in her arms? This is a mystery, says St. Thomas of Villanova: “Nor would she have laid Him in such a place, unless there had been some great mystery in it.” This great mystery has been explained by many in different ways, but the explanation most pleasing to me is that of St. Peter Damian: Jesus wished as soon as He was born to be placed on the straw, in order to teach us the mortification of our senses: “He laid down the law of martyrdom.” The world had been lost by sensual pleasures. From the time of Adam multitudes of his descendants had thus been lost. The Eternal Word came from Heaven to teach us the love of suffering; and He began as a Child to teach it by choosing for Himself the most acute sufferings that an infant could endure. It was, therefore, He Himself Who inspired His Mother to cease from holding Him in her tender arms, and to place Him on the hard bed, that He might the more feel the cold of the cave and the pricking of the rough straw.

But, my Jesus, I will not leave Thee alone to cry and to suffer. I also will weep; for I alone deserve to shed tears on account of the offences I have committed against Thee. I, who have deserved hell, will not refuse any suffering whatever, so that I may regain Thy favour, O my Saviour. Forgive me, I beseech Thee; receive me once more into Thy friendship, make me love Thee, and then chastise me as Thou wilt. Deliver me from eternal punishment, and then treat me as it shall please Thee. I do not seek the pleasures of this life; he does not

deserve pleasure who has had the temerity to offend Thee, O infinite Goodness. I am content to suffer all the crosses Thou shalt send me; but, my Jesus, I will love Thee still. O Mary, who didst sympathise by thy sufferings with the sufferings of Jesus, obtain for me the grace to suffer all my trials with patience. Woe to me, if, after so many sins, I do not suffer something in this life! And blessed shall I be if I have the happiness to accompany thee in thy sufferings, O my sorrowful Mother, and Thee, O my Jesus, always afflicted and crucified for love of me.

December the Thirtieth

Morning Meditation.

THE SHORTNESS OF LIFE.

All flesh is grass. The life of man is like the life of a blade of grass. Death comes, the grass is dried up. Behold, life ends, and the flower of all greatness and of all worldly goods falls off! *The grass is withered and the flower is fallen!*

I.

What is your life? It is a vapour which appeareth for a little while.—(James, iv., 15).
 What is your life? It is a vapour, which is dissipated by a blast of wind, and is seen no more. All know that they must die; but the delusion of many is, that they imagine death to be so far off as if it were never to arrive. But Job tells us that the life of man is short. *Man born of woman, living for a short time, . . . who cometh forth like a flower, and is destroyed.*—(Job xiv., 12). The Lord commanded Isaiah to preach this truth to the people. *Cry. . . . All flesh is grass. . . . Indeed, the people is*

grass. The grass is withered and the flower is fallen.—(Is. xl. 6 sqq.). The life of man may be likened to that of a blade of grass; death comes, the grass is dried up; behold, life ends, and the flower of all greatness and of all worldly goods falls off.

My days, says Job, *have been swifter than a post.*—(Job ix., 25). Death runs to meet us most swiftly and we at every moment run as swiftly towards death. Every step, every breath brings us nearer to our end. “What I write,” says St. Jerome, “is so much taken away from life.” During the time I write, I draw nearer to death. *We all die, and, like the waters that return no more, we fall into the earth.*—(2 Kings xiv., 14). Behold how the stream flows to the sea, and the passing waters never return! Thus, my brother, your days go by, and you approach death. Pleasures, amusements, pomps, praises and acclamations pass away; *and only the grave remaineth for me.*—(Job xvii., 1). At the hour of death the remembrance of the delights enjoyed, and of all the honours acquired in this life, will serve only to increase our pain and our diffidence of obtaining eternal salvation. Then the miserable worldly furniture, say: “My house, my gardens, my fashionable furniture, my pictures, my garments, will in a little time be no longer mine, *and only the grave remaineth for me.*”

Al, my God and Lord of infinite majesty! I am ashamed to appear before Thee. How often have I dishonoured Thee by preferring a sordid pleasure, the indulgence of anger, caprice, or vanity, to Thy grace? O my Redeemer, I adore and kiss Thy holy Wounds, which I have inflicted by my sins; but through which I hope for pardon and salvation. O my Jesus, make me understand the great injury I have done Thee in leaving Thee, the Fountain of every good, to drink putrid and poisoned waters. Nothing now remains but pain, remorse of conscience, and fruits for hell. *Father, I am not worthy to be called thy child.*—(Luke xv., 21). My Father! do not cast me off. It is true that I no longer merit the grace which would make me Thy child; but Thou hast said: *Turn ye to me, . . . and I will turn to*

you.—(Zach. i., 3). I wish to love Thee during the remainder of my life, and I wish to love nothing but Thee. Assist me; give me holy perseverance, and Thy holy love. Mary, my refuge, plead with Jesus Christ for me.

II.

How great is the folly of those who, for the miserable and transitory delights of this short life, expose themselves to the danger of an unhappy death, and afterwards of an unhappy eternity. Oh! how important is that last moment, that last gasp, that last closing scene! On it depends an eternity either of all delights or of all torments—a life of eternal happiness or of everlasting woe. Let us consider that Jesus Christ submitted to a cruel and ignominious death in order to obtain for us the grace of a good death. That we may at that last moment die in the grace of God is the reason why He gives us so many calls, so many lights, and admonishes us by so many threats.

If there were two tickets in a lottery, on one of which was written *Hell* and on the other *Heaven*, what care would you not take to draw that which would give you a right to Paradise, and to avoid the other, by which you would be condemned to a place in hell! O God! how the hands of those unhappy men tremble who are condemned to throw the die on which life or death depends! How great will be your terror at the approach of that last hour, when you will say: On this moment depends my life or death for eternity; on this depends whether I shall be forever happy or forever in despair! St. Bernardine of Sienna relates, that at death a certain prince exclaimed, with trembling and dismay: Behold, I have so many kingdoms and palaces in this world; but if I die this night I know not what apartment shall be assigned to me in the next.

Brother, if you believe that you must die, that there is an eternity, that you can die only once, and that if you then err, your error will be forever irreparable, why do you not resolve to begin at this moment to do all in your

power to secure a good death? St. Andrew Avellino said with trembling: "Who knows what will be my lot in the next life? Shall I be saved or damned?" Oh! hasten to apply a remedy in time; resolve to give yourself sincerely to God, and begin from this moment a life which, at the hour of death, will be to you a source, not of affliction, but of consolation. Give yourself up to prayer, frequent the Sacraments, avoid all dangerous occasions, and, if necessary, leave the world, secure to yourself eternal salvation, and be persuaded that to secure eternal life no precaution can be too great.

O my dear Saviour, how great are my obligations to Thee! How hast Thou been able to bestow so many graces on so ungrateful a traitor as I have been? Thou didst create me; and in creating me Thou didst see the injuries which I would commit against Thee. Thou didst redeem me by dying for me: and then, too, Thou didst see the ingratitude which I would be guilty of towards Thee. Being placed in the world I turned my back upon Thee by my sins. My soul was dead and Thou didst restore me to life. I was blind, and Thou didst enlighten me. I had lost Thee, and Thou didst enable me to find Thee. I was Thy enemy, and Thou didst make me Thy friend. O God of mercy, make me feel the obligations which I owe Thee, and make me weep over the offences which I have committed against Thee. O Eternal Father, I abhor and detest, above all evils, the injuries I have done Thee. Have mercy on me for the sake of Jesus Christ. Look at Thy Son dead on the Cross. *Sanguis ejus super me.* May His Blood flow upon me and wash my soul! Mary, my Queen and Mother, assist me by thy intercession. Mother of God, pray for me.

Spiritual Reading.

ON THE ADVANTAGES OF THE RELIGIOUS STATE.

VII.—MORITUR CONFIDENTIUS—A RELIGIOUS DIES MORE CONFIDENTLY.

Some are deterred from entering Religion by the apprehension that their abandonment of the world may be afterwards to them a source of regret. In making choice of a state of life, I would advise such persons to reflect, not on the time given to us to live, but on the hour of death, which will determine their happiness or misery for all eternity. And I would ask if in the world, surrounded by seculars, disturbed by the fondness of children, from whom they are about to be separated, perplexed with the care of their worldly affairs, and troubled by a thousand scruples of conscience, they can expect to die more content than in the House of God, assisted by their holy companions, who continually speak to them of God, pray for them, console and encourage them in their passage to eternity? Imagine you see, on the one hand, a prince dying in a splendid palace, attended by a retinue of servants, surrounded by his wife, his children, and relations, and represent to yourself, on the other, a Religious expiring in his monastery, in a poor cell, mortified, humble, far from his relatives, stripped of property and self-will; and tell me, which of the two dies more contented—that sick prince or that poor Religious? Ah! the enjoyment of riches, honours and pleasures of this life does not afford consolation at the hour of death, but rather begets grief and diffidence of salvation; while poverty, humiliations, penitential austerities, and detachment from the world, render death sweet, and give to a Christian increased hopes of attaining that true felicity which shall never terminate.

Jesus Christ has promised that whosoever leaves his

home and relatives for His love shall enjoy eternal life. *And every one that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundred-fold and possess life everlasting.*—(Matt. xix., 29). A certain Religious of the Society of Jesus, being observed to smile on his death-bed, some of his brethren began to apprehend that he was not aware of his danger, and asked him why he smiled; he answered: "Why should I not smile, since I am sure of Paradise? Has not the Lord Himself promised to give eternal life to those who leave the world for His sake? I have long since abandoned all things for the love of Him; His promise cannot fail. I smile, then, because I confidently expect eternal glory." The same sentiment was expressed long before by St. John Chrysostom, writing to a certain Religious: "God cannot tell a lie; and He has promised eternal life to those who leave the goods of this world. You have left all these things; why, then, should you doubt the fulfilment of His promise?"

St. Bernard says that "it is very easy to pass from the cell to Heaven; because a person who dies in a cell scarcely ever descends into hell, since it seldom happens that a Religious perseveres in his cell till death unless he be predestined to eternal happiness." St. Laurence Justinian says that Religion is the gate of Paradise; because, living in Religion, and partaking of its advantages, is a great mark of election to glory. No wonder, then, that Gerard, the brother of St. Bernard, when dying in his monastery, died singing. God Himself says: *Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.*—(Apoc. xiv., 13). And surely Religious, who, by the holy vows, and especially by the vow of obedience, or total renunciation of self-will, die to the world and to themselves, must be amongst those who *die in the Lord*. Father Suarez, remembering at the hour of death that all his actions in Religion were performed through obedience, was filled with spiritual joy, and exclaimed that he could not have imagined death could be so sweet and so full of consolation.

VIII.—PURGATOR CITIUS—A RELIGIOUS IS PURIFIED
MORE QUICKLY.

St. Thomas teaches that the perfect consecration which a Religious makes of himself to God, by his solemn Profession remits the guilt and punishment of all his past sins. The Saint writes: "It may be reasonably said that a person by entering Religion, obtains the remission of all his sins. For, to make satisfaction for all sins, it is sufficient to dedicate oneself entirely to the service of God by entering Religion, which dedication exceeds all manner of satisfaction." "Hence," he concludes, "we read in the Lives of the Fathers, that they who enter Religion obtain the same very grace as those who receive Baptism." The defects committed after Profession by a good Religious, are expiated in this world by his daily exercises of piety, meditations, Communions, and mortifications. But, should a Religious not have made full atonement in this life for all his sins, his Purgatory will not be of long duration. The many sacrifices which are offered for him after death, and the prayers of the Community, will soon release him from suffering.

Evening Meditation.

JESUS SLEEPING.

I.

Very short and painful were the slumbers of the Infant Jesus. A manger was His cradle, straw was His bed, and straw His pillow; so that the sleep of Jesus was often interrupted by the hardness of this rough and painful little bed, and by the severe cold of the cave. Notwithstanding this, overcome by nature, the sweet Babe from time to time slept amidst His sufferings. But the sleep of Jesus differed much from that of other children; the slumbers of other children are useful for the preservation

of life, but not for the operations of the soul, because the soul being buried with the senses in sleep, does not then work; but such was not the sleep of Jesus Christ: *I sleep, and my heart watcheth.*—(Cant. v., 2). His body was asleep, but His soul was watching, because it was united to the Person of the Word, Who could not slumber, nor be lulled to sleep by the senses. The Holy Infant, therefore, slept; but while He slept He thought of all the sufferings He was to endure for our love during His life and at His death. He thought of the fatigues He was to undergo in Egypt and in Nazareth during His poor and despised life. He thought then, in particular, of the scourges, of the thorns, of the ignominies, of the agonies, and of that desolate death that He was at last to suffer upon the Cross; and whilst He was sleeping He offered all this to His Eternal Father to obtain for us pardon and salvation. So that our Saviour, even while sleeping, was meriting for us and appeasing His Father, and obtaining graces for us.

My beloved and holy Infant, Thou sleepest, and oh, how much do not Thy slumbers enamour me! With others, sleep is the emblem of death; but in Thee it is the sign of eternal life, because whilst Thou art reposing, Thou art meriting for me eternal salvation. Thou sleepest; but Thy Heart sleeps not, it is thinking of Thy suffering and dying for me. Whilst Thou art sleeping Thou art praying for me, and obtaining for me from God the eternal rest of Paradise. But before Thou dost take me to repose with Thee, as I hope, in Heaven, I desire that Thou shouldst repose for ever in my soul.

II.

Let us now beseech the Divine Child, by the merit of His blessed slumbers, to deliver us from the deadly slumber of sinners who unhappily sleep in the death of sin, forgetful of God and of His love; and to give us the blessed sleep of the Sacred Spouse, of which He said: *Stir not up, nor make the beloved to awake, till she please.*—(Cant. ii., 7). This is the sleep that God gives to His beloved souls, which is none other, as St.

Basil says, "but the most profound oblivion of all things"; and this is when the soul forgets all earthly things, to attend only to God and to the things that concern His glory.

There was a time, O my God, when I drove Thee away from me; but I trust that, by knocking so often at the door of my heart—at one time by making it afraid, at another by enlightening it, then by words of love—Thou hast already obtained an entrance there. This, I say, is my hope; because I feel a great confidence that I have already been forgiven by Thee; I feel a great hatred and repentance for the offences I have committed against Thee—a repentance that gives me a great sorrow; but a sorrow that brings peace, a sorrow that comforts me and makes me hope assuredly for pardon from Thy goodness. I thank Thee, my Jesus, and I pray Thee never again to depart from my soul. I know indeed that Thou wilt not leave me, if I do not drive Thee away; and this is the grace I ask of Thee (and I pray Thee to give me Thy assistance that I may always seek it of Thee), that Thou wouldst not permit me ever to drive Thee from me. Make me forget everything, to think only of Thee Who hast always thought of me and of my welfare. Make me always love Thee in this life, so that, breathing forth my soul in Thy arms, united to Thee, it may repose eternally in Thee without fear of losing Thee again. O Mary, assist me in life and assist me in death, so that Jesus may always repose in me, and that I may always repose in Jesus.

Sunday Within the Octave of Christmas

Morning Meditation.

THE ETERNAL WORD BECOMES A SERVANT.

Jesus was bound in swaddling-clothes, says St. Ambrose, that I might be loosed from chains; His

poverty is my patrimony; the feebleness of the Lord is my strength; His tears have washed away my guilt! O my Jesus, Thou hast been pleased to become a servant for love of me, and in order to release me from the chains of hell. Bind my heart to Thy feet that it may no more stray from Thee.

I.

Very great would be your ingratitude to your God, O Christian soul, if you were not to love Jesus after He has been pleased to be bound in swaddling-clothes, that you may be released from the chains of hell; after He has become poor, that you may be made partaker of His riches; after He has made Himself weak, to give you power over your enemies; after He has chosen to suffer and to weep, that by His tears your sins may be washed away.

But, O God, how few there are who show themselves grateful for so immense a love by faithfully loving this their Redeemer! Alas! the greater part of men, after so incomparable a benefit, after so many great mercies and so much love, still say to God: Lord, we will not serve Thee; we would rather be slaves of the devil and condemned to hell, than be Thy servants. Listen how God upbraids such thankless wretches: *Thou hast burst my bands, and thou saidst: I will not serve.*—(Jer. ii, 20). What say you? Have you, too, been one of these? But tell me, whilst living far from God and the slave of the devil—tell me, have you felt happy? Have you been at peace? Ah, no, the divine words can never fail: *Because thou didst not serve the Lord thy God with joy and gladness of heart, thou shalt serve thy enemy with hunger and thirst and nakedness, and in want of all things.*—(Deut. xxviii., 47). Since thou hast preferred to serve thy enemy rather than to serve thy God, behold how that tyrant has treated thee. He has made thee groan as a slave in chains, poor, afflicted, and deprived of every interior consolation. But come, rise up; God speaks to thee whilst thou mayest still be freed from the

letters of death which bind thee : *Loose the bonds from off thy neck, O captive daughter of Sion.*—(Is. lii., 2).

O Jesus, I was once a slave of hell; but now that I am free from those unhappy chains, I consecrate myself entirely to Thee; I give Thee my body, my goods, my life, my soul, my will, and my whole liberty. I desire no longer to belong to myself, but only to Thee, my only Good. Ah, bind my heart to Thy feet, that it may no more stray from Thee. O most holy Mary! obtain for me the grace of living always bound to thy Son by the blessed chains of love. Tell Him to accept me as the slave of His love. He grants all that thou askest. Pray to Him, pray to Him, for me. This is my hope.

II.

Make haste while time is left, unbind thyself, poor soul, who hast become the voluntary slave of hell. Strike off these cursed chains that hold thee fast as a prey for hell; and bind thyself to God instead with chains of gold, chains of love, chains of peace, chains of salvation : *her bands are a healthful binding.*—(Eccles. vi., 31). But in what manner are souls bound to God? By love : *Have charity, which is the bond of perfection.*—(Col. iii., 4). A soul that always walks by the single way of the fear of punishment, and from this single motive avoids sin, is always in great danger of quickly relapsing into sin; but he that attaches himself to God by love is sure not to lose Him as long as he loves Him; and for this reason we must continually beg God to grant us the gift of His holy love, always praying and saying : O Lord, keep me united with Thee, never suffer me to be separated from Thee and from Thy love. The fear which we ought rather to desire and beg of God is a filial fear, the fear of ever displeasing this our good Lord and Father. Let us, too, always have recourse to most holy Mary, our Mother, that she may obtain for us the grace to love nothing but our God, and unite us so closely by love to her Blessed Son, that we may never again see ourselves separated from Him by sin.

Ah, my God, after all the favours Thou hast shown me, after pardoning me so repeatedly, and when now Thou dost enlighten me with so clear a knowledge, and invitest me to love Thee with so tender an affection, if I should ever be so wretched as again to turn my back upon Thee, how could I presume ever to receive pardon afresh! Should I not fear that in the same instant Thou wouldst cast me headlong into hell? Ah, never permit it; let me say again : "Suffer me not to be separated from Thee."

O Mary, my refuge, thou hast hitherto been my sweet advocate; for it was thou who didst prevail on God still to wait for me and to pardon me with so much mercy; help me at present, obtain for me the grace to die, and to die a thousand times, rather than ever again to lose the grace of my God.

Spiritual Reading.

THE FALL AND THE RESURRECTION OF MANY.

Behold this child is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel.—(Luke ii., 34).

Such was the language of holy Simeon when he had the consolation to hold in his arms the Infant Jesus. Among other things which he then foretold, he declared *that this child was set for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel.* In these words holy Simeon extols the lot of the Saints, who, after this life, shall rise to a life of immortality in the kingdom of bliss, and he deplures the misfortune of sinners, who, for the transitory and miserable pleasures of this world, bring upon themselves eternal ruin and perdition. Yet, notwithstanding the greatness of his own misery, the unhappy sinner, reflecting only on the enjoyment of present gains, calls the

Saints fools, because they wish to live in poverty, in humiliation and self-denial. But a day will come when sinners shall see their error and shall say: *We fools esteemed their life madness, and their end without honour.*—(Wis. v., 9). *We fools!* Behold how they shall confess *themselves* truly fools!

What greater folly can be conceived than to have the power of being the friends of God, and to wish to be His enemies? Their living at enmity with God makes the lives of sinners unhappy in this world, and purchases for them an eternity of misery hereafter. St. Augustine relates that two courtiers entered a monastery of hermits, and that one of them began to read the *Life of St. Anthony*. "He read," says the Saint, "and his heart was divested of the world." He read, and, in reading, his affections were detached from the earth. Turning to his companion, he exclaimed: "What do we seek? The friendship of the emperor is the most we can hope for. And how many perils does not that friendship bring upon us! Should we even obtain his friendship, how long will it last?"—Friend, said he, fools that we are, what do we seek? Can we expect more in this life, by serving the emperor, than to gain his friendship? And when after many dangers we succeed in making him our friend, we shall expose ourselves to greater danger of eternal perdition. What difficulties must we encounter in order to become the friend of Cæsar!—"But, if I wish, I can in a moment become the friend of God." I can acquire His friendship by endeavouring to recover His grace. His divine grace is that infinite treasure which makes us worthy of His friendship. *For she is an infinite treasure to men, which they that use become the friends of God.*—(Wis. vii., 14).

The Gentiles believed it impossible for a creature to become the friend of God. But Jesus Christ has declared that if we observe His commands we shall be His friends. *You are my friends if you do the things that I command you.*—(Jo. xv., 14).

How great, then, is the folly of sinners, who, though they have it in their power to enjoy the friendship of

God, wish to live at enmity with Him! The Lord does not hate any of His creatures: He does not hate the tiger, the viper or the toad. *For thou lovest all things that are, and hatest none of the things which thou hast made.*—(Wis. xi., 25). But He necessarily hates sinners. *Thou hatest all the workers of iniquity.*—(Ps. v., 7). God cannot but hate sin, which is His enemy and diametrically opposed to His will; and therefore, in hating sin, He necessarily hates the sinner who is united with his sin. *But to God the wicked and his wickedness are hateful alike.*—(Wis. xiv., 9).

The present life, as St. Gregory says, is the way by which we must reach Paradise, our true country.

But the misfortune of the greater part of mankind is that, instead of following the *Way of salvation*, they foolishly walk in the *road to perdition*. Some have a passion for earthly riches; and, for a vile interest, they lose the immense goods of Paradise. Others have a passion for honours; and for a momentary applause, they lose their right to be kings in Heaven; others have a passion for sensual pleasures; and, for transitory delights, they lose the grace of God, and are condemned to burn for ever in a prison of fire. Miserable souls! if, in punishment of a certain sin, their hand was to be burned with a red-hot iron, or if they were to be shut up for ten years in a dark prison, they certainly would abstain from it. And do they not know that, in chastisement of their sins, they shall be condemned to remain for ever in hell, where their bodies, buried in fire, shall burn for all eternity? Some, says St. John Chrysostom, to save the body, choose to destroy the soul; but do they know not that, in losing their soul, their bodies shall be condemned to eternal torments? If we neglect the soul, we cannot save the body.

Now, instead of seeking to be friends of God, sinners wish to be the slaves of Satan, who is a cruel and merciless tyrant to all who submit to his yoke. And if Satan does promise delights, he does so, as St. Cyprian says, not for our welfare, but that we may be the companions of his torments in hell.

Only the Saints, then, are truly wise. For let us be persuaded that the truly wise are those who know how to love God and to gain Heaven. Happy the man to whom God has given the Science of the Saints! Ah! how sublime the Science which teaches us to know how to love God and to save our souls! Happy is the man, says St. Augustine, who knows God, although ignorant of other things! Oh, how many of the rude and illiterate are saved, because, though unable to read, they know how to love God; and how many of the wise ones of the world are damned! But the wonder is, that though worldlings themselves are fully persuaded of this truth, and constantly extol the merit of those who retire from the world to live only to God, they still act as though they believed it not.

Tell me, to which class do you wish to belong—to the wise of the world, or to the wise of God? Before you make a choice, St. John Chrysostom advises you to go to the graves of the dead! Oh, how eloquently do the sepulchres of the dead teach us the Science of the Saints and the vanity of all earthly goods! “For me,” said the Saint, “I see nothing but rottenness, bones, and worms.” As if he said: Among these skeletons I cannot distinguish the noble, the rich, or the learned. I see that they have all become dust and rottenness. Thus all their greatness and glory have passed away like a dream.

What, then, must we do? Behold the advice of St. Paul: *This, therefore, I say, brethren: the time is short: it remaineth that . . . they that use this world, as if they used it not; for the fashion of this world passeth away.*—(1 Cor. vii., 29, 31). This world is a scene which shall pass away and end very soon: *The time is short.* During the days of life that remain, let us endeavour to live like men who are wise, not according to the world, but according to God, by attending to the sanctification of our souls and by adopting the means of salvation. Thus shall we be truly wise, and be happy for time and for eternity.

Evening Meditation.

“HE DIFFERETH NOTHING FROM A SERVANT.”

—(Epistle for Sunday. Gal. iv., 1—5).

I.

He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, says St. Paul. On considering the immense mercy in the work of human redemption, St. Zachary had good reason to exclaim: *Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, because he hath visited and wrought the redemption of his people.*—(Luke i., 68). Blessed forever be God Who hath vouchsafed to come down upon the earth and be made Man in order to redeem mankind: *That being delivered from the hands of our enemies, we may serve him without fear.*—(Ib. 74). In order that, loosened from the shackles of sin and death, wherein our enemies held us fast bound and enthralled, we may fearlessly, and with the freedom of the children of God, love Him and serve Him during this life, and afterwards go to possess and enjoy Him face to face in the kingdom of the Blessed that had been closed against us heretofore, but now thrown open to us by our divine Saviour.

We were, in fact, all the slaves of hell; but what has the Eternal Word, our Sovereign Lord, done to free us from that slavery? From being Lord He became a servant. And why?

Almighty God is Lord of all that is, or that can be in the world: *In thy power are all things; for thou hast created all.*—(Esther xiii., 9).

Now, though this Sovereign King bore sway over the Angels in Heaven, and ruled all creation, He did not rule over the hearts of men. Mankind was groaning under the miserable tyranny of the devil. But the Prophet Isaias long ago foretold that our Redeemer would destroy the empire which Satan held over mankind: *And the sceptre of their oppression thou hast overcome.*—(Is. ix., 4). Why does the Prophet call Satan

an *oppressor*? Because, says St. Cyril, this heartless master exacts from the poor sinners who become his slaves heavy tribute, in the shape of passions, hatreds, disorderly affections, by means of which he binds them in a still greater servitude and at the same time scourges them. Behold, Jesus is scarcely born, says the Venerable Bede, before He assumes Himself the form and office of a servant, in order to win us freedom from this slavery of Satan. In token of His servitude He begins to pay off our debts by His sufferings. God suffers Himself to be bound in swaddling-bands because He had come to free the world.

My Sovereign Lord and Redeemer, I was lost! Thou hast ransomed me from hell. But unhappy me! I have often since ruined myself again, and Thou hast as often released me again from eternal death. *I am Thine, save me.* Since, as I hope, I am Thine, suffer me never more to cast myself away by rebelling against Thee. I am resolved to suffer death, and a thousand deaths, rather than ever again become Thy enemy and the slave of hell. I entreat Thee to grant me Thy grace that I may always ask Thee for help to overcome the devil. O Mary, obtain this grace for me, by the love which thou bearest to thy Son.

II.

The world stood in admiration of that grand act of Charity which St. Paulinus performed in consenting to become a slave for the ransom of the son of a poor widow. But what comparison does this bear with the Charity of our Redeemer, Who, in order to rescue us from the slavery of the devil and from death, our just due, being God chose to become a servant, to be fast bound with cords, to be nailed to the Cross, and thereon in the end to lay down His life in a sea of sorrow and ignominy? In order, says St. Augustine, that the servant might become lord, God chose to become a servant.

“O amazing condescension of Thy bounty towards us! O inestimable tenderness of Thy charity!” exclaims the Holy Church, “that Thou mightest redeem the servant

Thou hast delivered up the Son.” Thou, then, O God of boundless Majesty, hast been so fascinated with love for men, that to redeem these Thy rebellious servants Thou hast consented to condemn Thy only Son to death. But, O Lord, replies the holy man, Job: *What is man, that thou shouldst magnify him, or why dost thou set thy heart upon him?*—(Job vii., 17). What is man, who is so vile and has proved so ungrateful to Thee, that Thou shouldst make him so great, by honouring and loving him to such an excess? Tell me, why are the salvation and happiness of man of so much importance to Thee? Tell me why Thou lovest him so much, that it would seem as if Thy Heart were set on nothing else but to love man and to make him happy?

Since Thou, O my Jesus, hast paid the price of my ransom, I beseech Thee let not that Blood which Thou hast shed for me be lost to me. I am sorry that I have despised Thee, O my Love—but grant me more sorrow. Make me know the evil I have committed in offending Thee. Most holy Mary, pray to Jesus for me and for all sinners. Obtain for me light and grace to love thy Son Who has loved me so much.

Last Day of the Year

Morning Meditation.

NEGLECT OF TIME.

He hath called against me the time.—(Lament. i., 15).

All the time that is not spent for God is time lost. At the hour of death worldlings will wish for another year, another month, another day—but they will not obtain it. They shall then be told that for them *time shall be no more.* Ah, my Jesus, I have been so many years in the world, and how many have I spent for Thee?

I.

There is nothing more precious than time, but there is nothing less esteemed and more despised by men of the world. This is what St. Bernard deploras when he says: "Nothing is more precious than time, but nothing is regarded more cheaply." The Saint adds: "The days of salvation pass away, and no one reflects that the day which has passed away from him can never return." You will see a gambler spend nights and days in play. If you ask him what he is doing, his answer is: "I am passing the time." You will see others standing several hours in the street, looking at those who go by, and speaking on obscene or on useless subjects. If you ask them what they are doing they will say: "We are passing the time." Poor blind sinners who lose so many days! Days that never return!

O time despised during life! you will be ardently desired by worldlings at the hour of death. They will then wish for another year, another month, another day; but they will not obtain it: they will then be told that time shall be no longer. How much would they then pay for another week, or another day, to settle the accounts of their conscience? To obtain a single hour, they would, says St. Laurence Justinian, give all their wealth and worldly possessions. But this hour shall not be given.

Ah, my Jesus, Thou hast spent Thy whole life for the salvation of my soul. There has not been a single moment of Thy life in which Thou hast not offered Thyself to the Eternal Father to obtain for me pardon and eternal glory. I have been so many years in the world, and how many of them have I spent for Thee? Ah! all that I remember to have done produces remorse of conscience. The evil has been great, the good very little, and all full of imperfections and tepidity, of self-love and distractions. Ah, my Redeemer! all this has arisen from my forgetfulness of what Thou hast done for me. I have forgotten Thee, but Thou hast not forgotten me; when I fled from Thee, Thou didst follow me, and call me so often to Thy love.

II.

The Prophet exhorts us to remember God and to procure His friendship, before the light fails. *Remember thy Creator . . . before the sun and the light be darkened.*—(Eccles. xii., 1). How great the distress and misery of a traveller who, when the night has come, perceives that he has missed his way, and that there is no time to correct his mistake. Such at death will be the anguish of the sinner who has lived many years in the world, and has not spent them for God. *The night cometh, when no man can work.*—(Jo. ix., 4). For him death shall be the night in which he will be able to do nothing. *He hath called against me the time.* Conscience will then remind the worldling of all the time that God has given him, which he has spent in the destruction of his soul; of all the calls and graces that he has received from God for his sanctification, and these he has voluntarily abused. The sinner will then see that the way of salvation is forever closed. Hence he will weep and say: O fool that I have been! O time lost! O life misspent! O lost years, in which I could have become a Saint, but have not! And now the time of salvation is gone forever. But of what use are these sighs and lamentations, when the scene is about to close—the lamp on the point of being extinguished—and when the dying sinner has reached that awful moment on which eternity depends?

Behold me, O Jesus! I will resist no longer. Shall I wait till Thou abandon me? I am sorry, O Sovereign Good! for having separated myself from Thee by sin. I love Thee, O infinite Goodness, worthy of infinite love. Ah! do not permit me ever again to lose the time which Thou in Thy mercy givest me. Ah! remind me always, O my beloved Saviour, of the love Thou hast borne me and of the pains Thou hast endured for me. Make me forget all things, that, during the remainder of my life, I may think only of loving and pleasing Thee. I love Thee, my Jesus, my Love, my All! I promise to make acts of love whenever Thou remindest me. Give me holy

perseverance. I place all my confidence in the merits of Thy Blood. I also trust in thy intercession, O my dear Mother Mary!

Spiritual Reading.

ON THE ADVANTAGES OF THE RELIGIOUS STATE.

IX.—“REMUNERATUR COPIOSIUS”—A RELIGIOUS IS MORE ABUNDANTLY REWARDED.

Worldlings are blind to the things of God; they do not comprehend the greatness of eternal life, in comparison with which the present life is but a moment, almost nothing. If they were truly enlightened they would assuredly abandon their possessions—even kings would abdicate their crowns—and quitting the world, would retire into the cloister to attend to their eternal salvation—an exceeding difficult affair for persons living in the world. Bless, then, O Religious soul, and continually thank God, Who, by His lights and graces, has delivered you from the bondage of Egypt and brought you to His own house; prove your gratitude by fidelity to His service, and by a faithful correspondence with so great a grace. Compare the goods of this world with the eternal felicity which God has prepared for those who leave all things for His sake, and you will find that there is a greater disparity between the transitory joys of this life and the eternal beatitude of the Saints, than there is between a gram of sand and the entire creation.

Jesus Christ has promised that whosoever shall leave all things for His sake, shall receive a hundred-fold in this life, and eternal glory in the next. Who can ever doubt His words? Can you imagine that He will not be faithful to His promise? Is He not more liberal in rewarding virtue than severe in punishing vice? If they who give a cup of cold water in His Name shall not be left without reward, how great, how incomprehensible

must be the reward which a Religious, who aspires to perfection, shall receive for the numberless works of piety which he performs every day! Reward for so many acts of charity, for abstinence, for so many Meditations, Offices, and Communion, for so many acts of mortification, for Spiritual Reading—all of which a Religious who tends to perfection performs every day! Do you not know that these good works performed through obedience, and the other vows of Religious, merit a far greater reward than the good works of seculars? Brother Lacci, of the Society of Jesus, appeared after death to a certain person, and said that he and King Phillip the Second were crowned with bliss, but his own glory as far surpassed that of Phillip, as the exalted dignity of a sovereign on earth is raised above the lowly station of a humble Religious.

The dignity of martyrdom is sublime; but the Religious state appears to possess something still more excellent. The Martyr suffers that he may not lose his soul; the Religious suffers to render himself more acceptable to God. A Martyr dies for the *Faith*; a Religious, for *perfection*. Although the Religious state has lost much of its primitive splendour, we may still say, with truth, that the souls most dear to God, who have attained the greatest perfection, and who edify the Church by the odour of their sanctity, are, for the most part, to be found in Religion. How many shall we find in the world, even amongst the most fervent, who rise at midnight to pray and sing the praises of God? How many who spend five or six hours each day in these or similar works of piety? Who practise fasting, abstinence, and mortification? How many who observe silence, or accustom themselves to do the will of others rather than their own? And, surely, all these are performed by the Religious of every Order. Even in convents where discipline is relaxed, many are found who aspire to perfection, observe the Rule, and perform, in private, many works of supererogation. It is evident that the conduct of the generality of pious Christians in the world cannot be compared with that of a good Religious. No

wonder, then, that St. Cyrian called virgins consecrated to God, *the flower of the garden of the Church, and the noblest portion of the flock of Jesus Christ.* St. Gregory Nazianzen says Religious "are the first fruits of the flock of the Lord, the pillars and crown of Faith, and the pearls of the Church." I hold as certain that the greater number of the seraphic thrones, which were left vacant by the fall of the unhappy associates of Lucifer, will be filled by Religious. Out of the sixty, who, during the last Century were enrolled in the Catalogue of Saints, or honoured with the appellation of "Blessed," all, with the exception of five or six belonged to Religious Orders. Jesus Christ once said to St. Teresa: "Woe to the world but for Religious." Ruffinus says: "It cannot be doubted that the world is preserved from ruin by the merits of Religious." When, therefore, the devil affrights you by representing the difficulty of observing your Rule, and practising self-denial and the austerities necessary for salvation, raise your eyes to Heaven, and the hope of eternal beatitude will give you strength and courage to suffer all things. The trials, mortifications, and the miseries of this life will end one day, and to them will succeed the ineffable delights of Paradise, which shall be enjoyed for eternity without fear of failure or of diminution.

Evening Meditation.

JESUS WEeping.

I.

The tears of the Infant Jesus were very different from those of other new-born babes: these weep through pain; Jesus did not weep from pain, but through compassion for us and through love: "They weep on account of suffering, Christ out of compassion," says St. Bernard. Tears are a great sign of love. Therefore did the Jews say when they saw the Saviour weeping for the death of Lazarus: *Behold how he loved him.*—(Jo. xi., 36).

Thus also might the Angels have said on beholding the tears of the Infant Jesus: "Behold how He loves them." Behold how our God loves men; since for the love of them we see Him made Man, become an Infant, and weeping. Jesus wept, and offered to His Father His tears to obtain for us the pardon of our sins. "These tears," says St. Ambrose, "washed away my sins." By His cries and tears He implored mercy for us who were condemned to eternal death, and thus He appeased the indignation of His Father.

My beloved Infant, whilst Thou wert weeping in the stable of Bethlehem, Thou wert thinking of me, beholding even my sins, which were the cause of Thy tears. And have I, O my Jesus, instead of consoling Thee by my love and gratitude at the thought of what Thou hast suffered to save me—have I increased Thy grief and the cause of Thy tears? If I had sinned less Thou wouldst have wept less. Weep, yes, weep, for Thou hast cause to weep in seeing such great ingratitude of men for Thy so great love. But since Thou weapest, weep also for me; Thy tears are my hope. I also weep for the offences I have offered Thee, O my Redeemer; I hate them, I detest them, I repent of them with my whole heart. I weep for all those wretched days and nights of mine in which I lived Thy enemy and deprived of Thy beautiful grace; but what would my tears avail, O my Jesus, without Thine?

II.

Oh, how eloquently did the tears of this Divine little One plead in our behalf! Oh, how dear they were to God! It was then that the Father caused the Angels to proclaim that He made peace with men, and received them into His favour: *And on earth peace to men of good will.*—(Luke ii., 14). Jesus wept through love, but He also wept through grief in seeing that so many sinners, even after all His tears and so much blood shed for their salvation, would yet continue to despise His grace. But who would be so hard-hearted, on seeing an Infant God weeping for our sins, as not to weep also, and detest

those sins that have made this loving Saviour shed so many tears? Oh, let us not increase the sorrows of this Innocent Babe; but let us console Him by uniting our tears to His! Let us offer to God the tears of His Son, and let us beseech Him for their sake to forgive us!

Eternal Father, I offer Thee the tears of the Infant Jesus; for their sake forgive me. And Thou, my dear Saviour, offer to Him all the tears which Thou didst shed for me during Thy life, and with them appease Him for me. I beseech Thee also, O my Love, to soften my heart by these tears, and to inflame it with Thy holy love. Oh, that I could from this day forth console Thee by my love as much as I have pained Thee by offending Thee. Grant therefore, O Lord, that the days which remain to me of life may no more be spent in offending Thee, but only in weeping for the offences I have offered Thee, and in loving Thee with all the affections of my soul. O Mary, I beseech thee by that tender compassion which thou didst so often feel at seeing the Infant Jesus in tears, obtain for me a constant sorrow for the offences which I have ungratefully committed against Him.

First Friday of December

Morning Meditation.

THE BITTERNESS OF THE HEART OF JESUS IN THE WOMB OF HIS MOTHER.

The Devotion of all devotions is love for Jesus Christ, and frequent meditation on the love which this amiable Redeemer has borne and still bears us. Let us consider the sufferings which the Heart of Jesus endured for us even from His Infancy, for then we shall be unable to love anything else but the Heart which hath loved us so much.

I.

Consider the great bitterness with which the Heart of the Infant Jesus must have felt itself afflicted and oppressed, in the womb of Mary, at the very first moment when His Father proposed for His consideration all the series of contempt, sorrow and agonies which He was to suffer during His life, to deliver men from their miseries: *In the morning he wakeneth my ear . . . And I do not resist . . . I have given my body to the strikers.*—(Is. l., 4, 6). Thus did Jesus speak by the mouth of the Prophet. *In the morning he wakeneth my ear.* That is to say: From the first moment of My conception My Father made Me feel that it was His will that I should lead a life of sorrow and in the end should be sacrificed upon a Cross. *And I do not resist . . . I have given my body to the strikers.* All this I have accepted for your salvation, O ye souls of men! From that time forth I gave up My Body to the scourges, to the nails, and to the death of the Cross!

My beloved Redeemer, how much did it not cost Thee, even from Thy first entrance into the world, to raise me from the mire into which I have fallen by my sins! Thou didst consent to be treated as the lowest of slaves in order to deliver me from the slavery of the devil, to whom I had willingly sold myself by sin. Yet, knowing all this, I have had the boldness continually to afflict Thy most amiable Heart which has loved me so much! But since Thou, Who art innocent, and art my God, hast accepted such a painful life and death, I will accept for Thy love, O my Jesus, every trouble that shall come from Thy hands. I accept and embrace it because it comes from these hands once pierced through in order to deliver me from the hell which I have so often deserved. O my Lord, give me Thy holy love in order to render all sufferings and ignominy sweet and pleasant to me.

Most holy Mary, recommend me to thy Son for the love that thou bearest Him. Behold, I am one of those sheep for whom thy Son has died!

II.

Reflect that whatever Jesus Christ suffered in His life and in His Passion, was all placed before Him while He was yet in the womb of His Mother, and He accepted all with love. But in accepting all this, and in overcoming the natural repugnance of the senses, O God, what anguish and oppression did not the innocent Heart of Jesus suffer! Well did He understand what He was to endure; first of all shut up for nine months in the dark prison of the womb of Mary; then in enduring the shame and the sufferings of His birth; being born in a cold grotto that was a stable for beasts; in having afterwards to lead for thirty years a despised life in the shop of an artisan; and in seeing that He was to be treated by men as ignorant, a slave, a seducer, and one guilty of death, and that the most infamous and painful death allotted to criminals.

All this did our loving Redeemer accept every moment, but at each moment that He accepted it, He suffered at once all the pains and humiliations that He was afterwards to endure even until His death. The very knowledge of His divine dignity made Him feel, still more, the insults that He was to receive from men: *All the day long my shame is before me.*—(Ps. xliii., 16). He had continually before His eyes His shame, especially that confusion He should one day feel at seeing Himself stripped naked, scourged, and suspended by three nails, and so end His life in the midst of the insults and curses of those very men for whom He was dying: *Becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross.*—(Phil. ii., 8). And why? To save us miserable and ungrateful sinners.

O loving Heart of Jesus, that loves men with so much tenderness and is so little loved by men—do Thou apply a remedy to such great ingratitude! In flame our hearts with a true love for Thee. Ah, why can I not go through the whole world to make known the graces, the sweetness, the treasures that Thou dispensest to those who truly love Thee! Accept the desire I have of seeing all hearts burning with love for Thee. O divine Heart, be Thou my

consolation in trials, my repose in labour, my solace in anxieties, my haven in tempests. I consecrate to Thee my body and my soul, my heart and my life, all that I am. To Thee I offer all my thoughts, all my affections, all my desires. O Eternal Father, I offer to Thee the pure affections of the Heart of Jesus. If Thou dost reject mine, Thou canst not reject Thy Son's. Blessed art thou O immaculate Mary, who hadst thy heart always and entirely united to the Heart of Jesus, obtain for me that in future I may wish and desire only what Jesus wills and what thou willest. Amen.

Spiritual Reading.

**BEHOLD THE HEART THAT HAS LOVED MEN
SO MUCH.**

As has been already said the Devotion of all devotions is love for Jesus Christ, and frequent meditation on the love which this amiable Redeemer has borne us and still bears us.

A devout author laments, and most justly, the sight of so many persons who pay much attention to the practice of various devotions, but neglect this; of so many preachers and confessors who say a great many things but speak so little of love for Jesus Christ; whereas love for Jesus Christ ought to be the principal, indeed the only, devotion of a Christian. Therefore the only object and care of preachers and confessors towards their hearers and penitents ought to be to recommend to them constantly, and to inflame their hearts with, the love of Jesus Christ. This neglect is the reason why souls make so little progress in virtue, and remain grovelling in the same defects, and even frequently relapse into grievous sins because they take but little care, and are not sufficiently admonished to acquire the love of Jesus Christ, which is that golden cord which unites and binds the soul to God.

For this sole purpose did the Eternal Word come into this world, to make Himself loved. *I am come to cast fire upon the earth, and what will I but that it be kindled?*—(Luke xii., 49). For this purpose did the Eternal Father send Him into the world in order that He might make known to us His love, and thus obtain ours in return; and He protests that He will love us in the same proportion that we love Jesus Christ: *For the Father himself loveth you, because you have loved me.*—(Jo. xvi., 27).

Moreover, He gives us His graces as far as we ask for them in the Name of His Son: *If you ask the Father anything in my name he will give it to you.* And He will admit us to the eternal beatitude in so far as He finds us conformable to the life of Jesus Christ. *For whom he foreknew he also predestinated to be made conformable to the image of his son.*—(Rom. viii., 29). But we shall never acquire this conformity, nor even ever desire it, if we are not given to meditation upon the love which Jesus Christ has borne us.

For this same purpose it is related in the Life of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, a nun of the Order of the Visitation, that our Saviour revealed His wish to this His servant, that in our times the Devotion and Feast of the Sacred Heart should be established and propagated in the Church. In this way, devout souls would, by their adoration and prayer, make reparation for the injuries His Heart constantly receives from ungrateful men when He is exposed in the Blessed Sacrament upon the altar. It is also related that while this devout virgin was one day praying before the Most Holy Sacrament, Jesus Christ showed her His Heart surrounded by thorns, with a cross on the top and in a throne of flames, and He spoke thus to her: "Behold the Heart that has so much loved men, and has spared nothing for love of them, even to consuming Itself to give them pledges of Its love, but Which receives from the majority of mankind no other recompense but ingratitude and insults towards

the Sacrament of My Love: and what grieves Me most is that hearts consecrated to Me treat Me thus."

Then He urged her to use her utmost endeavours to secure that a particular Feast, the First Friday after the Octave of Corpus Christi, should be celebrated in honour of His Divine Heart. And this for three reasons: (1) In order that the faithful might return thanks to Him for the great Gift which He has left them in the Adorable Eucharist. (2) In order that loving souls might make amends by their prayers and pious affections for the irreverences and insults which He has received and still receives from sinners in the Most Holy Sacrament. (3) In order that they might make reparation for the neglect He meets with in so many churches where He is so little adored and revered.

He promised that He would endow with the riches of His Sacred Heart those who should render Him this honour, both on the day of this Feast, and on every other day when they should visit Him in the Most Holy Sacrament.

Evening Meditation.

AND THE WORD WAS MADE FLESH.—
(Jo. i., 14).

God sent the Archangel Gabriel to ask Mary's consent that He should become her Son; Mary gives her consent, and behold the Word is made Man. O wonderful prodigy at which the heavens and all nature stand in astonishment! The Word made flesh! A God made Man! What if we were to see a king become a worm, to save the life of a little worm of earth by his death?

Behold the only-begotten Son of God, omnipotent and true God, equal to the Father, born a little Infant in a stable. *He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men.*—(Phil. ii., 7). If any one would see a God annihilated, let him enter into the Cave of Bethlehem, and he will find Him as a little Infant,

bound in swaddling-clothes, so that He cannot move, and weeping and trembling with cold. Ah, holy Faith, tell me whose Son is this poor Child? Faith answers: He is the Son of God, and He is true God. And what has brought Him to so miserable a condition? It is the love He had for men. And yet there are men to be found who do not love this God!

O amiable Infant, though I see Thee in this cavern lying on straw poor and despised, yet Faith teaches me that Thou art my God, Who earnest down from Heaven for my salvation. I acknowledge Thee, then, for my sovereign Lord and Saviour; but I have nothing alas to offer Thee. I have no gold of love, because I have loved creatures; I have loved my own caprices, and I have not loved Thee, O amiable Infinite One! I have not the incense of prayer, because I have lived in a miserable state of forgetfulness of Thee. I have no myrrh of mortification, for I have often displeased Thy infinite goodness in order not to be deprived of my miserable pleasures. What then shall I offer Thee? I offer Thee my heart, soiled and poor as it is; do Thou accept it and change it.

II.

Behold the end for which the Son of God willed to be born an Infant, to give Himself to us from His Childhood, and thus to draw to Himself our love. Why, asks St. Francis de Sales, does Jesus take the sweet and tender form of an Infant, if it be not to stimulate us to love Him and to confide in Him? St. Peter Chrysologus had said before: "Thus He willed to be born, because He wished to be loved."

Oh, dear Child Jesus, my Saviour, I love Thee, in Thee do I trust. Thou art all my hope and all my love. What would have become of me if Thou hadst not come down from Heaven to save me? I know the hell which would have awaited me for the offences I have offered Thee. Blessed be Thy mercy, because Thou art ever ready to pardon me if I repent of my sins. Yes, I repent with all my heart, my Jesus, of having despised Thee.

Receive me into Thy favour, and make me die to myself to live only to Thee, my only Good. Thou earnest into the world for this purpose, to wash the hearts of men from their sins by Thy Blood and thus change them from sinners into saints. Give me the gold of Thy holy love; give me the spirit of holy prayer, give me the desire and strength to mortify myself in everything that displeases Thee. I am resolved to obey Thee and to love Thee; but Thou knowest my weakness, oh, give me the grace to be faithful to Thee! Most holy Virgin, thou who didst welcome with such affection and didst console the holy Magi, do thou welcome and console me also, who come to visit thy Son and to offer myself to Him. O my Mother, I have great confidence in thy intercession! Do thou recommend me to Jesus. To thee do I entrust my soul and my will; bind them forever to the love of Jesus!

Feast of the Immaculate Conception

(December 8th).

Morning Meditation.

IT WAS BECOMING THAT THE ETERNAL FATHER SHOULD PRESERVE MARY FROM ORIGINAL SIN.

As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.—(Cant. ii., 2).

Great indeed was the injury entailed on Adam and on all his posterity by his accursed sin. But from this general misfortune God was pleased to exempt the Blessed Virgin, as the predestined Mother of His only begotten Son and the first-born of Grace. She was to crush the serpent's head and to be the sinless Mediatrix of peace between men and God. Hence the Eternal

Father could well say of His beloved Daughter: *As the lily among thorns, so is my beloved among the daughters,* always immaculate and always beloved.

I.

It was most becoming that God should preserve Mary from original sin for He destined her to crush the head of the infernal spirit which, by seducing our First Parents, brought death upon all men. This the Lord foretold: *I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed; she shall crush thy head.*—(Gen. iii., 15). But if Mary was that Valiant Woman brought into the world to conquer Lucifer, certainly it was not becoming that he should first conquer her and make her his slave. Reason would indeed demand that she should be preserved from all stain and even momentary subjection to her opponent. How then could God permit that she should first be the slave of the infernal serpent? Praised and ever blessed be God, Who, in His infinite goodness, pre-endowed Mary with such great grace that, remaining always free from guilt of sin, she was ever able to beat down and confound the serpent's pride.

Besides this it was wholly becoming that the Eternal Father should create Mary, "the one and only daughter of life," free from the stain of original sin and always possessed by His grace, destined as she was to be the repairer of a lost world, Mediatrix of peace between men and God. "O Blessed Virgin," says St. John Damascene, "thou wast born that thou mightest minister to the salvation of the whole world." "Hail, reconciler of the whole world!" cries out St. Ephrem. "Hail, thou who art appointed umpire between God and man!" cries St. Basil of Silucia.

Now it certainly would not be becoming to choose an enemy to treat of peace with the offended person, and still less an accomplice in the crime itself. St. Gregory says that, "an enemy cannot undertake to appease his judge who is at the same time the injured party; for if he did, instead of appeasing him, he would provoke him to

greater wrath." And, therefore, as Mary was to be the Mediatrix of peace between men and God, it was of the utmost importance that she should not herself appear as a sinner and an enemy of God, but that she should appear in all things as a friend, and free from every stain. Hence it was becoming that God should preserve her from sin, that she might not appear guilty of the same fault as the men for whom she was to intercede.

Ah, my Immaculate Lady, I rejoice with thee on seeing thee enriched with so great purity. I thank our common Creator for having preserved thee from every stain of sin. *Thou art all fair and there is not a spot in thee!*—(Cant. iv., 7). O most pure dove, all fair, all beautiful, always the friend of God! Ah, most sweet, most amiable, immaculate Mary, disdain not to cast thy compassionate eyes upon the wounds of my soul. Behold me, pity me, heal me! The happy day when I shall go to behold thy beauty in Paradise seems a thousand years off, so much do I long to praise and love thee more than I now do, my Mother, my Queen, my beloved, most sweet, most pure, immaculate Mary! Amen.

II.

But above all it was becoming that the Eternal Father should preserve this His daughter unspotted from Adam's sin, because He predestined her to be the Mother of His only-begotten Son. As Jesus was the first-born of God, *the first-born of every creature*—(Col. i., 15), so was Mary, the destined Mother of God, always considered by Him as His first-born by adoption, and therefore He always possessed her by His grace. *The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his ways.*—(Prov. viii., 22). For the honour, therefore, of His Son, it was becoming that the Father should preserve the Mother from every stain of sin. When David was planning the Temple of Jerusalem, on a scale of magnificence worthy of God, he said: *For a house is being prepared not for man but for God.*—(1 Par. xxix., 1). How much more reasonable, then, is it not, to suppose that the Sovereign Architect,

Who destined Mary to be the Mother of His own Son, adorned her soul with all the most precious gifts that she might be a dwelling worthy of a God!

We know that a man's highest honour is to be born of noble parents. *And the glory of children are their fathers.*—(Prov. xvii., 6). How, then, can we suppose that God Who could cause His Son to be born of a noble Mother by preserving her from sin, would, on the contrary, permit Him to be born of one infected by it, and thus leave it always in Lucifer's power to reproach Him with the shame of having a mother who had once been his slave and the enemy of God. No, certainly, the Eternal Father did not permit this; but He well provided for the honour of His Son by preserving His Mother always immaculate, that she might be a Mother worthy of such a Son. And the Holy Church herself assures us of this: "O Almighty and Eternal God Who by the co-operation of the Holy Ghost, didst prepare the body and soul of the glorious Virgin Mother Mary, that she might become a worthy habitation for Thy Son."

Ah, my most beautiful Lady, I rejoice in seeing thee, by thy purity and thy beauty, so dear to God. I thank God for having preserved thee from every stain. O thou, who from the first moment of thy life didst appear pure and beautiful before God, pity me, who not only was born in sin, but have again since Baptism stained my soul with crimes. What grace will God ever refuse thee? Immaculate Virgin, thou hast to save me. Amen.

Spiritual Reading.

IT WAS BECOMING THAT THE SON SHOULD PRESERVE HIS MOTHER FROM ORIGINAL SIN.

In the second place it was becoming that the Son should preserve Mary from sin, as being His Mother. No man can choose his mother; but should such a thing ever be granted to any one, who is there who, if able to choose a queen, would wish for a slave? Or if able to choose a

friend of God, would wish for an enemy? If, then, the Son of God alone could choose a Mother according to His own Heart and His own liking, we must consider, as a matter of course, that He chose one worthy of God. St. Bernard says, "that the Creator of men becoming man, must have Himself selected a Mother who He knew would be worthy of Him." As it was becoming that a most pure God should have a Mother pure from all sin, He created her spotless. Here we may apply the words of the Apostle to the Hebrews: *For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest; holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners.*—(Heb. vii., 26). A learned author observes that, according to St. Paul, it was fitting that our Blessed Redeemer should not only be separated from sin, but also from sinners; according to the explanation of St. Thomas, who says, "that it was necessary that He, Who came to take away sins, should be separated from sinners, as to the fault under which Adam lay." But how could Jesus Christ be said to be separated from sinners, if He had a Mother who was a sinner?

St. Ambrose says, "that Christ chose this vessel into which He was about to descend, not of earth, but from Heaven; and He consecrated it a temple of purity." This agrees with that which St. John the Baptist revealed to St. Bridget, saying: "It was not becoming that the King of Glory should repose otherwise than in a chosen vessel exceeding all men and angels in purity." And to this we may add that which the Eternal Father Himself said to the same Saint: "Mary was a clean, and an unclean vessel: clean, for she was all fair; but unclean, because she was born of sinners, though she was conceived without sin, that My Son might be born of her without sin." And remark these last words: "Mary was conceived without sin." Not that Jesus Christ could have contracted sin; but that He might not be reproached with even having a Mother infected with it, who would consequently have been the slave of the devil.

The Holy Ghost says that *the glory of a man is from the honour of his father, and a father without honour is*

the *disgrace of the son*.—(Ecclus. iii., 13). “Therefore it was,” says an ancient writer, “that Jesus preserved the body of Mary from corruption after death; for it would have been to His dishonour had that virginal flesh with which He had clothed Himself become the food of worms.” For, he adds: “Corruption is a disgrace of human nature; and as Jesus was not subject to it, Mary was also exempted; for the flesh of Jesus is the flesh of Mary.” But since corruption of her body would have been a disgrace for Jesus Christ, because He was born of her, how much greater would the disgrace have been, had He been born of a mother whose soul was once infected by the corruption of sin? For not only is it true that the flesh of Jesus is the same as that of Mary, “but,” adds the same author, “the flesh of our Saviour, even after His Resurrection, remained the same that He had taken from His Mother. The flesh of Christ is the flesh of Mary; and though it was glorified by the glory of His Resurrection, yet it remains the same that was taken from Mary.” And now if this is true, supposing that the Blessed Virgin had been conceived in sin, though the Son could not have contracted its stain, nevertheless His having united flesh to Himself which once had been infected with sin, a vessel of uncleanness and subject to Lucifer, would always have been a dishonour to Him.

Mary was not only the Mother, but the worthy Mother of our Saviour. She is called so by all the holy Fathers. St. Bernard says: “Thou alone wast found worthy to be chosen as the one in whose virginal womb the King of kings should have His first abode.” St. Thomas of Villanova says: “Before she conceived she was already worthy to be the Mother of God.” The Holy Church herself attests that Mary merited to be the Mother of Jesus Christ, saying: “The Blessed Virgin, who merited to bear in her womb Christ our Lord”; and St. Thomas Aquinas, explaining these words, says, that “the Blessed Virgin is said to have merited to bear the Lord of all; not that she merited His Incarnation, but that she merited, by the graces she had received, such a degree of purity and sanctity, that she could worthily be the

Mother of God”; that is to say, Mary could not merit the Incarnation of the Eternal Word, but by divine grace she merited such a degree of perfection as to render her worthy to be the Mother of a God; according to what St. Augustine says: “Her singular sanctity, the effect of grace, merited that she alone should be judged worthy to receive a God.”

And now, supposing that Mary was worthy to be the Mother of God, “what excellence and what perfection was there that did not become her?” asks St. Thomas of Villanova. St. Thomas says: “that when God chooses any one for a particular dignity, He renders him fit for it”; hence he adds: “that God, having chosen Mary for His Mother, He also by His grace rendered her worthy of this highest of all dignities.” “The Blessed Virgin was divinely chosen to be the Mother of God, and therefore we cannot doubt that God had fitted her by His grace for this dignity; and we are assured of it by the Angel: *For thou hast found grace with God; behold thou shalt conceive*.—(Luke i., 50). And thence the Saint argues that “the Blessed Virgin never committed any actual sin, not even a venial one. Otherwise,” he says, “she would not have been a mother worthy of Jesus Christ; for the ignominy of the Mother would also have been that of the Son, for He would have had a sinner for His mother.” And now if Mary, on account of a single venial sin, which does not deprive a soul of divine grace, would not have been a mother worthy of God, how much more unworthy would she have been had she contracted the guilt of original sin, which would have made her an enemy of God and a slave of the devil? And this reflection it was that made St. Augustine utter those memorable words, that, when speaking of Mary for the honour of Our Lord, Whom she merited to have for her Son, he would not entertain even the question of sin in her; “for we know,” he says, “that through Him, Who it is evident was without sin, and Whom she merited to conceive and bring forth, she received grace to conquer all sin.”

It was no shame to Jesus Christ that He was contemptuously called by the Jews the Son of Mary, meaning that He was the Son of a poor woman: *Is not his mother called Mary?*—(Matt. xiii., 55). He came into this world to give us an example of humility and patience. But, on the other hand, it would undoubtedly have been a disgrace should He have heard the devil say: "Was not His mother a sinner? Was He not born of a wicked mother, who was once our slave?" It would even have been unbecoming had Jesus Christ been born of a woman whose body was deformed, or crippled, or possessed by devils; but how much more would it not have been so, had He been born of a woman whose soul had been once deformed by sin, and in the possession of Lucifer!

Ah! indeed, God, Who is Wisdom itself, well knew how to prepare Himself a becoming dwelling, in which to reside on earth: *Wisdom hath built herself a house.*—(Prov. ix., 1). *The Most High has sanctified his own tabernacle. God will help it in the morning early.*—(Ps. xiv., 5, 6). David says our Lord sanctified this His dwelling *in the morning early*; that is to say, from the beginning of her life, to render her worthy of Himself; for it was not becoming that a Holy God should choose Himself a dwelling that was not holy: *Holiness becometh thy house.*—(Ps. xcii., 5). The Holy Church sings: "Thou, O Lord, hast not disdained to dwell in the Virgin's Womb." Yes, for He would have disdained to have taken flesh in the womb of an Agnes, a Gertrude, a Teresa, because these virgins, though holy, were nevertheless for a time stained with original sin; but He did not disdain to become Man in the womb of Mary, because this beloved Virgin was always pure and free from the least shadow of sin, and was never possessed by the infernal serpent. And therefore, St. Augustine says: "the Son of God never made Himself a more worthy dwelling than Mary, who was never possessed by the enemy, nor despoiled of her ornaments." On the other

hand St. Cyril of Alexandria asks: "Who ever heard of an architect who built himself a temple, and yielded up the first possession of it to his greatest enemy?"

Yes, says St. Methodius, speaking on the same subject, that Lord Who commanded us to honour our parents, would not do otherwise, when He became Man, than observe it, by giving His Mother every grace and honour: "He Who said, *Honour thy father and thy mother*, that He might observe His own decree, gave all grace and honour to His Mother." Therefore we must certainly believe that Jesus Christ preserved the body of Mary from corruption after death; for if He had not done so, He would not have observed the law, which, at the same time that it commands us to honour our mother, forbids us to show her disrespect. But how little would Jesus have guarded His Mother's honour, had He not preserved her from Adam's sin! "Certainly that son would sin," says the Augustinian Father Thomas of Strasburg, "who, having it in his power to preserve his mother from original sin did not do so." "But that which would be a sin in us," continues the same author, "would certainly have been considered unbecoming in the Son of God, Who, whilst He could make His Mother immaculate, did it not." "Ah, no," exclaims Gerson, "since Thou, the supreme Prince, choosetest to have a Mother, certainly Thou owest her honour. But now if Thou didst permit her, who was to be the dwelling-place of the all-pure God, to be in the abomination of original sin, certainly it would appear that the law was not well fulfilled."

"Moreover, we know," says St. Bernardine of Sienna, "that the Divine Son came into the world to redeem Mary more than all other creatures." There are two means by which a person may be redeemed, as St. Augustine teaches us: the one by raising him up after having fallen, and the other by preventing him from falling; and this last means is doubtless the more honourable. "He is

more honourably redeemed," says the learned Suarez, "who is prevented from falling, than he who, after falling, is raised up"; for thus the injury or stain, which the soul always contracts in falling, is avoided. This being the case, we ought certainly to believe that Mary was redeemed in the more honourable way, and the one more becoming to the Mother of God, as St. Bonaventure remarks, "for it is to be believed that the Holy Ghost, as a very special favour, redeemed and preserved her from original sin by a new kind of sanctification, and this in the very moment of her Conception; not that sin was in her, but that it might otherwise have been." On the same subject Cardinal Cusano beautifully remarks, that "others had Jesus as a liberator, but to the most Blessed Virgin He was a pre-liberator"; meaning, that all others had a Redeemer Who delivered them from sin with which they were already defiled, but that the most Blessed Virgin had a Redeemer Who, because He was to become her Son, preserved her from ever being defiled by sin.

In fine, to conclude in the words of Hugo of St. Victor, the tree is known by its fruits. If the Lamb was always immaculate, the Mother must also have been always immaculate: "Such the Lamb, such the Mother of the Lamb; for the tree is known by its fruits." Hence this same Doctor salutes Mary, saying: "O worthy Mother of a worthy Son"; meaning, that no other than Mary was worthy to be the Mother of such a Son, and no other than Jesus was a worthy Son of such a Mother; and then he adds these words: "O fair Mother of Beauty itself, O high Mother of the Most High, O Mother of God!" Let us then address this most Blessed Mother in the words of St. Ildephonsus: "Suckle, O Mary, thy Creator, give milk to Him Who made thee, and Who made thee such that He could be made of thee." Amen.

Evening Meditation.

IT WAS BECOMING THAT THE HOLY GHOST SHOULD PRESERVE MARY FROM ORIGINAL SIN.

I.
My sister, my spouse, is a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed up.—(Cant. iv., 12).

Since it was becoming that the Eternal Father should preserve Mary from sin as His daughter, and the Son as His Mother, it was also becoming that the Holy Ghost should preserve her as His Spouse. St. Augustine says that "Mary was that only one who merited to be called the Mother and Spouse of God." For St. Anselm asserts that the Divine Spirit, the Love itself of the Father and the Son, came corporally into Mary, and enriching her with singular grace above all creatures, rested in her and made her the Queen of Heaven and earth. *The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee.*—(Luke i., 35).

And now, had an excellent artist the power to make his bride in reality such as he would represent her in his picture, what pains would he not take to render her as beautiful as possible! Who, then, can say that the Holy Ghost did otherwise with Mary, when He could make her, who was to be His Spouse, as beautiful as it was becoming that she should be? Ah no, the Holy Ghost acted as it became Him to act, for this same Lord declares: *Thou art all fair, O my love, and there is not a spot in thee.*—(Cant. iv., 7).

The Holy Ghost signifies the same thing when He called this His Spouse an enclosed garden and a sealed fountain: *My sister, my spouse, is a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed up*—a Spouse into whom no guile could enter, against whom no fraud of the enemy could prevail, and who was always holy in mind and body. "Thou art," says St. Bernard, "an enclosed garden into which has never entered the hand of sinners to pluck its flowers."

Ah, my immaculate Queen, fair dove, beloved of God, disdain not to cast thine eyes on the many stains and

wounds of my soul. See me and pity me. God Who loves thee much, denies thee nothing, and thou knowest not how to refuse those who have recourse to thee. O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee.

II.

In Proverbs we read : *Many daughters have gathered together riches, thou hast surpassed them all.*—(Prov. xxxi., 29). If Mary has surpassed all others in the riches of grace, she must have had original justice as Adam and the Angels had it. In the Canticles we read : *There are young maidens without number. One is my dove, my perfect one* (in the Hebrew it is *my entire, my immaculate one*) *is but one. She is the only one of her mother.*—(Cant. vi., 7). All souls are daughters of divine grace, but amongst these Mary was the *dove* without the gall of sin, the *perfect one* without spot in her origin, the *one* conceived in grace.

Hence it is that the Angel, before she became the Mother of God, found her already *full of grace*, and saluted her : *Hail, full of grace!*—(Luke, i., 28). Grace was given partially to other Saints, but to the Blessed Virgin all grace was given. So much so that St. Thomas says : “Grace rendered not only the soul but even the flesh of Mary holy, so that the Blessed Virgin might be able to clothe the Eternal Word with it.”

O immaculate and entirely pure Virgin Mary, Mother of God, Queen of the Universe, our own good Lady, thou art the advocate of sinners, the consolation of the world, the ransom of captives, the joy of the sick, the comfort of the afflicted, the refuge and salvation of the whole world. O most pure Virgin Mary, I venerate thy most holy heart which was the delight and resting-place of God, thy heart overflowing with humility, purity and divine love. Ah, my Mother, for the love of Jesus, take charge of my salvation. O Lady, deny not thy compassion to one to whom Jesus has not denied His Blood. O my Mother, abandon me not! Never, never cease to pray for me until thou seest me safe in Heaven at thy feet, blessing and thanking thee for ever. Amen.

New Year's Day

(Feast of the Circumcision of Our Lord).

Morning Meditation.

JESUS OUR SAVIOUR.

Consider that the Infant Jesus, eight days after His Birth, showed Himself even then to be our *Saviour*, by shedding His divine Blood for us in the Circumcision, and taking the Name of *Saviour*. O most merciful Infant God, I give Thee thanks, and I beseech Thee by the pain which Thou didst feel, and by the Blood which Thou didst shed in Thy Circumcision, to grant me the grace and the power to tear out of my heart all earthly affections.

I.

Behold how the Eternal Father, having sent His Son to suffer and die for us, wills that on this day He should be circumcised, and should begin to shed His Divine Blood, which He has to shed for the last time on the day of His death upon the Cross in a sea of contumely and sorrow. And wherefore? In order that this innocent Son should thus pay the penalties which we have deserved. The Holy Church exclaims : “O admirable condescension of divine pity towards us! O inestimable love of charity! To redeem the slave Thou hast delivered Thy Son to death!”

O Eternal God, who could ever have bestowed upon us this infinite gift but Thou Who art infinite goodness and infinite love. O my God, if in giving me Thy Son, Thou hast given me the dearest treasure Thou hast, it is right that I should give myself entirely to Thee. Yes, my God, I give Thee my whole self; do Thou accept of me, and permit me not to leave Thee again.

II.

Behold, on the other hand, the Divine Son, Who, all humble, and full of love towards us, embraces the bitter death destined for Him in order to save us sinners from eternal death, and willingly begins on this day to make satisfaction for us to the divine justice with the price of His Blood. *He humbled himself*, says the Apostle, *becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross.*—(Phil. ii., 8). Thou, therefore, O my Jesus, hast accepted death for my love; what, then, shall I do? Shall I continue to offend Thee by my sins? No, my Redeemer, I will no longer be ungrateful to Thee. I am sorry from my heart that I have caused Thee so much bitterness in times past. I love Thee, O infinite Goodness, and for the future I will never cease to love Thee.

Our Redeemer has said: *Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*—(Jo. xv., 13). Thou, O my Jesus, as St. Paul tells us, hast shown greater love than this towards us, by giving Thy life for us who were Thy enemies. Behold one of them, O Lord, at Thy feet. How many times have I, a miserable sinner, renounced Thy friendship because I would not obey Thee! I now see the evil I have done; pardon me, my Jesus, for I could wish to die of sorrow. I now love Thee with my whole soul, and I desire nothing else but to love Thee and to please Thee. O Mary, Mother of God and my Mother, pray to Jesus for me.

Spiritual Readings.

THE NAME OF JESUS CONSOLES.

This great Name of Jesus was not given by man, but by God Himself; "The Name of Jesus," says St. Bernard, "was preordained by God." It was a new Name: *A new name which the mouth of the Lord shall name.*—(Is. lxii., 2). A new Name which God could give

only to Him Whom He destined to be the Saviour of the world. A new and an eternal Name; because, as our salvation was decreed from all eternity, so from all eternity was this Name given to the Redeemer. Nevertheless this Name was only bestowed on Jesus Christ in this world on the day of His Circumcision: *And after eight days were accomplished that the child should be circumcised, his name was called Jesus.* The Eternal Father wished at that time to reward the humility of His Son by giving Him so honourable a Name. Yes, while Jesus humbles Himself, submitting in His Circumcision to be branded with the mark of a sinner, it is just that His Father should honour Him by giving Him a Name that exceeds the dignity and sublimity of any other name: *God hath given him a name that is above all names.*—(Phil. ii., 9). And He commands that this Name should be adored by the Angels, by men, and by devils: *That in the name of Jesus every knee should bow of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth.*—(Ibid. ii., 10). If, then, all creatures are to adore this great Name, still more ought we sinners to adore it, since it was in our behalf that this Name of Jesus, which signifies Saviour, was given to Him; and for this end also He came down from Heaven, namely, to save sinners: "For us men and for our salvation He came down from Heaven, and was made Man." We ought to adore Him, and at the same time to thank God Who has given Him this Name for our good; for it is this Name that consoles us, defends us, and makes us burn with love.

The Name of Jesus consoles us; for when we invoke Jesus, we find relief in all our afflictions. When we have recourse to Jesus, He wishes to console us because He loves us; and He can do so, because He is not only Man, but He is also the Omnipotent God; otherwise He could not properly have this great Name of *Saviour*. The Name of Jesus signifies that the bearer of it is of infinite power, infinite wisdom and infinite love; so that if Jesus Christ had not united in Himself all these perfections, He could not have saved us: "If any one of these," says St.

Bernard, "had been wanting, Thou couldst not call Thyself *Saviour*." Thus, when speaking of the Circumcision, the Saint says: "He was circumcised as being the son of Abraham, He was called Jesus as being the Son of God." He is branded as man with the mark of sin, having taken upon Himself the burden of atoning for sin; and from His very Infancy He began to satisfy for the crimes of men, by suffering and shedding His Blood.

The Name of Jesus is said by the Holy Spirit to be like oil poured out: *Thy name is as oil poured out.*—(Cant. i., 2). And so indeed it is, says St. Bernard; for as oil serves for light, for food, and for medicine, so especially the Name of Jesus is light: "it is a light when preached." And how was it, says the Saint, that the light of Faith shone forth so suddenly in the world that in a short time so many Gentile nations knew the true God, and became His followers, if it was not through hearing the Name of Jesus preached? "Whence, think you, shone forth in the whole world, so bright and so sudden, the light of Faith, except from the preaching of the Name of Jesus?" Through this Name we have been happily made sons of the true light, that is, sons of the Holy Church; since we were so fortunate as to be born in the bosom of the true Church, in Christian and Catholic kingdoms—a grace which has not been granted to the greater part of men, who are born amongst idolaters, Mahometans, or heretics.

Further, the Name of Jesus is a food that nourishes our souls. "The thought of it is nourishment." This Name gives strength to find peace and consolation even in the midst of the miseries and persecutions of this world. The holy Apostles rejoiced when they were ill-treated and reviled, being comforted by the Name of Jesus: *They went from the presence of the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus.*—(Acts. v., 41).

It is light, it is food, and it is also medicine to those who invoke it: "When pronounced, it soothes and anoints." The holy Abbot says: "At the rising of the light of this Name, the clouds disperse, and calm

returns." If the soul of any one is afflicted and in trouble, let him pronounce the Name of Jesus, and immediately the tempest will cease and peace will return. Does any one fall into sin? Does he run in despair into the snares of death? Let him invoke the Name of Life, and will his life not be renewed? He shall immediately be encouraged to hope for pardon, by calling on Jesus, Who was destined by the Father to be our Saviour, and obtain pardon for sinners. Euthymius says that if when Judas was tempted to despair, he had invoked the Name of Jesus, he would not have given way to temptation: "If he had invoked that Name, he would not have perished." Therefore, he adds, no sinner can perish through despair, however abandoned he may be, who invokes the Holy Name, which is one of hope and salvation: "Despair is far off where His Name is invoked."

But sinners leave off invoking this saving Name, because they do not wish to be cured of their infirmities. Jesus Christ is ready to heal all our wounds; but if people cherish their wounds, and will not be healed, how can Jesus Christ heal them? The Venerable Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, a Sicilian nun, once saw the Saviour, as it seemed, in a hospital, going round with medicines in His hands, to cure the sick people who were there; but these miserable people, instead of thanking Him and begging Him to come to them, drove Him away. So do many sinners, after they have of their own free will poisoned their souls with sins, refuse the gift of health, that is, the grace offered them by Jesus Christ, and thus remain lost through their infirmities.

But, on the other hand, what fear can that sinner have who has recourse to Jesus Christ, since Jesus offers Himself to obtain our pardon from His Father, He having paid by His death the penalty due to us? St. Laurence Justinian says: "He Who had been offended, appointed Himself as Intercessor, and Himself paid what was owing to God." Therefore, adds the Saint, "if thou art bound down by sickness, if sorrows weary thee, if thou art trembling with fear, invoke the Name of Jesus." O poor

man, whoever thou art, if thou art weighed down by infirmity or by grief and fear, call on Jesus, and He will console thee. It is enough that we pray to the Father in His Name, and all we ask will be granted to us. This is the promise of Jesus Himself, which He repeated many times, and which cannot fail: *If you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it to you.*—(Jo. xvi., 23). *Whatsoever you shall ask of the Father in my name that will I do.*—(Jo. xiv., 13).

Evening Meditation.

HIS NAME WAS CALLED JESUS.

—(Gospel, Luke ii., 21).

The Name of Jesus is a divine Name, announced to Mary on the part of God by St. Gabriel: *and thou shalt call his name Jesus.*—(Luke, i., 31). For that reason it was called a name above all names.—(Phil. ii., 9). And it was also called a Name in which alone salvation is found: *whereby we must be saved.*—(Acts iv., 12).

This great Name is likened by the Holy Spirit unto oil: *Thy name is as oil poured out.*—(Cant. i., 2). For this reason, says St. Bernard, that as oil is *light, food, and medicine*, so the Name of Jesus is *light to the mind, food to the heart, and medicine to the soul.*

It is light to the mind. By this Name the world was converted from the darkness of idolatry to the light of Faith. We who have been born in these regions, where before the coming of Christ our ancestors were Gentiles, should all have been in the same condition had not the Messias come to enlighten us. How thankful ought we not, then, to be to Jesus Christ for the gift of Faith! And what would have become of us if we had been born in Asia, in Africa, in America, or in the midst of heretics and schismatics? He who believes not is lost: *He that believeth, not shall be condemned.*—(Mark xvi., 16). And thus probably we also should have been lost.

O Jesus, Thou Who didst make the power of Thy Name to shine forth to deliver us from the servitude of sin, and the slavery of the devil, deign now and always to preserve our souls from all unworthy subjection. O Jesus all powerful, if the eyes of our souls had not been opened and enlightened by the light of Faith which Thou hast taught us by Thy own mouth, how should we ever have been able to know Thy divine mysteries! Without Thy aid we should always have been buried in the darkness of ignorance and the shadow of death. May thanks be ever given to our sweet Jesus Who has had compassion on us, and, in opening the gates of Heaven to us, has made us heirs of His Eternal Kingdom.

II.

The Name of Jesus is also food that nourishes our hearts; yes, because this Name reminds us of what Jesus has done to save us. Hence this Name consoles us in tribulation, gives us strength to walk along the way of salvation, supplies us with courage in difficulties, and inflames us with love for our Redeemer, when we remember what He has suffered for our salvation.

Lastly, this Name is medicine to the soul, because it renders it strong against the temptations of our enemies. The devils tremble and fly at the invocations of this Holy Name, according to the words of the Apostle: *That at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth.*—(Phil. ii., 10). He who in temptation calls upon Jesus shall not fall, and shall be saved: *Praising, I will call upon the Lord; and I will be saved from my enemies.*—(Ps. xvii., 4). And who was ever lost who when he was tempted invoked Jesus? He alone is lost who does not invoke His aid, or who, whilst the temptation continues, ceases to invoke Him. Oh, that I had always called upon Thee, my Jesus; for then I should never have been conquered by the devil! I have miserably lost Thy grace, because in temptation I have neglected to call Thee to my assistance. But now I hope for all things through Thy Holy Name. Write, therefore, O my Saviour, write upon my poor heart Thy

most powerful Name of *Jesus*, so that, by having it always in my heart by loving Thee, I may have it always on my lips by invoking Thee, in all the temptations that hell prepares for me to induce me to again become its slave, and to separate myself from Thee. In Thy Name I shall find every good. If I am afflicted, it will console me when I think how much more afflicted Thou hast been than I am, and all for the love of me. If I am disheartened on account of my sins, it will give me courage when I remember that Thou camest into the world to save sinners. If I am tempted, Thy Holy Name will give me strength, when I consider that Thou canst help me more than hell can cast me down; finally, if I feel cold in Thy love, Thy Name will give me fervour, by reminding me of the love that Thou bearest me. I love Thee, my *Jesus*! To Thee do I give all my heart, O my *Jesus*! Thee alone will I love! Thee will I invoke as often as I possibly can. I will die with Thy Name upon my lips; a Name of hope, a Name of salvation, a Name of love. O Mary, if thou lovest me, this is the grace I beg of thee to obtain for me—the grace constantly to invoke thy name and that of thy Son; obtain for me that these most sweet Names may be the breath of my soul, and that I may repeat them constantly during life, in order to repeat them with my last breath. *Jesus* and Mary, help me; *Jesus* and Mary, I love You; *Jesus* and Mary I recommend my soul to You.

Feast of the Holy Name of *Jesus*

(The Sunday between Circumcision and Epiphany).

Morning Meditation.

THE NAME OF *JESUS* A NAME OF GLADNESS.

The Name of *Jesus* was given to the Incarnate Word, not by men, but by God Himself. *And thou shalt call*

this name Jesus. It is the Name of our Saviour, a Name of Gladness, a Name of Hope, a Name of Love. Thy Name, then, O *Jesus*, will always be my defence, my comfort, a fate to keep me always burning with Thy love.

I.

Consider that the Holy Name of *Jesus* is not a Name invented by man, but it comes from God, Who wished it to be made known by the Archangel Gabriel, as St. Luke testifies: *His name was called Jesus . . . by the angel.*—(Luke ii., 21). St. Bernard also says that this Name is not a simple figure of things, or a shadow without reality. *Jesus* is a Name that expresses perfectly the hypostatic union of the Divine nature and the human nature. The world could not have been saved by God, for God could not suffer, nor by a mere man, because man is limited and finite. This is the reason why the Holy Name *Jesus*, which signifies the same as *Saviour*, as the Angel declares, has been given to the Son of God, made Man through Mary, to show that it was both as God and Man He accomplished the redemption of mankind by delivering men from the slavery of sin. In short, *Jesus* is a Name that comprises Infinity, Eternity, Immensity, Wisdom, Justice, Mercy, and all the adorable Perfections of God. What happiness for us to be reconciled with the Eternal Father through the merits of this divine Mediator Who of His infinite goodness paid our debt in His precious Blood! Adorable *Jesus*! if Thou hadst sacrificed Thyself to deliver Thy people from the hands of their enemies in order to acquire an eternal Name, it would be but fair that this Name should surpass and eclipse every other name, even that of the Seraphim, as St. Paul says: *Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath inherited a more excellent name than they.*—(Heb. i., 4). And if the Eternal Father has wished that this Name should be that of His Son, mayest Thou grant that, having experienced on earth its happy effects, we may arrive at the complete happiness of Heaven to praise Thee and to bless Thee all eternity.

II.

The Name of Jesus is a Name of Gladness, a Name of Hope, a Name of Love. It is a Name of Gladness, because if the remembrance of past transgressions afflicts us, this Name comforts us in the remembrance that the Son of God became Man for this purpose—to make Himself our Saviour. In fact, as soon as the Name of Jesus passes from the heart to the tongue, by the light of this divine Name darkness is dispersed, the mind is calmed, the heart is strengthened, the faculties brighten up, and everything returns to life. There is no name in the world equal to the Name of Jesus in sweetness. "Nothing is sweeter to chant," says St. Bernard, "nothing more agreeable to hear, nothing more charming to think of, than the Name of Jesus, the Son of God."

Oh, how happy shall we be if in all our trials, in all occasions of sorrow, we take care to invoke the glorious Name of Jesus, and while invoking it with our lips to consecrate our hearts to Jesus!

It is a Name of Hope, because he that prays to the Eternal Father in the Name of Jesus may hope for every good he asks for. *If you ask the Father anything in my name he will give it to you.*—(Jo. xvi., 23).

It is a Name of Love. It is a sign that represents to us how much God has done for the love of us. The Name of Jesus brings to our remembrance all the sufferings which Jesus endured for us in life and in death. Therefore a devout writer exclaims: "O Jesus, how much it cost Thee to be Jesus—that is, my Saviour!"

O sweet Jesus, our Love and our Hope! Do Thou write Thy Name on my poor heart and on my tongue, in order that when I am tempted to sin, I may resist by invoking Thee; so that if I am tempted to despair I may trust in Thy merits; and that if I feel myself tepid in loving Thee, Thy Name may inflame my heart at the recollection of how much Thou hast loved me. Thy Name, then, will always be my defence, my comfort, and the fire that shall always keep me inflamed with Thy love. *Memento me.* therefore, always to call Thee my Jesus, and to live and die with Thy Holy Name on my lips,

saying even with my last breath: "I love Thee, my Jesus; my Jesus, I love Thee." O Mary, my Queen, make me when I am dying invoke thee continually, together with thy Son Jesus.

Spiritual Readings.

THE NAME OF JESUS OUR DEFENCE.

The Name of Jesus defends us. Yes, it defends us against all the deceits and assaults of our enemies. For this reason the Messiah was called *God the Mighty*—(Is. ix., 6); and His Name was called by the Wise Man a strong tower: *The name of the Lord is a strong tower*—(Prov. xviii., 10); that we may know that he who avails himself of this powerful Name will not fear all the assaults of hell. St. Paul writes thus: *Christ humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross.*—(Phil. ii., 8). Jesus Christ during His life humbled Himself in obeying His Father, even to die on the Cross; which is as much as to say, as St. Anselm remarks, He humbled Himself so much that He could humble Himself no more; and therefore His divine Father, as a reward for the humility and obedience of His Son, raised Him to such a sublime dignity that there could be no higher: *God hath given him a name which is above all names; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth and under the earth.*—(Phil. ii., 9, 10). God gave Him a Name which is so great and powerful that it is venerated in Heaven, on earth, and in hell. A Name powerful in Heaven, because it can obtain all graces for us; powerful on earth, because it can save all who invoke it with devotion; powerful in hell, because this Name makes all the devils tremble. These rebel angels tremble at the sound of this most Sacred Name, because they remember that Jesus Christ was the Mighty One Who destroyed the dominion and power they formerly had over man. They tremble, says St. Peter Chrysologus, because at this

Name they have to adore the whole majesty of God: "In this Name the whole majesty of God is adored." Our Saviour Himself said that through this powerful Name His disciples should cast out devils. *In my name they shall cast out devils.*—(Mark xvi., 17). And, in fact, the Church in her Exorcisms always makes use of this Name in driving out the infernal spirits from those who are possessed. And priests who are assisting persons dying call to their aid the Name of Jesus, to deliver them from the assaults of hell, which at that last moment are so terrible.

In the Life of St. Bernardine of Sienna, we see how many sinners the Saint converted, how many abuses he put an end to, and how many cities he sanctified, by trying, when he preached, to induce the people to invoke the Name of Jesus. St. Peter says that there is no other Name given to us by which we can find salvation but this ever-blessed Name of Jesus: *For there is no other name under heaven given to men whereby we must be saved.*—(Acts iv., 12). Jesus is He Who has not only saved us, but continually preserves us from the danger of sin by His merits, each time we invoke Him with confidence: *Whatsoever you shall ask the Father in my name, that will I do.*—(Jo. xiv., 13).

In temptations, then, I repeat with St. Laurence Justinian, "whether you are tempted by the devil, or are attacked by men, invoke the Name of Jesus." If the devils and men torment you and urge you to sin, call on Jesus, and you will be delivered; and if temptations do not cease to persecute you, continue to invoke Jesus, and you will never fall. Those who practise this devotion have experienced that they keep themselves safe, and that they always come off victorious.

Let us always add the holy Name of Mary, which is likewise terrible to hell, and we shall always be secure. "This short prayer—Jesus and Mary—is easy to remember," says Thomas à Kempis, "and powerful to protect; is strong enough to deliver us from all the assaults of our enemies."

Evening Meditation.

THE NAME OF OUR SAVIOUR A NAME OF GREAT POWER.

I.

Consider that the Name *Jesus* signifies *Saviour*; and St. Peter—(Acts iv., 12)—assures us that the Eternal Father has not given to men any other Name by which they may be saved amidst the snares of this deceitful world, than the adorable Name of Jesus. It is this Name that makes the truth of Faith shine everywhere, and that calls all men from the abyss of darkness, to the adorable light of the Gospel. It is by virtue of this adorable Name that the Apostle gave light to the blind, made the lame walk, healed the sick, raised the dead to life, and filled the whole world with wonder. And if the Angel at first announced that Jesus would bring life into the world by delivering it from the cruel slavery into which Adam had plunged it, this good Saviour confirmed this promise Himself when He declared that He had come so that His sheep might *have life, and might have it more abundantly.*—(Jo. x., 10). By virtue of His Name we see idolatry overthrown, to the great confusion of pagan princes and priests, who did all in their power to uphold it.

O amiable and Holy Name of Jesus, may the Seraphim of Heaven give Thee suitable thanks for me, and never cease to praise Thee by ever repeating that Thou dost merit all glory, all honour, and all power. My sweet Saviour, I hope to obtain, by virtue of Thy Name, the salvation of my body and soul; I hope that with this glorious Name in my heart and on my lips, victorious over the world and the flesh, I shall have the happiness to sing Thy praises and to bless the august Trinity for ever and ever.

II.

Consider also the efficacy of the adorable Name of Jesus in making our prayers pleasing to God, and in obtaining

all that we ask of Him. This Name opens for us the way to arrive promptly at the feet of the Most High, and to have our prayers heard at once. The Gospel attests that the prayers of Jesus Himself have always been heard by virtue of His great Name, and that He authorizes us to say, when speaking to God: "Our Father, Who art in Heaven." In consideration of the Name of Jesus, God looks with a favourable eye upon our petition. For this reason Jesus exhorted the Apostles, and exhorts us all, that we should ask of His Father in His Name, in order to be sure that we shall obtain what we seek: *If you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it to you.*—(Jo. xvi., 23). It is enough for Him to hear the petition, and He will bestow upon us the favours that have been asked of Him in the Name of His Beloved Son, with Whom He is well pleased, and Who, in order to satisfy His offended justice, has shown Himself obedient even unto death. We should, then, know how to profit by the efficacious power of the Holy Name of Jesus; being sure that our prayers will be heard, we should often, every hour of the day, repeat our prayers to the Eternal Father, and we shall advance in perfection on the road of the divine precepts, until we attain the happiness of seeing and possessing Him for all eternity in Heaven.

O Sweet Jesus, our Love and our Hope, since Thou hast deigned to assume mortal flesh, in order to open to us the gate of mercy, and to render our prayers efficacious by virtue of Thy glorious Name, grant that our prayers for the grace of perseverance may be heard, so that, faithful to the Divine law to the end of our lives, we may, with Thy Holy Name on our lips, pass from this valley of tears to the glory of Paradise.

January the Third

Morning Meditation.

THE VALUE OF TIME.

Son, observe the time.—(Ecclus., iv., 23).

Time is a treasure of inestimable value because in every moment of time we can gain an increase of grace and eternal glory. If the Blessed in Heaven could grieve they would do so for having lost so much time; and in hell the lost souls are tormented with the thought that there is now no more time for them. *Son, observe the time.*

I.

Son, says the Holy Ghost, be careful to observe the time, the greatest and most precious gift which God can bestow upon you in this life. The very Pagans knew the value of time. Seneca said that "no price is an equivalent for it." But the Saints have understood its value still better.* According to St. Bernardine of Sienna, a moment of time is of as much value as God; because in each moment a man can, by acts of contrition or of love, acquire the grace of God and eternal glory.

Time is a treasure which can be found only in this life: it is not to be found in the next, in hell or in Heaven. In hell the damned exclaim with tears: O that an hour were given to us! They would pay any price for an hour of time in which they might repair their ruin, but this hour they will never have! In Heaven there is no weeping; but were the Saints capable of weeping, all their tears would arise from the thought of having lost the time in which they could have acquired greater glory, and from the conviction that this time will never again be

* The holy writer himself, St. Alphonsus, made a vow, "never to lose a moment of time."

given to them. A Benedictine nun appeared after death in glory to a certain person and said she was perfectly happy, but that if she could desire anything it would be to return to life and to suffer pains and privations in order to merit an increase of glory. She added that for the glory which corresponds to a single *Ave Maria*, she would be content to endure till the Day of Judgment the painful illness that caused her death.

O my God, I thank Thee for the time which Thou givest me to repair the disorders of my past life. Were I to die at this moment the remembrance of the time I have lost would be one of my greatest torments. Ah, my Lord, Thou hast given me time to love Thee and I have spent it in offending Thee! I deserved to be sent to hell from the first moment in which I turned my back upon Thee, but Thou hast called me to repentance and hast pardoned me. I promised to offend Thee no more and how often have I returned to sin! How often hast Thou pardoned me my ungrateful relapses! Blessed for ever be Thy Mercy! Ah, how sorry I feel for having offended so good a God!

II.

Walk whilst you have the light.—(Jo. xii., 35).

How are you spending your time? Why do you always defer till to-morrow what you can do to-day? Remember that the time past is no longer yours: the future is not under your control: you have only the miserable man, says St. Bernard, do you presume on the future as if God had placed time in your power! How can you who are not sure of an hour, promise yourself to-morrow? asks St. Augustine. If, then, says St. Teresa, you are not prepared for death to-day, tremble lest you die an unhappy death. *Walk whilst you have the light.*

We must walk in the way of the Lord during life, now that we have the light; for at the hour of death His light is taken away. Death is not a time for preparing, but for finding ourselves prepared. *Be ye ready.*—

(Luke xii., 40). At the hour of death we can do nothing: what is then done is done. *Behold now is the acceptable time.*—(2 Cor. vi., 2). In the lives of the Saints there is no *to-morrow*. *To-morrow* is found in the lives of sinners who are ever saying: *Hereafter! Hereafter!* And in this state they continue till death.

My Saviour, the patience alone with which Thou hast waited for me ought to enamour me of Thee. Ah! do not suffer me to live any longer ungrateful for the love Thou hast shown me. Detach me from every creature and draw me entirely to Thyself. O my God, I will no longer waste the time Thou givest me to repair the evil which I have done. I will spend it all in serving and loving Thee. Give me holy perseverance. I love Thee, O infinite Goodness, and hope to love Thee for ever. I thank thee, O Mary. By thy advocacy thou hast obtained for me the time which is given me. Assist me now, and obtain for me the grace to spend it all in loving thy Son, my Redeemer, and in loving thee, my Queen and Mother.

Spiritual Reading.

THE NAME OF JESUS INFLAMES WITH
HOLY LOVE.

The Name of Jesus not only consoles us and preserves us from all evil, but it also inflames with holy love all those who pronounce it with devotion. The Name of Jesus, that is, of Saviour, is a Name which expresses in itself love, for it recalls to us how much Jesus Christ has done and suffered to save us. "The Name of Jesus," says St. Bernard, "places before thee all that God has done for the human race." So that a pious author said, with all the affection of his heart: "O my Jesus, how much did it cost Thee to be Jesus, that is, my Saviour!"

St. Matthew writes, when speaking of the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ: *And they put over his head his cause written: This is Jesus the King of the Jews.*—(xxvii., 37). The

Eternal Father so ordained that on the Cross on which our Redeemer died should be written : " This is Jesus, the Saviour of the world." Pilate wrote this, not that he had judged Jesus guilty because He took to Himself the title of King, for Pilate made no account of this accusation : and besides, at the same time that he condemned Him he declared Him innocent, and protested that he had no part in His death : *I am innocent of the blood of this just man.*—(Matt. xxviii., 24). Why, then, did he give Him the title of King? He wrote it by the will of God, Who thereby wished to say to us men—Do you know why My innocent Son is dying? He is dying because He is your Saviour; this divine Pastor dies on this infamous tree in order to save you, His sheep. Therefore it was said in the sacred Canticles : *His name is as oil poured out.*—(Cant. i., 2). St. Bernard explains this, saying : " that is, the effusion of the Divinity." In the Redemption God Himself, out of the love which He bore us, gave Himself and communicated Himself entirely to us : *He hath loved us and hath delivered Himself for us.*—(Eph. v., 2). And that He might be able to communicate Himself to us, He took upon Himself the burden of suffering the pains due to us. *He hath borne our infirmities, and carried our sorrows.*—(Is. liii., 4). " By this title," says St. Cyril of Alexandria, " He blotted out the decree issued against the human race," according to the words of the Apostle : *Blotting out the handwriting of the decree that was against us.*—(Col. ii., 14). Our loving Redeemer wished to deliver us from the malediction we had deserved, by making Himself the object of the divine curse in taking all our sins upon Himself : *Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.*—(Gal. iii., 13).

Therefore it is not possible for a soul that is faithful in invoking the Name of Jesus, and remembering all that He has done to save us, not to be inflamed with love towards One Who has loved us so much. " When I utter the Name of Jesus," says St. Bernard, " I see before me a Man of meekness, humility, kindness, and mercy, Who at the same time is the Almighty God, Who heals and

strengthens me." When we say *Jesus*, we should imagine to ourselves that we see a Man, meek, benignant, kind, and full of virtues; and know that He is our God, Who, to cure our wounds, chose to be despised, wounded, and even to die of pure grief on a Cross. St. Anselm, therefore, exhorts all who call themselves Christians to cherish the beautiful Name of Jesus, to have it always in their hearts, that it may be their only food, their only consolation. " Let Jesus be ever in thy heart. Let Him be thy food, thy delight, thy consolation." Ah, says St. Bernard, it is he who experiences it, that can alone know what sweetness, what a paradise it is even in this valley of tears, truly to love Jesus.

" The love of Jesus, what it is,
None but His lov'd ones know."

Well did St. Rose of Lima know this happiness, from whose mouth came forth such a burning flame of love, after she had received Holy Communion, that it burned the hands of those who gave her water (as was the custom) to drink after Communion; as also did St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi, who, with a Crucifix in her hand, cried out, burning with love : " O God of love ! O God of love ! Even mad with love !"; and St. Philip Neri, whose ribs were forced out to give room to his heart, burning with divine love, to beat more freely; and St. Stanislaus Kostka, who was obliged to have his breast bathed with cold water to mitigate the great ardour with which he was burning for the love of Jesus; and St. Francis Xavier, who, for the same cause, uncovered his breast, saying : " Lord, it is enough ! No more !"—in this way declaring himself unable to bear the great flame that was burning in his heart.

Let us also try as much as we can to keep Jesus in our hearts by loving Him, and to keep Him on our lips by often calling on Him. St. Paul says that the Name of Jesus cannot be pronounced with devotion except by the operation of the Holy Spirit : *And no man can say the Lord Jesus but by the Holy Ghost.*—(1 Cor. xii., 3). So

that the Holy Spirit communicates Himself to all those who devoutly pronounce the Name of Jesus.

The Name of Jesus is unappreciated by many, and why? Because they love not Jesus. The Saints have always on their lips this Name of salvation and love. There is not a page in all the Epistles of St. Paul in which the Name of Jesus is not found many times repeated; and it is the same in the writings of St. John. The Blessed Henry Suso, the more to increase his love for this Holy Name, one day with a sharp iron engraved the Name of Jesus over his heart; and being all bathed in his blood, he said: "Lord, I desire to write Thy Name on my heart itself, but I cannot; Thou Who canst do everything, imprint, I pray Thee, Thy sweet Name on my heart, so that neither Thy Name nor Thy love may ever be effaced from it." St. Jane Frances de Chantal imprinted the Name of Jesus on her heart with a hot iron.

Jesus Christ does not expect so much from us. He is satisfied if we keep Him in our hearts by love, and if we often invoke Him with affection. And as whatever He did and said during life was all for us, so it is but just that whatever we do, we should do it in the Name of Jesus Christ, and for His love, as St. Paul exhorts us: *All whatsoever you do, in word or in work, all things do ye in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*—(Col. iii., 17). And if Jesus has died for us, we ought to be ready willingly to give our lives for the Name of Jesus Christ, as the same Apostle declared he was ready to do: *For I am ready, not only to be bound, but to die also in Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.*—(Acts xxi., 13).

If we are in affliction, let us invoke Jesus, and *He will console us.* If we are tempted, let us invoke Jesus and *He will give us strength* to withstand our enemies. If, lastly, we are in aridity, and are cold in divine love, let us invoke Jesus, and *He will inflame our hearts.* Happy are they who have this most tender and Holy Name always on their lips! A Name of peace, a Name of hope, a Name of salvation, and a Name of love. And

oh happy shall we be if we are fortunate enough to die pronouncing the Name of Jesus! But if we desire to breathe out our last sigh with this sweet Name on our tongue, we must accustom ourselves to repeat it often during our life.

Let us always add the beautiful Name of Mary, which is also a Name given from Heaven, and is a powerful Name which makes hell tremble; and is besides a sweet Name, in that it reminds us of that Queen who, being the Mother of God, is also our Mother, the Mother of Mercy, the Mother of Love.

Evening Meditation.

THE OCCUPATIONS OF THE INFANT JESUS IN THE STABLE OF BETHLEHEM.

I.

There are two principal occupations of a solitary—to pray, and to do penance. Behold the Infant Jesus in the little Grotto of Bethlehem giving us the example. He, in the Crib which He chose for His oratory upon earth, never ceases to pray, and to pray continually, to the Eternal Father. There He constantly makes acts of adoration, of love, and of prayer.

Before the coming of Jesus, the God made Man, the Divine Majesty had been, it is true, adored by men and by Angels; but God had not received from all these creatures that honour which the Infant Jesus gave Him by adoring Him in the stable where He was born. Let us, therefore, constantly unite our adoration to that of Jesus Christ, when He was upon this earth.

Oh, how beautiful and perfect were the acts of love which the Incarnate Word made to His Father in His prayer! God had given to man the commandment to love Him with all his heart and all his strength, but this precept had never been perfectly fulfilled by any man. The first to accomplish it amongst women was Mary, and amongst men the first was Jesus Christ, Who fulfilled it

in a degree infinitely superior to Mary. The love of the Seraphim may be said to be cold in comparison with the love of this Holy Infant. Let us learn from Him to love the Lord our God as He ought to be loved; and let us beseech Him to communicate to us a spark of that pure love with which He loved the Divine Father in the stable of Bethlehem.

My dear Redeemer, how much do I owe Thee! If Thou hadst not prayed for me, in what state of ruin should I not find myself! I thank Thee, O my Jesus; Thy prayers have obtained for me the pardon of my sins, and I hope that they will also obtain for me perseverance unto death. Thou hast prayed for me, and I bless Thee with my whole heart for it; but I beseech Thee not to leave off praying for me. I know that Thou dost continue even in Heaven to be our advocate: *We have an advocate, Jesus Christ; Who also maketh intercession for us.*—(I Jo. ii., 1. Rom. viii., 34). Continue therefore to be my Advocate who am in so much need of Thy intercession. I hope God has already pardoned me through Thy merits; but as I have already so often fallen, I may therefore fall again. Hell does not cease, and will not cease, to tempt me, in order to make me again lose Thy friendship.

II.

Oh, how beautiful, perfect, and dear to God were the prayers of the Infant Jesus! At every moment He prayed to His Father, and His prayers were all for us and for each one of us in particular. All the graces that each of us has received from the Lord, our being called to the true Faith, our having had time given us for repentance, the lights, the sorrow for sins, the pardon of them, the holy desires, the victory over temptations, and all the other good acts that we have made, or shall make, of confidence, of humility, of love, of thanksgiving, of offering, of resignation—all these Jesus has obtained for us, and all have been the effect of the prayers of Jesus. Oh, how much do we owe Him! And how much ought we not to thank Him and to love Him!

Ah, my Jesus, Thou art my hope; it is Thou Who must give me fortitude to resist; from Thee I seek it, and of Thee I hope for it. But I will not content myself with the grace not to fall again; I desire also the grace to love Thee exceedingly. My death approaches. If I were to die now, I should indeed hope to be saved; but I should love Thee little in Paradise because I have loved Thee but little hitherto. I will love Thee much in the days that remain to me that I may love Thee still more in eternity. O Mary, my Mother, do thou also pray and beseech Jesus for me. Thy prayers are all-powerful with thy Son Who loves thee much. Beseech Jesus to give me a great love for Him, and let this be constant and for ever.

First Friday of January

Morning Meditation.

THE HEART OF JESUS FULL OF SUFFERINGS EVEN FROM HIS INFANCY.

My sorrow is continually before me.—(Ps. xxvii., 18).

We have been accustomed to hear of the Creation, the Incarnation, the Redemption; of Jesus born in a stable, of Jesus dead upon the Cross. O my God, if we knew that another man had conferred on us any of these benefits we could not help loving him. O adorable Heart of my Jesus, Heart inflamed with the love of men, Heart created on purpose to love them, how is it possible that Thou canst be despised, and Thy love so ill corresponded with!

I.

Consider that in the moment that the soul of Jesus Christ was created and united to His little body in the

womb of Mary, the Eternal Father intimated to His Son His will that He should die for the Redemption of the world; and in this same moment He presented to His view the entire dreadful scene of the sufferings He would have to endure, even unto death, in order to redeem mankind. Our Divine Redeemer saw in that moment all the labours, contempt, and poverty He would have to suffer during His whole life, in Bethlehem as in Egypt and in Nazareth; all the sufferings and ignominy of His Passion, the scourges, the thorns, the nails, and the Cross; all the weariness, the sadness, the agonies, and the abandonment in which He was to end His life upon Calvary.

When Abraham was leading his son to death, he would not inform him of it to his affliction beforehand, even during the short time that was necessary for them to arrive at the Mount. But the Eternal Father chose that His Incarnate Son, Whom He had destined to be the Victim of His justice in atonement for our sins, should, from the beginning, suffer all the pains to which He was to be subject during His life and at His death.

O sweet, O amiable, O loving Heart of Jesus! even from Thy infancy Thou wert full of bitterness, and Thou didst suffer agonies in the womb of Mary without consolation, and without any one to look upon Thee and to console Thee. All this Thou didst suffer, O my Jesus, in order to satisfy for the eternal sorrow and agony which I deserved to endure in hell for my sins. Thou didst suffer deprived of all relief, to save me who have had the boldness to forsake God, and to turn my back upon Him, in order to satisfy my miserable inclinations. I thank Thee, O afflicted and loving Heart of my Lord! I thank Thee and I sympathise with Thee, especially when I see that whilst Thou dost suffer so much for men, these very men do not even pity Thee. O love of God, O ingratitute of man! O men, O men, behold this little innocent Lamb Who is in agony for you, to satisfy the divine justice for the injuries you have committed against Him. See how He prays and intercedes for you with His Eternal Father; behold Him and love Him.

II.

Wherefore, from the first moment that He was in His Mother's womb, Jesus suffered continually that sorrow which He endured in the Garden, and which was sufficient to have taken away His life as He said: *My soul is sorrowful even unto death.*—(Matt. xxvi., 38). From that time forth He felt most vividly all the sorrows and contumely that awaited Him.

The whole life of our Blessed Redeemer was a life of pains and tears: *My life is wasted with grief, and my years in sighs.*—(Ps. xxx., 11). His divine Heart was never for one moment free from suffering. Whether He watched or slept, whether He laboured or rested, whether He prayed or spoke, He had continually before His eyes that bitter representation which tormented His holy Soul more than their sufferings tormented the holy Martyrs. The Martyrs suffered, but, assisted by grace, they suffered with joy and fervour. Jesus Christ suffered, but He suffered with a Heart full of weariness and sorrow; and He accepted all for love of us.

O my Redeemer, how few there are who think of Thy sorrows and Thy love! O God, how few there are who love Thee! Unhappy me, I also have lived so many years forgetful of Thee! Thou hast suffered so much in order to be loved by me, and I have not loved Thee. Forgive me, my Jesus, forgive me, for I will amend my life and I will love Thee. Ah, wretched me if I still resist Thy grace, and in resisting damn myself! All the mercies Thou hast shown me, and above all, Thy sweet voice now calling me to love Thee—all these great graces will be, if I resist them, my greatest punishment in hell. O my beloved Jesus, have pity on me, and let me live no longer ungrateful to Thy love. Give me light; give me strength to conquer everything in order to accomplish Thy will. My dearest Mother Mary, help me. It is thou who hast obtained for me all the favours I have received from God.

Spiritual Reading.

"THE GRACE OF GOD OUR SAVIOUR HATH
APPEARED."

Alexander the Great, after he had conquered Darius and subdued Persia, wished to gain the affection of that people, and so went about dressed in the Persian costume. In like manner God would appear to act. In order to draw towards Himself the affections of men, He clothed Himself completely after the human fashion, and appeared as Man: *in shape found as a man.*—(Phil. ii., 7). By this means He wished to make known the depth of the love which He bore to man: *The grace of God our Saviour hath appeared to all men.*—(Tit. ii., 11).

Man does not love Me, God would seem to say, because he does not see Me. I wish to make Myself seen by him and to converse with him, and thus make Myself loved: *He was seen upon earth, and conversed with men.*—(Baruch iii., 38).

The Divine love for man was extreme, and had been from all eternity: *I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore have I drawn thee, taking pity on thee.*—(Jer. xxxi., 3). But heretofore it had not appeared how great and inconceivable this love was that manifested itself when the Son of God showed Himself a little One in a stable on a bundle of straw: *The goodness and kindness of God our Saviour appeared.*—(Tit. ii., 4). The Greek text reads: *The singular love of God towards men appeared.* St. Bernard says that from the beginning the world had seen the Power of God in creation, and His Wisdom in the government of the world; but only in the Incarnation of the Word was it seen how great was His Mercy. Before God made Man was seen upon earth, men could not conceive an idea of the Divine Goodness; therefore did He take mortal flesh, that, appearing as Man, He might make plain to men the greatness of His benignity.

And in what other way could the Lord better display to thankless man His goodness and His love? Man, by despising God, says St. Fulgentius, put himself aloof from God forever; and as man was unable to return to God, God came in search of him on earth. St. Augustine had already said this: "Because we would not go to the Mediator, He condescended to come to us."

I will draw them with the cords of Adam, with the bands of love.—(Osee. xi., 4). Men allow themselves to be drawn by love; the tokens of affection shown to them are a sort of chain which binds them, and, in a sense, forces them to love those by whom they are loved. For this end the Eternal Word chose to become Man, to draw to Himself by the greatest proof of affection the love of men. God was made Man that God might be more easily loved by man. It seems that our Redeemer wished to signify this very thing to a devout Franciscan called Father Francis of St. James, as is related in the Franciscan Diary for the 15th of December. Jesus frequently appeared to him as a lovely Infant; and the holy friar longed in his fervour to hold Him in his arms, but the sweet Child always fled away; whereupon the servant of God lovingly complained of this. One day the divine Child again appeared to him; but how? He appeared with golden chains in His hands wherewith they should be bound as prisoners one with the other and never to be separated. Francis, emboldened at this, fastened the chains to the foot of the Infant, and bound Him to his heart; and, in very truth, from that time forward it seemed to him as if he saw the beloved Child in the prison of his heart, a perpetual Prisoner. That which Jesus did with this His servant He really has done with all men when He Himself became Man; He wished to be, as it were, enchained by us with such a prodigy of love and at the same time to enchain our hearts by obliging them to love Him, according to the prophecy of Osee: *I will draw them with the cords of Adam, with the bands of love.*

In divers ways, says St. Leo, had God already benefited man; but in no way has He more clearly exhibited the

excess of His bounty than in sending him a Redeemer to teach him the way of salvation, and to procure for him the life of grace. "The Goodness of God has imparted gifts to the human race in various ways; but it surpassed the ordinary bounds of its abundant kindness when, in Christ, Mercy Itself came down to those who were in sin, Truth to those who were wandering in error, and Life to those who were dead."

Evening Meditation.

THE KINDNESS OF JESUS OUR GOD.

I.

Forget not the kindness of thy surety.—(Ecclus. xxix., 19).

St. Francis of Sales called Mount Calvary *the mountain of lovers*. It is impossible to remember that Mount and not love Jesus Christ, Who died there for love of us.

O God! how is it that men do not love this God Who has done so much to be loved by men! Before the Incarnation of the Word, man might have doubted whether God loved him with a true love; but after the coming of the Son of God, and after His dying for the love of men, how can we possibly doubt His love? "O man," says St. Thomas of Villanova, "look on that Cross, on those torments, and that cruel death, which Jesus has suffered for thee: after so great and so many tokens of His love, thou canst no longer entertain a doubt that He loves thee, and loves thee exceedingly." And St. Bernard says that "the Cross and every Wound of our Blessed Redeemer cry aloud to make us understand the love He bears us."

In this grand Mystery of man's Redemption, we must consider how Jesus employed all His thoughts and zeal to discover every means of making Himself loved by us. Had He merely wished to die for our salvation, it would have been sufficient had He been slain by Herod with

the other children; but no, He chose before dying to lead for thirty-three years a life of hardship and suffering; and during that time, in order to win our love, He appeared in several different guises. First of all, as a poor child, born in a stable; then as a little boy helping in the workshop; and finally, as a criminal, executed on a Cross. But before dying on the Cross, we see Him in many different states, one and all calculated to excite our compassion, and to make Himself loved: in agony in the Garden, bathed from head to foot in a sweat of blood; afterwards, in the court of Pilate, torn with scourges; then treated as a mock king, with a reed in His hand, a ragged garment of purple on His shoulders, and a crown of thorns on His head; dragged publicly through the streets to death with the Cross upon His shoulders; and at length, on the hill of Calvary, suspended on the Cross by three iron nails. Tell me, does He merit our love or not, this God Who has vouchsafed to endure all these torments, and to use so many means in order to captivate our love? Father John Rigouleux used to say: "I would spend my life in weeping for the love of a God Whose love induced Him to die for the salvation of men."

O most beautiful and most loving Heart of Jesus, miserable is the heart which does not love Thee! O God, for the love of men Thou didst die on the Cross, helpless and forsaken, and how then can men live so forgetful of Thee? O love of God! O ingratitude of man!

II.

Forget not the kindness of thy surety; for he hath given his life for thee.—(Ecclus. xxix., 19). Be not unmindful of Him Who has stood surety for thee; Who, to satisfy for thy sins, was willing to pay off, by His death, the debt of punishment due by thee. Oh, how desirous is Jesus Christ that we should continually remember His Passion! And how it saddens Him to see that we are so unmindful of it! Were a person to endure for one of his friends, affronts, blows, and

imprisonment, how afflicting would it be for him to know that that friend afterwards never gave it a thought, and cared not even to hear it spoken of! On the contrary, how gratified would he be to know that his friend constantly spoke of it with the warmest gratitude, and often thanked him for it. So it is pleasing to Jesus Christ when we preserve in our minds a grateful and loving recollection of the sorrows and death which He suffered for us. Jesus Christ was the Desired of all the ancient Fathers; He was the Desired of all nations before He was yet come upon earth. Now, how much more ought He to be our only desire and our only Love, now that we know that He is really come, and are aware how much He has done and suffered for us—so that He even died upon the Cross for love of us!

O men, O men! do but cast one look on the innocent Son of God, agonising on the Cross and dying for you, in order to satisfy the divine justice for your sins, and by this means to allure you to love Him. Observe how, at the same time, He prays His Eternal Father to forgive you. Behold Him, and love Him. Ah, my Jesus, how small is the number of those who love Thee! wretched, too, am I, for I also have lived so many years unmindful of Thee, and have grievously offended Thee, my beloved Redeemer! It is not so much the punishment I have deserved that makes me weep, as the love which Thou hast borne me. O sorrows of Jesus! O ignominies of Jesus! O wounds of Jesus! O death of Jesus! O love of Jesus! rest deeply engraved in my heart, and may your sweet recollection be forever fixed there, to wound me and inflame me continually with love. I love Thee, my Jesus; I love Thee, my Sovereign Good; I love Thee, my Love and my All; I love Thee and I will love Thee for ever. Oh, suffer me never more to forsake Thee, never more to lose Thee! By the merits of Thy death make me entirely Thine. In this I firmly trust. And I have great confidence in thy intercession, O Mary, my Queen; make me love Jesus Christ, and make me also love thee, my Mother and my hope!

First Saturday of January

Morning Meditation.

MARY'S PRAYERS FOR US ARE ALWAYS HEARD.

St. Bernard exhorts us to seek grace and to seek it through Mary, for, he says, she is a Mother to whom nothing can be denied. If, then, we wish to be saved, let us recommend ourselves to Mary for her prayers will always be heard.

I.

Jesus is the Mediator of Justice; Mary, the Mediatrix of Grace. For, as St. Bernard, St. Bonaventure, St. Bernardine of Siena, St. Germanus, St. Antoninus and others say it is the will of God to dispense through the hands of Mary whatever graces He is pleased to bestow upon us. With God, the prayers of the Saints are the prayers of His friends, but the prayers of Mary are the prayers of His Mother! The most pleasing devotion to the Blessed Virgin is ever to have recourse to her and to say: O Mary, intercede for me with thy Son Jesus.

Jesus is omnipotent by nature; Mary is omnipotent by grace; she obtains whatever she asks. It is impossible, says St. Antoninus, that this Mother should ask any favour of her Son for those who are devout to her and the Son not grant her request. Jesus delights to honour His Mother by granting whatever she asks of Him. Hence St. Bernard exhorts us to seek for grace and to seek it through Mary; because she is a Mother to whom nothing can be denied. If, then, we would be saved, let us recommend ourselves to Mary, that she may intercede for us, because her prayers are always heard. O Mother of Mercy, have pity on me. Thou art styled the advocate of sinners; assist me, therefore, a sinner who places his confidence in thee.

II.

Let us not doubt that Mary will hear us when we address our prayers to her. It is her delight to exercise her powerful influence with God in obtaining for us what-ever graces we stand in need of. It is sufficient to ask favours of Mary to obtain them. If we are unworthy of them, she renders us worthy by her powerful intercession; and she is very desirous that we should have recourse to her, that she may save us. What sinner ever perished, who, with confidence and perseverance, had recourse to Mary, the refuge of sinners? He is lost who has not recourse to Mary.

O Mary, my Mother and my hope! I take refuge under thy protection; reject me not, as I have deserved. Protect me and have pity on me, a miserable sinner. Obtain for me the forgiveness of my sins; obtain for me holy perseverance, the love of God, a good death, and a happy eternity. I hope all things of thee, because thou art most powerful with God. Make me holy, since, by thy holy intercession, thou hast it in thy power to do so. O Mary, in thee, next to thy divine Son Jesus, do I confide; in thee do I place all my hope.

Spiritual Reading.

OUR ETERNAL SALVATION IS IN PRAYER.

Prayer is not only *useful*, but *necessary* for salvation; and therefore God, Who desires that we should be saved, has enjoined it as a precept: *Ask, and it shall be given you.*—(Matt. vii., 7). It was an error of Wickliff, condemned by the Council of Constance, to say that prayer was only a Divine *counsel* to us and not a command. *It is necessary*—not it is advisable or fitting—*always to pray.*—(Luke xviii., 1). Wherefore Doctors of the Church always maintain that he cannot be held guiltless of grievous sin who neglects to recommend himself to God, at least once in a month, and at all times when he finds himself assailed by severe temptation.

The reason of this necessity of recommending ourselves often to God arises from our inability to do any good work, or to entertain any good thoughts, of ourselves: *Without me ye can do nothing.*—(Jo. xv., 5). *We are not sufficient to think anything of ourselves as of ourselves.*—(2 Cor. iii., 5). Therefore, St. Philip Neri says that he despaired of *himself*. On the other hand, St. Augustine writes that God desires to bestow His graces, but only on those who beg them. And especially, said the Saint, as God gives the grace of perseverance only to those who seek it.

It is a fact that the devil never ceases to go about seeking to devour us, and therefore we need ever to defend ourselves by prayer. "Continual prayer is necessary for man," says St. Thomas. Jesus Christ first taught us: *We must always pray, and not faint.*—(Luke xviii., 1). Otherwise, how can we resist the constant temptations of the world and the devil? It was the error of Jansenius, condemned by the Church, that the observance of certain precepts was impossible, and that sometimes grace itself failed to render it possible to us. God is faithful, says St. Paul, Who does not suffer us to be tempted above our strength. Yet He desires that, when we are tried, we should have recourse to Him for help to resist. St. Augustine writes: "The law is given, that grace may be sought; grace is given that the law may be fulfilled." Granting that the law cannot be fulfilled by us without grace, God has yet given us the law, in order that we may seek the grace to fulfil it; and, therefore, He gives grace that we may fulfil it. All this was well expressed by the Council of Trent in these words: "God does not command things that are impossible, but, in commanding, He counsels thee both to do what thou canst, and seek for aid for what thou canst not do, and He helps thee that thou mayst be able to do it."

Thus the Lord is ever ready to give His help, in order that we may not be overcome by temptation; but He gives this help only to those who fly to Him in the time of trial, and especially in temptations against chastity,

as the Wise Man wrote : *And as I knew that I could not otherwise be continent, except God gave it, and this also was a point of wisdom to know whose gift it was, I went to the Lord and besought him.*—(Wis. viii., 21). Let us rest assured that we can never overcome our carnal appetites if God does not give us help, and we cannot have this help without prayer; but if we pray we shall assuredly have power to overcome the devil in everything, through the grace with which God will strengthen us; as St. Paul says : *I can do all things in him who strengtheneth me.*—(Phil. iv., 13).

It is also most useful to us, in order to obtain divine grace, to have recourse to the intercession of the Saints, who have great power with God, especially for the benefit of those who have a particular devotion to them. This is not a mere devotion dependent upon our private fancy, but it is a duty; for St. Thomas says that the Divine law requires that we mortals should receive the aid which is necessary for our salvation, through the prayers of the Saints. This aid comes especially through the intercession of Mary, whose prayers are of more value than those of all the Saints. So true is this that St. Bernard says it is through her intercession that we have access to Jesus Christ our Mediator and Saviour. "Through thee we have access to the Son, O thou giver of grace, and Mother of our salvation, that through thee He may receive us, Who through thee was given to us." This, indeed, I have sufficiently proved in my book called *The Glories of Mary*—(Pt. I., Ch. 5), and also in my work *On Prayer*, in which I have brought forward the opinion of many Saints, especially St. Bernard, and of many Theologians, that through Mary we receive all the graces which we receive from God. Hence St. Bernard says : "Let us seek for grace, and let us seek it through Mary; for he that seeks finds, and cannot be disappointed." The same was said by St. Peter Damian, St. Bonaventure, St. Bernardine of Sienna, St. Antoninus, and others.

Let us, then, pray, and pray with confidence, says the Apostle. Let us go confidently to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help us in

time of need. Jesus Christ now sits on the throne of grace to comfort all who fly to Him, and says : *Ask, and it shall be given to you.* On the Day of Judgment He will also sit upon His throne, but it will be a throne of Judgment. What madness, then, it is in those who, having it in their power to be delivered from their miseries by going to Jesus, now that He sits on His throne of grace, wait till He becomes their Judge, and will not avail themselves of His mercy. He says to us that whatever we ask of Him, if we have confidence, He will give us. And what more can one friend do to another to show his love than say : "Ask what thou wilt, and I will give it thee." St. James goes further and says : *If any of you need wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men abundantly and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him.*—(James i., 5). By "wisdom" is here meant the knowledge of the salvation of the soul. To have this "wisdom" we must seek of God the graces necessary to bring us to salvation. And will God give them? Most assuredly He will give them, and in still greater abundance than we ask them. Let us observe also the words : *Upbraideth not.* If the sinner repents of his sins, and asks salvation from God, God does not that which men do, that is, reproach the ungrateful with their ingratitude, and deny them what they ask; but He gives to them willingly, and even more than they beg for. If, then, we would be saved, we must have our lips ever open in prayer, and say : *My God, help me! My God have mercy! Mary, have mercy!* If we cease to pray, we are lost. Let us pray for ourselves : let us pray for sinners, for this is most pleasing to God. Let us also pray daily for the Holy Souls in Purgatory. Those holy Prisoners are most grateful to all who pray for them.

Whenever we pray, let us seek the grace of God through the merits of Jesus Christ, for He Himself assures us that He will give whatever we ask in His Name.

O my God, this is the grace which, above all others, I ask through the merits of Jesus Christ : grant that throughout my life, and especially in time of temptation,

I may recommend myself to Thee, and hope for Thy help through the love of Jesus and Mary. O holy Virgin, obtain for me this grace on which depends my salvation.

Evening Meditation.

THE SOLITUDE OF JESUS IN THE STABLE.

Jesus chose at His birth the stable of Bethlehem for His hermitage and oratory; and for this purpose He so disposed events as to be born outside the city in a solitary cave, in order to commend to us the love of solitude and silence. Jesus remains in silence in the manger; Mary and Joseph adore and contemplate Him in silence. It was revealed to Sister Margaret of the Blessed Sacrament, a Discalced Carmelite, who was called the "Spouse of the Infant Jesus," that all that passed in the Cave of Bethlehem, even the visit of the shepherds and the adoration of the holy Magi, took place in silence, and without a word.

Silence in other infants is due to helplessness; but in Jesus Christ it was virtue. The Infant Jesus does not speak, but oh! how eloquent is His silence! Oh, blessed is he that converses with Jesus, Mary and Joseph, in this holy solitude of the manger! The shepherds, though admitted there but for a very short time, came out from the stable all inflamed with the love of God; for they did nothing but praise and bless Him: *They returned glorifying and praising God.*—(Luke ii., 20). Oh, happy is the soul that shuts itself up in the solitude of Bethlehem to contemplate the divine mercy, and the love that God has borne, and still bears, to men! *I will lead her into the wilderness, and I will speak to her heart.*—(Os. ii., 14). There the divine Infant will speak, not to the ear, but to the heart, inviting the soul to love a God Who has loved her so much. When we see there the poverty of this wandering little Hermit, Who remains in that cold

cave, without fire, with a manger for a cradle, and a little straw for a bed; when we hear the cries, and behold the tears of this innocent Child, and consider that He is our God—how is it possible to think of anything but of loving Him! Oh, what a sweet hermitage for a soul that has Faith is the stable of Bethlehem!

My dearest Saviour, Thou art the King of Heaven, the King of kings, the Son of God; and how is it that I see Thee in this cave, forsaken by all? I see no one assisting Thee but Joseph and Thy holy Mother. I desire to unite myself to them in keeping Thee company. Do not reject me. I do not deserve it, but I feel that Thou dost invite me, by Thy sweet voice speaking to my heart. Yes, I come, O my beloved Infant! I will leave all things to pass my whole life alone with Thee, my dear little Hermit, the only Love of my soul. Fool that I was, to have hitherto forsaken Thee and left Thee alone, O my Jesus, whilst I was seeking miserable and empoisoned pleasures from creatures; but now, enlightened by Thy grace, I desire nothing but to live in solitude with Thee, Who didst Thyself will to live in solitude on this earth: *Who will give me wings like a dove, and I will fly and be at rest?*—(Ps. liv., 7).

II.

Let us also imitate Mary and Joseph, who, burning with love, remain contemplating the great Son of God clothed in flesh, and made subject to earthly miseries—Wisdom become an Infant that cannot speak—the Great One become little—the Supreme One become so abased—the rich One become so poor—the Omnipotent so weak. In short, let us meditate on the Divine Majesty shrouded beneath the form of a little Infant, despised and forsaken by the world, Who does and suffers everything in order to make Himself loved by men; and let us beseech Him to admit us into this sacred retreat—there to stop, there to remain, and never to leave it again. "O solitude," says St. Jerome, "in which God speaks and converses familiarly with His servants." O beautiful solitude, in

which God speaks and converses with His chosen souls, not as a sovereign, but as a friend, as a brother, as a spouse! Oh, what a paradise it is to converse alone with the Infant Jesus in the little grotto of Bethlehem!

Ah, who will enable me to fly from this world, where I have so often found my ruin—to fly, and to come and remain always with Thee, Who art the joy of Paradise and the true Lover of my soul? Oh, bind me, I pray Thee, to Thy feet, so that I may no longer be separated from Thee, but may find my happiness in continually remaining in Thy company! Ah, by the merits of Thy solitude in the Cave of Bethlehem, give me a constant interior recollection, so that my soul may become a solitary little cell, where I may attend to nothing but to conversing with Thee; where I may take counsel with Thee in all my thoughts and actions; where I may dedicate to Thee all my affections; where I may always love Thee, and sigh to leave the prison of this body to come and love Thee face to face in Heaven. I love Thee, O infinite Goodness, and I hope always to love Thee, in time and in eternity. O Mary, thou who canst do all things, pray to Jesus to enchain me with His love, and not to permit me ever again to lose His grace.

The Feast of the Epiphany

(January 6th).

Morning Meditation.

THEY FOUND THE CHILD WITH MARY, HIS MOTHER.

They found the child with Mary, his mother.—(Matt. ii., 11). The kings find a poor Maiden, and her poor Infant wrapped in poor swaddling-clothes, and not one to attend on Him or assist Him. They adore, they

acknowledge Him for their God, and, kissing His feet, they offer Him their gifts of Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh. Let us adore our little King, and offer Him all our hearts.

I.

The Son of God is born humble and poor in a stable. There indeed the Angels of Heaven acknowledged Him, singing: *Glory to God in the highest*—(Luke ii., 14); but men on earth, for whose salvation Jesus is born, leave Him neglected: only a few shepherds come and acknowledge Him, and confess Him to be their Saviour. But our loving Redeemer desires from the very beginning to communicate to us the grace of Redemption, and therefore He begins to make Himself known even to the Gentiles, who neither knew Him nor looked for His coming. For this purpose He sends the star to give notice to the holy Magi, enlightening them at the same time with interior light, in order that they may come to acknowledge and adore their Redeemer. This was the first and sovereign grace bestowed upon us; our call to the true Faith.

O Saviour of the world, what would have happened us if Thou hadst not come to enlighten us? We should be like our forefathers, who worshipped as gods, animals, stones, and wood, and consequently we should have all been damned. I give Thee thanks to-day on behalf of all men.

II.

Behold, the Magi without delay set out on their journey; and led by the star they arrive at the place where the Holy Infant is lying: *They found the child with Mary his mother.*—(Matt., ii., 11). They find there only a poor Maiden, and a poor Infant wrapped in poor swaddling-clothes. But on entering into that abode, a stable for beasts, they feel an interior joy, and their hearts are drawn towards this sweet Infant. The straw, the poverty, those cries of the Infant

Saviour, are all darts of love and fire to their enlightened hearts.

The Infant looks upon these holy pilgrims with a joyful countenance, and thus shows that He accepts these first-fruits of His Redemption. The divine Mother is also silent, but welcomes them with her smiling looks, and thanks them for the homage done to her Son. They adore Him also in silence, and acknowledge Him for their Saviour and their God, offering Him gifts of Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh.

Yes, my Infant Jesus, the more humbled and poor I behold Thee, the more dost Thou inflame me with Thy love.

O Jesus, my Infant King! I also adore Thee, and offer Thee my miserable heart. Accept it and change it. Make it wholly Thine own, so that it may love nothing but Thee. My sweet Saviour, save me, and let my eternal happiness be to love Thee always and without reserve. O Mary, most holy Virgin, I hope for this grace from thee.

Spiritual Reading.

“LO, HERE AM I, SEND ME!”

The Eternal Word became Man in order to inflame us with His divine love. Adam, our first parent, sinned, Ungrateful for the benefits bestowed upon him, he rebelled against God by a violation of the precept given him not to eat of the forbidden fruit. On this account God is obliged to drive him out of the earthly paradise in this world, and in the world to come to deprive not only Adam, but all the descendants of this rebellious creature, of the heavenly and everlasting Paradise which He had prepared for them after this mortal life.

Behold, then, all mankind together condemned to a life of pain and misery, and forever shut out from Heaven. But hearken to God, Who, as Isaias tells us, would seem, after our manner of understanding, to give vent to His affliction in lamentations; *And now what*

have I here, saith the Lord, for my people is taken away gratis.—(Is. li., 5). “And now,” says God, “what delight have I left in Heaven, now that I have lost men who were My delight?” *My delights were to be with the children of men.*—(Prov. viii., 31).

But how is this, O Lord? Thou hast in Heaven so many Seraphim, so many Angels; and canst Thou thus take to heart having lost men? Indeed, what need hast Thou of Angels or of men to fill up the sum of Thy happiness? Thou hast always been, and Thou art in Thyself, most happy; what can ever be wanting to Thy bliss, which is infinite? “That is all true,” says God, “but” (and these are the words of Cardinal Hugo on the above text of Isaias)—“but, losing man, I deem that I have nothing.” I consider that I have lost all, since My delights were to be with men; and now I have lost these men, and, poor hapless creatures, they are doomed to live forever far away from Me.

But how can the Lord call men His delight? Yes, indeed, writes St. Thomas, God loves man just as if man were His God, and as if without man He could not be happy; “as if man were the God of God Himself, and without him He could not be happy.” St. Gregory of Nazianzen adds, moreover, that God, for the love He bears to men, seems beside Himself: “we are bold to say it, God is out of Himself by reason of His immense love.” So runs the proverb: “Love puts the lover beside himself.”

And here St. Bernard, in his contemplations on this subject, imagines a struggle to ensue between the *Justice* and *Mercy* of God. *Justice* says: “I perish if Adam die not.” *Mercy*, on the other hand, says: “I perish if he does not obtain forgiveness.” In this contest the Lord decides, that in order to deliver man, who was guilty of death, some innocent one must die: “I et uno die who is no debtor to death.”

On earth, there was not one innocent. “Since, therefore,” says the Eternal Father, “amongst men there is none can satisfy My Justice, let Him come forward Who will go to redeem man.” The Angels, the Cheru-

bim, the Seraphim—all are silent; not one replies. One voice alone is heard, that of the Eternal Word, Who says: *Lo, here am I; send me.*—(Is. vi., 8).
 says the Only-Begotten Son, “Thy Majesty, being infinite, and having been injured by man, cannot be fittingly satisfied by an Angel, who is merely a creature; and though Thou mightest accept of the satisfaction of an Angel, reflect that, in spite of so great benefits bestowed on man, in spite of so many promises and threats, We have not yet been able to gain his love, because he is not yet aware of the love We bear him. If We would oblige him to love Us, what better occasion can we find than that, in order to redeem him, I, Thy Son, should go upon earth, should there assume human flesh, and pay by my death the penalty due by him. In this manner Thy justice is fully satisfied, and at the same time man is fully convinced of Our love!” “But think,” answered the Heavenly Father—“think, O My Son, that in taking upon Thyself the burden of man’s satisfaction, Thou wilt have to lead a life full of sufferings!” “It matters not,” replied the Son: *Lo, here am I, send me.* “Think that Thou wilt have to be born in a cave, the shelter of the beasts of the field; thence Thou must flee into Egypt whilst still an Infant, to escape the hands of those very men who, even from Thy tenderest Infancy, will seek to take away Thy life.” “It matters not: *Lo, here am I, send me.*” “Think that, on Thy return to Palestine, Thou shalt there lead a life most arduous, most despicable, passing Thy days as a simple boy in a carpenter’s shop.” “It matters not: *Lo, here am I, send me.*” “Think that when Thou goest forth to preach and to manifest Thyself, Thou wilt have indeed a few, but very few, to follow Thee; the greater part will despise Thee and call Thee impostor, magician, fool, Samaritan; and finally, they will persecute Thee to such a pass that they will make Thee die shamefully on a gibbet by dint of torments.” “It matters not: *Lo, here am I, send me.*”

So, then, for us miserable worms, and to captivate our love, has a God deigned to become Man? Yes, it is of

Faith, as the Holy Church teaches us: *For us men, and for our salvation, He came down from Heaven . . . and was made Man.*—(Nicene Creed). Yes, indeed, so much has God done in order to be loved by us.

Evening Meditation.

HAPPINESS OF HAVING BEEN BORN AFTER THE REDEMPTION AND IN THE TRUE CHURCH.

I.

When the fulness of time had come, God sent his son . . . that he might redeem them who were under the law.—(Gal. iv., 4).

How thankful should we not be to Almighty God for having caused us to be born after the great work of man’s redemption was accomplished! This is what is meant by the *fulness of time*, a time blessed by the fulness of grace, which Jesus Christ obtained for us by coming into the world. Miserable should we have been if, guilty as we are of manifold sins, we had lived on this earth before the coming of Jesus Christ.

Oh, in what a miserable state were all men before the coming of the Messias; the true God was hardly known even in Judea, and in every other part of the world idolatry reigned, so that our forefathers worshipped stones, and wood, and devils; they worshipped innumerable false gods, but the true God was neither loved nor known by them. Even now, how many countries are there in which there are scarcely any Catholics, and all the rest of the inhabitants are either infidels or heretics, and all these are certainly in the way to be lost! What obligation do we not owe God for causing us to be born, not only after the coming of Jesus Christ, but also in countries where the true Faith reigns!

I thank Thee, O Lord, for this. Woe to me if, after so many transgressions, it had been my lot to live in the midst of infidels and heretics! I know, O my God, that

Thou wilt that I should be saved; and I, miserable wretch, have willed so many times to damn myself by losing Thy favour. Have pity, my Blessed Redeemer, on my soul, which has cost Thee so much.

II.

God sent his son that he might redeem them that were under the law.—(Gal. iv., 4). The slave therefore sins, and by sinning gives himself over to the power of the devil, and his own Lord comes and ransoms him by His death.

O immense love, O infinite, love of God towards man! O my Saviour, if Thou hadst not redeemed me by Thy death, what would have become of me? Of me, who so many times have deserved hell by my sins. Oh, if Thou, my Jesus, hadst not died for me, I should have lost Thee forever, and there would have been no hope for me of recovering Thy grace, or of seeing Thy beautiful face in Paradise. My dearest Saviour, I thank Thee; and I hope to come to Heaven, there to thank Thee for all eternity. I regret above every evil that of having despised Thee in times past. In future, I purpose to choose every suffering, every kind of death, rather than offend Thee. I beseech Thee, my Jesus, let me never do so again. Never let me be separated from Thee, never let me be separated from Thee. I love Thee, O infinite Goodness, and I will always love Thee in this life, and for all eternity. O my Queen and advocate Mary, keep me always under thy protection, and deliver me from sin.

The Presentation in the Temple

(January 7th).

Morning Meditation.

PRESENTATION OF JESUS IN THE TEMPLE.

He delivered himself . . . an oblation and a sacrifice to God.—(Eph. v., 2).

If Jesus offers His life to His Father for the love of us, it is just that we should offer Him our life and our entire being. This is what He desires, as He signified to the Blessed Angela de Foligno, saying to her: "I have offered Myself for thee, in order that thou shouldst offer thyself to Me."

I.

The time having now come when, according to the Law, Mary had to go to the Temple for her purification, and to present Jesus to the Divine Father, behold she sets out in company with Joseph. Joseph carries the two turtle doves they are to offer to God, and Mary carries her dear Infant: she takes the Lamb of God to offer Him to the Almighty, in token of the great Sacrifice that this Son would one day accomplish on the Cross.

Consider the holy Virgin entering the Temple; she makes an oblation of her Son on behalf of the whole human race, and says: Behold, O Eternal Father, Thy beloved Only-Begotten One, Who is Thy Son and mine also; I offer Him to Thee as a Victim to Thy divine justice, in order to appease Thy wrath against sinners. Accept Him, O God of mercy! Have pity on our miseries; and for the love of this immaculate Lamb do Thou receive men into Thy grace.

Eternal Father, I, a miserable sinner, who have deserved a thousand hells, present myself this day before Thee, O God of infinite Majesty, and I offer Thee my poor heart. But, O God, what a heart I offer Thee

—a heart that has never known how to love Thee, but has, on the contrary, so often offended Thee and so often betrayed Thee! But now I offer it to Thee full of penitence, and resolved to love Thee at all costs and to obey Thee in all things. Pardon me, and draw me entirely to Thy love. I do not deserve to be heard; but Thy Infant Son, Who offers Himself to Thee in the Temple as a Sacrifice for my salvation, merits for me this grace. I offer Thee this Thy Son and His Sacrifice, and in this I place all my hopes.

II.

The offering of Mary is joined to that of Jesus. Behold Me, (says the Holy Infant), behold Me, O My Father; to Thee do I consecrate My whole life; Thou hast sent Me into the world to save it by My Blood; behold My Blood and My whole self. I offer Myself entirely to Thee for the salvation of the world. *He delivered himself . . . an oblation and a sacrifice to God.*

No sacrifice was ever so acceptable to God as this which His dear Son then made—Who had become, even from His infancy, a Victim and Priest. If all men and Angels had offered their lives, their oblations would not have been so pleasing to God as this of Jesus Christ, because in this offering alone the Eternal Father received infinite honour and infinite satisfaction.

I thank Thee, O my Father, for having sent Thy Son upon the earth to sacrifice Himself for me. And I bless Thee, O Incarnate Word, Lamb of God, Who didst offer Thyself to die for my soul. I love Thee, my dear Redeemer, and Thee alone will I love; for I find none but Thee Who has offered and sacrificed His life to save me. It makes me shed tears to think how ungrateful I have been to Thee; but Thou wilt not my death, but that I should be converted and live. Yes, my Jesus, I turn to Thee, and repent with my whole heart of having offended Thee, of having offended the great God, Who has sacrificed Himself for me. Do Thou give me life, and life shall then be spent in loving Thee, the sovereign

Good; make me love Thee, I ask Thee nothing more. Mary, my Mother, thou didst offer thy Son in the Temple even for me; do thou offer Him again for me, and beseech the Eternal Father to accept me for His own, for the love of Jesus. And thou, my Queen, do thou also accept me for thy faithful servant. If I am thy servant, I shall also be the servant of thy Son.

Spiritual Reading.

ST. SIMEON'S PROPHECY.

In this valley of tears every man is born to weep, and all must suffer by enduring the evils which are of daily occurrence. But how much greater would the misery of life be, did we also know the future evils which await us! "Unfortunate, indeed, would his lot be," says Seneca, "who, knowing the future, would have to suffer all by anticipation."

The Lord shows us this mercy—He conceals the trials that await us, that, whatever they may be, we may endure them but once. He did not show Mary this compassion; for she, whom God willed to be the Queen of Sorrows, and in all things like His Son, had always before her eyes, and continually suffered, all the torments that awaited her; and these were the sufferings of the Passion and Death of her beloved Jesus; for in the Temple, St. Simeon, having received the Divine Child into his arms, foretold to her that her Son would be a mark for all the persecutions and opposition of men. *Behold, this child is set . . . for a sign which shall be contradicted.* And, therefore, that a sword of sorrow should pierce her soul. *And thy own soul a sword shall pierce.*—(Luke ii., 34, 35).

The Blessed Virgin herself told St. Matilda, that, on this announcement of St. Simeon, "all her joy was changed into sorrow." For, as it was revealed to St. Teresa, though the Blessed Mother already knew that the

life of her Son would be sacrificed for the salvation of the world, yet she then learnt more distinctly and in greater detail the sufferings and cruel death that awaited her poor Son. She knew He would be contradicted, and contradicted in everything—contradicted in His doctrines; for, instead of being believed, He would be esteemed a blasphemer for teaching that He was the Son of God. This He was declared to be by the impious Caiphas, saying: *He hath blasphemed, he is guilty of death.*—(Matt. xxvi., 65). He was Wisdom itself and was treated as ignorant: *How doth this man know letters, having never learned?*—(Jo. vii., 15). As a false prophet: *And they bindfolded him, and smote his face . . . saying: Prophecy, who is it that struck thee?*—(Luke xxii., 64). He was treated as a madman: *He is mad, why hear you him?*—(Jo. x., 20). As a drunkard, a glutton, and a friend of sinners: *Behold the man that is a glutton, and a drinker of wine, a friend of publicans and sinners.*—(Luke vii., 34): *As a sorcerer: By the prince of devils he casteth out devils.*—(Matt. ix., 34). As a heretic, and possessed by the evil spirit: *Do w not say well of thee that thou art a Samaritan and hast a devil?*—(Jo. viii., 48). In a word, Jesus was considered so notoriously wicked, that, as the Jews said to Pilate, no trial was necessary to condemn Him. *If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up to thee.*—(Jo. xviii., 30). He was contradicted in His very soul; for even His Eternal Father, to give place to divine justice, contradicted Him, by refusing to hear His prayer, when He said: *Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me.*—(Matt. xxvi., 39); and abandoned Him to fear, weariness, and sadness; so that our afflicted Lord exclaimed: *My soul is sorrowful even unto death!*—(Ib. 38); and His interior sufferings even caused Him to sweat Blood. Contradicted and persecuted, in fine, in all His body and all through His life; for He was tortured in all His sacred members, in His hands, His feet, His face, His head, and His whole body; so that, drained of His Blood, and an object of scorn, He died of torments on an ignominious Cross.

When David, in the midst of all his pleasures and regal grandeur, heard from the Prophet Nathan, that his son should die—*The child that is born to thee shall surely die.*—(2 Kings xii., 14), he could find no peace, but wept, fasted, and slept on the ground. Mary with the greatest calmness received the announcement that her Son should die, and always peacefully submitted to it; but what grief must she continually have suffered, seeing this amiable Son always near her, hearing from Him words of eternal life, and witnessing His holy demeanour!

Abraham suffered much during the three days he passed with his beloved Isaac, after knowing that he was to lose him. O God, not for three days, but for three and thirty years had Mary to endure a like sorrow! But do I say a like sorrow? It was as much greater as the Son of Mary was more lovely than the son of Abraham.

Evening Meditation.

THE FIRST SWORD OF SORROW.

(First Dolour).

I.

The Blessed Virgin revealed to St. Bridget, that while on earth, there was not an hour in which grief did not pierce her soul: "as often," she continued, "as I wrapped my Son in His swaddling-clothes, as often as I saw His hands and feet, so often was my soul absorbed, so to say, in fresh grief; for I thought how He would be crucified."

The Abbot Rupert contemplates Mary suckling her Son, and thus addressing Him: *A bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me; he shall abide between my breasts.*—(Cant. i., 12). Ah, Son, I clasp Thee in my arms, because Thou art so dear to me; but the dearer Thou art to me, the more dost Thou become a bundle of myrrh and sorrow to me when I think of Thy sufferings. "Mary," says St. Bernardine of Sienna, "reflected that

the Strength of the Saints was to be reduced to agony; the Beauty of Paradise to be disfigured; the Lord of the world to be bound as a criminal; the Creator of all things to be made livid with blows; the Judge of all to be condemned; the Glory of Heaven despised; the King of kings to be crowned with thorns, and treated as a mock king."

It was revealed to the same St. Bridget, that the afflicted Mother, already knowing what her Son was to suffer, "when suckling Him, thought of the gall and vinegar; when swathing Him, of the cords with which He was to be bound; when bearing Him in her arms, of the Cross to which He was to be nailed; when sleeping, of His death." As often as she put on His garment, she reflected that one day it would be torn from Him, that He might be crucified; and when she beheld His sacred hands and feet, she thought of the nails which would one day pierce them; and then, as Mary said to St. Bridget, "my eyes filled with tears, and my heart was tortured with grief."

I pity thee, O afflicted Mother, on account of the first Sword of Sorrow that pierced thee, when, in the Temple, all the outrages which men would inflict on thy beloved Jesus, were made known to thee by St. Simeon, and which thou already knewest from the Sacred Scriptures; outrages which were to cause Him to die before thine eyes, on that infamous Cross, exhausted of His Blood, abandoned by all, and thyself unable to defend or help Him. By that bitter knowledge, then, which for so many years afflicted thy heart, I beseech thee, my Queen, to obtain for me the grace that during my life and at my death I may ever keep the Passion of Jesus and Thy sorrows impressed on my heart.

II.

The Evangelist says that as Jesus Christ advanced in years, so also did He *advance in wisdom and in grace with God and men.*—(Luke ii., 52). This is to be understood as St. Thomas explains it—that He advanced

in wisdom and grace in the estimation of men and before God, inasmuch as all His works would continually have availed to increase His merit, had not grace been conferred upon Him from the beginning, in its complete fulness, by virtue of the hypostatic union. But, since Jesus advanced in the love and esteem of others, how much more must He have advanced in that of Mary! And, O God, as love increased in her, so much the more did her grief increase at the thought of having to lose Him by so cruel a death; and the nearer the time of the Passion of her Son approached, so much the deeper did that Sword of Sorrow, foretold by St. Simeon, pierce the heart of His Mother. This was precisely revealed by the Angel to St. Bridget, saying: "That Sword of Sorrow was every hour approaching nearer to the Blessed Virgin, as the time of the Passion of her Son drew near."

Since, then, Jesus our King, and His most holy Mother, did not refuse, for love of us, to suffer such cruel pains throughout their lives, it is reasonable that we at least should not complain if we have to suffer something. Jesus, crucified, once appeared to Sister Magdalen Orsini, a Dominicaness, who had long been suffering under a great trial, and encouraged her to remain, by means of that affliction, with Him on the Cross. Sister Magdalen complainingly answered: "O Lord, Thou wast tortured on the Cross only for *three hours*, and I have endured my pain for many years." The Redeemer then replied: "Ah, ignorant soul, what dost thou say? From the first moment of My conception I suffered in Heart all that I afterwards endured dying on the Cross." If, then, when we suffer we also complain, let us imagine Jesus and His Mother Mary addressing the same words to ourselves.

Ah, my Blessed Mother, it is not one sword only with which I have pierced thy heart, but I have done so with as many as are the sins which I have committed. Ah, Lady, it is not to thee, who art innocent, that sufferings are due, but to me who am guilty of so many crimes. But since thou hast been pleased to suffer so much for me, ah, by thy merits, obtain me great sorrow for my

sins, and patience under the trials of this life, which will always be light in comparison with my demerits, for I have often deserved hell.

The Flight into Egypt

Morning Meditation.

“THEY SEEK THE CHILD TO DESTROY HIM.”

Arise! and take the Child and his mother and fly into Egypt.—(Matt. ii., 13).

Behold, Jesus is no sooner born than He is persecuted unto death. Herod is a figure of those miserable sinners who, as soon as they see Jesus Christ born again in their souls by the pardon of their sins, persecute Him unto death by returning to their sins, for they seek the Child to destroy him.—(Ibid.).

I.

The Angel appeared to St. Joseph in a dream, and informed him that Herod was seeking the Infant Jesus to destroy His life; wherefore he said: *Arise, and take the Child and his mother and fly into Egypt.* Behold, then, how Jesus is no sooner born than He is persecuted unto death. Herod is a figure of those miserable sinners who, as soon as they see Jesus Christ born again in their souls by the pardon of sin, persecute Him unto death by returning to their sins: for they seek the Child to destroy him.

Joseph immediately obeys the command of the Angel, and gives notice of it to his holy spouse. He then takes the few tools that he can carry, in order to make use of them in his trade, and to be able in Egypt to support his poor family. Mary at the same time puts together a little bundle of clothes for the use of the holy Child; and

then she goes into her cell, kneels down first before her Infant Son, kisses His feet, and with tears of tenderness says to Him: O my Son and my God, hardly art Thou born and come into the world to save men, than these men seek Thee to put Thee to death! She then takes Him; and the two holy spouses, shedding tears as they go, at once set out on their journey.

My dear Jesus, Thou art the King of Heaven, but now I behold Thee as an Infant wandering over the earth; tell me whom dost Thou seek? I pity Thee when I see Thee so poor and humbled; but I pity Thee more when I see Thee treated with such ingratitude by the same men whom Thou camest to save. Thou dost weep; but I also weep, because I have been one of those who in times past have despised and persecuted Thee. But now I value Thy grace more than all the kingdoms of the world; forgive me, O my Jesus, all the evil I have committed against Thee, and permit me to carry Thee always in my heart during the journey of my life to eternity, even as Mary carried Thee in her arms during the flight into Egypt.

II.

Let us consider the occupation of these holy Pilgrims during their journey. All their conversation is upon their dear Jesus alone, on His patience and His love; and thus they console each other in the midst of the trials and sufferings of so long a journey. Oh, how sweet it is to suffer at the sight of Jesus suffering! “O my soul,” says St. Bonaventure, “do thou also keep company with these three poor holy Exiles, and have compassion on them in the long, wearisome, and painful journey which they are making. And beseech Mary that she will give her divine Son to me to carry in my heart.”

Consider how much they must have suffered, especially in those nights which they had to pass in the desert of Egypt. The bare earth serves them for a bed in the cold open air. The Infant weeps; Mary and Joseph shed tears of compassion. O Holy Faith! who would not

weep at seeing the Son of God become an Infant, poor and forsaken, flying across a desert in order to escape death?

My beloved Redeemer, I have many times driven Thee out of my soul; but now I hope that Thou hast again taken possession of it. I beseech Thee, do Thou bind it to Thyself with the sweet chains of Thy love. I will never again drive Thee from me. But I fear lest I should again abandon Thee, as I have done in times past. O my Lord! let me die rather than treat Thee with fresh and still more horrible ingratitude. I love Thee, O infinite Goodness; and I will always repeat, I love Thee, I love Thee, I love Thee; and so I hope to die saying: *God of my heart, and the God that art my portion forever.*—(Ps. lxxii., 26). O my Jesus! Thou art so good, so worthy of being loved, oh, do Thou make Thyself loved; make Thyself loved by all the sinners who persecute Thee; give them light, make them know the love Thou hast borne them and the love Thou deservest since Thou goest wandering over the earth as a poor Infant, weeping and trembling with cold, and seeking souls to love Thee! O Mary, most holy Virgin, O dearest Mother and companion of the sufferings of Jesus, do thou help me always to carry and preserve thy Son in my heart, in life and in death!

Spiritual Reading.

THE SECOND SWORD OF SORROW.

(*Second Dolour*).

As the stag, wounded by an arrow, carries the pain with him wherever he goes, because he carries with him the arrow which has wounded him, so did the divine Mother, after the sad Prophecy of St. Simeon, as we have already seen, always carry her sorrow with her in the continual remembrance of the Passion of her Son. Hailgrino, explaining this passage of the Canticles: *Thé*

horns of thy head, as the purple of the king—(Cant. vii., 5)—says that these purple hairs were Mary's continual thoughts of the Passion of Jesus, which kept the Blood which was one day to flow from His wounds always before her eyes: "Thy mind, O Mary, and thy thought, steeped in the Blood of our Lord's Passion, were always filled with sorrow, as if they actually beheld the Blood flowing from His wounds." Thus her Son Himself was that arrow in the heart of Mary; and the more amiable He appeared to her, so much the more deeply did the thought of losing Him by so cruel a death wound her heart.

Now Herod having heard that the expected Messias was born, foolishly feared that He would deprive him of his kingdom. Hence St. Fulgentius, reproving him for his folly, thus addresses him: "Why art thou troubled, O Herod? This King Who is born comes not to conquer by the sword, but to subjugate men wonderfully by His death." The impious Herod, therefore, waited to hear from the holy Magi where the King was born, that he might take His life; but finding himself deceived, he ordered all the infants found in the neighbourhood of Bethlehem to be put to death. Then it was that the Angel appeared in a dream to St. Joseph, and commanded him to arise, and take the Child and his mother, and fly into Egypt.—(Matt. ii., 13). According to Gerson, St. Joseph immediately, on that very night, made the order known to Mary; and taking the Infant Jesus, they set out on their journey, as it is sufficiently evident from the Gospel itself: *Who arose and took the Child and his mother, by night, and retired into Egypt.*—(Ibid. ii., 14).

O God, says Blessed Albert the Great, in the name of Mary, "must He then fly from men Who came to save men!" Then the afflicted Mother knew that already the Prophecy of Simeon concerning her Son began to be verified: *He is set for a sign that shall be contradicted.*—(Luke ii., 34). Seeing that He was no sooner born than He was persecuted unto death, what anguish, writes St. John Chrysostom, must the intimation of that cruel exile of herself and her Son have caused in her heart: "Flee

from thy friends to strangers, from God's temple to the temples of devils. What greater tribulation than that a new-born child, hanging on its mother's neck, and she, too, in poverty, should be forced to fly?"

Any one can imagine what Mary must have suffered on this journey. The distance to Egypt was great. Most authors agree that it was three hundred miles, so that it was a journey of upwards of thirty days. The road was, according to St. Bonaventure's description of it, "rough, unknown, and little frequented." It was in the Winter season; so that they had to travel in snow, rain, and wind, over rough and dirty roads. Mary was then but fifteen years of age—a delicate young maiden, unaccustomed to such journeys. They had no one to attend upon them. St. Peter Chrysologus says: "Joseph and Mary have no servants; they were themselves both masters and servants." O God, what a touching sight must it have been to behold that tender Virgin, with her new-born Babe in her arms, wandering through the world! "But how," asks St. Bonaventure, "did they obtain their food? Where did they repose at night? How were they lodged?" What can they have eaten but a piece of hard bread, either brought by St. Joseph, or begged as an alms? Where can they have slept on such a road unless on the sand or under a tree in a wood, exposed to the cold and the dangers of robbers and wild beasts, with which Egypt abounded? Ah, had anyone met these three greatest Personages in the world, for what could he have taken them but for poor wandering beggars?

They resided in Egypt, according to Brocard and Jansenius, in a district called Matura; though St. Anselm says that they lived in the city of Heliopolis, or at Memphis, now called Cairo. Here let us consider the great poverty they must have suffered during the seven years which, according to St. Antoninus, St. Thomas, and others, they spent in Egypt. They were foreigners, unknown, without revenue, money, or relatives, barely able to support themselves by their humble efforts. "As they were destitute," says St. Basil, "it is evident that

they must have laboured much to provide themselves with the necessaries of life." Landolph of Saxony has moreover written, and let this be a consolation for the poor, that "Mary lived there in the midst of such poverty that at times she had not even a little bread to give to her Son, when, urged by hunger, He asked for it."

The sight, then, of Jesus and Mary wandering as fugitives through the world, teaches us that we also must live as pilgrims here below; detached from the goods which this world offers us, and which we must soon leave to enter eternity: *We have not here a lasting city, but seek one that is to come.*—(Heb. xiii., 14). To which St. Augustine adds: "Thou art a guest: thou givest a look, and passest on." It also teaches us to embrace crosses, for without them we cannot live in this world, Blessed Veronica de Binasco, an Augustinian nun, was carried in spirit to accompany Mary with the Infant Jesus on their journey into Egypt; and after it the divine Mother said: "Daughter, thou hast seen with how much difficulty we have reached this country. Now learn that no one receives graces without suffering." Whoever wishes to lighten the sufferings of this life must go in company with Jesus and Mary: *Take the Child and his mother.* All sufferings become light, and even sweet and desirable to him who by his love bears this Son and this Mother in his heart. Let us, then, love them; let us console Mary by welcoming in our hearts her Son, Whom men even now continue to persecute by their sins.

The most holy Virgin one day appeared to Blessed Colette, a Franciscan nun, and showed her the Infant Jesus torn to pieces, and said: "Thus it is that sinners continually treat my Son, renewing His death and my sorrows. My daughter, pray for them, that they may be converted." To this we may add another vision vouchsafed the Venerable Sister Joanna of Jesus and Mary, also a Franciscan nun. She was one day meditating on the Infant Jesus persecuted by Herod, when she heard a great noise, as of armed men pursuing some one; and immediately she saw before her a most beautiful Child, Who, all out of breath and running, exclaimed: "O my

Joanna, help Me, conceal Me! I am Jesus of Nazareth; I am flying from sinners, who wish to kill Me and persecute Me as Herod did. Do thou save Me.”

Thus, O Mary, even after thy Son has died by the hands of men who persecuted Him unto death, ungrateful sinners have not yet ceased persecuting Him by their sins, and continue to afflict Thee, O sorrowful Mother! And I, O my God, also have been one of these. Ah, my most sweet Mother, obtain me tears to weep over such ingratitude. By the sufferings thou didst endure in that journey to Egypt, assist me in the journey which I am now making to eternity; that I may at length be united to thee in loving my persecuted Saviour in the Kingdom of the Blessed. Amen.

Evening Meditation.

MAN IS A TRAVELLER ON EARTH.

Seeing that on this earth so many miscreants live in prosperity, and so many Saints live in tribulations, the very Gentiles, by the sole aid of the light of nature, came to this conclusion—that, as there is a just God, there must be another life in which the wicked are punished and the good rewarded. But what the Gentiles learned by the light of reason, we Christians know by the light of Faith. *We have not here a lasting city, but we seek one that is to come.*—(Heb. xiii., 14). This earth is not our country; it is for us a place of passage, from which we shall soon go to the house of eternity. *Man shall go into the house of his eternity.*—(Eccles. xii., 5). The house, then, dear reader, from which you inhabit is not your home; it is a hospital, from which you will soon, and when you least expect, be dislodged. Remember that when the time of death has arrived, your dearest relatives will be the first to banish you from it; and what will be your true home? The home of your body will be a grave, in which it will remain till the day of Judgment; but your soul will go to *the house of*

eternity—either to Heaven or to hell. St. Augustine tells you that you are a stranger, a traveller, a spectator. It would be foolishness in a traveller to spend all his patrimony in purchasing a villa, or a house in a country through which he is merely passing, and which he must leave in a few days. Reflect, says the Saint, that in this world you are only on a journey; fix not your affections on what you see; look and pass on, and labour to procure a good house, in which you will have to dwell forever.

Behold, then, O Lord, the home which I have deserved by the life I led. Alas! it is hell, in which, from the first sin I have committed, I ought to dwell, abandoned by Thee, and without having it ever in my power to love Thee. Blessed forever be Thy mercy, which has waited for me, and which now gives me time to repair the evil I have done. O my God, I will no longer abuse Thy patience. I am sorry above all things for having offended Thee, not so much because I have merited hell, as because I have outraged Thy infinite goodness. Never more, my God, never more will I rebel against Thee; I desire death rather than offend Thee.

II.

Happy you, if you save your soul! Oh! how delightful is Heaven! All the princely palaces of this world are but stables compared with the city of Paradise, which alone can be called the *city of perfect beauty*. There you will have nothing to desire; for you will be in the society of the Saints, of the divine Mother, and of Jesus Christ, and will be free from all fear of evil; in a word, you will live in a sea of delights, and in unceasing joy, which will last forever. *Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads!*—(Is. xxxv., 10). This joy shall be so great, that at every moment for all eternity it will appear new. But unhappy you, if you are lost! You will be confined in a sea of fire and of torments, in despair, abandoned by all, and without God. And for how long? Perhaps after the lapse of a hundred thousand years, your pains will have an end? A hundred and a thousand millions of years and ages will pass by, and your hell will always be

at its commencement. What are a thousand years compared with eternity? Less than a day which is gone by. *A thousand years in thy sight are as yesterday, which is past.*—(Ps. lxxxix., 4). Would you wish to know the house which will be your dwelling for eternity? it will be that which you merit, and which you choose for yourself by your works.

O my Sovereign Good! were I now in hell, I could never love Thee, nor couldst Thou love me. I love Thee, and wish to be loved by Thee; this I do not deserve, but Jesus merits it for me because He has offered Himself to Thee in sacrifice on the Cross, that Thou mightest be able to pardon and love me. Eternal Father, give me, then, for the sake of Thy Son, the grace to love Thee, and to love Thee with all my heart. I love Thee, O my Father, Who hast given me Thy Son. I love Thee, O Son of God, Who didst die for me. I love Thee, O Mother of Jesus! who, by thy intercession, hast obtained for me time for repentance. O Mary, obtain for me sorrow for my sins, the love of God, and holy perseverance.

January the Ninth

Morning Meditation.

SALVATION ALONE IS NECESSARY.

The affair of eternal salvation is not only the *most important*, it is the *only affair* to which we have to attend in this life. Only one thing is necessary. If you save your soul, it will do you no harm to have lived here in poverty, afflictions and contempt.

I.

But one thing is necessary.—(Luke x., 42). It is not necessary that in this world we should be honoured with dignities, favoured with riches, with good health, and earthly pleasures; but it is necessary that we should be saved; for there is no middle course—we must either be *saved* or be *damned*. After this short life, we shall be either eternally happy in Heaven, or eternally wretched in hell.

How many worldly persons there are who, loaded with riches and honours in this life, and lifted up to high positions, and even to thrones, now find themselves in hell, where all their fortune in this world serves only to increase their pains and their despair. This is what the Lord warned us of: *Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth destroy.*—(Matt. vi., 19). The acquisition of earthly goods perishes with death; but the acquisition of spiritual goods is an univalued treasure, and is eternal.

God has taught us that He wills the salvation of all, and to all He gives the power of being saved. Miserable is he who is lost; it is all his own doing: *Destruction is thy own, O Israel; thy help is only in me.*—(Osee xiii., 9). And this will be the greatest pain of the damned, the thought that they are lost through their own fault. Fire and the worm (that is, the remorse of conscience) will torture the damned in punishment for their sins, but the worm will forever torment them more terribly than the flame. How much pain do we not suffer through the loss of any object of value—a diamond, a watch, a purse of money—especially when this happens through our own carelessness! We cannot eat or sleep, for thinking of our loss, so long as there is hope of repairing it in some way or other. What, then, will be the torment of one who, through his own fault, has lost God and Paradise, without a hope of ever recovering them!

O my God! what is it that will befall me? Shall I be lost? One lot or the other must be mine. I hope to be saved; but who shall assure me of it? I know that I

have repeatedly deserved hell. Yes, my Saviour, Thy death is my hope.

II.

We have erred from the way.—(Wis. v., 6). The eternal complaint of the souls miserably damned will be: We have gone astray, destroying ourselves of our own accord, and there is no remedy for our error! In most of the misfortunes that occur to persons in this life, a remedy comes with time, or with a change of state, or, at least, through a holy resignation to the will of God. But none of these remedies will help us when we have reached eternity, if in this life we have wandered from the path to Heaven.

Therefore, the Apostle St. Paul exhorts us to labour for our eternal salvation with a continual fear of losing it: *Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.* (Phil. ii., 12). This fear will cause us to walk with caution, and to avoid occasions of evil; it will aid us continually to recommend ourselves to God, and thus we shall be saved. Let us pray the Lord that He will fix this thought in our hearts—that upon the life we lead in this world depends the question whether we shall be eternally blessed or eternally miserable without hope of remedy.

My God, many times have I despised Thy grace; I deserve no mercy, but Thy Prophet teaches me that Thou showest mercy to all who seek Thee. In the past I have fled from Thee; but now I seek nothing, I ask nothing, I love nothing but Thee. Do not despise me in Thy goodness. Remember the Blood Thou hast shed for me. This Blood, and thy intercession, O Mary, Mother of God, are my only hope.

Spiritual Reading.

THE GREAT THOUGHT OF ETERNITY.

St. Augustine called the thought of Eternity *the great thought—Magna cogitatio*. This thought has brought

the Saints to count all the treasures and greatness of this life as nothing more than straw, dust, smoke, and refuse. This thought has sent anchorites to hide themselves in deserts and caves, noble youths, and even kings and emperors, to shut themselves up in cloisters. This thought has given courage to Martyrs to endure the torture of piercing nails and heated irons, and even of being burnt in the fire.

No; we are created not for this earth: the end for which God has placed us in the world is—that with our good deeds we may inherit eternal life. *The end is eternal life.*—(Rom. vi., 22). Therefore, St. Eucherius said that the only affair we should attend to in this life is Eternity; that is, win a happy Eternity, and escape a miserable one: the object for which we contend is Eternity. If assured of this end, we are forever blessed; if we fail in it, forever miserable.

Happy he who lives with Eternity ever in view, in a lively Faith that he must speedily die, and enter upon Eternity. *The just man lives by Faith.*—(Gal. iii., 11). It is Faith that makes the just live in the sight of God, and which gives light to their souls, by withdrawing from them earthly affections, and placing before their thoughts the eternal blessings which God promises to them that love Him.

St. Teresa said that all sins had their origin in a want of Faith. Therefore in order to overcome our passions and temptations, we ought constantly to revive our Faith by saying: *I believe in life everlasting.* I believe that after this life, which will soon be ended, an eternal life awaits me, either full of joys, or full of pains, according to my merits or demerits.

St. Augustine says that the man who thinks of Eternity, and yet is not converted to God, has either lost his senses or his Faith. “O Eternity!” (these are his words), “he that meditates upon thee, and repents not, either has not Faith, or if he has Faith, he has no heart.” In reference to this, St. John Chrysostom relates that the Gentiles, when they saw Christians sinning, thought their

either liars or fools. If you believe not, they said, what you say you believe, you are liars; if you believe in Eternity and sin, you are fools. "Woe to sinners who enter upon Eternity without having known it, because they would not think upon it!" exclaims St. Cæsarius; and then he adds: "But oh, double woe! They enter upon it and they never come forth."

St. Teresa used to say to her disciples: "My children, there is *one soul, one Eternity!*" By which she meant: My children, we have *one soul*, and when that is lost, all is lost; and, *once lost*, it is lost *forever!* In a word, upon the last breath we breathe in dying, depends whether we shall be forever blessed, or forever in despair. If the Eternity of the next life, if Paradise, if hell, were mere fictions of literary men, things of doubtful reality, even then we ought to bestow all our care to live well, and not to risk our soul to be lost forever. But it is not so; these things are not doubtful; they are beyond dispute; they are things of Faith; they are more real than the things we see with our bodily sight.

Let us then pray to our Lord: *Increase our Faith*—(Luke xvii., 5); for we may, if weak in Faith, become worse than Luther or Calvin. On the other hand, one thought of living Faith upon the Eternity that awaits us can make us Saints.

St. Gregory writes that they who meditate on Eternity are neither puffed up by prosperity, nor cast down by adversity; for they desire nothing and fear nothing in this world. When infirmities or persecutions come upon us, let us think of the hell we have deserved through our sins. Thus every cross will seem light, and we shall thank the Lord, saying: *It is the mercy of the Lord that we are not consumed.*—(Lament. iii., 22). And with David: *Unless the Lord had been my helper, my soul had almost dwelt in hell.*—(Ps. xciii., 17). Through myself I was already lost; Thou hast done this, O God of mercy! Thou hast stretched forth Thy hand, and drawn me forth from hell: *Thou hast delivered my soul, that it should not perish.*—(Is. xxxviii., 17).

O my God, Thou knowest how often I have deserved hell; but, notwithstanding, Thou biddest me hope, and I desire to hope. My sins terrify me, but Thy death gives me courage, and Thou dost promise pardon to him that repents. A contrite and humbled heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise. I have dishonoured Thee in the time past, but now I love Thee above all things, and I grieve more than for any other evil, that I have offended Thee. O my Jesus, have mercy upon me. Mary, Mother of God, pray for me.

Evening Meditation.

THE DWELLING OF JESUS IN EGYPT.

Jesus chose to dwell in Egypt during His infancy, that therein He might lead a hard and a more abject life. According to St. Anselm and other writers, the Holy Family lived in Heliopolis. Let us with St. Bonaventure contemplate the life of Jesus during the seven years He remained in Egypt, as was revealed to St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi.

The house is very poor, for St. Joseph has little wherewith to pay rent; their bed is poor, their food poor; their life, in short, is one of strict poverty, for day by day they barely gain their livelihood by the work of their hands, and they live in a country where they are unknown and are despised, having neither relatives nor friends.

The Holy Family does indeed live in great poverty; but oh, how well-ordered are the occupations of these three sojourners! The Holy Infant speaks not with His tongue, but in His Heart He continually speaks to His Heavenly Father, offering all His sufferings, and every moment of His life for our salvation. And Mary does not speak, but at the sight of that dear Infant she meditates on the Divine love, and the favour that God has conferred upon her by choosing her for His Mother. Joseph also works in silence; but at the sight of the

Divine Child his heart is inflamed, and he thanks the Child for having chosen him for the companion and guardian of His life.

O Holy Infant, Who livest in this country of barbarians, poor, unknown, and despised, I acknowledge Thee for my God and Saviour, and I thank Thee for all the humiliations and sufferings Thou didst endure in Egypt for the love of me. By Thy manner of life there Thou dost teach me to live as a pilgrim on this earth, giving me to understand that this is not my country; but that Paradise which Thou hast purchased for me by Thy death, is my home. Ah, my Jesus, I have been ungrateful to Thee because I have thought but little of what Thou hast done and suffered for me. When I think that Thou, the Son of God, didst lead a life of such tribulation upon this earth, so poor and neglected, how is it possible that I should go about seeking the amusements and good things of the earth? Take me, I pray Thee, my dear Redeemer, for Thy companion; admit me to live always united with Thee upon this earth, in order that, united with Thee in Heaven, I may love Thee there, and be Thy companion throughout eternity.

II.

In this house Mary weans Jesus : at first she fed Him from her breast, now she feeds Him with her hands ; she holds Him in her lap, takes from the porringer a little bread soaked in water, and puts it into the sacred mouth of her Son. In this house Mary released her Infant from His swathing-bands, and made Him His first little garments and dressed Him in them. In this house the Child Jesus begins to walk and speak. Let us adore the first steps of the Incarnate Word, and the first words of Eternal Wisdom uttered by Him. Here also He began to do the work of a little servant-boy, occupying Himself in all the little services that a child can render.

Ah, weaning ! ah, little garment ! ah, first steps ! ah, lispings words ! ah, little services of the little Jesus, how do you not wound and inflame the hearts of those who love Jesus and meditate on everything in His life.

Behold God trembling and falling ! God lispings ! God become so weak that He can occupy Himself in nothing but little household affairs, unable even to lift a bit of wood, if too heavy for the strength of a child ! O Holy Faith, enlighten us, and make us love this good Lord, Who for the love of us has submitted Himself to so many miseries ! It is said that on the entrance of Jesus into Egypt all the idols of the country fell down ; oh, let us pray God that He will make us love Jesus from our hearts, since in the soul into which the love of Jesus enters, all idols of earthly affections are overthrown.

Give me light, O God ; increase my Faith. What are riches, or pleasures, or dignities, or honours ! All is vanity and folly. The only real riches, the only real good, is to possess Thee Who art the Infinite Good. Blessed he who loves Thee ! I love Thee, O my Jesus, and I seek none other but Thee. I desire Thee, and Thou desirest me. If I had a thousand kingdoms, I would renounce them all to please Thee. " My God and my All ! " If in times past I have sought after the vanities and pleasures of this world, I now detest them, and am sorry that I have done so. My beloved Saviour, from this day forward Thou shalt be my only delight, my only love, my only treasure. Most holy Mary, pray to Jesus for me. Beseech Him to make me rich in His love alone, and I desire nothing more.

January the Tenth

Morning Meditation.

THE FAILURE TO SAVE ONE'S SOUL IS WITHOUT REMEDY.

An irreparable affair ! No error can be compared with the error of neglecting one's eternal salvation. For all

other failures there is a remedy. If you lose your soul the loss is irreparable, for the soul, once lost, is lost for ever!

I.

No error, says St. Eucherius, can be compared with the error of neglecting eternal salvation. For all other errors there is a remedy: if you lose property in one way, you may recover it in another; if you lose a situation, there may be some means of afterwards regaining it; if your life be but brief, provided your soul be saved, all is safe. But if you lose your soul, the loss is irreparable. Death happens but once; the soul, once lost, is forever lost. Nothing remains but to weep for all eternity with the other miserable wretches in hell, whose greatest torment is the conviction, that the time for repairing their ruin is gone forever. *The summer is over, and we are not saved.*—(Jer. viii., 20). Ask the worldly wise now in that pit of fire, what are their present sentiments; ask them if, condemned to that eternal prison, they feel happy at having made a fortune in this life. Listen to their wailing and lamentation: *We have erred.*—(Wis. v., 6). But of what use is it to know their error now, when there is no remedy for their eternal damnation? Should a man find his palace in ruins, how great would be his pains in reflecting on the impossibility of repairing the evil, when his loss is due only to his own neglect.

The greatest torment of the damned consists in the thought of having lost their souls and of being damned through their own fault. *Destruction is thy own, O Israel.*—(Osee xiii., 9). St. Teresa says that if a person loses a ring or even a trifle through his own fault, his peace is disturbed; he neither eats nor sleeps. O God! how great will be the torture of the damned Christian when, on entering hell and finding himself shut up in that dungeon of torments, he reflects on his misfortune, and sees that for all eternity there will be no relief, no mitigation of pain! He will say: "I have lost my soul! I have lost Paradise! I have lost my God! I have lost all—and all is lost forever! And why? Through my own fault."

Ah my Jesus, remind me always of the death Thou hast suffered for me, and give me confidence. I tremble lest the devil should make me despair at death by bringing before my view the many acts of treason I have committed against Thee. How many promises have I made never more to offend Thee after the light Thou hast given me! and, after all my promises, I have, presuming on pardon, again turned my back upon Thee. Thus have I insulted Thee because Thou didst not chastise me! My Redeemer! give me a great sorrow for my sins before I leave this world. I ask of Thee sorrow and love.

II.

But you will say—If I commit this sin why may I not hope to escape damnation? I may still be saved. Yes; but *you may also be damned*: and it is more likely that you will be damned, for the Scriptures threaten eternal woes to all obstinate traitors, such as you are in your present dispositions. *Woe to you, apostate children, saith the Lord.*—(Is. xxx., 1). *Woe to them, for they have departed from me.*—(Osee vii., 13). By committing this sin, you at least expose your eternal salvation to great danger. And is it an affair to be exposed to risk? There is no question of a house, of a villa, or of a situation. There is question, says St. John Chrysostom, of being sent into an eternity of torments, and of losing an eternity of glory. And will you risk this business of sovereign importance on a *perhaps*?

You say: Perhaps I shall not be lost: I hope that God will hereafter pardon me. But in the meantime what happens? You condemn yourself to hell. Tell me, would you cast yourself into a deep pool of water, saying: Perhaps I shall not be drowned? Surely you would not. Why then risk your eternal salvation on such a groundless hope, on a *perhaps*? Oh! how many has this accursed hope sent to hell! Do you realise that the hope of those who are obstinately determined to commit sin is not *Hope*, but an *illusion* and *presumption*, which move God, not to mercy, but to greater wrath? If you say you are now unable to resist the temptation and passion to whose

domination you submit, how will you resist them hereafter, when, by yielding to sin, your strength will not be increased, but greatly diminished? For, on the one hand, your own malice will render you more blind and obdurate; and, on the other, Divine help will be withdrawn. Do you expect that the more you multiply your sins and insults against God, the more abundantly He will pour upon you His lights and graces?

I am sorry, O Sovereign Good, for having offended Thee. I promise to die a thousand times rather than abandon Thee. But make me in the meantime feel that Thou hast said to me what Thou didst say to Magdalen—*Thy sins are forgiven thee*—by giving me, before death, a great sorrow for all my iniquities, otherwise I fear my death will be troubled and unhappy. *Be not thou a terror unto me; thou art my hope in the day of affliction.*

—(Jer. xvii., 17). O my crucified Jesus! be not a terror to me in my last moments. If I die before I have wept over my sins and have loved Thee, Thy Wounds and Thy Blood will inspire me with fear rather than confidence. I do not ask of Thee consolations and earthly goods during the remainder of my life; I ask of Thee sorrow and love. O my dear Saviour, hear my prayer for the sake of that love which made Thee offer Thy life as a sacrifice for me on Calvary. Mary, my Mother, obtain for me these graces, along with holy perseverance till death.

Spiritual Reading.

AN ADMONITION ADDRESSED TO PERSONS OF ALL STATES WHO DESIRE TO BE SAVED.

God wishes us all to be saved: *Who will have all men to be saved.*—(1 Tim. ii., 4). He is ready to give to all the help necessary for salvation; but He grants it only to those who ask Him, as St. Augustine says: "He gives only to those who ask." Hence it is the common opinion of Theologians, and of the Holy Fathers, that prayer is necessary for adults as a means of salvation; that is to

say, a person who does not pray, but neglects to ask of God the help requisite for overcoming temptations, and for preserving grace already received, cannot be saved.

On the other hand, Our Lord cannot refuse to give grace to those who ask it, because He has promised to do so: *Cry to me, and I will hear thee.*—(Jer. xxxiii., 3). Have recourse to Me, and I will not fail to hear you. Ask of Me all you desire, and you shall obtain it: *Ask, and it shall be given to you.*—(Jo. xv., 7). These promises, however, are not to be understood with reference to temporal goods, because God gives these only when they are for the benefit of the soul; but He has promised absolutely to give spiritual graces to one who asks Him; and having made the promise God will keep it. "By His promise, He has made Himself our debtor," says St. Augustine.

It should also be observed that if God binds Himself by a promise to hear us, He binds us by precept to ask. *Ask, and it shall be given to you.*—(Matt., vii., 7). *We ought always to pray.*—(Luke xviii., 1). These words "ask" and "we ought" convey, as St. Thomas teaches, a grave precept, which is binding for our whole life; but especially is it binding when a man is in danger of death or of falling into sin; because if he does not then have recourse to God, he will certainly be overcome. And he who has already fallen under God's displeasure, commits a fresh sin when he neglects to turn to God for help to rise out of his miserable state. But will God hear him while he is yet His enemy? Yes, He will hear, if the sinner humbles himself, and from his heart prays for pardon; since it is written in the Gospel: *For every one that asketh, receiveth.*—(Luke xi., 10). It says that God has promised to hear all who pray to Him, whether they are just or sinners. In another place God says: *Call upon me . . . and I will deliver thee.*—(Ps. xlix., 15). Call upon Me, and I will deliver thee from hell, to which thou dost stand condemned.

There will be no excuse on the Day of Judgment for one who dies in mortal sin. It will be of no use for him to say that he had not the strength to resist the tempta-

tion which troubled him, because Jesus Christ will answer : If you had not the strength, why did you not ask it of Me, and I should certainly have given it you? If you fell into sin, why did you not have recourse to Me, that I might deliver you from it?

You see, then, if you desire to be saved, and would keep yourself in the grace of God, you must often pray to Him, that He may keep His hand over you. The Council of Trent declares that for a man to persevere in the grace of God, it is not enough that he should have only that general aid which God gives to all, but he must also have that special assistance which can be obtained by holy Prayer. For this reason the Doctors of the Church say, that one is bound, under grievous sin, to recommend himself often to God, and to ask for the grace of holy perseverance at least once a month. And any one who finds himself in the midst of *dangerous occasions* is under the obligation of asking *more frequently* for the grace of perseverance.

It is besides most useful to keep up some particular devotion to the Mother of God, to obtain the grace of perseverance, for she is called the Mother of perseverance. A person who has not this special devotion to the Blessed Virgin will find it very difficult to persevere, for, as St. Bernard says, all divine graces, and especially this grace of perseverance, which is the greatest of all, come to us through the hands of Mary.

Would to God that preachers were more mindful in putting before their hearers this great means of prayer! They ought often to make it their chief subject, besides speaking of it in every discourse. If they omit to do so they will have to render a severe account to God. Many confessors, too, are particular about the resolution their penitents make *not to offend God again*, but few take the trouble to inculcate that *they must pray when they are again tempted to fall*. We must be well persuaded that, when a temptation is violent, if the penitent does not beg for God's assistance, all his resolutions will avail him little. Prayer alone can save him. It is certain that he who prays is saved; he who prays not is damned.

Therefore, I repeat, if you wish to be saved, pray continually to the Lord that He may give you light and strength not to fall into sin. We must be importunate with God, in asking Him for His grace. "This importunity with God is our opportunity," says St. Jerome. Every morning we must beseech Him to keep us from sin during that day. And when any bad thought presents itself to your mind or you are tempted by some dangerous occasion, immediately have recourse to Jesus Christ and the Blessed Virgin, saying : "My Jesus help me ! Most Blessed Virgin, come to my aid !"; It is enough at such a time to pronounce the Names of Jesus and Mary, and the temptation will vanish; but should the temptation continue, persevere in invoking the assistance of Jesus and Mary and you will be victorious.

Evening Meditation.

THE RETURN OF JESUS FROM EGYPT.

I.

According to the common opinion of the Doctors of the Church, Jesus lived as an exile in Egypt for seven years, and then, after the death of Herod, the Angel again appeared to St. Joseph and commanded him to take the Holy Child and His Mother and return to Palestine. St. Joseph, consoled by this command, communicates it to Mary. Before their departure, these holy spouses courteously informed the friends whom they had made in the country. Joseph then collects the few instruments of his trade, Mary her little bundle of clothes, and taking the Divine Child by the hand, they set out on their journey homewards, leading Him between them.

St. Bonaventure considers that this journey was more fatiguing to Jesus than was the flight into Egypt, because He had now grown to boyhood, and on this account Mary and Joseph could not carry Him in their arms on so long a journey, and at the same time the

Holy Child, at that age, was not able to make a long journey. Jesus was therefore obliged through fatigue, frequently to stop and rest on the way. But Joseph and Mary, whether they walk or sit, always keep their eyes and thoughts fixed upon the beloved little Child, Who was the object of all their love. Oh, with what recollection does that happy soul pass through this life who keeps before its eyes the love and the example of Jesus Christ!

Beloved and adored Child, Thou dost return to Thy country; but whither, O God, whither dost Thou return? Thou comest to that place where Thy countrymen prepare for Thee insults during life, and scourges, thorns, and a Cross at Thy death. All this was already present to Thy divine eyes, O my Jesus! and yet Thou comest of Thy own will to meet that Passion which men prepare for Thee. My beloved Redeemer, if Thou hadst not come to die for me, I could not go to love Thee in Paradise, but must have always remained far away from Thee. I acknowledge that hell would be but a slight punishment for me. But Thou hast waited to pardon me. I thank Thee, O my Redeemer; I repent, and detest all the offences I have committed against Thee. O Lord, I beseech Thee, deliver me from hell. Ah, if I were miserable enough to damn myself, how would my torments in hell be increased by the remorse caused by my having meditated during life on the love Thou hast borne me!

II.

The holy Pilgrims interrupt, at times, the silence of this journey by some holy conversation; but with whom and of whom do they converse? They speak only with Jesus and of Jesus. He who has Jesus in his heart, speaks only with Jesus or only of Him.

Consider again the pain that our little Saviour must have endured during the nights of this long journey, in which He had no longer the bosom of Mary for His bed, as in His flight, but the bare ground; and for His food He had no more milk, but a little hard bread, too hard

for His tender age. He was probably also afflicted by thirst, for, in this desert the Jews had been in such want of water, that a miracle was necessary to supply them with it. Let us contemplate and lovingly adore all these sufferings of the Child Jesus.

I love Thee now, dear Jesus, but I love Thee too little. Thou dost merit an infinite love. Grant at least that I may love Thee with all my strength. Ah, my Saviour, my Joy, my Life, my All, whom should I love if I love not Thee, the infinite Good? I consecrate all my wishes to Thy will; at the sight of the sufferings Thou hast undergone for me, I offer myself to suffer as much as it shall please Thee. *Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*—(Matt. vi., 13). Deliver me from sin, and then dispose of me as Thou wilt. I love Thee, infinite Good, and I am content to receive any punishment, even to be annihilated, rather than live without loving Thee.

Second Friday of January

Morning Meditation.

THE GOODS OF THIS WORLD ARE FALSE GOODS.

St. Teresa used to say that nothing that *ends* ought to be considered of any consequence. Death approaches, the curtain falls, the scene closes, and thus all things come to an end. Let us therefore strive to gain that fortune which will not fail with time.

I.

What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul.—(Matt. xvi., 26). O great maxim, which has conducted so many souls to Heaven, and given so many Saints to the Church! What

doth it profit us to gain the whole world, which passes away, and lose the soul, which is eternal?

The world! And what is this world but mere show—a scene which quickly passes away? *The fashion of this world passeth away.*—(1 Cor. vii., 31). Death approaches, the curtain falls, the scene closes, and thus all things come to an end!

Alas! at the hour of death, how will all worldly things appear to a Christian—those silver vessels, those heaps of money, that rich and vain furniture—when he must leave them all forever?

O Jesus! grant that henceforward my soul may be wholly Thine; grant that I may love no other but Thee. I desire to renounce all things before death tears me away from them.

What does it avail a man to be happy for a few days (if anything can be called happiness without God), if afterwards he must be unhappy forever?

David says that earthly goods, at the hour of death, will seem as a dream to one waking from sleep: *As the dream of them that awake.*—(Ps. lxxii., 20). What disappointment does he feel who, having dreamt that he was a king, on awaking finds himself still lowly and poor as ever!

O my God! who knows but that this Meditation which I am now reading may be the last call for me? Enable me to root out of my heart all earthly affections, before I enter into eternity. Grant that I may be sensible of the great wrong that I have done Thee, by offending Thee, and by forsaking Thee for the love of creatures. *Father, I am not worthy to be called thy son.*—(Luke xv., 21). I am grieved for having turned my back upon Thee; do not reject me, now that I return to Thee.

II.

No post of honour, no pomps, no riches, no amusements, will console a Christian at the hour of death; the love of Jesus Christ, and the little that he has suffered for His love, will alone console him.

Phillip II., when dying, said: "Oh that I had been a Lay-brother in some monastery, and not a king!" Philip III. said: "Oh that I had lived in a desert! for now I shall appear but with little confidence before the tribunal of God." Thus do those express themselves at the hour of death, who have been esteemed the most fortunate in this world.

In short, all earthly goods acquired during life generally end at the hour of death in remorse of conscience and fears of eternal damnation. O God! will the dying sinner say, I have had sufficient light to direct me to withdraw myself from the world, but yet I have followed the world, and the maxims of the world; and now what sentence will be pronounced upon me? Fool that I have been! I might have been a Saint, with the opportunities and advantages that I enjoyed! I might have led a happy life in union with God; and now what do I get from my past life? But when will he say this? When the scene is about to close, and he is entering eternity—at the very moment on which will depend his happiness or misery forever!

O Lord, have pity on me! In the past I have not been so wise as to love Thee. From this day forward, Thou alone shalt be my only Good. My God and my All! Thou alone deservest all my love, and Thee alone will I love.

Spiritual Reading.

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

I.—WHAT THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST HAS DONE FOR GOD AND FOR US.

Father Balthassar Alvarez, a great servant of God, used to say that we must not think we have made any progress in the way of God until we have come to keep Jesus crucified ever in our heart. And St. Francis de Sales said that "the love which does not spring from

the Passion is feeble." Yes, because we cannot have a more powerful motive for loving God than the Passion of Jesus Christ, by which we know that the Eternal Father, to prove His exceeding love for us, was pleased to send His only-begotten Son upon earth to die for us sinners. Hence the Apostle says that God, through the excess of love wherewith He loved us, willed that the death of His Son should convey life to us: *For his exceeding charity wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together in Christ*—(Ephes. ii., 4). And this was precisely the expression used by Moses and Elias on Mount Tabor, in speaking of the Passion of Jesus Christ. They did not know how to give it any other appellation than an excess of love: *And they spoke of his excess, which he should consume in Jerusalem*.—(Luke, ix., 31).

When our Saviour came into the world, the shepherds heard the Angels singing: *Glory to God in the highest*.—(Luke ii., 14). But the humiliation of the Son of God in becoming Man through His love for man, might have seemed rather to obscure than to manifest the Divine glory; but no; and there was no means by which the glory of God could have been better manifested in the world than by Jesus Christ dying for the salvation of mankind, since the Passion of Jesus Christ has made us realize how great is the Mercy of God, in that a God was willing to die to save sinners, and to die, moreover, by a death so painful and ignominious. St. John Chrysostom says that the Passion of Jesus Christ was not an ordinary suffering, nor His death like the death of other men.

It has made us know the Divine Wisdom. Had our Redeemer been merely God, He could not have made satisfaction for man; for God could not make satisfaction to Himself in place of man; nor could God make satisfaction by means of suffering, being impassible. On the other hand, had He been merely man, man could not have made satisfaction for the grievous injury done by him to the Divine Majesty. What, then, did God do? He sent His very own Son, true God as the Father, to

take human flesh, that as Man He might by His death pay the debt due to the divine Justice, and as God might make full satisfaction to it.

It has, moreover, made us understand how great is Divine Justice. St. John Chrysostom says that God reveals to us the greatness of His Justice, not so much by hell in which He punishes sinners, as by the sight of Jesus on the Cross; since in hell creatures are punished for the sins of their own, but on the Cross we behold a God cruelly treated in order to make satisfaction for the sins of men. What obligation had Jesus Christ to die for us? *He was offered because it was his own will*.—(Is. liii., 7). He might justly have abandoned man to his perdition; but His love for us would not let Him see us lost; wherefore He chose to give Himself up to so painful a death in order to obtain for us salvation: *He hath loved us, and delivered himself up for us*.—(Eph. v., 2).

From all eternity He loved man: *I have loved thee with an everlasting love*.—(Jer. xxxi., 3). But then, seeing that His Justice obliged Him to condemn man, and to keep him at a distance, separated from Himself in hell, His Mercy urged Him to find a way by which He might be able to save him. But how? By making satisfaction Himself to the divine Justice by His own death. And consequently He willed that there should be affixed to the Cross whereon He died the sentence of condemnation to eternal death which man had merited, in order that it might remain there, cancelled in His Blood. *Blotting out the writing of the decree that was against us, which was contrary to us, he hath taken the same out of the way, fastening it to the cross*.—(Col. ii., 14). And thus, through the merits of His own Blood, He pardons all our sins: *Forgiving you all offences*.—(Col. ii., 13). And at the same time He despoils the devils of the rights they had acquired over us, carrying along with Him in triumph not only ourselves, but even our enemies, whose prey we had become. *And despoiling the principalities and powers, he hath exposed them confidently in open show, triumphing over them in him-*

self.—(Col. ii., 15). On which Theophylact comments : “As a Conqueror in triumph, carrying with Him the booty and the enemy.”

Hence, when satisfying divine Justice on the Cross, Jesus Christ speaks but of Mercy. He prays His Father to have mercy on the very Jews who had contrived His death, and on His murderers who were putting Him to death : *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*—(Luke xxiii., 34). While He was on the Cross, instead of punishing the two thieves, who had just before reviled Him—*And they that were crucified with him reviled him.*—(Mark xv., 32)—when He heard one asking for mercy : *Lord, remember me when thou shalt come into thy kingdom.*—(Luke xxiii., 42), overflowing with mercy, He promised him Paradise that very day : *This day thou shalt be with me in paradise.*—(Luke xxiii., 43). Then, before He expired, He gave to us, in the person of St. John, His own Mother to be our Mother : *He saith to the disciple : Behold thy mother.*—(Jo. xix., 27). There upon the Cross He declares Himself content in having done everything to obtain salvation for us, and He completes the sacrifice by His death : *Afterwards Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished . . . said : It is consummated ; and bowing his head he gave up the ghost.*—(Jo. xix., 28).

And behold, by the death of Jesus Christ, man is set free from sin and from the power of the devil ; and, moreover, is raised to grace, and to a greater degree of grace than Adam lost : *And where sin abounded, says St. Paul, grace did more abound.*—(Rom. v., 20). It remains therefore for us, writes the Apostle, to have frequent recourse with all confidence to the throne of grace, which Jesus crucified is, in order to receive from His Mercy the grace of salvation, together with aid to overcome the temptations of the world and of hell : *Let us go therefore with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace in seasonable aid.*—(Heb. iv., 16).

Evening Meditation.

II.—WHAT THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST REQUIRES OF US.

I.

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

It was for this end, says St. Paul, that Jesus Christ died, that each of us should no longer live to the world or to himself, but to Him alone Who has given Himself wholly to us. *And Christ died for all, that they who live may not now live to themselves, but to him who died for them.*—(2 Cor. v., 15). He who lives to the world seeks to please the world ; he who lives to himself seeks to please himself ; but he who lives to Jesus Christ seeks only to please Jesus Christ, and fears only to displease Him. His only joy is to see Him loved ; his only sorrow, to see Him despised. This is to live to Jesus Christ ; and this is what He claims from each one of us. I repeat, does He claim too much from us, after having given us His Blood and His life?

Ah, my Jesus, I love Thee above all things, and whom would I wish to love if I love not Thee, Who art infinite Goodness, and Who hast died for me. Would that I could die of grief every time I think of how I have so often driven Thee away from my soul by my sins, and separated myself from Thee, Who art my only Good, and Who hast loved me so much. *Who shall separate us*

from the *charity of Christ?*—(Rom. viii., 35). It is sin only that can separate me from Thee. But I hope in the Blood Thou hast shed for me, that Thou wilt never allow me to separate myself from Thy love, and to lose Thy grace, which I prize more than every other good. I give myself wholly to Thee. Do Thou accept me, and draw all my affections to Thyself, that so I may love none but Thee.

II.

Why, then, O my God! do we employ our affections in loving creatures, relatives, friends, the great ones of the world, who have never suffered for us scourges, thorns, or nails, nor shed one drop of blood for us; and not in loving a God, Who for love of us came down from Heaven and was made Man, and has shed all His Blood for us in the midst of torments, and finally died of grief upon a Cross, in order to win to Himself our hearts! Moreover, in order to unite Himself more closely to us, He has left Himself, after His death, upon our altars, where He makes Himself one with us, that we may understand how burning is the love wherewith He loves us? “He hath mingled Himself with us,” exclaims St. John Chrysostom, “that we may be one and the same thing; for this is the desire of those who ardently love.” And St. Francis de Sales, speaking of the Holy Communion, adds: “There is no action in which we can think of our Saviour as more tender or more loving than this in which He, as it were, annihilates Himself, and reduces Himself to food, in order to unite Himself to the hearts of His faithful ones.”

But how comes it, O Lord, that I, after having been loved by Thee to such an excess, have had the heart to despise Thee? According to Thy just reproach: *I have brought up children, and exalted them, but they have despised me*—(Is. i., 2), I, too, have dared to turn my back upon Thee, in order to gratify my senses. *Thou hast cast me behind thy back.*—(Ezech. xxiii., 35). I have dared to drive Thee from my soul. *The wicked have said to God: Depart from us.*—(Job xxi., 14). I

have dared to afflict that Heart of Thine which has loved me so much. And what am I now to do? Ought I to be distrustful of Thy Mercy? I curse the days wherein I dishonoured Thee. Oh, would that I had died a thousand times, O my Saviour, rather than that I had ever offended Thee! O Lamb of God! Thou hast bled to death upon the Cross to wash away our sins in Thy Blood. O sinners! what would you not pay on the day of Judgment for one drop of the Blood of this Lamb! O my Jesus! have pity on me, and pardon me; but Thou knowest my weakness; take, then, my will that it may never more rebel against Thee. Expel from me all love that is not for Thee. I choose Thee alone for my Treasure and my only Good. Thou art sufficient for me, and I desire no other good but Thee. *The God of my heart, and the God that is my portion forever.*—(Ps. lxxii., 26).

O little Sheep beloved of God (so used St. Teresa to call the Blessed Virgin), who art the Mother of the divine Lamb, recommend me to thy Son. Thou, after Jesus, art my hope; for thou art the hope of sinners. Into thy hands I entrust my eternal salvation. *Spes nostra, salve!*

Second Saturday of January

Morning Meditation.

THE LOSS OF JESUS IN THE TEMPLE.

Our Lord, having given us the Blessed Virgin Mary as a model of perfection, it was necessary that she should be laden with sorrows, that in her we may admire heroic patience and endeavour to imitate it. The loss of her Son in the Temple was one of the greatest sorrows that Mary had to endure in her life. *Therefore do I weep,*

and my eyes run down with water because the Comforter, the relief of my soul, is far from me.—(Lament. i., 16).

I.

St. Luke relates that Mary and Joseph went every year to Jerusalem on the Feast of the Pasch, and took the Infant Jesus with them. It was the custom, says the Venerable Bede, when the Jews made this journey to the Temple, or at least on the return journey, for the men to be separated from the women; and the children went at their pleasure, either with their fathers or their mothers. Our Redeemer, Who was then twelve years old, remained during this Solemnity for three days in Jerusalem. Mary thought He was with Joseph, and Joseph that He was with Mary: *Thinking that he was in the company.*—(Luke ii., 44).

The Holy Child employed all these three days in honouring His Eternal Father, by fasts, vigils, and prayers, and in being present at the sacrifices, all of which were figures of His own great Sacrifice on the Cross. If He took a little food, says St. Bernard, He must have procured it by begging; and if He took any repose, He could have no other bed but the bare ground.

When Mary and Joseph had come a day's journey, they did not find Jesus; wherefore, full of sorrow, they began to seek Him amongst their relatives and friends. At last, returning to Jerusalem, after three days they found Him in the Temple, disputing with the Doctors, who, full of astonishment, admired the questions and answers of this wonderful Child. On seeing Him Mary said: *Son why hast thou done so to us? Behold thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.*—(Luke ii., 48).

O Mary, thou weepst because thou hast lost thy Son for a few days; He has withdrawn Himself from thy eyes, but not from thy heart. Dost thou not see that the pure love with which thou lovest Him keeps Him constantly united and bound to thee? Thou knowest well that he who loves God cannot but be loved by God, Who says: *I love those that love me*—(Prov. viii., 17); and with St.

John: *He that abideth in charity abideth in God, and God in him.*—(Jo. iv., 16). Wherefore, then, dost thou fear? Wherefore dost thou weep? Leave those tears to me, who have so often lost God through my own fault, by driving Him away from my soul. O my Jesus! how could I offend Thee thus with my eyes open, when I knew that by sinning I should lose Thee?

II.

There is not upon earth a sorrow like to that which is felt by a soul that loves Jesus, when she fears that Jesus Christ has withdrawn Himself from her through some fault of her own. This was the sorrow of Mary and Joseph, which afflicted them so much during these days; for they feared, in their humility, as says the devout Lanspergius, that perhaps they had rendered themselves unworthy of the care of such a treasure. Wherefore, on seeing Him, Mary said to Him, in order to express this sorrow: *Son, why hast thou done so to us? Behold thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.* And Jesus answered: *Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?*—(Luke ii., 49).

Let us learn from this Mystery two lessons: the first, that we must leave all our friends and relatives when the glory of God is in question; and secondly, that God easily makes Himself found by those who seek Him: *The Lord is good to the soul that seeketh him.*—(Lam. iii., 25).

Thou wilt not that the heart that seeks Thee should despair, but rather that it should rejoice: *Let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord.*—(Ps. civ., 8). If hitherto I have forsaken Thee, O my Love, I will now seek Thee, and will seek none but Thee. And provided I possess Thy grace, I renounce all the goods and pleasures of this world; I renounce even my own life. Thou hast said that Thou lovest him who loves Thee; I love Thee, do Thou also love me. I esteem Thy love more than the dominion of the whole world. O my Jesus, I desire not to lose Thee any more; but I cannot trust myself, I trust in Thee: *In thee, O Lord, have I put my trust; I shall not be confounded forever.*—(Ps. xxx., 6). I be-

seech Thee, do Thou bind me to Thee, and permit me not to be again separated from Thee. O Mary, through thee have I found my God, Whom I had once lost; do thou obtain for me also holy perseverance; wherefore I will also say to thee with St. Bonaventure: "In thee, O Lady, have I hoped; let me not be confounded forever."

Spiritual Reading.

THE THIRD SWORD OF SORROW.

(*The Third Dolour*).

There are some who assert, and not without reason, that this Dolour was not only one of the greatest, but the greatest and most painful of all.

For, in the first place, Mary, in her other Dolours, had Jesus with her; she suffered when St. Simeon prophesied to her in the Temple; she suffered in the Flight into Egypt; but still in company with Jesus. But in this Dolour she suffered far from Jesus, not knowing where He was: *And the light of my eyes itself is not with me.*—(Ps. xxxvii., 11). Thus weeping she then said: "Ah, the light of my eyes, my dear Jesus, is no longer with me; He is far from me, and I know not whither He is gone!" Origen says, that through the love which this holy Mother bore her Son, "she suffered more in this loss of Jesus than any Martyr ever suffered in the separation of his soul from his body." Ah, too long indeed were those three days for Mary; they seemed three ages; they were all bitterness, for there was none to comfort her. And who can ever comfort me, she said with the Prophet, far from me? And therefore my eyes can never weep enough: *Therefore do I weep, and my eyes run down with water, because the Comforter . . . is far from me.*—(Lam. i., 16). And with Tobias she repeated: *What manner of joy shall be to me who sit in darkness and see not the light of heaven.*—(Tob. v., 12).

In the second place, Mary, in all her other Sorrows, well understood their cause—the Redemption of the world, the Divine will; but in this she knew not the cause of the absence of her Son. "The sorrowful Mother," says Lانسپريوس, "was grieved at the absence of Jesus, because, in her humility, she considered herself unworthy to remain longer with or to attend upon Him on earth, and have the charge of so great a Treasure." "And who knows," she thought within herself, "maybe I have not served Him as I ought; perhaps I have been guilty of some negligence, for which He has left me." "They sought Him," says Origen, "lest perchance He had entirely left them." It is certain that, to a soul that loves God, there can be no greater pain than the fear of having displeased Him. Therefore in this Sorrow alone did Mary complain, lovingly expostulating with Jesus, after she had found Him: *Son, why hast thou done so to us? Thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.*—

(Luke ii., 48). By these words she had no thought of reproving Jesus, as heretics blasphemously assert, but only meant to express to Him the grief proceeding from the great love she bore Him, which she had experienced during His absence: "It was not a rebuke," says Denis the Carthusian, "but a loving complaint."

In fine, this sword so cruelly pierced the heart of the most holy Virgin, that the Blessed Benvenuta, desiring one day to share the holy Mother's pain in this Dolour, and entreating her for this favour, Mary appeared to her with the Infant Jesus in her arms; but while Benvenuta was enjoying the sight of this most beautiful Child, in a moment she was deprived of it. So great was her grief that she had recourse to Mary, entreating her to mitigate it, that it might not cause her death. In three days the holy Virgin again appeared, and said: "Know, my daughter, that thy sorrow is only a small part of that which I endured when I lost my Son."

This sorrow of Mary ought, in the first place, to serve as a consolation to those souls who are desolate, and no longer enjoy, as they once enjoyed, the sweet presence of their Lord. They may weep, but they should weep in

peace, as Mary wept over the absence of her Son; and let them take courage and not fear that on this account they have lost the divine favour; for God Himself assured St. Teresa, that "no one is lost without knowing it; and that no one is deceived without wishing to be deceived." If Our Lord withdraws Himself from the sight of a soul that loves Him, He does not, therefore, depart from the heart; He often conceals Himself from a soul, that it may seek Him with a more ardent desire and greater love. But whoever wishes to find Jesus must seek Him, not amidst delights and pleasures of the world, but amidst crosses and mortifications, as Mary sought Him. *We sought thee sorrowing*, as Mary said to her Son. "Learn then, from Mary," says Origen, "to seek Jesus."

Moreover, in this world she would seek no other good than Jesus. Job was not unhappy when he lost all that he possessed on earth; riches, children, health and honours, and even descended from a throne to a dung-hill; but because he had God with him, he was even then happy. St. Augustine says: he had lost what God had given him, but he still had God Himself." Truly miserable and unhappy are those souls that have lost God. If Mary wept over the absence of her Son for three days, how should sinners weep, who have lost divine grace, and to whom God says: *You are not my people, and I will not be yours.*—(Osee i., 9). For this is the effect of sin; it separates the soul from God: *Your iniquities have divided between you and your God.*—(Is. lix., 2). Hence, if sinners possess all the riches of the earth, but have lost God, all, even in this world, becomes vanity and affliction to them, as Solomon confessed: *Behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.*—(Eccles. i., 14). But the greatest misfortune of these poor blind souls is, as St. Augustine observes, that if they lose an ox, they do not fail to go in search of it; if they lose a sheep, they use all diligence to find it; if they lose a beast of burden, they cannot rest; but when they lose their God, Who is the supreme Good, they eat and drink and repose.

It is related that in India a young man was leaving his room with the intention of committing a sin, when he

heard a voice saying: "Stop! whither art thou going?" He turned around, and saw an image in relief, representing our Lady of Sorrows, who, drawing out the sword which was in her breast, said: "Take this dagger and pierce my heart, rather than wound my Son by committing such a sin!" On hearing these words the youth prostrated himself on the ground, and bursting into tears, with deep sorrow, asked and obtained pardon from God and our Blessed Lady.

Evening Meditation.

"HE WAS SUBJECT TO THEM."

I.

St. Joseph, on his return to Palestine, heard that Archelaus reigned in Judea instead of his father, Herod, whereupon he was afraid to go and live there; and being warned in a dream, he went to live in Nazareth, a city of Galilee, and there in a poor little cottage he fixed his dwelling. O blessed house of Nazareth, I salute and venerate thee! There will come a time when thou wilt be visited by the great ones of the earth: when the pilgrims find themselves inside thy poor walls, they will never be satisfied with shedding tears of tenderness at the thought that within them the King of Paradise passed nearly all His life.

O my adorable Infant, I see Thee an humble servant-boy, working even in the sweat of Thy brow in this poor shop. I understand it all; Thou art serving and working for me. But since Thou dost employ Thy whole life for the love of me, so grant, I pray Thee, my dear Saviour, that I may employ all the rest of my life for Thy love. Look at my past life: it has been a life of sorrow and tears both for me and for Thee—a life of disorder, a life of sin. Oh, permit me at least to keep Thee company during the remainder of my days, and to labour and suffer with Thee in the shop of Nazareth, and afterwards

to die with Thee on Calvary, embracing that death which Thou hast destined for me. My dear Jesus, my love, suffer me not to leave and forsake Thee again, as I have done in times past.

II.

In this house, then, the Incarnate Word lived during the remainder of His infancy and youth. And how did He live? Poor and despised by men, performing the offices of a common working-boy, and obeying Joseph and Mary : *and he was subject to them.*—(Luke ii., 51). O God, how touching it is to think that in this poor house the Son of God lives as a servant ! Now He goes to fetch water ; then He opens or shuts the shop ; now He sweeps the room ; now He collects the shavings for the fire ; now He labours in assisting Joseph at his trade. O wonder ! To see God sweeping ! God serving as a boy ! O thought that ought to make us all burn with holy love for our Redeemer, Who has reduced Himself to such humiliations in order to gain our love !

Let us adore all these servile actions of Jesus, which were all divine. Let us adore, above all, the hidden life that Jesus Christ led in the house of Nazareth ! O proud men, how can you desire to make yourselves seen and honoured, when you behold your God, Who spends thirty years of His life in poverty, hidden and unknown, to teach us the love of retirement and of a humble and a hidden life !

O my God, Thou art suffering such poverty in a shop, hidden, unknown, despised ; and I, a vile worm, have gone about seeking honours and pleasures, and for the sake of these have separated myself from Thee, O sovereign Good ! Now, my Jesus, I love Thee ; and because I love Thee I will not remain any longer separated from Thee. I renounce all things, in order to unite myself to Thee, my hidden and despised Redeemer. Thy grace gives me more happiness than have all the vanities and pleasures of the world, for which I have so miserably forsaken Thee. Eternal Father, for the merits of Jesus Christ, unite me to Thyself by the gift of Thy

holy love. Most holy Virgin, how blessed wert thou, who, being the companion of thy Son in this poor and hidden life, didst make thyself so like to thy Jesus ! O my Mother, grant that I also, at least during the short remainder of my life, may endeavour to become like to thee and to my Redeemer. Amen.

First Sunday after Epiphany

(The Feast of the Holy Family).

Morning Meditation.

JESUS AT NAZARETH.

And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and grace with God and men.—(Gospel of Feast. Luke, ii., 42—52).

Every word, every action of Jesus was so holy that it filled all with love for Him, but especially Mary and Joseph who were constantly observing Him. A God serving as a boy ! A God working, and sweating as He planes a piece of wood ! Ought not the mere thought of this to move our hearts to love Him !

I.

St. Luke, speaking of the life of the Infant Jesus in the house of Nazareth, writes : *And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age, and grace with God and men.*—(Luke ii., 52). As Jesus grew in age, so did He increase in wisdom ; not that He went on every year acquiring knowledge of things, as is the case with us ; for, from the first moment

of His life, Jesus was full of all Divine knowledge and wisdom : *In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*—(Col. ii., 3). But it is said that He advanced, because every day as He advanced in age He manifested more and more His sublime wisdom.

Thus it is also said that He advanced in grace with God and men ; with God, because all His divine actions, though they did not render Him more holy or increase His merit—since Jesus was from the first full of sanctity and merit, of Whose fulness we have received all graces : *of his fulness we have all received*—(Jo. i., 16);—yet, nevertheless, these operations of the Redeemer were all sufficient in themselves to increase His grace and merit.

Grow, my beloved Jesus, grow continually for me ; grow to teach me Thy virtues by Thy divine example ; grow to consummate the great sacrifice on the Cross, on which depends my eternal salvation ! Grant also my Saviour, that I, too, may grow more in Thy love and grace. Miserable that I have been, my ingratitude has only increased towards Thee Who hast loved me so much. O my Jesus, grant that in future it may be just the contrary with me ; Thou knowest all my weakness, it is from Thee that I must receive light and strength. Make me know the claims which Thou hast to my love. Thou art a God of infinite beauty and of infinite majesty, Who didst not refuse to come down upon this earth and become Man for us, and for our sakes to lead a life abject and painful, and to end it by a most cruel death. And where can we ever find an object more amiable and more worthy of love than Thee ? Fool that I was, in times past I refused to know Thee, and therefore I lost Thee. I implore Thy pardon ; I am heartily sorry, and I am determined to be entirely devoted to Thee in future.

II.

He advanced also in grace with men, increasing in beauty and amiability. Oh, how Jesus showed Himself more and more amiable every day of His youth, showing more and more every day the claims He had upon men's

love ! With what delight did the holy Youth obey Mary and Joseph ! With what recollection of mind did He work ! With what moderation did He partake of food ! With what modesty did He speak ! With what sweetness and affability did He converse with all ! With what devotion did He pray ! In a word, every action, every word, every movement of Jesus, inflamed with love the hearts of all those who beheld Him, and especially of Mary and Joseph, who had the good fortune to see Him always at their side. Oh, how these holy spouses remained always intent in contemplating and admiring the operations, the words, and gestures of this Man-God !

Look at Jesus growing towards manhood, how busily He toils and labours, in helping Joseph in his trade of a carpenter ! Who can ever attentively consider Jesus, that beautiful Youth, fatiguing and exhausting Himself in bringing into form some rough-hewn piece of wood, and not exclaim : But, most sweet Youth, art Thou not that God, Who by a word didst create the world out of nothing ? And how comes it that Thou hast laboured now for a whole day, bathed in sweat, to fashion this piece of wood ; and even still Thy work remains unfinished ? What has reduced Thee to such a state of weakness ? O Holy Faith ! O Divine Love ! O God ! O God ! how such a thought as this, if once well mastered, would suffice, not only to inflame us, but to reduce us, so to speak, to ashes with the fire of love ! Has a God, then, come to such a pass as this ? And wherefore ? To make Himself loved by men !

O most amiable Infant Jesus, God and Man, it was Thy burning love for me which urged Thee to do all this. I give Thee thanks ; and I beseech Thee, by Thy Incarnation, to give me the grace to correspond to such great goodness.

O my sweetest Love, I am sorry that I have offended Thee. I desire to be always faithful in Thy service ; enkindle in me Thy love ; make me chaste and holy.

Spiritual Readings.

MARY'S POVERTY.

Our most loving Redeemer, that we might learn from Him to despise the things of the world, was pleased to be poor on earth: *Being rich*, says St. Paul, *he became poor for your sake, that through his poverty you might be rich.*—(2 Cor. viii., 9). Therefore doth Jesus Christ exhort each one who desires to be His disciple: *If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor . . . and come, follow me.*—(Matt. xix., 21).

Behold Mary, His most perfect disciple, who indeed imitated His example. Father Canisius proves that Mary could have lived in comfort on the property she inherited from her parents, but she preferred to remain poor, and reserving only a small portion for herself, distributed the rest in alms to the Temple and the poor. Many authors are of opinion that Mary even made a Vow of Poverty; and we know that she herself said to St. Bridget: "from the beginning I vowed in my own heart that I would never possess anything on earth."

The gifts received from the holy Magi cannot certainly have been of small value; but we are assured by St. Bernard that she distributed them to the poor through the hands of St. Joseph. That the divine Mother immediately disposed of these gifts is evident from the fact that, at her Purification in the Temple, she did not offer a lamb, which was the offering prescribed in Leviticus for those who could afford it, *for a son she shall bring a lamb*—(Lev. xii., 6); but she offered two turtle-doves, or two pigeons, which was the oblation prescribed for the poor: *And to offer a sacrifice, according as it is written in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons.*—(Luke ii., 24). Mary herself said to St. Bridget: "All that I could get I gave to the poor, and only reserved a little food and clothing for myself."

Out of love for poverty she did not disdain to marry St. Joseph, who was only a poor carpenter, and after-

wards to maintain herself by the work of her hands, spinning or sewing, as we are assured by St. Bonaventure. The Angel, speaking of Mary, told St. Bridget that "worldly riches were of no more value in her eyes than mire." In a word, she lived always poor, and she died poor; for at her death we do not know that she left anything but her two poor gowns, to two women who had served her during her life, as it is recorded by Metaphrastes and Nicephorus.

St. Philip Neri used to say that "he who loves the things of the world will never become a Saint." We may add what St. Teresa says on the same subject, that "it justly follows that he who runs after perishable things, should also himself be lost." But, on the other hand, she adds, that the virtue of poverty is a treasure which comprises in itself all other treasures. She says the "virtue of poverty"; for, as St. Bernard remarks, this virtue does not consist only in *being poor*, but in *loving poverty*. Therefore did Jesus Christ say: *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*—(Matt. v., 3). They are blessed because they desire nothing but God, and in God they find every good; in poverty they find their Paradise on earth, as St. Francis did when He exclaimed: "My God and my All."

Let us, then, as St. Augustine exhorts us, "love that one Good in which all good things are found," and address our Lord in the words of St. Ignatius: "Give me only Thy love and Thy grace, and I am rich enough."

When we have to suffer from poverty, let us console ourselves, says St. Bonaventure, with the thought that Jesus and His Mother were also poor like ourselves.

Ah, my most holy Mother, thou hadst indeed reason to say that God was thy joy: *and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour*—(Luke i., 47); for in this world thou didst desire and love no other good but God. *Draw me after thee.*—(Cant. i., 3). O Lady, detach me from the world, that I may love Him alone, Who alone deserves to be loved. Amen.

Evening Meditation.

JOSEPH'S LOVE FOR MARY AND JESUS.

I.

Consider, in the first place, the love which Joseph bore to his holy spouse. Of all the women who had ever lived, she was the most beautiful. She was more humble, more meek, more pure, more obedient, more inflamed with the love of God, than all Angels or all men who have been, or shall be, created. Hence she merited all the affections of Joseph, who was so great a lover of virtue. Add to this, the tenderness with which he saw himself loved by Mary, who certainly loved her own spouse above all creatures. Besides, Joseph regarded her as the beloved of God, chosen to be the Mother of His only-begotten Son. Consider how great must have been the affection which, for all these reasons, the just and grateful heart of Joseph entertained for so amiable a spouse as Mary.

Consider, secondly, the love which Joseph bore to Jesus. Having given to our Saint the place of father to Jesus, God must certainly have infused into the heart of Joseph the love of a father, and of a father of a Son so amiable, a Son Who was also God. Hence the love of Joseph was not purely human, like the love of other fathers, but a love superhuman; for he found in the same person One Who behaved like his son, and yet was his God. Joseph knew from the Angel, by a divine revelation, that the Child by Whom he was always accompanied was the Divine Word, Who had become Man for the love of men, and especially for the love of him. He knew that he himself had been chosen from among all men to be the guardian of the life of the divine Infant, and that the Infant wished to be called his Son.

Most holy Patriarch, I rejoice at thy happiness and greatness, in being made worthy to have power to command, with the authority of father, Him Whom Heaven and earth obey. My holy patron, since a God has served thee, I too wish to enrol myself in thy service.

I wish henceforth to serve thee, to honour and love thee as my master. Take me under thy protection, and dispose of me as thou pleasest. I know that whatever thou shalt tell me to do, will be for my welfare, and for thy glory and that of my Redeemer.

II.

Consider what a flame of holy love must have been kindled in the heart of Joseph by meditating on all these things, and in seeing his Lord performing for him all the little offices of a boy—at one time opening and closing the door; at another helping him to saw or plane; and at another, gathering fragments of wood, or sweeping the house; and finally, in seeing that He obeyed all his commands, and never did anything without his direction.

What affection must he have felt in carrying Jesus in his arms, caressing Him, and in receiving the caresses of that sweet Infant! In hearing from Him the words of Eternal Life, which, like so many loving darts, wounded his heart! And particularly in witnessing the holy examples of all virtues which the divine Child gave him. Long familiarity with persons who love one another cools their affection; for the longer men converse together, the more perfectly they learn one another's defects. This was not the case with Joseph; the more he conversed with Jesus, the better he became acquainted with His sanctity. Consider, then, how great was Joseph's love for Jesus, since, according to the authors, he enjoyed His company for the space of twenty-five years.

My holy St. Joseph, pray to Jesus for me. Having obeyed all thy commands on earth, He will certainly never refuse anything thou askest of Him. Tell Him to pardon me the offences that I have offered to Him. Tell Him to detach me from creatures and from myself; ask Him to inflame me with His holy love; and then let Him treat me as He pleases.

And thou, O most holy Mary, through the love which Joseph bore thee, take me under thy patronage, and beg of this thy spouse to accept me for his servant.

And Thou, O my dear Jesus, Who, to atone for my disobedience, didst wish to humble Thyself so as to obey a man, ah, through the merits of the obedience which Thou didst show on earth to Joseph, give me grace henceforth to obey all Thy wishes; and through the love Thou didst bear to Joseph, and which he bore to Thee, grant me a great love of Thee, O infinite Goodness, Who dost deserve the love of my whole heart; forget the injuries I have done Thee, and have mercy on me. I love Thee, O my Love; I love Thee, O my God; I wish always to love Thee.