

MEDITATIONS & READINGS

ST. ALPHONSUS

VOLUME III – PART II

AFTER PENTECOST

V TO XI SUNDAY

Meditations and Readings

FOR

EVERY DAY OF THE YEAR

Selected from the Spiritual Writings of
SAINTE ALPHONSUS

*Doctor of the Church and Founder of the Congregation
of the Most Holy Redeemer*

VOLUME THREE
PART II.

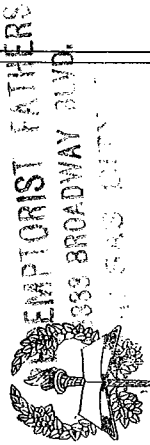
FOREWORD

BY

HIS GRACE THE ARCHBISHOP OF TUAM

Edited by

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



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OUR LADY OF PERPETUAL SUCCOUR AND IRELAND. (Áit maísh-
roean Sioft-Cabhrac i' Éire). S. uá C., O'Áit-
Éire.

MEDITATIONS & READINGS
FOR EVERY DAY OF THE YEAR

VOLUME III.—PART II.
AFTER PENTECOST
(V. TO XI, SUNDAY)

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FOREWORD

As a boy I read with great profit the popular spiritual works of St. Alphonsus Liguori. I am delighted to know that Fr. Coyle is having them republished in an enlarged edition and in the new form of "Meditations and Readings for Every Day of the Year."

I do not know of any religious books at once so sane, so spiritual and so adapted to the intelligence of the ordinary reader. They go straight to the root of normal spirituality. They are commonsense founded on the Truths of Faith. Such books were never so much needed as at the present day. We are living in an age of secularism. Never before did life offer so many attractions to divert the mind from the consideration of the Eternal Truths. Never before was there such an output of purely secular books, magazines, and newspapers, so smoothly written and so beautifully illustrated that the temptation to read them is universal and almost irresistible. Some of them are mere covers for sensuality, and others are hostile to the Faith, and all have a demoralising influence on the mind. To counteract the resulting influence we want a corresponding output of wholesome Catholic literature, including books that advertise the attractions of the spiritual life. We want books that will bring home to our youth that there is no

happiness comparable to the humble joy of the good Christian. We want books that will, with flashes from the Beyond, dissipate the spell that the prospect of sensual pleasure casts over the imagination of youth. We want books, too, that will terrify the hardened sinner and confirm the struggling aspirant to the higher life in the grim determination to walk in the narrow way. Now such are the ascetic works of St. Liguori that Father Coyle is engaged in having re-published. From my heart I wish him success in this apostolic mission. From my heart I pray that these volumes may have a wide circulation.

It is recognised that St. Liguori was one of the greatest missionaries of all time. He was himself a great preacher of the Gospel. He founded the Congregation of the Redemptorists who have been in the thick of the fight against the world, the flesh, and the devil for well-nigh two hundred years, and who are only growing more vigorous with time. The Saint was a classical writer of Moral Theology. And while his Moral Theology holds the scales evenly between laxity and rigorism, his spiritual writings hold the scales between sentimental piety and cold ascetical teaching, with a like evenness, which attracts and converts the sinner, encourages the weak, and confirms the strong.

✠ T. P. GILMARTIN,
Archbishop of Tuam.

ST. JARLATH'S,
28th April, 1928.

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LETTER FROM HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL LOGUE
TO THE EDITOR.

ARA COELL,
ARMAGH,
16th March, 1924.

MY DEAR FATHER COYLE,

I have put off writing to thank you for your interesting and edifying volume, *Meditations and Readings for Every Day of the Year*, till I should find time to look through it. I have done so now, and I can congratulate you on undertaking a very useful work; and I hope you will be spared till you complete it.

The Ascetic Works of St. Alphonsus have done wonders in conveying solid instruction, nourishing piety, and exciting fervour among the people in every state and stage of life. They have been an ever enduring source of piety, especially in inspiring love of our Holy Redeemer and tender devotion to His Blessed Mother. It is a question whether his great Theological Works have contributed more to the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

Hence it was not without regret I noticed that these Spiritual Works were not so common among the people as they were in my early days. They seemed to be giving place to more showy and more superficial modern works which are far from breathing the fervent spirit of the great Doctor and Saint. One of the chief fruits which I expect from the work you have undertaken is the redress of this serious spiritual loss.

You have commenced well, and I trust you will be

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able to continue till the Spiritual Works of St. Alphonsus are again as extensively circulated among the people as they were in the past. The scheme you have sketched out for yourself will familiarize the people with the beauty and fervour of St. Alphonsus' Works, and from using your volumes for casual reading they will be likely to drink more deeply of the source of fervour the Saint has opened up to them.

Wishing you every blessing and success in your useful work,

I am,

Dear Father Coyle,
Yours gratefully,

✠ MICHAEL CARDINAL LOGUE.

**LETTER OF APPROBATION AND BLESSING FROM
MOST REV. PATRICK MURRAY, C.S.S.R.,**

Superior-General and Rector Major.

**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, breathe 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

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HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL O'DONNELL wrote :

It is a pleasure to me to subscribe my name to the beautiful letter written by my lamented predecessor, his Eminence Cardinal Logue, to commend Father Coyle's publications from the Spiritual Works of St. Alphonsus Liguori.

✠ **PATRICK CARDINAL O'DONNELL,**
Archbishop of Armagh.

Armagh, 20th February, 1926.
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Sacred Sciences, but also to the faithful of every condition of life, to whom he points out the way to solid virtue, and smooths 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.

It is unnecessary for me to add anything to these words of two Popes. I wish only to say that this infinite amiability of Jesus Christ is particularly well shown in the present volume, for, in addition to the Meditations and Readings on the Religious State and on other subjects, there are given about forty Meditations on the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, in which are contained some of the most beautiful and devotional pages written by the Saint. Moreover the division of the ascetic writings of the Saint into two Meditations and a Spiritual Reading for every day of the year, and this arranged in such a way as not to interrupt the sequence of any work of the Saint, will please many, both in the Cloister and in the world, who desire to know and follow in their spiritual life the teachings of this great Doctor of the Church and Director of Souls.

In conclusion, in the name of St. Alphonsus I bless you and these Meditations and Readings with the hope that they may be everywhere known and read and well thought on, so that all may know the infinite amiability and mercy of Jesus Christ and the unspeakable amiability and mercy of His Blessed Mother, and that they may thus seek and love and serve Them alone.

Your devoted servant and confrère,

PATRICK MURRAY, C.S.S.R.,

Sup. Gen. and Rector Major.

REV. J. B. COYLE, C.S.S.R.,

St. JOSEPH'S,

DUNDALK.

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THE EDITOR'S FOREWORD

THE Editor has aimed at making each of the Parts of this Series of MEDITATIONS AND READINGS from St. Alphonsus as complete as possible. It has also been his aim and desire to make each a volume that would do good service at the time of a Spiritual Retreat.

In this particular Part of the Series quite a large number of Meditations, which St. Alphonsus himself intended specially for those making a Retreat, are included, and besides these Meditations, a short, but very precious treatise of the Saint on *Closed Retreats* has been inserted as Spiritual Reading. After reading the Saint's pages one would wish to proclaim him the Apostle of the *Closed Retreats* that are having in many countries such excellent results of late years.

We cannot do better than quote here what St. Alphonsus says in another place about the value of Retreats made in private. He writes : "There can be no doubt that Retreats made in common, in which the meditations and lectures are given by a priest, are very profitable; but for all who desire to advance in Divine love, one great means is to perform the same Spiritual Exercises in a private Retreat. It is in total solitude that God speaks most efficaciously to the souls of His beloved ones, and it is impossible for a Christian to make such Retreats and not come forth from each a different man. In order the better to enjoy God, Who in solitude

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communicates Himself more familiarly to those who seek Him, the Saints retired into caves and deserts. St. Bernard says he learned more about Divine things amid the beeches and the oaks of the forest than he ever learned from masters or from books. You can make the same solitude for yourself even in your own house. Strive to avail of it for a Retreat of at least eight days.

“But others, you will say, do not make such Retreats. Well, be it so; what then? If others do not make Retreats, do you at least make them, and your good example will win over others to do the same. Even if it be looked upon as singular, such singularities are pleasing to God. No one, as St. Bernard says, can become perfect if he be not singular in the practice of virtue and in availing himself of the means of salvation.”

With these simple, beautiful lines from St. Alphonsus, we introduce this new volume of **MEDITATIONS AND READINGS** to our Catholic people, only asking from them a remembrance in their prayers.

—THE EDITOR.

*Clonard Monastery, Belfast,
Feast of Corpus Christi,
May 30, 1929.*

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MEDITATIONS AND READINGS

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Morning Meditation

SALVATION IS OUR ONLY BUSINESS IN THIS WORLD.

One thing is necessary (Luke x. 42). It is not necessary we should be rich, or honoured, or in the enjoyment of good health, but it is necessary we should be saved. For this end alone has God placed us in this world, and woe to us if we do not attain it!

I.

Of all our affairs there is none more important than that of our eternal salvation, on which depends our happiness or misery for eternity.

One thing is necessary. It is not necessary that we should be rich, honoured, or in the enjoyment of good health, but it is necessary that we should be saved. For this end alone has God placed us in the world; and woe to us if we do not attain it!

St. Francis Xavier said that the only good to be obtained in this world is salvation; and the only evil to be dreaded, damnation. What matter if we are poor, or despised, or infirm? If we are saved we shall be happy forever. On the contrary, what does it avail to be great, or to be monarchs? If we are lost, we shall be miserable for all eternity.

O God, what will become of me? I may be saved, and I may also be lost! And if I may be lost, why do I not resolve to adhere more closely to Thee?

My Jesus, have pity on me. I will amend my life.

Give me Thy assistance. Thou hast died to save me, and shall I, notwithstanding, forfeit my salvation?

II.

Have we already done enough to secure salvation? Are we already secure of not falling into hell?

What exchange shall a man give for his soul?—(Matt. xvi. 26). If he lose his soul, what will compensate him for his loss?

What have not the Saints done to secure their salvation? How many kings and queens have renounced their kingdoms and shut themselves up in cloisters! How many young men have left their country, and have gone to live in deserts! How many young virgins have renounced marriage with the great ones of the world, to go and give their lives for Jesus Christ! And what are we doing?

O my God, how much has Jesus Christ done for our salvation! He spent thirty-three years in toil and labour; He gave His Blood and His Life; and shall we, through our own fault, be lost?

O Lord, I give Thee thanks for not having called me out of the world when I had forfeited Thy grace. Had I died then, what would have become of me for all eternity?

God desires that all should be saved: *He will have all men to be saved.*—(1 Tim. ii. 4). If we are lost, it will be entirely our own fault. And this will be our greatest torment in hell.

St. Teresa says that even the loss of a trifle, of an ornament, of a ring, when it has happened through our own carelessness, occasions us the greatest uneasiness. What a torment, then, will it be to the damned to have wilfully lost all—their souls, Heaven, and God!

Alas! death approaches; and what have I done for life eternal?

O my God, for how many years have I deserved to dwell in hell, where I could not repent, nor love Thee! Now that I can repent and love Thee, I will repent and I will love Thee.

Spiritual Reading

I.—THE ADVANTAGE OF A RETREAT
MADE IN SOLITUDE AND SILENCE.*

I have received your last letter in which you tell me you are still undecided as to the state of life you should choose, and that having communicated to your Pastor the advice I gave you—namely, to go for that purpose to perform the Spiritual Exercises in the house your father owns in the country—the said Pastor answered you it was not necessary to go there to torture your brains for eight days in solitude, but that it was enough for you to attend the Retreat he would soon have for the people in his own church. Now, as on this point of making the Exercises you again ask my advice, it is necessary I should answer you more at length, and show you how much greater the fruit of the Spiritual Exercises is when they are performed in silence, in some retired place, than in public, when one is obliged during the time to live in one's own house and converse with relatives and friends: and the more so in your case, for, as you write to me, you have in your own home no quiet room to which you can retire.

Besides, I am very much in favour of a Retreat performed in solitude, closed away from the world, as I know it is to such a Retreat I owe my own conversion and my resolution to give up the world. I will later suggest to you the means and precautions to be taken during the Spiritual Exercises in order to reap from them the fruit you desire. I beg of you, when you have read this letter yourself, to give it to your Rev. Parish Priest that he may read it also.

Let us, then, speak first of the great benefit of the Spiritual Exercises when performed in solitude, where one converses with God alone, and let us see the reason for this.

* This little treatise was written by St. Alphonsus in the form of a letter to a young man who consulted him as to the state of life he should choose.—Ed.

The truths of eternal life, such as the great affair of our salvation, the value of the time God gives us that we may amass merits for a happy Eternity, the obligations under which we are to love God for His infinite goodness and the immense love He has for us,—these and similar things are not seen with the eyes of the flesh, but only with the eyes of the mind. It is, on the contrary, certain that, unless our understanding represents to the will the value of a good or the greatness of an evil, we shall never embrace that good nor reject that evil. And this is the ruin of those who are attached to this world. They live in darkness, and not seeing the greatness of eternal good and eternal evil, and allured by the senses, they give themselves up to forbidden pleasure and thus miserably perish.

Wherefore the Holy Ghost admonishes us that in order to avoid sin we must keep before our eyes the last Things which are to come upon us; that is, Death, with which all the goods of this earth will come to an end for us, and the Divine Judgment, in which we shall have to give to God an account of our whole life. *Remember thy last end and thou shalt never sin*—(Eccles. vii. 40). And in another place God says: *Oh, that they would be wise and would understand and would provide for their last end*—(Deut. xxxii. 29). By which words He wishes us to understand that if men would consider the things of the next life, they would all certainly take care to sanctify themselves, and would not expose themselves to the danger of an unhappy life in Eternity. But they shut their eyes to the light and thus, remaining blind, precipitate themselves into an abyss of evil. This is why the Saints always prayed the Lord to give them light. *Enlighten my eyes, that I never sleep in death*—(Ps. xii. 4). *May God cause the light of his countenance to shine upon us*—(Ps. lxxvi. 2). *Make the way known to me wherein I should walk*—(Ps. cxlii. 8). *Give me understanding and I will learn thy commandments* (Ps. cxviii. 78).

Now in order to obtain this Divine light we must come close to God. *Come ye to him and be enlightened*

—(Ps. xxxiii. 6). For, as St. Augustine tells us, that as we cannot see the sun without the light of the sun itself, so we cannot see the light of God but by the light of God Himself. This light is obtained in the Spiritual Exercises; by them we come close to God, and God enlightens us with His light. The Spiritual Exercises mean nothing else than that we retire for a time from intercourse with the world, and go to converse with God alone, where God speaks to us by His inspirations, and we speak to God in our meditations by acts of love, by repenting of the sins by which we have displeased Him, by offering ourselves to serve Him for the future with all our heart, and by beseeching Him to make known to us His will, and give us strength to accomplish it.

Holy Job says: *Now I should have rest in my sleep with kings and consuls of the earth who build themselves solitudes*—(Job iii. 13). Who are these kings that build themselves solitudes? They are, as St. Gregory says, those who rise above this world, and withdraw from its tumults to render themselves fit to talk alone with God. “They build solitudes, that is, they separate themselves as far as possible from the tumult of the world, in order to be alone and to become fit to speak with God.”

One day as St. Arsenius was reflecting on the means that he should take to become a saint, God caused him to hear these words: *Fuge! Tace! Quiesce!* “Fly! Be silent! And rest!” Fly from the world; be silent; cease to talk with men, and speak only with Me, and thus rest in peace and solitude. In conformity with this, St. Anselm wrote to one worried by many worldly occupations, who complained that he had not a moment of peace, and gave the following advice: “Leave your occupations for a while; hide yourself from your tumultuous thoughts; apply yourself for a time to contemplate God and rest in Him: Say to God: Now teach my heart where and how I may seek Thee; where and how I may find Thee.” Words that are applicable, each and all, to yourself. Fly, says he, for a short time from those earthly occupations which render you so unquiet, and rest in solitude with God. Say to Him: O Lord, show me where and

how I may find Thee, that I may speak alone with Thee, and at the same time hear Thy words.

God speaks indeed to those who seek Him, but He does not speak in the midst of the tumult of the world. The Lord is not in the commotion of the earthquake, as was said to Elias when God called him to solitude. The voice of God, as it is said in the same place, is as the breath of a gentle air, which is scarcely heard, and then not by the ear of the body, but by that of the heart, without noise and in a sweet retreat. This is exactly what the Lord says through Osee: *I will lead her into solitude, and I will speak to her heart*—(ii. 14). When the Lord wishes to draw a soul to Himself, He leads it into solitude, far from the embarrassment of the world and intercourse with men, and there speaks to it in words of fire. The word of God is said to be of fire, because it melts a soul, as the sacred Spouse says: *My soul melted when he (my beloved) spoke*—(Cant. v. 6). It prepares the soul to submit readily to the direction of God, and to embrace the manner of life which God wishes. The word of God is so exceedingly efficacious that at the very time it is heard it operates in the soul all that God requires.

Evening Meditation

THE PRACTICE OF THE LOVE OF JESUS CHRIST.

“*Charity beareth all things.*”

HE THAT LOVES JESUS CHRIST BEARS ALL THINGS FOR HIM, AND ESPECIALLY ILLNESS, POVERTY, AND CONTEMPT.

I.

Father Balthazar Alvarez said that a Christian must not imagine himself to have made any progress in perfection until he has succeeded in penetrating his heart with a lasting sense of the sorrows, poverty, and ignominies

of Jesus Christ, so as to be able to support with loving patience every sorrow, privation, and contempt, for the sake of Jesus Christ.

In the first place, let us speak of bodily infirmities, which, when borne with patience, merit for us a beautiful crown.

St. Vincent de Paul said: “Did we but know how precious a treasure is contained in infirmities, we would accept them with joy as the greatest of all possible blessings.” Hence the Saint himself, though constantly afflicted with ailments that often left him no rest day or night, bore them with so much peace and serenity of countenance that no one could guess that anything ailed him at all. Oh, how edifying to see a sick person bear his illness with a peaceful countenance, as did St. Francis de Sales! When he was ill, he simply made known his complaint to the physician, obeyed him exactly by taking the prescribed medicines, however nauseous; and for the rest, he remained at peace, never uttering a single complaint in all his sufferings. What a contrast to this is the conduct of those who do nothing but complain even for the most trifling indisposition, and who would like to have around them all their relatives and friends in order to have their sympathy! Far different was the instruction of St. Teresa to her nuns: “My sisters, learn to suffer something for the love of Jesus Christ, without letting all the world know of it.” One Good Friday Jesus Christ favoured the Venerable Father Louis da Ponte with so much bodily suffering that no part of him was exempt from its particular pain; he mentioned his severe sufferings to a friend, but he was afterwards so sorry at having done so that he made a vow never again to reveal to anybody whatever he might afterwards have to suffer. I say “he was favoured”; for, to the Saints, the illnesses and pains which God sends them are real favours.

II.

One day as St. Francis of Assisi lay on his bed in excruciating torments, a companion said to him:

“Father, beg of God to ease your pains, and not to lay so heavy a hand upon you.” On hearing this the Saint instantly leaped from his bed, and going down on his knees, thanked God for his sufferings; then, turning to his companion he said: “Listen; did I not know that you so spoke from simplicity, I would refuse ever to see you again.”

Some one who is sick will say it is not so much the infirmity itself that afflicts me as that it prevents me from going to church to perform my devotions, to communicate, and to hear Holy Mass; I cannot go to choir to recite the Divine Office with my brethren; I cannot celebrate Mass; I cannot pray; for my head is aching with pain, and light almost to fainting. But tell me now, if you please, why do you wish to go to church or to choir? Why would you communicate and say or hear Holy Mass? Is it to please God? But it is not now the pleasure of God that you say Office; that you communicate, or hear Mass; but that you remain patiently on this bed, and support the pains of this infirmity. But you are not pleased with my speaking thus; then you are not seeking to do what is pleasing to God, but what is pleasing to yourself. The Blessed John of Avila wrote as follows to a priest who so complained to him: “My friend, busy not yourself with what you would do if you were well, but be content to remain ill as long as God thinks fit. If you seek the will of God, what matters it to you whether you be well or ill?”

Monday—Sixth Week after Pentecost

Morning Meditation

LOSS OF THE SOUL, AN IRREPARABLE EVIL.

How long shall we delay? Until we have to weep with the damned, saying: *Ergo erravimus!* *We therefore have erred!*—(Wis. v. 6), and there is now no longer, or ever shall be, any remedy for us? For every other misfortune in this world there is some remedy, but for the loss of the soul, there is none.

I.

And how long shall we delay? Until we have to weep with the damned, saying: *Ergo erravimus!* *We therefore have erred!*—and there is now no longer, or ever shall be, any remedy for us?

For every other misfortune in this world there is some remedy, but for the loss of the soul there is none.

What pains and trouble men take to obtain wealth, dignities, pleasures! But what are they doing to save their souls? Nothing; as though the loss of the soul were but of little consequence!

How much diligence in preserving bodily health! The best physicians, the best remedies, the best climate, are sought after. And as regards the health of the soul, what great negligence!

O my God, I will no longer resist Thy calls! Who knows but that the words which I am now reading may be my last call from God!

Can we be sensible of the danger of being lost forever and not tremble? And do we delay to apply a remedy to the disorders of our consciences?

My soul, how many graces has not God bestowed upon you that you may be saved! He has caused you to be born in the bosom of the true Church. How many advantages for becoming a Saint. Sermons, confessions, the good example of companions. How many lights, how many loving calls in Spiritual Exercises, in Meditation, in Holy Communion! How many mercies has He not shown you! How long has He not waited for you! How many times has He not pardoned you!—graces which He has not bestowed on so many others.

II.

What is there that I ought to do more to my vineyard that I have not done to it?—(Is. v. 4). What more, says Almighty God, ought I to do for your soul? For how many years have you been in the world and what fruit have you hitherto brought forth?

If we had been allowed to choose the means of salvation, what more easy and effectual means could we have chosen?

Alas! if we do not avail ourselves of so many graces, they will serve only to render our death the more miserable.

To become a saint it is not necessary to have ecstasies and visions; sufficient for you are the ordinary means which you possess. Meditate, communicate frequently, read spiritual books, fly all sinful occasions, and you will become a saint.

O God, already have I lived many years in the world, and what have I hitherto gained? O Jesus! Thy precious Blood, Thy death upon the Cross, are my hope!

If this night I were to die, should I be satisfied with my past life? No; and why do I delay? Death may come, and I may have to lament and say: Alas! my life is now at an end, and I have done nothing!

What a grace would it be for a sick man, already despaired of by his physicians, to be allowed another year, or even another month! And God grants me this time; and how shall I employ it for the future?

O Lord, since Thou hast waited for me until now, I will no longer disregard Thee. Here I am! Tell me what Thou requirest of me, and I will do it. I will not wait to give myself to Thee until time for me be no more. O Jesus! I will never more offend Thee. I will spend the remainder of my life in bewailing my past sins, and in loving Thee, the God of my soul.

Spiritual Reading

II.—THE ADVANTAGES OF A RETREAT
MADE IN SOLITUDE AND SILENCE.

One day the Lord said to St. Teresa: "There are many souls to whom I would willingly speak, but the world makes so great a noise in their hearts that My voice cannot be heard. Oh, if they would but separate themselves a little from the world!" Thus, then, my very dear friend, the Lord wishes to speak to you, but alone and in solitude; since if He would speak to you in your own house, your relations, your friends, and your domestic occupations would continue to make a noise in your heart, and you would be unable to hear His voice. The Saints have for this reason left their homes and their country, and gone to hide themselves in caverns or deserts, or at least in a cell in some Religious house, there to find God and hear His voice. St. Eucherius relates that a certain person seeking a place in which he could find God, went for this purpose to ask counsel from a master of the spiritual life. The man of God led him to a solitary place and then said: "Behold, here God may be found!" adding nothing more. By this he wished him to understand that God is not to be found in the midst of the noise of the world, but in solitude. St. Bernard says that he learned to know God better amongst the beeches and oaks than in all the learned books he had ever studied.

Worldlings love to be in company with friends, to talk and divert themselves; but the desire of the Saints is to live in solitary places, in the midst of forests, or in caverns, there to converse alone with God Who in solitude familiarly converses with souls as a friend with his friend. "Oh, Solitude," exclaims St. Jerome, "in which God familiarly converses with His servants!" The Venerable Vincent Caraffa said that if it had been free to him to wish for anything in this world, he would have asked for nothing but a little grotto with a piece of bread and a spiritual book, there always to live far from men, and conversing alone with God. The Spouse of the Canticles, praising the beauty of a soul living in solitude, compares it to the beauty of the turtle-dove: *Thy cheeks are beautiful as the turtle-dove's*—(Cant. i. 9), precisely because the turtle-dove avoids the company of other birds, and always lives in the most solitary places. Hence it is that the holy Angels are filled with admiration and joy at the beauty and splendour of a soul ascending into Heaven after a life hidden and solitary as in a desert: *Who is this that cometh up from the desert, flowing with delights?*—(Cant. viii. 5).

Now I have written all these things in order to inspire you with a love for holy solitude, for I hope that in the Exercises you are going to perform you will not have to torture your brains, as your pastor said, but that the Lord will make you taste so great a spiritual delight, that you will come out of your Retreat with such an affection for the Spiritual Exercises that you will not fail hereafter to go through them every year. This will be of immense advantage to your soul, whatever state of life you may choose, because in the midst of the world, its various occupations, disturbances, and distractions always produce dryness of spirit, so that it is necessary from time to time to refresh and renew it, as St. Paul exhorts: *Be ye renewed in the spirit of your mind*—(Ephes. iv. 23).

King David, troubled by earthly cares, wished to have wings and to fly from the bustle of the world in order to find rest: *Who will give me wings . . . and I will fly away*

and be at rest?—(Ps. liv. 7). But being unable to leave the world in body, he at least sought from time to time to withdraw himself from the affairs of the realm he governed and dwelt in solitude conversing with God, and thus his spirit found peace. *I have gone far off, flying away, and I abode in the wilderness*—(Ps. v. 8).

Evening Meditation

THE PRACTICE OF THE LOVE OF JESUS CHRIST.

"Charity beareth all things."

HE THAT LOVES JESUS CHRIST BEARS ALL THINGS FOR HIM, AND ESPECIALLY ILLNESS, POVERTY AND CONTEMPT.

I.

You say you are unable even to pray, because your head is so weak. Be it so: you cannot meditate; but why cannot you make acts of resignation to the will of God? If you would only make these acts, you could not make a better prayer, welcoming with love all the torments that assail you. Thus did St. Vincent de Paul act. When attacked by a serious illness, he was wont to keep himself tranquilly in the presence of God, without forcing his mind to dwell on any particular subject; his sole exercise was to elicit some short acts from time to time, as of love, of confidence, of thanksgiving, and more frequently of resignation, especially in the crisis of his sufferings. St. Francis de Sales made this remark: "Considered in themselves tribulations are terrifying; but considered in the will of God, they are lovely and delightful." You cannot make meditation, you say, and what more exquisite prayer than to cast a look from time to time on your crucified Lord, and to offer Him your pains, uniting the little that you endure with the overwhelming torments that afflicted Jesus on the Cross!

