

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

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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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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 carelessly 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. 25). 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 twofoldfulness 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 the West*, 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 their 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.

