

MEDITATIONS & READINGS

ST. ALPHONSUS

VOLUME I – PART II
EPIPHANY SEPTUAGESIMA

Meditations and Readings
FOR
EVERY DAY OF THE YEAR

Selected from the Spiritual Writings of
SAINT ALPHONSUS

VOLUME ONE.
PART II.

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



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PRAYER. By **ST. ALPHONSUS** Jubilee Edition.

OUR LADY OF PERPETUAL SUCCOUR AND IRELAND. (στη μαρις-οσαν σιουτ-καθηραε ιη εηρε). S. U. A. C., O'Διτ-εηης.

MEDITATIONS & READINGS
FOR EVERY DAY OF THE YEAR

VOLUME I.—PART II.
EPIPHANY SEPTUAGESIMA

*Letter from His Eminence Michael Cardinal Logue,
Archbishop of Armagh and Primate
of All Ireland.*

*

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PATRITII MURRAY, C.S.S.R.

Superioris Generatis et Rectoris Majoris

ARA COELL,

ARMAGH,

16th March, 1924.

MY DEAR FATHER COYLE,

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

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

Hence it was not without regret I noticed that these Spiritual Works were not so common among the people

as they were in my early days. They seemed to be giving place to more showy and superficial modern works which are far from breathing the fervent spirit of the great Doctor and Saint. One of the chief fruits which I expect from the work you have undertaken is the redress of this serious spiritual loss.

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

Wishing you every blessing and success in your useful work,

I am,

Dear Fr. Coyle,

Yours gratefully,

✕ MICHAEL CARD. LOGUE.

Letter of Approbation and Blessing from Most Rev. Patrick Murray, Superior General and Rector Major of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer.

✕

J.M.J.A.T.

SANT' ALFONSO—VIA MERULANA.

ROMA.

23rd October, 1923.

MY DEAR FATHER COYLE,

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

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

Pope Benedict XV., also wrote recently, on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of the Doctorate of St. Alphonsus, that the excellence and utility of his teaching are becoming every day more apparent, and that his

writings are helpful, not only to Theologians and Professors of the Sacred Sciences, but also to the faithful of every condition of life, to whom he points out the way to solid virtue, and smooths for them the path to the highest Christian perfection. His Holiness adds that the Saint's one great ambition in all his writings was to make known to all men the infinite amiability of Jesus Christ.

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

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

Your devoted servant and confrère,

PATRICK MURRAY, C.S.S.R.,
Sup. Gen. and Rector Major.

REV. J. B. COYLE, C.S.S.R.,
St. JOSEPH'S,
DUNDALK.

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MEDITATIONS AND READINGS

Monday—First Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

THE BODY IN THE GRAVE.

Christian soul, follow the advice of St. Chrysostom: "Go to the grave. Contemplate there, dust, ashes, worms—and sigh!" O God, that body pampered with so many delicacies, clothed with so much pomp—see to what it is reduced! The worms, after having consumed all the flesh, devour one another, and in the end nothing remains but a fetid skeleton.

I.

Behold how the corpse first turns yellow and then black. Afterwards the entire body is covered with a white disgusting mould; then comes forth a clammy, fetid slime which flows to the earth. In that putrid mass is generated a great multitude of worms which feed on the flesh. Rats come to feast on the body; some attack it on the outside; others enter into the mouth and bowels. The cheeks, the lips, and the hair fall off. The ribs are first laid bare, and then the arms and legs. The worms, after having consumed all the flesh, devour one another; and in the end, nothing remains but a fetid skeleton which in the course of time falls to pieces.

The bones separate from one another and the head separates from the body. *They became like the chaff of a summer threshing-floor, and they were carried away by the wind.*—(Dan. ii., 35). Behold what man is: he is a little dust on the threshing-floor which is blown away by the wind.

Behold a young nobleman who was the life and soul of conversation: where is he now? Enter his apartment: he is no longer there. If you look for his bed, his robes, or his armour, you will find that they have passed into the hands of others. If you wish to see him, turn to the grave where he is changed into corruption and withered bones. O God, that body, pampered with so many delicacies, clothed with so much pomp, and attended by so many servants, to what is it now reduced? O ye Saints, who knew how to mortify your bodies for the love of that God Whom alone you loved on this earth, you well understood the end of all human greatness, of all earthly delights! Now your bones are honoured as sacred Relics, and preserved in shrines of gold, and your souls are happy in the enjoyment of God, awaiting the last day on which your bodies shall be made partners of your glory, as they have been partakers of your cross in this life. True love for the body consists in treating it here with rigour and contempt, that hereafter it may be happy, and in now refusing it all pleasures which may make it miserable for eternity.

Behold, then, O my God, to what this body by which I have so much offended Thee, must be reduced! To worms and rottenness! This does not afflict me; on the contrary I rejoice that this flesh of mine which has made me lose Thee, my Sovereign Good, will one day rot and be consumed. What grieves me is that to indulge in these wretched pleasures, I have given so much displeasure to Thee. But I will not despair of Thy mercy. Thou hast waited for me in order to pardon me. Thou wilt forgive me if I repent. O Infinite Goodness, I repent with my whole heart of having despised Thee. I will say with St. Catherine of Genoa: *My Jesus, no more sins! No more sins! I*

will no longer abuse Thy patience. I will not wait till the hour of death to begin to love Thee. From this moment I love Thee. I embrace Thee and unite myself to Thee, and I promise never again to depart from Thee. O most holy Virgin, bind me to Jesus Christ and obtain for me the grace never to lose Him more.

II.

In this picture of death behold yourself, and what you must one day become. *Remember that dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return.* Consider that in a few years, and perhaps in a few months or days, you will become rottenness and worms. By this thought Job became a Saint. *I have said to rottenness: Thou art my father: to worms, my mother and my sister.* (Job, xvii., 14).

All must end; and if, after death, you lose your soul all will be lost for you. Consider yourself already dead, says St. Laurence Justinian, since you know that you must of necessity die. If you were already dead, what would you not desire to have done? Now that you are alive, reflect that you will one day be among the dead. St. Bonaventure says, that to guide the vessel safely, the pilot must remain at the helm, and in like manner, to lead a good life, a man should always imagine himself at the hour of death. ‘‘Look at the sins of your youth, and be covered with shame!’’ says St. Bernard. ‘‘Look at the sins of your manhood, and weep! Look at the disorders of your present life, and tremble!’’

When St. Camillus of Lellis saw the graves of the dead, he said within himself: If these could return to life, what would they not do for eternal glory? And I, who have time,—what do I do for my soul? This the Saint said through humility. But you, perhaps, have reason to fear that you are the barren fig-tree of which the Lord spoke: *Behold, for these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and I find none.*—(Luke, xiii., 7). You have been in this world for more than three years, and what fruit have you produced? Remember,

says St. Bernard, that the Lord seeks not only flowers but fruits; that is, not only good desires and resolutions, but also holy works. Learn then to profit by the time which God in His mercy gives you. Do not wait until you shall crave for time to do good, when time shall be no more. Do not wait till you are told: *Time shall be no more.*—(Apoc. x., 6). Depart! The time for leaving this world has arrived. What is done, is done! Behold, O my God, I am that tree which deserved for so many years to hear from Thee: *Cut it down! Why cumbereth it the ground?*—(Luke, xiii., 7). Yes; during the many years which I have been in the world, I have brought forth no other fruit than the briars and thorns of sin. But, O Lord, Thou dost not wish that I despair. Thou hast said to all, that he who seeks Thee shall find Thee. I seek Thee, O my God, and wish for Thy grace. For all the offences I have offered to Thee I am sorry with my whole heart. I would wish to die of sorrow for them. Hitherto I have fled from Thee, but now I prefer Thy friendship to the possession of all the kingdoms of the earth. I will no longer resist Thy invitations. Dost Thou wish me to be all Thine? I give Thee my whole being without reserve. Thou gavest Thyself entirely to me on the Cross. I give myself entirely to Thee. O Mary, my great advocate, do thou also listen to my cry and pray to Jesus for me.

Spiritual Reading.

ORIGINAL SIN.

To fulfil his duties in life, it is necessary for man to know what is his Last End in which he may find his perfect happiness. Man's Last End is to love and serve God in this life, and to enjoy Him for eternity in the next. Thus, God has placed us in this world not to

acquire riches, honours and pleasures, but to obey His Commandments, and, by observance of them, to gain the eternal Beatitude of Paradise.

For this end the Lord created Adam who was the first man, and gave him Eve for his wife, that from them mankind might be propagated. He created them in sanctifying grace, and placed them in the terrestrial paradise, with the promise that they should be thence transferred to Heaven to enjoy complete and eternal felicity. During their sojourn on this earth God gave them for their food all the fruits of that garden of delights; but, to try their obedience, He forbade them to eat the fruit of only one tree which He pointed out to them. But Adam and Eve disobeyed God, and ate the forbidden fruit. For this sin they were deprived of divine grace, were instantly banished from Paradise, and as rebels to the divine Majesty, were with all their posterity condemned to temporal and eternal death. Thus was Heaven shut against them and all their descendants.

This is the *Original sin* in which, as children of a rebellious father, we are all born children of wrath and enemies of God. When a vassal rebels against his sovereign, all the descendants of the rebel become hateful to the prince and are banished from the kingdom. Thus Original sin, by the disobedience of Adam, deprives us all of the grace of God.

According to the doctrine of the Church, the Blessed Virgin Mary had the privilege of being exempt from this Original guilt. It is certain that she was also free from all actual sin. Such is the doctrine of the Church, as the Council of Trent has declared: "If any one saith that a man 'once justified . . . is able, during his whole life, to avoid all sins, even those that are venial—except by a special privilege from God, as the Church holds in regard of the Blessed Virgin—let him be anathema." But if Mary contracted no guilt from which she required to be redeemed, must it be said that she was not redeemed by Jesus Christ as all the other children of Adam? No; she was redeemed, but redeemed in a more excellent manner. Others are redeemed

after having incurred Original guilt; Mary was redeemed by being preserved from it. And this privilege was justly given to her alone—that blessed Woman whom God had predestined to be His own Mother. Still more was it becoming that God should preserve Mary from Original sin, for He destined her to crush the head of that infernal serpent, which, by seducing our first parents, entailed death upon all men: and this the Lord foretold: *I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head.*—(Gen. iii., 15). But if Mary was to be that Valiant Woman brought into the world to conquer Lucifer, certainly it was not becoming that he should first conquer her, and make her his slave; but it was reasonable that she should be preserved from all stain, and even momentary subjection to her opponent. The proud spirit endeavoured to infect the most pure soul of this Virgin with his venom, as he had already infected the whole human race. But praised and ever blessed be God, Who in His infinite goodness, pre-endowed her for this purpose with such great grace, that remaining always free from guilt of any sin, she was ever able to beat down and confound his pride, as an ancient author writes: “Since the devil is the head of Original sin, this head it was that Mary crushed: for sin never had any entry into the soul of this Blessed Virgin, which was consequently free from all stain.” And St. Bona-venture more expressly says: “It was becoming that the Blessed Virgin Mary, by whom our shame was to be blotted out, and by whom the devil was to be conquered, should never, not even for a moment, have been under his dominion.”**

With the one exception of God’s glorious Mother all the rest of mankind are born infected with the sin of Adam, in punishment of which our understanding is darkened to the knowledge of Eternal Truth and our will inclined to evil. But by the merits of Jesus Christ we obtain at

* In the Bull, “Ineffabilis Deus” Pius IX. in the year 1854, solemnly defined as an Article of Faith that the Most Blessed Virgin was from the first moment of her conception preserved by God from all stain of Original Sin. More than 100 years before the Immaculate Conception was defined by Pius IX. St. Alphonsus bound himself by vow to defend it.—Ebdirook.

our Baptism Divine Grace and the remedy for all our miseries. We thus became the adopted sons of God and heirs of Paradise provided we persevere till death in the Grace of God. If we lose Divine Grace by mortal sin, and do not receive pardon, we shall be condemned to hell. We can obtain the pardon of mortal sin in the Sacrament of Penance.

Evening Meditation.

THE GREAT DIGNITY AND ADVANTAGES OF A SOUL IN GOD’S GRACE.

I.

If, says the Lord, *thou wilt separate the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth.*—(Jer. xv., 19). They who know how to distinguish what is precious from what is vile, are like God “Who knows how to refuse the evil and to choose the good.” Let us consider how great a good it is to be in the grace of God. Men do not understand the value of divine grace. *Man knoweth not the price thereof.*—(Job xxxviii., 13). Hence they exchange it for vanity, for a little earth, or for a beastly pleasure! But it is an infinite treasure which makes us worthy of the friendship of God. For, says the Wise Man, *she is an infinite treasure to men, which they that use become the friends of God.*—(Wis. vii., 14). Hence a soul in grace is the friend of God. The Gentiles, who were deprived of the light of Faith, deemed it impossible for a creature to attain to the friendship of God; and they, guided only by the light of nature, could scarcely think otherwise. But God has declared in several places in the Holy Scriptures, that by means of grace we become His friends if we observe His Law. *You are my friends if you do the things that I*

command you. *I will not now call you servants . . . but I have called you friends.*—(Jo. xv., 14, 15). Hence, St. Gregory exclaims: "O Goodness of God! We do not deserve to be called even servants and He condescends to call us friends!"

How fortunate would the man esteem himself who should have a king for his friend! In a vassal it would be temerity to presume to seek the friendship of his sovereign, but it is not temerity in a soul to aspire to the friendship of its God. The most men can expect to gain in the service of an emperor is, to become his friends; and should they succeed in gaining his friendship, they will expose their eternal salvation to greater risk. It is with difficulty I can ever become the friend of Caesar, but if I wish, I am this moment the friend of God.

Whosoever is in the state of grace is the friend of God. He also becomes the child of God: *You are gods and the sons of the Most High.*—(Ps. lxxxi., 6). This is the great gift which we have received from the divine love through Jesus Christ. Behold, says St. John, *what manner of charity the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called, and should be, the sons of God.*—(I Jo. iii., 1). Moreover, the soul in the state of grace is the spouse of God. *I will espouse thee to me in faith.*—(Osee, ii., 20). Lastly, the soul in grace is the temple of the Holy Ghost. Sister Mary d'Oignies saw a devil go out from an infant who was receiving Baptism, and the Holy Ghost enter with a multitude of Angels.

Therefore, O my God, when my soul had the happiness of being in Thy grace, it was Thy friend, Thy child, Thy spouse, and Thy temple; but by committing sin, it lost all and became Thy enemy and the slave of hell. But I thank Thee, O my God, for giving me time to recover Thy grace. I am sorry above all things for having offended Thee, O infinite Goodness, and I love Thee above all things. Ah! receive me again into Thy friendship. For Thy Mercy's sake do not reject me. I know that I deserve to be banished from Thy face, but by the Sacrifice which He offered on Calvary, Jesus Christ has

merited for me mercy and pardon. *And lead us not into temptation.* Ah! do not permit my enemies to tempt me so that I may be conquered. *But deliver us from evil.* Deliver me from hell; but deliver me first from sin, which alone can lead me to hell. O Mary, pray for me and preserve me from the great misfortune of ever seeing myself in sin and deprived of the grace of thy God and mine.

II.

St. Thomas of Aquin says that the gift of God's grace surpasses all created nature since it is a participation of the divine nature. And St. Peter said the same: *that by these ye may be made partakers of the divine nature.*—(2 Pet. i., 4). Such great things Jesus Christ merited for us by His Passion: He has even communicated to us the same splendour that He received from the Father. *And the glory which thou hast given to me, I have given to them.*—(John xvii., 22). In fine, a soul in the state of grace is one with God. *He, says St. Paul, that is joined to the Lord is one spirit.*—(Cor. vi., 17). The Redeemer has said that in a soul that loves God, the Three Persons of the Most Holy Trinity dwell. *If any one love me, my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and we will make our abode with him.*—(John xiv., 23).

So great is the beauty of a soul in the state of grace, that God Himself extols it. *How beautiful art thou! How beautiful art thou!*—(Cant. iv., 1). The Lord appears never to take His eyes off the soul that loves Him, nor to close His ears to its petitions. *The eyes of the Lord are upon the just: and his ears unto their prayers.*—(Ps. xxxiii., 16). St. Bridget used to say that one could not behold the beauty of a soul in the grace of God and not die for very joy. And St. Catherine of Sienna seeing a soul in the state of grace, said that she would willingly have given her life to prevent that soul from losing such beauty. Hence she kissed the ground on which priests walked, because through them souls recover the grace of God.

How many treasures of merits can a soul in the state of grace acquire? Each moment it can merit an eternity of glory. St. Thomas teaches that every act of love merits for the soul eternal life. Why then should we envy the great ones of the earth? If we are in the grace of God, we can constantly acquire far more greatness in Heaven. A certain Lay-Brother of the Society of Jesus, appeared after death, and said that he and Philip the Second of Spain were in the enjoyment of glory; but that his glory in Heaven was as far superior to that of Philip, as that monarch was raised above him on this earth. Moreover, he alone who has experienced it can conceive the peace which a soul in the grace of God enjoys even in this life. *O taste and see that the Lord is sweet.*—(Ps. xxxiii., 9). The words of the Lord cannot fail. *Much peace have they that love thy law.*—(Ps. cxviii., 165). The peace of a soul united with God, surpasses all the pleasures of the senses and the world. *The peace of God which surpasseth all understanding.*—(Phil. iv., 7).

O my Jesus, Thou art the good Shepherd, Who allowed Thyself to be slaughtered in order to give life to Thy sheep. When I fled away from Thee, Thou didst not cease to follow and seek after me. Thou receivest me now that I seek Thee and cast myself with a penitent heart at Thy feet. Give me Thy grace which I have miserably lost through my own fault. I am sorry for it with my whole heart; I would wish to die of sorrow at the thought of having so often turned my back on Thee. Pardon me through the merits of the painful death which Thou didst suffer for me on the Cross. Bind me with the sweet chains of Thy love, and do not permit me ever more to fly away from Thee. Since I have merited the eternal torments of hell, give me strength to bear with patience all the crosses which Thou sendest me. And since I have deserved to be for eternity under the feet of the devils, make me to embrace with love all the contempt and insults which I shall receive from men. Finally, make me obedient to all Thy holy inspirations, and give me grace to conquer all human respect for the love of Thee. I am resolved henceforward to serve Thee

only: let others say and do what they please, I will serve Thee alone, O my most amiable God! Thee only do I wish to please. But give me Thy grace without which I can do nothing. I love Thee, O my Jesus, with my whole heart, and I trust in Thy Blood. Mary, my hope, assist me by thy prayers. I glory in being thy servant, and thou dost glory in saving sinners who have recourse to thee. Come to my relief and save me.

Tuesday—First Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

THE SENTENCE OF DEATH.

Who is the man that shall live and not see death? The sentence has been already passed. Fire, water, the sword and the power of princes, says St. Augustine, may be resisted, but *death*—who shall resist it? *It is appointed unto men once to die.*

I.

The Sentence of Death has been written against all men. You are a man, you must therefore die. "Our other good and evil things," says St. Augustine, "are uncertain; death alone is certain." It is uncertain whether the infant that is just born will be rich or poor; whether he will have good or bad health; whether he will die in youth or in old age. But it is certain that he will die. The stroke of death will fall on all the nobles and monarchs of the earth. When death comes there is no earthly power able to resist it. St. Augustine says: "Fire, water, the sword, and the power of princes may be resisted;

but *death*, who shall resist it?" It is related that at the end of his life a certain king of France said: "Behold, with all my power, I cannot induce death to wait one hour longer for me." When the end of life arrives, it is not delayed a single moment. *Thou hast appointed his bounds, which cannot be passed.*—(Job xiv., 5).

Dearly beloved Christian, though you should live as many years as you expect, a day will come, and on that day an hour, which will be the last hour for you. For me who am now writing, and for you who read this little book, the day and the moment have been decreed when I shall no longer write, and you will no longer read. *Who is the man that shall live and not see death?*—(Ps. lxxxviii., 49). The sentence has been already passed.

Unhappy me, who have spent so many years only in offending Thee, O God of my soul. Behold those years are already past: death is perhaps at hand, and what do I find but pains and remorse of conscience? Oh, that I had always served Thee, my Lord! Fool that I have been! I have lived so many years on this earth, and instead of acquiring merits for Heaven, I have burdened my soul with debts to divine justice. Ah, my dear Redeemer, give me light and strength now to adjust my accounts. Death is perhaps not far off. I wish to prepare for that great moment which will decide my eternal happiness or misery. I thank Thee for having waited for me till now; and since Thou hast given me time to repair the past, do Thou tell me, O my God, what I am to do for Thee. Dost Thou wish me to weep over the offences I have offered to Thee? I am sorry for them and detest them with my whole soul. Dost Thou wish me to spend the remaining years and days of my life in loving Thee? I desire to do so, O God; I have even hitherto frequently resolved to do so; but I have violated my promises. Receive back the traitor that now casts himself with sorrow at Thy feet, that loves Thee and asks Thy mercy.

II.

There never has been a man so foolish as to flatter himself that he will not have to die. What has happened to your forefathers will also happen to you. Of the immense numbers that lived in this country in the beginning of the last Century there is not one now living. Even the princes and monarchs of the earth have changed their country, and of them nothing now remains but a marble mausoleum with a grand inscription which only serves to teach us that of the great ones of this world nothing is left but a little dust inclosed in a tomb. "Tell me," says St. Bernard, "where are the lovers of the world? Of them nothing remains save ashes and worms."

Since our souls will be eternal, we ought to procure not a fortune which soon ends, but one that will be everlasting. What would it profit you to be happy here, were it possible to be happy without God, if hereafter you should be miserable for all eternity? You have built that house to your entire satisfaction, but remember that you must soon leave it to rot in a grave. You have obtained that dignity which raises you above others, but death will come and reduce you to the level of the humblest peasant.

O my Jesus, I will be no longer ungrateful for the great graces Thou hast bestowed upon me. If I do not now change my life, how shall I be able at death to hope for pardon and for Paradise? Behold, I now firmly resolve to begin to serve Thee in earnest. But give me strength; do not abandon me. Thou didst not abandon me when I offended Thee; I therefore hope more confidently for Thy aid now that I purpose to renounce all things to please Thee. Accept me, then, as one of Thy lovers, O God worthy of infinite love! I love Thee, O my Jesus. I love Thee with my whole heart. I love Thee more than myself. Behold, I am Thine; dispose of me, and of all that I possess, as Thou pleasest. Give

me perseverance in obeying Thy commands. Give me Thy love, and then do with me what Thou wilt. Mary, my Mother, my hope, my refuge, to thee I recommend myself; to thee I consign my soul. Pray to Jesus for me.

Spiritual Reading.

ACTUAL SINS.

With regard to the sins that men actually commit, we must distinguish between *mortal* and *venial* sins.

1. To understand the nature of *mortal* sin, it is necessary to know that as the soul gives life to the body, so the grace of God gives life to the soul. Hence as the body without the soul is dead, and only fit for the grave, so by sin the soul dies to the grace of God and is doomed to be buried in hell. Hence grievous sin is called *mortal* because it *kills* the soul. *The soul that sinneth, the same shall die.*—(Ezech. xviii., 20). I said that the soul is doomed to hell. But what is this hell? It is a place to which all who die in mortal sin go to suffer eternal torments. *These shall go into everlasting punishment.*—(Matt. xxv., 46). And what pains shall they suffer in hell? Every conceivable pain. There the damned are immersed in a sea of fire, tortured by all sorts of torments, overwhelmed with despair, and abandoned for all eternity.

But is it reasonable, some one will say, that a soul should suffer an eternity of torments for a single mortal sin? He who speaks thus shows that he does not understand what a mortal sin is. Mortal sin is a turning of the back upon God. Thus it is defined by St. Thomas and St. Augustine, as a turning away from the unchangeable God. Hence God says to the sinner, *Thou hast forsaken me; thou hast gone backward.*—(Jer. xv., 6). Mortal sin is an insult offered to God

by sinners. *I have brought up children and exalted them, but they have despised me.*—(Is. i., 2). It is a dishonour done to the divine Majesty. *By the transgression of the law thou dishonourest God.*—(Rom. ii., 23). It is to say to God: I will not obey Thee! *Thou hast broken my yoke, . . . and thou saidst, I will not serve.*—(Jer. ii., 20). This is the essence of mortal sin; and for it one hell is not enough: a hundred or a thousand hells would not be sufficient to punish a single mortal sin. If a person unjustly injures a peasant he deserves to be punished. If he does it to a nobleman, a prince, or an emperor, he merits far greater chastisement. But what are all the kings of the earth and even all the Saints of Heaven in comparison with God? They are as nothing. *All nations are before him as if they had no being at all.*—(Is. xl., 17). Now, I ask, what chastisement is due to one who insults God, and a God Who has died for the love of us?

However, it must be observed that to make a sin mortal three things are required: *full advertence, perfect consent, and grievous matter.* If any of these three be wanting, the sin is not mortal. It can be only venial, or perhaps no sin at all.

2. *Venial* sin does not kill the soul, but it wounds it. Venial sin is not a grievous offence, but still it is an offence against God. It is not as great an evil as mortal sin; but it is a greater evil than all the evils that can happen to creatures. A lie, a venial curse, is a greater evil than if all men, all the Saints, and all the Angels were to be sent to hell.

Some venial sins are deliberate, others are indeliberate. *Indeliberate* venial sins, or sins committed without full advertence or perfect consent, are less culpable. All men fall into such sins. The Blessed Virgin only had the privilege of being exempt from them.

Deliberate venial sins, which are committed with full advertence and consent, are more criminal, particularly when there is an affection for them; such as certain feelings of hatred, of ambition, certain rooted attachments, and the like. "Who," says St. Basil, "shall dare to call any sin light?" It is enough to understand

that it offends God, to make us avoid it more than any other evil. The deformity of a venial sin was once shown to St. Catherine of Genoa; she afterwards felt surprised that she did not die of horror at the sight of it. And let him who thinks lightly of venial sin remember, that if he does not amend, he will soon be on the brink of some mortal sin. The more venial sins the soul commits, the weaker she becomes, the greater the power which the devil acquires over her, and the fewer the graces that God bestows upon her. *He that contemneth small things shall fall by little and little.*—(Eccclus. xix., 1).

Let us, then, be careful to avoid sin, which alone can make us unhappy in this life and in the next; and let us continually thank the goodness of God for not having already sent us to hell for our sins. Let us henceforth attend to the salvation of our souls, and let us consider how little is all we do for our salvation; how little is all we do for eternal life.

But, to make sure of our eternal salvation, it is not enough to *begin*: it is necessary to *persevere*; and in order to persevere, it is necessary to be humble, always distrusting our own strength, confiding only in God, and continually asking His help to persevere. Woe to the man who trusts in himself and glories in his own good works.

Evening Meditation.

THE MISERY OF A SOUL IN SIN.

I.

Consider the misery of a soul at enmity with God. She is separated from God her Sovereign Good. *Your iniquities*, says the Prophet Isaias, *have divided between you and your God.*—(Is. lix., 2). Hence the soul is no longer God's, and God is no longer hers. *You are not my people and I will not be yours.*—(Osee, i., 9). And

the soul not only belongs no longer to God, but God even hates her and condemns her to hell. God does not hate His creatures. He does not hate wild beasts, the viper or the toad. *Thou lovest all things that are and hatest none of the things which thou hast made.*—(Wis. xi., 25). But He cannot refrain from hating sinners. *Thou hatest all the workers of iniquity.*—(Wis. xi., 25). Yes; God cannot but hate sin, which is diametrically opposed to His will; and in hating sin He must necessarily hate the sinner who is united to his sin. *But to God the wicked and his wickedness are hateful alike.*—(Ps. v., 7).

O God! if a man has for his enemy a monarch of the earth, he cannot sleep, he is every moment in dread of death. And how can he who is the enemy of God enjoy peace? He may escape the vengeance of his sovereign by concealing himself or by taking refuge in a distant country. But who can escape the hand of God? *If I ascend into heaven, thou art there; if I descend into hell, thou art present. If I take my wings early in the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there also shall thy hand lead me.*—(Ps. cxxxviii., 8, 10).

Behold, O my Redeemer, the miserable state to which I have brought myself! To make me worthy of Thy grace, Thou didst spend thirty-three years in toil and pains; and I, for the poisoned pleasure of a moment, have despised and lost it. I thank Thy mercy which still gives me time to recover it if I wish. Yes, I wish to do everything in my power to regain it. Tell me what I must do in order to obtain Thy pardon. Dost Thou wish me to repent? O my Jesus! I am sorry with my whole heart for having offended Thy infinite Goodness. Dost Thou wish me to love Thee? I love Thee above all things. Hitherto I have unfortunately employed my heart in loving creatures and vanities. From this day forward I will live only for Thee. I will love only Thee my God, my Treasure, my Hope, my Strength. *I will love thee, O Lord, my strength.*—(Ps. xvii., 2).

II.

Poor sinners! They are cursed by God, cursed by the Angels, cursed by the Saints, cursed also every day on earth by all Priests and Religious, who, in reciting the Divine Office, proclaim them accursed. *They are cursed who decline from thy commandments.*—(Ps. cxviii., 21). Moreover, that soul that is at enmity with God has lost all its merits. Should a man be equal in merit to St. Paul the Hermit, who lived forty-eight years in a cave; to St. Francis Xavier, who gained ten millions of souls to God; or to St. Paul the Apostle, who, according to St. Jerome, surpassed in merit all the other Apostles,—that man, if he commit a single mortal sin, loses all. *All his justices which he hath done shall not be remembered.*—(Ezech. xviii., 24). Behold the ruin which mortal sin produces: it transforms the child of God into the slave of Lucifer; His beloved friend into an enemy whom He sovereignly hates; and the heir of Heaven into one doomed to hell. St. Francis de Sales used to say that, were the Angels capable of weeping they would shed tears of pity at the sight of a soul that commits mortal sin and loses the divine grace.

But the great misfortune is that the Angels would weep, if it were in their power to do so, and the sinner himself weeps not! “A Christian,” says St. Augustine, “if he loses a sheep or any other valuable animal, weeps over the loss, and neither eats nor sleeps; but when he loses the grace of God, he eats and sleeps and sheds not a single tear.”

Thy merits, Thy Wounds, O my Jesus, shall be my hope and my strength; from Thee I hope for strength to be faithful to Thee. Give me then, O my Redeemer, the gift of Thy grace, and do not permit me ever again to depart from Thee. Divest my soul of all worldly affections, and inflame my heart with Thy holy love. Mary, my Mother, who wert always on fire with divine love, make me burn like thee with the love of God.

Wednesday—First Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

“YESTERDAY FOR ME, TO-DAY FOR THEE.”

Who can tell whether it will be either in a year, or within a month, or within a week, or even whether you will be alive to-morrow? “Yesterday for me, to-day for thee.” O my Jesus, give me light and pardon me.

I.

It is appointed. It is certain, then, that we are all condemned to death. We are born, says St. Cyprian, with the halter round the neck, and every step we make brings us nearer to death. As your name was one day inserted in the Register of Baptisms, so it shall be one day written in the records of the dead. As in speaking of those who have already departed you say: God be merciful to my father, to my uncle, to my brother,—so others shall say the same of you. As you have heard the death-bell toll for many, so others shall hear it toll for you.

But what would you say if you saw a man on his way to the place of execution, jesting, laughing, gazing about in every direction, and thinking only of comedies, festivities and amusements? And are not you now on your way to death? What are the objects of your thoughts? Behold in that grave your friends and relatives on whom justice has been already executed. How great is the terror and dismay of a man condemned to die, when he beholds his companions hanging dead on the gibbet! Look, then, at these dead bodies. Each

of them says to you : *Yesterday for me ; to-day for thee.*—(Eclus. xxxiii., 28). The same is said to you by the portraits of your deceased relatives, by the memorandum books, the houses, the beds, the garments which they have left. *Yesterday for me ! To-day for thee !*

My beloved Redeemer, I would not dare to appear before Thee, did I not see Thee hanging on the Cross lacerated, despised, and lifeless, for the love of me. My ingratitude has been great ; but Thy mercy is still greater. My sins have been very grievous ; but Thy merits exceed their enormity. Thy Wounds, Thy Blood, and Thy Death, are my hope. I deserve hell by my first sin ; to that sin I have added so many other offences. And Thou hast not only preserved my life, but Thou hast also invited me to pardon, and hast offered me peace with so much mercy and so much love. How can I fear that Thou wilt cast me away now that I love Thee and desire nothing but Thy grace ? Yes, my dear Lord, I love Thee with my whole heart, and I desire only to love Thee. I love Thee, and am sorry for having despised Thee, not so much because I have deserved hell, as because I have offended Thee, my God, Who hast loved me so tenderly.

II.

To know that you must die—that after death you shall enjoy eternal glory, or suffer eternal torments—that on death depends your eternal happiness or eternal misery—and, with all this before your eyes, not to think of settling your accounts, and of adopting every means of securing a happy death, is surely the extreme of folly. We pity those who meet with a sudden and unprovided death ; why, then, do we ourselves not endeavour to be always prepared ? We, too, may die suddenly and without preparation. Indeed sooner or later, with or without warning, whether we think or think not of it, we shall die : and every hour, every moment, brings us nearer to our end, which shall be the infirmity that will send us out of this world.

In every age, houses, streets and cities are filled with new people ; the former inhabitants have been borne away to the grave. As the days of life have ended for them, so a time will come when neither you nor I, nor anyone alive, shall live any longer on this earth. *Days shall be formed and no one in them.*—(Ps. cxxxviii., 16). We shall all then be in eternity, which shall be for us either an eternal day of delights, or an eternal night of torments. There is no middle way. It is certain and of Faith that one or the other will be our lot.

O my Jesus, open to me the bosom of Thy goodness ; add mercies to mercies. Grant that I may be no longer ungrateful to Thee ; change my whole heart. Grant that my heart, which once despised Thy love and exchanged it for the miserable delights of this earth, may now be entirely Thine, and may burn with continual flames of love for Thee. I hope to gain Paradise, that I may always love Thee. I cannot enjoy in that kingdom a place among the innocent—I must remain among the penitents ; but though among these I wish to love Thee more than the innocent. For the glory of Thy mercy make all Heaven behold so great a sinner inflamed with an ardent love. I resolve henceforth to be all Thine and to think only of loving Thee. Assist me with Thy light and grace to execute this desire, which Thou in Thy goodness hast inspired. O Mary, thou who art the mother of perseverance, obtain for me the grace to be faithful to my promise.

Spiritual Reading.

“ *THOU SHALT NOT HAVE STRANGE GODS BEFORE ME.*”—(Exod. xx., 3).

The First Commandment obliges us to give to God due worship and honour. *What* this God is, it is impossible to understand. But let it be enough for us to know that His principal attributes are as follows :

1. God is *Independent*. All things depend on God, but He depends on no one; and, therefore, He possesses all perfections, in regard to which no one can set any bounds to Him.

2. God is *Almighty*. He can do whatever He wishes; by one act of His Will He created the world. He first created the heavens, and the Angels, who are pure spirits, and He created them in the state of grace. But Lucifer, when he was commanded to adore the Son of God, Who was to be made man, through pride refused to obey, and induced a third part of the Angels to join with him in his rebellion against God. These rebellious angels were instantly banished from Heaven by the Archangel Michael, and condemned to hell. They are the devils, who tempt us to sin, in order to make us companions of their torments. Miserable should we be, if we had not God to assist us. We should not have strength to resist their temptations. But God requires, as the condition of giving us this assistance, that in our temptations we instantly turn to Him, and ask His assistance; if we act otherwise, we shall be defeated by our enemies. The Angels who remained faithful were immediately admitted into the enjoyment of the glory of Paradise; and from among these Angels, the Lord has appointed those who were to be our guardians: *He hath given his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.*—(Ps. xc., 11). Let us every day give thanks to our Angel Guardian, and entreat him to assist us always and never abandon us. Next the Lord created the earth and all those things that we see. He then made man, that is, Adam and Eve. So God is the Lord of all things, for He created all things; and as He created all things by one act of His Will, so by another act He can, if He pleases, destroy all things. This is what is meant by God's *Omnipotence*,—that is, God is Almighty.

3. God is also *Most Wise*. He governs all things created without labour or inconvenience. He sees and has before Him all things, past and future, and knows all our thoughts better than they are known to ourselves.

4. God is *Eternal*. He always has been, and always will be and nothing in Him ever had a beginning, or shall have an end.

5. God is *Immense*. He is in Heaven, on earth and in all places.

6. God is *Holy* in all His works, and it is impossible for Him to be in any way evil.

7. God is *Just*. He leaves no sinful act unpunished, and no good act without its reward.

8. God is all *Mercy* to penitent sinners, and all *Love* to the souls that love Him. In a word, God is *Infinite Goodness*; so that He cannot be better or more perfect than He is.

This God, our Creator and Preserver, we are bound to love and honour, principally by acts of the three Theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity. "God," says St. Augustine, "is to be worshipped by Faith, Hope, and Charity."

Evening Meditation.

THE SINNER INSULTS GOD.

I.

I have brought up children and exalted them; but they have despised me.—(Is. i., 2).

What does the sinner do when he commits mortal sin? He insults God. The malice of an insult is, St. Thomas says, estimated from the condition of the person who receives the insult and of the person who offers it. It is sinful to offend a peasant; it is more criminal to insult a nobleman; but to treat a monarch with contempt and insolence, is a still greater crime. Who is God? *He is Lord of lords, and King of kings.*—(Apoc. xviii., 14). He is a Being of infinite majesty, before whom all the princes of the earth and all the Saints and Angels are

less than an atom of sand. *As a drop of a bucket . . . as a little dust.*—(Is. xl., 15). And the Prophet Isaiah adds, that compared with the greatness of God, all creatures are as insignificant as if they did not exist. *All nations are before him as if they had no being at all.*—(Is. xl., 17). Such is God. And what is man? He is, according to St. Bernard, a heap of worms, the food of worms by which he shall be soon devoured. *He is miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.*—(Apoc. iii., 17). Man is a miserable worm that can do nothing: he is so blind that he knows nothing, and so poor and naked that he possesses nothing. And this miserable worm voluntarily insults God! “Vile dust,” says the same St. Bernard, “dares to provoke such tremendous majesty.” The angelic Doctor, then, had just reason to say that the sin of man contains, as it were infinite malice. And St. Augustine calls sin “an infinite evil.” Hence were all men and Angels to offer themselves to death and annihilation, such an offering would not satisfy for a single sin. God punishes sin with the pains of hell; but all Theologians teach that *this chastisement is less than sin deserves.*

And what punishment can be sufficient for a worm who assails his Lord? God is the Lord of all because He has created all. *All things are in thy power . . . Thou hast made heaven and earth and all things.*—(Esth. xiii., 9). All creatures obey God. *The winds and the sea obey him.*—(Matt. viii., 27). *Fire, hail, snow, ice, stormy winds fulfil his word.*—(Ps. cxlviii., 8). But when man sins, what does he do? He says to God: Lord, I will not serve Thee. *Thou hast broken my yoke; thou hast burst my bonds; thou saidst: I will not serve.*—(Jer. ii., 20). The Lord says to him: Seek not revenge; take not that property which belongs to another; abstain from that unchaste gratification. But man answers: I will have revenge; I will take possession of that property; I will indulge in that forbidden pleasure. Like Pharaoh, when Moses, on the part of God, commanded him to allow the people to go into the desert, the sinner answers: *Who is the Lord, that I*

should hear his voice? I know not the Lord.—(Exod. v. 2). The sinner says the same: Lord, I know Thee not, I will do what I please.

Behold, O my God, at Thy feet the rash and daring rebel who has had the temerity and the audacity to insult Thee so often to Thy very face, and to turn his back upon Thee. Thou hast said: *Cry to me, and I will hear.*—(Jer. xxxiii., 8). Hell is too little for me; this I already know. But, remember, O Lord, that I am more sorry for having offended Thee Who art infinite Goodness, than I would be for the loss of all my property and of my very life. Ah, Lord, pardon me, and do not permit me ever to offend Thee again.

II.

In a word, the sinner insults the Lord to His face, and turns his back upon Him. Mortal sin is precisely a turning away from God. Of this the Lord Himself complains. *Thou hast forsaken me, saith the Lord; thou art gone backward.*—(Jer. xv., 6). You have, says God, been ungrateful to me; you have turned your back upon me; you are gone backward. God has declared that He hates sin. Hence He cannot but hate the sinner who commits it. *But to God the wicked and his wickedness are hateful alike.*—(Wis. xiv., 9). In committing sin man dares to declare himself the enemy of God, and to contend single-handed with the Lord. *He hath, says Job, strengthened himself against the Almighty.*—(Job xv., 25). What would you say if you saw an insect attack an armed soldier? God is the Omnipotent Being Who by a nod has created Heaven and earth out of nothing.—(Mach. vii., 28). And if He wished, He could by another act of His will, destroy all creatures. *The Almighty Lord, who, at a beck, can utterly destroy . . . the whole world.*—(Ibid. viii., 18). In consenting to sin, the sinner stretches out his arm against the Lord. *He hath, says Job, stretched out his hand against God. He hath run against him with his neck raised up, and is armed with a fat neck.*—(Job xv., 25). He raises his neck, that is, he swells with pride, and runs

to insult God; he arms himself with a fat neck, that is, with ignorance; for a fat neck is the symbol of ignorance—of that ignorance which makes the sinner say, *What harm have I done? What great evil is that sin which I have committed? God is merciful. He pardons sinners.* What an insult to God! What temerity! What blindness!

Thou hast waited for me, O my God, that I may repent and forever bless Thy mercy and love Thee. Yes, I repent, I bless Thee, I love Thee and I hope, through the merits of Jesus Christ, that I shall never again be separated from Thy love. Thy love has rescued me from hell; it is by Thy love that I am to be preserved from sin for the future. I thank Thee, my Lord, for the light and the desire Thou givest me to love Thee forever. Ah, take possession of my whole being—of my soul and body—of my powers and senses—of my will and liberty. I am Thine—save me. Thou art my only Good; Thou art alone amiable: mayest Thou also be my only Love. Give me fervour in loving Thee. I have offended Thee grievously. Hence it is not enough for me to love Thee. I wish to love Thee ardently in order to compensate for the injuries I have done Thee. From Thee Who art omnipotent I hope for this love. I also hope for it, O Mary, through thy prayers which are powerful with God.

Thursday—First Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

MEMENTO MORI! REMEMBER DEATH!

Oh, how correctly men estimate things, and how well directed their actions whose judgments are formed and whose conduct is regulated in view of death! “Consider the end of life,” says St. Laurence Justinian, “and you will love nothing in this world.”

I.

Death is certain. But, O God, this truth Christians know, this they believe and see; and how can they still live so forgetful of death as if they would never have to die? If after this life there were neither hell nor Heaven, could they think less of it than they do at present? It is this forgetfulness that makes them lead so wicked a life. If you wish to live well, spend the remaining days of life with death before your eyes. *O death, thy sentence is welcome.*—(Eccclus. xli., 3). Oh, how correctly do men estimate things, and how well directed their actions whose judgments are formed and whose conduct is regulated in view of death! “Consider the end of life,” says St. Laurence Justinian, “and you will love nothing in this world.” *All that is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes and the pride of life.*—(1 John, ii., 16). All the goods of this earth are reduced to the pleasures of sense, to riches and honours. But all these are readily despised by the man who considers that after being the food of worms in the grave, he will soon be reduced to dust.

And in reality it was in view of death that the Saints despised all the goods of this earth. St. Charles Borromeo kept on his table a skull in order that he might continually contemplate it. Cardinal Baronius had inscribed on his ring the words, *Memento Mori! Remember Death!* The Venerable Father Juvenal Ancina, Bishop of Saluzzo, had this motto written on a skull, “What you are, I was; and what I am, you shall be.” A holy hermit being asked when dying how he could be so cheerful, said: “I have always kept death before my eyes; and therefore, now that it has arrived, I see nothing new in it.”

Then, at death, all shall be at an end for me! I shall then find only the little I have done for Thee, O my God, and what do I wait for! Do I wait till death comes and finds me as miserable and defiled with sin as I am at present? Were I now called to eternity I

should die with great disquietude on account of my past sins. No, my Jesus, I will not die in so sad a state. I thank Thee for having given me time to weep over my iniquities and to love Thee. I wish to begin from this moment. I am sorry from the bottom of my heart for having offended Thee, O Sovereign Good, and I love Thee above all things—I love Thee more than my life.

II.

What folly would it not be for a traveller to think only of acquiring dignities and possessions in the countries through which he had to pass, and thus reduce himself to the necessity of living miserably in his native land where he must remain during his whole life! And is not he a fool who seeks after happiness in this world where he spends only a few days, and exposes himself to the risk of being unhappy in the next where he must spend his eternity? We do not fix our affections on borrowed goods, because we know that they must soon be returned to the owner. All the goods of this earth are lent to us: it is folly to set our heart on what we must soon give up. Death shall strip us of them all. The acquisitions and fortunes of this world all terminate in a dying gasp, a funeral and a lowering into the grave. The house which you have built for yourself you must soon give up to others. The grave will be the dwelling of your body till the Day of Judgment; thence it will go to Heaven or to hell, wheresoever the soul will have already gone.

Oh, my Jesus, I give myself entirely to Thee. From this moment I embrace and unite Thee to my heart. I now consign my soul to Thee. *Into thy hands I commend my spirit.* I will not wait to give it to Thee when that *Professore*, "Depart, O soul," will announce my departure from this world. I will not wait till then to ask Thee to save me. "Jesu, sis mihi Jesus." My Saviour, save me now by granting me pardon and the grace of Thy holy love. Who knows but this consideration I am making may be the last call Thou wilt give me, and the last mercy Thou wilt show me? Extend

Thy hand, O my Love, and deliver me from the mire of my tepidity. Give me fervour and make me do with great love all that Thou dost demand of me. Eternal Father, for the love of Jesus Christ, give me holy perseverance, and the grace to love Thee, and to love Thee ardently during the remainder of my life. O Mary, through the love which thou bearest to thy Jesus, obtain for me these two graces—perseverance and love.

Spiritual Reading.

FAITH.

Faith is a virtue, or a gift that God infuses into our souls in Baptism; a gift by which we believe the Truths God Himself has revealed to the Holy Church, and which she proposes to our belief.

By the *Church* is meant the congregation of all who are *baptized* (for persons *not baptized* are out of the Church), and profess the true Faith under a visible Head, that is, the Sovereign Pontiff. I say the *true Faith*, to exclude heretics, who, though baptized, are separated from the Church! I say *under a visible head*, to exclude schismatics who do not obey the Pope, and on that account, easily pass from schism to heresy. St. Cyprian well says: "Heresies and schisms have no other origin than this—the refusal to obey the Priest of God and the notion that there can be more than one Priest at one time presiding over the Church, and more than one Judge at a time filling the office of Vicar of Christ."

We have all revealed Truths in the Sacred Scriptures, and in the Traditions gradually communicated by God to His servants. But how should we be able to ascertain what are the *true Traditions* and the *true Scriptures*, and what is their *true meaning*, if we had not the Church to teach us? This Church Jesus Christ established as *the pillar and the ground of the truth*.

—(1 Tim. iii., 15). To this Church our Saviour Himself has promised that she shall never be conquered by her enemies. *The gates of hell shall not prevail against her.*—(Matt. xvi., 18). The gates of hell are the heresies and heresiarchs that have caused so many miserable, deluded souls to wander from the right way. This Church it is that teaches us, through her ministers, the truths that we are to believe. Thus, St. Augustine says: "I would not believe the Gospel, were I not moved by the authority of the Church."

THE MOTIVE OF FAITH, AND HOW WE SHOULD MAKE AN ACT OF FAITH.

The cause or motive, then, which imposes on me the obligation to believe the Truths of Faith is, because God, the infallible Truth, has revealed them, and because the Church proposes them to my belief. So we should make an Act of Faith in this way: "O my God, revealed to the Church the Truths of Faith, hast all the Church proposes to my belief."

This is the reason or motive which makes me believe the Truths of revelation. Let us now see what are those Truths which we are obliged to believe.

THE PRINCIPAL ARTICLES OF FAITH.

There are four principal Articles of Faith:

1. There is an ever-present God.
2. He is a Rewarder Who rewards with the eternal glory of Paradise all who observe His law, and punishes all who transgress it with the everlasting torments of hell.
3. In God there are Three Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these Persons, though distinct from one another, are but One God, because They are one Essence and one Divinity. Hence, as the Father is Eternal, Omnipotent, Infinite, so are the Son and the Holy Ghost equally Eternal, Omnipotent, and Infinite. The Son is begotten of the Intelligence of the

Father. The Holy Ghost proceeds from the Will of the Father and the Son, by the Love with which They love each other.

4. The Incarnation of the Eternal Word—that is, of the Second Person—the Son, Who, by the operation of the Holy Ghost, was made man in the womb of the Virgin Mary—for the Person of the Word assumed the nature of man, so that the two natures, the Divine and the human, were united in the Person of Jesus Christ, Who suffered and died for our salvation. But what necessity was there that Jesus Christ should suffer for our redemption? Man had sinned; and to obtain pardon it was necessary that man should make a full satisfaction to God for the sins that had been committed. But how could man make such satisfaction to the infinite majesty of God? What, then, did God do? The Father sent the Son to take upon Himself our nature; and the Son, Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, atoned to the divine justice on behalf of man. Such is the debt and the love that we owe to Jesus Christ. Denis the Carthusian tells us of a young man who, at Mass, did not kneel down at the words of the Creed, *Et homo factus est*; upon which a devil with a club appeared to him, and said: "Thou ungrateful wretch, dost thou not thank the God Who was made flesh for thee? If He had done for us what He has done for thee, we should be always prostrate in thankful adoration. And thou dost not even make a sign of thankfulness." Then he gave him a terrible blow with his club and left him half dead.

Evening Meditation.

HE THAT LOVES GOD MUST LOVE, NOT ABHOR, DEATH.

How can he abhor death who is in the grace of God? *He that abideth in love dwelleth in God and God in him.*—(1 John, iv., 16). He, therefore, that loves God

is secure of His grace, and dying thus he is sure of going to rejoice forever in the kingdom of the Blessed; and shall such a one fear death? David truly said: *Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight no man living shall be justified.*—(Ps. cxlii. 2). This means that no man may presume to be saved by his own merits; for no one but Jesus and Mary can say that he has been without sin through life. Yet he ought not to fear death, if, with true repentance for his sins, he trusts in the merits of Jesus Christ Who came on earth to save sinners. *The Son of man came to save that which was lost.*—(Matt. xviii. 11). And for this end He died, and poured forth His Blood to save sinners. The Blood of Christ Jesus, says the Apostle, speaks better in favour of sinners than the blood of Abel spoke against Cain who slew him.—(Heb. xii., 22).

It is true that, without a divine revelation, no man can possess an infallible certainty of his own salvation; but he that has given himself with a true heart to God, and is ready to lose everything, even life itself, rather than lose the divine grace, has a moral certainty that he will be saved. This certainty is founded on the divine promises. No man, says the Scripture, ever trusted in God and was confounded. Almighty God declares in many passages that He does not desire the death of the sinner but that he be converted and live. *Is it my will that a sinner should die, saith the Lord God, and not that he should be converted from his ways and live?*—(Ezech. xviii., 23). In another place He makes the same declaration and adds an oath: *As I live, saith the Lord God, I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.*—(Ezech. xxxiii., 11). And God laments over those obstinate sinners who choose to perish because they will not leave their sins, and He says: *Why will you die, O house of Israel?* And to those who repent of their sins He promises to forget all their iniquities. *If the wicked do penance for all his sins which he hath committed he shall live. . . . I will not remember all his iniquities that he hath done.*—(Ezech. xviii., 21).

O my beloved Jesus and my Judge, when Thou dost judge me, for Thy mercy condemn me not to hell! In hell I could not love Thee, but should hate Thee forever; and how can I hate Thee Who art so worthy of love, and Who hast loved me? If Thou wilt condemn me to hell, at least grant me grace to be able to love Thee there with all my heart. This grace to love Thee I do not deserve through my sins, but if I do not deserve it, Thou hast purchased it for me with the Blood Thou didst shed with such anguish for me upon the Cross.

II.

When a sinner also hates the sins he has committed, it is a certain sign that he has been pardoned. A holy Father says that whoever can say, with truth: *I hate and abhor my iniquities*—(Ps. cxviii., 163), may be certain that they are forgiven. We have another sign of pardon when we recover grace and persevere in a good life for a considerable time after having sinned. It is also a sure sign to the same effect when we have a fixed resolution to die rather than lose the friendship of God, as also when we earnestly desire to love Him, and to see Him loved by others, and when we feel distress at seeing Him offended.

How is it then, that certain great Saints after having given themselves wholly to God, and after a life of mortification and detachment from all earthly things, at the hour of death have felt great terror at the thought of appearing before Christ their Judge? I reply that those great Saints who suffered these fears at the moment of death were very few, and that it was the will of God that they should thus purge away the remains of their sins before entering into eternal blessedness; but that generally speaking, all the Saints have died in remarkable peace, and with an earnest desire to depart to the presence of God. And besides, this is the difference between sinners and Saints at the hour of death: sinners pass from fear to despair, Saints from fear to confidence, and thus die in peace.

Therefore, every one who has a hope that he is in the grace of God ought to desire death, repeating the prayer which Christ has taught us : *They kingdom come!* And he ought to embrace death with joy when it comes that where no one lives without imperfections, and go to behold God, face to face, and love Him with all his powers in the kingdom of love.

O my Judge, inflict on me every pain, but deprive me not of the power of loving Thee. O Mother of God, behold the peril in which I stand of being condemned to be unable to love thy Son Who deserves an infinite love! Help me; have pity on me. St. Joseph, my Protector, obtain for me a holy death. My Guardian Angel, St. Michael the Archangel, defend me from the evil one in the last conflict. My holy Patrons and all ye Saints in Paradise, succour me in that last hour. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, be with me in the hour of my death.

Friday—First Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

“FOR WHAT IS YOUR LIFE?”

Worldlings esteem happy only those who enjoy the pleasures, the riches and the pomps of this earth. But death puts an end to all these earthly goods. *For what is your life? It is a vapour which appeareth for a little while.* O my Jesus, how often, for the miserable pleasures and goods of this earth, have I offended and lost Thee Who art an Infinite Good!

I.

For what is your life? It is a vapour which appeareth for a little while.—(James iv., 15). The vapours exhaled from the earth, when raised in the air and clothed in the light of the sun, make a splendid appearance, but how long does this splendour last? It vanishes before the first blast of wind. Behold that nobleman : to-day flattered and feared and almost adored; to-morrow dead, despised, reviled and trampled upon. At death we must leave all things. The brother of that great servant of God, Thomas à Kempis, took delight in speaking of a beautiful house which he had built for himself : a friend told him that it had one great defect. “What is it?” he asked. “It is,” answered the other, “that you have made a door in it.” “What!” rejoined the brother of à Kempis, “is a door a defect?” “Yes,” answered the friend; “for through this door you must one day be carried dead and must leave house and all.”

Death in a word, strips man of all this world’s goods. Oh, what a spectacle to behold a prince banished from his palace, never more to return to it; and to see others take possession of his furniture, his money, and all his other goods! The servants leave him in the grave with a garment scarcely sufficient to cover his body. There is no longer any one to esteem or flatter him, no longer any one to attend to his commands. Saladin, who had acquired many kingdoms in Asia, gave directions at death, that when his body should be carried to the place of burial a person should go before, holding a winding-sheet suspended from a pole and crying aloud : “This is all that Saladin brings with him to the grave.”

My Lord, since Thou givest me light to know that whatever the world esteems is smoke and folly grant me strength to detach my heart from earthly goods before death separates me from them. Miserable that I have been! How often for the miserable pleasures and goods of this earth, have I offended and lost Thee, Who art an Infinite Good! O Jesus, my heavenly Physician,

Ah, assist me! Thou knowest my weakness. Hell will not cease to tempt me: it already prepares a thousand attacks to make me again its slave. NO, my Jesus, do not abandon me. I wish to be henceforth the slave of Thy love. Thou art my only Lord; Thou hast created and redeemed me; Thou hast loved me more than all others; Thou alone hast merited my love; These alone do I wish to love.

Spiritual Reading.

THE THINGS THAT WE MUST KNOW AND BELIEVE—

SOME NECESSARY BY NECESSITY OF MEANS, AND OTHERS BY NECESSITY OF PRECEPT.

There are some Articles to be believed by *necessity of means* without which we cannot obtain salvation; others by *necessity of precept*. The necessity of *means* implies that if we do not believe certain Articles of Faith, we cannot be saved. The necessity of *precept* signifies that we must believe certain other Articles proposed to us by the Church, but if it happens that we are ignorant of them by invincible ignorance, we are excused from sin and may be saved.

1. To know and believe that there is a God, and that He is a just rewarder of virtue and punisher of vice, is certainly necessary as a *means of salvation*, according to the words of the Apostle, *For he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and is a rewarder to them that seek him.*—(Heb. xi., 6). Some authors hold that belief in the other two Articles—the *Trinity of Persons* and the *Incarnation of the Word*—is necessary by *necessity of precept*, but not necessary as a *means of salvation*, so that a person inculpably ignorant of them may be saved. At any rate it is certain, as Innocent

cast Thine eyes upon my poor soul, look at the many wounds which I have inflicted on it by my sins, and have pity on me. *If thou wishest thou canst make me clean.*—(Matt. viii., 2). I know that Thou art able and willing to heal me; but in order to heal me, Thou wishest me to repent of the injuries which I have committed against Thee. I am sorry for them from the bottom of my heart. Heal me, then, now that it is in Thy power to heal me. *Heal my soul, for I have sinned against thee.*—(Ps. xl., 5).

II.

When the body of the prince is laid in the grave, his flesh drops off, and behold, his skeleton can no longer be distinguished from others. "Contemplate," says St. Basil, "the sepulchres of the dead, and see if you can distinguish who has been a servant, and who has been a master." Diogenes was one day seen by Alexander the Great seeking with great anxiety for something among the bones of the dead. Alexander asked him what he was in search of. "I am looking," replied Diogenes, "for the head of Philip your father. I am not able to distinguish it. If you can find it, show it to me." "Men," says Seneca, "are born unequal; but after death all are equal." And Horace says that death brings down the sceptre to the level of the spade—*Sceptra lignonibus æquat*. In a word, when death comes, *the end comes*; all ends, we leave all things; and of all we possess in this world, we bring nothing to the grave.

I have forgotten Thee, O Lord, but Thou hast not forgotten me; and now Thou makest me feel that Thou wilt even forget the injuries I have done Thee, if I detest Thee. *But if the wicked do penance . . . I will not remember all his iniquities.*—(Ezech. xviii., 21). Behold, I detest my sins, I hate them above all things. Forget, then, O my Redeemer, all the displeasure I have given Thee. For the future I will forfeit all things, even life, rather than forfeit Thy grace. And what can all the goods of this earth profit me without Thy grace?

XI. declared (when condemning a contrary proposition), that he who is ignorant of the two Mysteries of the Most Holy Trinity and of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ cannot receive absolution.

2. We are obliged only by necessity of *præcepti* (which, however, binds under grievous sin), to know and believe the other Articles of the Creed, at least the principal Articles among them—such as that God has created Heaven and earth; that He preserves and governs the universe; that the Blessed Virgin Mary is the true Mother of God and is ever a Virgin; that on the third day after His death Jesus Christ rose from the dead by His own power; that He ascended into Heaven and there sits on the right hand of His Eternal Father. By this it is meant that Jesus Christ, even as Man, sits at the right hand of God—that is, that He permanently possesses a glory equal to that of the Father, as Bellarmine explains. I said *even as Man*. For as God, Jesus Christ is in all things equal to the Father. As Man, He is, indeed, inferior to the Father, but because our Saviour is at the same time both *God and Man*, and only one Person, therefore the Humanity of Jesus Christ in Heaven has a glory and majesty equal to that of the Father, not by its own dignity, but because it is united with the Person of the Son of God. When a king sits on his throne, the regal purple that he wears is there with him; thus the Humanity of Christ by itself is not equal to God, but because it is united with a divine Person, it is seated on the same throne with God, with a glory equal to that of God.

We are also bound to know and believe that, on the last day of the world all men shall rise, and shall be judged by Jesus Christ. We must also believe that the *Roman Catholic Church* is the *only true Church*. Hence they who are out of our Church, or separated from it, cannot be saved, except infants who die after Baptism. We are obliged to believe in the Communion of Saints—that is, that each of the faithful in the state of grace partakes of the merits of all the Saints living and dead. We must also believe in the remission of

sins—that is, that our sins are remitted in the Sacrament of Penance, provided we are sincerely penitent for them. Lastly, we must believe in Eternal life—that is, that he who is saved by dying in a state of grace will go to Heaven, where he will enjoy God for all eternity; and that he who dies in sin will be sent to hell, where he will be tormented for all eternity.

Moreover, every Christian is obliged to know the Precepts of the Decalogue and those of the Church, and the principal obligations of his own state of life, whether he be an ecclesiastic or secular, married or single, a lawyer, doctor, etc.

Every one is bound also to know and believe in the Seven Sacraments and their effects, particularly the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Penance, and Eucharist, and the other Sacraments when he is about to receive them.

All are obliged to know the *Our Father*. The “Our Father,” or Lord’s Prayer, is a prayer that Jesus Christ Himself composed, and left to us that we may know in what manner to ask the graces most necessary for our salvation. St. Hugh, Bishop of Grenoble, on one occasion when he was ill, repeated the *Our Father* three hundred times in one night. His attendant advised him not to repeat it so often, for fear of increasing his illness. The Saint answered that the oftener he said it, the faster he recovered. It is particularly useful to repeat over and over again the words, *Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven*; for the greatest grace that God can bestow upon us is to make us do His holy will here on earth. It is also very profitable to repeat the petition, *and lead us not into temptation*, begging the Lord to deliver us from the temptations in which He foresees that we should fall.

Moreover, every one should learn the *Hail Mary*, in order to know how to recommend ourselves to the Mother of God through whom, as St. Bernard says, we receive all the graces God gives us.

All should likewise know that there exists a Purgatory, a place for expiating sins after death, where the Faithful

suffer for their sins those temporal punishments that they did not fully undergo in this life. We should, therefore, be mindful to pray and offer our suffrages for the Holy Souls in Purgatory whom we are, as far as we can, bound to relieve in their sufferings. Indeed the least pain in Purgatory is greater than all the pains of this life put together, for the pains of these spouses of Christ are most intense, and these Poor Souls are unable to assist themselves. If on this earth, our neighbour were suffering great pain, and we could relieve him without any great inconvenience, should we not be obliged to do so? We are equally bound to render assistance to these Holy Souls, at least by our prayers.

We should also know that it is very useful to us to obtain the intercession of the Saints, and particularly of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This is of Faith, as the Council of Trent has declared against the impious Calvin who said it was wrong to ask the assistance of the Saints. Nay, according to the doctrine of St. Thomas, we mortals are absolutely bound to go to the Saints in order to obtain, through their intercession, the divine graces necessary for our salvation; not because God cannot save us without the intercession of the Saints, but because the order established by God requires that while we remain in this life we should be brought back to Him by the mediation and prayers of the Saints. This doctrine is also held by other Theologians. We should likewise venerate the Relics of the Saints, the Cross, and Sacred Images.

Evening Meditation.

JESUS SATISFIES FOR OUR SINS.

Blotting out the handwriting of the decree that was against us which was contrary to us. And he hath taken the same out of the way fastening it to the cross.—(Coloss. ii., 14).

The sentence was already recorded against us that was to condemn us to eternal death, as rebels against

the offended Majesty of God. And what did Jesus Christ do? With His Blood He cancelled the writing of the condemnation, and, to deliver us from all fear, He fastened it to His own Cross on which He died to satisfy divine Justice for us. My soul, behold the obligation thou art under to thy Redeemer; and hear how the Holy Spirit now reminds thee: *Forget not the kindness of thy surety.*—(Eccclus. xxix., 20). Forget not the kindness of thy Surety. Who, taking upon Himself thy debts, hath paid them for thee; and behold, the pledge of the payment has been already fixed to the Cross. When, therefore, thou dost remember thy sins, look upon the Cross and have confidence. Look on that sacred wood red with the Blood of the Lamb of God sacrificed for thy love, and hope in and love a God Who hath loved thee so much.

Yes, my Jesus, I hope for everything from Thy infinite goodness. It is of Thy divine nature to render good for evil to those who repent of their sins, who are sorry for having committed them, and love Thee. Yes, I am sorry above all things, my beloved Redeemer, for having despised Thy goodness so much, and, wounded by Thy love, I love Thee and I ardently desire to please Thee in everything that is Thy will. Alas! when I was in sin, I was the servant of the devil and he was my master. Now that I hope to remain in Thy grace, Thou alone, my Jesus, art the only Lord of my heart and my only Love. Take possession of me, then, and keep me always, possess me entirely, for Thine only do I desire to be. Nevermore will I forget the pains Thou hast suffered for me, so that I shall be more and more inflamed with Thy love. I love Thee, my most dear Redeemer; I love Thee, O Word Incarnate, my Treasure, my All. I love Thee! I love Thee!

II.

But if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Just, and he is the propitiation for our sins.—(1 Jo. ii., 1).

Oh, what great confidence do these words give to penitent sinners! Jesus Christ is in Heaven, advocating their cause, and He is certain to obtain pardon for them. The devil, when a sinner has escaped from his chains, tempts him to be diffident of obtaining pardon. But St. Paul encourages him, saying, *Who is he that shall condemn? Jesus Christ that died, . . . who also maketh intercession for us.*—(Rom. viii., 34). The Apostle means to say, that if we detest the sins we have committed, we should not fear. Who is He that will condemn us? Jesus Christ, the same Who died that we might not be condemned, and Who is now in Heaven advocating our cause. He goes on to say: *Who, then, shall separate us from the love of Christ?*—(Rom. viii., 35). As if he would say: But, after we have been pardoned with so much love by Jesus Christ, and have been received into His grace, who could have the heart to turn his back upon Him and separate himself from His love?

No, my Jesus, I no longer rely upon myself so as to live separated from Thee and deprived of Thy love. I weep over the unhappy days when I lived without Thy grace. Now I hope that Thou hast pardoned me. I love Thee and Thou lovest me. But Thou dost love me with a boundless love, and I love Thee so little. Give me more love. Infinite Goodness, I repent above all things for having hitherto so ill-treated Thee; now I love Thee above all things; I love Thee more than myself; and I delight more in knowing Thou art infinitely blessed, than in my own happiness, because Thou art worthy of infinite love. I deserve nothing but hell. My Jesus, I wish for nothing from Thee but Thyself.

Saturday—First Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

MARY'S FAITH.

St. Leo applies to our Blessed Lady the words of Proverbs: *Her lamp shall not be put out in the night.* When the Disciples doubted, she did not doubt. She saw Jesus weep and believed Him the Joy of Paradise. She saw Him in death, despised and crucified, and although Faith wavered in others, Mary remained firm in the belief that He was God. O Virgin Mary, increase our Faith!

I.

As the Blessed Virgin is the Mother of holy Love and Hope, so also is she the Mother of Faith: *I am the mother of fair love, and of fear, and of knowledge, and of holy hope.*—(Ecclus. xxiv., 24). And with reason is she so, says St. Ireneus, for “the evil done by Eve’s incredulity was remedied by Mary’s Faith.” This is confirmed by Tertullian who says that because Eve, contrary to the assurance that she had received from God, believed the serpent, she brought death into the world; but our Queen, because she believed the Angel when he said that she, remaining a virgin, would become the Mother of God, brought salvation into the world. For St. Augustine says that “when Mary consented to the Incarnation of the Eternal Word, by means of her Faith she opened Heaven to men.” Richard of St. Laurence, on the words of St. Paul, for

the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the believing wife—(Cor. vii., 14), says that "Mary is the believing woman by whose Faith the unbelieving Adam and all his posterity have been saved." Hence on account of her Faith, Elizabeth called the holy Virgin blessed: *Blessed art thou that hast believed, because those things shall be accomplished in thee that were spoken by the Lord.*—(Luke i., 45). And St. Augustine adds, that Mary was more blessed in receiving the Faith of Christ than in conceiving the Flesh of Christ.

Father Suarez says that the most holy Virgin had more Faith than all men and Angels. She saw her Son in the Crib of Bethlehem, and believed Him the Creator of the world. She saw Him fly from Herod, and yet believed Him the King of kings. She saw Him born and believed Him Eternal. She saw Him poor and in need of food, and believed Him the Lord of the universe. She saw Him lying on straw, and believed Him Omnipotent. She observed that He did not speak, and she believed Him Infinite Wisdom. She heard Him weep, and believed Him the Joy of Paradise. In fine, she saw Him in death, despised and crucified, and, although Faith wavered in others, Mary remained firm in the belief that He was God.

On these words of the Gospel, *there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother*—(Jo. xix., 25), St. Antoninus says: "Mary stood supported by her Faith which she retained firm in the Divinity of Christ." And for this reason it is, the Saint adds, that in the office of *Tenebræ* only one candle is left lighted. St. Leo, on this subject, applies to our Blessed Lady the words of Proverbs, *Her lamp shall not be put out in the night.*—(Prov. xxxi., 18).

Therefore Mary merited by her great Faith to become "the light of all the faithful," as St. Methodius calls her, and the "Queen of the true Faith," as she is called by St. Cyril of Alexandria. The Holy Church herself attributes to the merits of Mary's Faith the destruction of all heresies: "Rejoice, O Virgin Mary, for thou alone hast destroyed all heresies throughout the world."

II.

St. Ildephonsus exhorts us to imitate Mary's Faith. But how can we do so? Faith at the same time that it is a gift, is also a virtue. It is a gift of God inasmuch as it is a light infused by Him into our souls; and a virtue, inasmuch as the soul has to exercise itself in the practice of it. Hence Faith is not only to be the rule of our belief, but also that of our actions; therefore St. Gregory says "he truly believes who puts what he believes into practice;" and St. Augustine, "Thou sayest, I believe; do what thou sayest, and that is Faith." To have a lively Faith is to live according to our belief: *My just man liveth by faith.*—(Heb. x., 38). Thus did the Blessed Virgin live very differently from those who do not live in accordance with what they believe, and whose Faith is dead, as St. James declares, *Faith without works is dead.*—(James ii., 26).

Diogenes sought for a man on earth; but God, amongst the many faithful, seems to seek for a Christian, for few there are who have good works. The greater number have only the name of Christian. To such as these should be applied the words once addressed by Alexander the Great to a cowardly soldier who was also named Alexander: "Either change thy name or change thy conduct." But as Blessed John of Avila used to say, "It would be better to shut up these poor creatures as madmen who believe that an eternity of happiness is prepared for those who lead good lives, and an eternity of misery for those who lead bad lives, and yet live as if they believed nothing." St. Augustine therefore exhorts us to see things with the eyes of Christians, that is to say, with eyes which look at all things in the light of Faith; for, as St. Teresa often said, all sins come from a want of Faith. Let us therefore entreat the most holy Virgin, by the merit of her Faith to obtain us a lively Faith. "O Lady, increase our Faith."

Spiritual Reading.

PROOFS OF THE TRUTH OF OUR FAITH.

Before I proceed farther, I will answer an objection which may be made. It is asserted that the truth of our Faith is clear and evident: but how can it be clear when there are so many Mysteries, such as the Trinity, the Incarnation of the Word, and the Eucharist, which are obscure and incomprehensible?

I answer, the *Mysteries* of the Faith are obscure, but not the *truth* of the Faith. That our Faith is *true*, is evident by the plainest and most irrefragable arguments. The *Mysteries* of Faith are obscure to us, and God Himself wishes them to be obscure. First, because He wishes to be honoured by our believing, though we cannot comprehend, all the truths that He has revealed; and, secondly, because we acquire merit by believing what we do not see. What merit should a man have for believing something because he sees and comprehends it? St. Gregory says that Faith has no merit if human reason furnishes a proof for it. But if we are unable to comprehend the material things of this world—for who is there that comprehends how the magnet attracts iron? how a single grain of corn, sown in the earth, produces a thousand other grains? Who comprehends the action of the moon, or that of lightning?—what wonder is there if we cannot comprehend the *Mysteries* of God?

The *objects*, then, of our Faith are obscure; but the *truth* of our Faith is established by so many evident proofs, that he who does not embrace it can only be called a fool. These proofs are numerous. We shall mention only three of them:

1. The first is taken from the Prophecies written in the Holy Bible so many ages before the event and afterwards exactly fulfilled. Long before it happened, the Death of Our Redeemer was foretold by several Prophets.

David, Daniel, Aggeus and Malachy foretold the time and circumstances of His Death. It was foretold that in punishment of the murder of Jesus Christ by the Jews, their temple should be destroyed, and they should be driven from their country; that they should remain blinded in their sin, and should be scattered over the whole earth. We know that all this has taken place. It was also foretold that after the death of the Messias, the world should be converted from idolatry to the worship of the true God—and this was done by the holy Apostles, who, unaided by learning, nobility, riches, or the protection of the great, and even in spite of the opposition of the potentates of the earth, recalled the world to the worship of the true God and induced men to forsake their gods and their inveterate habits of vice, in order to embrace a Faith that taught them to believe so many Mysteries they could not comprehend, and imposed on them so many Precepts hard to be observed, because so contrary to corrupt nature; such as, to love our enemies, to abstain from pleasures, to bear insults, and to place all our affections, not in the goods that we see, but in the goods of a future life that we do not see.

2. We have further evident proofs of our Faith in the multitude of miracles wrought by Jesus Christ, by the Apostles and other Saints, in the presence of the very enemies of the Faith, who, when they could not deny the prodigies, said that they were performed by diabolical agency. But true miracles that surpass the power of nature, such as the raising of the dead to life, giving sight to the blind, and the like, cannot be wrought by devils. They have no power to work such miracles. God cannot permit a miracle except in confirmation of the true Faith. Should He permit a miracle in confirmation of error, He Himself would deceive us. Therefore, the true miracles that we witness in the Catholic Church are infallible proofs of the Truth of our Faith.

3. The constancy of the Martyrs is again a very strong argument in favour of our Faith. In the first ages of the Church, in the reign of the tyrants, there were many millions of persons, and among them many tender virgins

and children, who, rather than deny the Faith of Jesus Christ, endured with joy torments and death. Sulpitius Severus writes that, in the time of Diocletian, the Martyrs presented themselves to their judges with a desire of Martyrdom that surpassed the avidity with which men pursue the riches and honours of the world.

The Martyrdom of St. Mauritius, and the whole Theban Legion, is one famous in history. The Emperor Maximian commanded all his soldiers to assist at an impious sacrifice he was going to offer to his false deities. St. Mauritius and his soldiers, because they were all Christians, refused to obey the order of the Emperor. Having heard of their refusal, Maximian, to punish their disobedience, ordered them to be decimated—that is, the head of every tenth man in the legion to be cut off. Each of them desired to die; and the soldiers who were spared envied the happiness of those who were put to death for Jesus Christ. As soon as this was made known to Maximian, he ordered them to be decimated a second time; but this only increased their desire of Martyrdom. In the end the tyrant ordered them all to be beheaded; and all with joy in their faces, laid down their arms, and, like so many meek lambs, gladly and without resistance submitted to death.

Prudentius relates that a child, seven years old, whose name is unrecorded, was tempted by Asclepiades to deny the Faith of Christ; but when the boy refused, saying that he had been taught this Faith by his mother, the tyrant sent for her, and in her presence caused the child to be scourged till his whole body became one wound. All the spectators shed tears of pity; but the mother exulted with joy at the sight of the fortitude of her son. Before death, the child being thirsty, asked his mother for a little water. “Son,” said the mother, “have patience a little while; you shall soon be satiated in Heaven with every delight.” The prefect, enraged at the constancy of the mother and the son, commanded his head to be cut off instantly. After the execution of the order, the mother took the dead child in her arms, and kissed him with feelings of the most joyful triumph because he had laid down his life for Jesus Christ.

From all that we have said, we ought to gather that we are bound to return God the most heartfelt thanks for having given us the gift of the true Faith. How great is the number of infidels, heretics, and schismatics! Catholics do not amount to a tenth of the human race, and God has placed us in this number. By His Providence we are born in the bosom of the true Church. Few thank God for this great benefit. Let us, at least, be careful to thank Him for it every day.

Evening Meditation.

THE PATIENCE OF GOD WITH SINNERS.

I.

The more we have experienced the patient mercies of God, the more we ought to be afraid of continuing to abuse them, lest the hour of God's vengeance overtake us. *Revenge is mine, and I will repay in due time.*—(Deut. xxxii., 35). God's forbearance will cease towards those who cease not to abuse it.

I give Thee thanks, O Lord, for having patiently borne with me though I have so often betrayed Thee. Make me sensible of the evil that I have done in abusing Thy patience for so long a time. Make me sorry for all the offences I have committed against Thee. No, I will never more abuse Thy tender mercy.

“Commit this sin; you can afterwards confess it.” Such is the artifice with which the devil has drawn many souls into hell. Many Christians now in hell have been lost by this delusion. *The Lord waiteth that he may have mercy on you.*—(Is. xxx., 18). God waits for the sinner that the sinner may be converted and obtain mercy; but when God sees that the time which He allows the sinner for doing penance is employed only to increase the number of his offences, then He waits no longer but punishes him as he deserves.

Pardon me, O God, for I desire never more to offend Thee. And why should I delay? That Thou mayest condemn me to hell? I fear, indeed, that now Thou canst no longer have patience with me. I have, indeed, offended Thee too grievously. I am sorry for it. I repent of it. I hope for forgiveness through the merits of the Blood Thou hast shed for me.

II.

The mercies of the Lord that we are not consumed: because his compassions have not failed.—(Lam. iii., 22). Thus should he exclaim who finds to his confusion, that he has frequently offended God. He should be most grateful to God for not having suffered him to die in his sins, and be most careful not to offend Him again; otherwise the Lord will reproach him, saying: *What more could I have done for my vineyard that I have not done?*—(Is. v., 4). God will say to him: Ungrateful soul, if thou hadst committed the same offences against man, who is viler than the earth, verily he would not have borne with thee. And what great mercies have I not exercised towards thee! How many times have I not called thee, and enlightened thee, and pardoned thee? The time of punishment is at hand! The time of forgiveness is past!—Thus has God spoken to many who are now suffering in hell, where one of their greatest torments is the remembrance of the mercies they formerly received from God.

Jesus, my Redeemer and my Judge, I also have deserved to hear the same from Thy mouth; but I hear Thee now calling me again to pardon: *Be converted to the Lord thy God*—(Osee xiv., 2). O accursed sin which has made me lose my God, how much do I abhor and detest thee! I turn my whole soul towards Thee, my Lord and my God. My sovereign Good, I love Thee, and because I love Thee I repent with my whole soul for having during the time past, so much despised Thee. My God, I desire never more to offend Thee: give me Thy love, grant me perseverance. Mary, my refuge, succour and help me.

Second Sunday after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

THE TENDER COMPASSION OF MARY, AND HER READINESS TO ASSIST US IN ALL OUR WANTS.

They have no wine.—(Gospel of Sunday. Jo. ii., 1—11).

Mary showed, even when living in this world, the great compassion she would afterwards exercise towards us in our necessities. Without being asked, and listening only to the dictates of her compassionate heart, she lays before her Son the distress of the bride and bridegroom. *They have no wine.* If Mary unasked is so prompt to succour the needy, how much more so is she to succour those who invoke her aid and ask for her help?

I.

The tenderness of Mary's Mercy may be inferred from the fact related in to-day's Gospel. The wine fails, the spouses are troubled, no one speaks to Mary to ask her Son to console them in their necessity. But the tenderness of Mary's heart which, according to St. Bernardine of Sienna, cannot but pity the afflicted, moved her to take the office of advocate, and without being asked, to entreat her Son to work a miracle. "Unasked, she assumed the office of an advocate and a compassionate helper." Hence, adds the same Saint, if, unasked, this good Lady has done so much, what will she not do for those who invoke her intercession?

From what is related in the Gospel St. Bonaventure draws another argument to show the great graces we

may hope to obtain through Mary now that she reigns in Heaven. If she was so compassionate on earth, how much greater must be her mercy now that she is in Paradise? Great was the mercy of Mary while in exile on earth, but it is much greater now that she is a Queen in Heaven, because she now sees the misery of men. Mary in Heaven enjoys the vision of God, and therefore she sees our wants far more clearly than when she was on earth; hence, as her pity for us is increased, so also is her desire to assist us more ardent. Truly, then, has Richard of St. Victor spoken, addressing the Blessed Virgin: "So tender is thy heart thou canst not see misery without succouring it."

St. Peter Damien says that the Virgin "loves us with an invincible love." How ardently soever the Saints may have loved this amiable Queen, their affection fell far short of the love which Mary bore to them. It is this love that makes her so solicitous for our welfare. The Saints in Heaven, says St. Augustine, have great power to obtain grace from God for those who commend themselves to their prayers; but as Mary is of all the Saints the most powerful, she is of all the most desirous to procure for us the divine Mercy.

O Mary, behold at thy feet a miserable slave of hell, who implores thy Mercy. I, indeed, deserve no favour, but thou art the Mother of Mercy, and Mercy is exercised in favour of those who are unworthy. The whole world calls thee the refuge and the hope of sinners; thou art, then, my refuge and my hope. I am a lost sheep, but it was to save the lost sheep the Eternal Word came down from Heaven and became thy Son. He wishes me to have recourse to thee and that thou assist me by thy prayers.

II.

Our great advocate Mary once said to St. Bridget, she regards not the iniquities of the sinner who has recourse to her, but the disposition with which he invokes her aid. If he comes to her with a firm purpose of amendment she receives him, and by her intercession heals

his wounds, and brings him to salvation. "However great a man's sins may be, if he return to me, I am ready instantly to receive him. Nor do I regard the number or the enormity of his sins, but the will with which he comes to me; for I do not disdain to anoint and heal his wounds, because I am called, and truly am, the Mother of Mercy." The Lord keeps His eyes upon the just.—(Ps. xxxiii., 16). But the Blessed Virgin keeps them upon the just and sinners, and acts towards each one of them precisely like a mother who has her eyes always fixed upon her child either to prevent it from falling or to raise it when fallen.

The Blessed Virgin is called a *fair olive tree in the plains*.—(Eccclus. xxiv., 19). From the olive, oil only comes forth; and from the hands of Mary only graces and mercies flow. According to Cardinal Hugo, it is said that she remains in the plains to show that she is ready to assist all those who have recourse to her.

St. Bonaventure used to say that in turning to Mary, he saw Mercy itself receiving him. "When I behold thee, O my Lady, I see nothing but Mercy." The Virgin said one day to St. Bridget that miserable, and miserable for eternity, shall be the sinner who, though he has it in his power during life to come to her who is able and willing to assist him, neglects to invoke her aid, and is lost. *The devil*, says St. Peter, *as a roaring lion goeth about seeking whom he may devour*.—(1 Pet. v., 8). But this Mother of Mercy constantly goeth about in search of sinners to save them. This Queen of clemency presents our petitions, and begins to assist us before we ask the assistance of her prayers. Because Mary's heart is so full of tenderness towards us that she cannot behold our miseries without affording relief.

Let us, then, in all our wants, be most careful to have recourse to this Mother of Mercy who is always ready to assist those who invoke her aid. She is always prepared to come to our help and frequently anticipates our supplications; but ordinarily, she requires that we should pray to her, and is offended when we neglect to ask her assistance. Thou, O Blessed Lady, art displeased not only with those who commit an injury

to be a refusal of the request of Mary, the Son, says St. John Chrysostom, resolved to yield to the desire of the mother. "Although He said, *My hour is not yet come*, He granted the petition of His Mother." Mary said to the waiters: *Whatever he shall say to you do ye*. Jesus bade them fill the water-pots with water and the water was changed into most excellent wine. Thus the bridegroom and the entire family were filled with gladness.

From the fact related in this day's Gospel, let us consider *the greatness of Mary's power to obtain for us from God all the graces of which we are in need*.

So great is Mary's merit in the eyes of God, that, according to St. Bonaventure, her prayers are infallibly heard. "The merit of Mary is so great before God, that her petition cannot be rejected." But why are the prayers of Mary so powerful in the sight of God? It is, says St. Antoninus, because "the petition of the Mother of God partakes of the nature of a command, and therefore it is impossible that she should not be heard." The prayers of the Saints are the prayers of *servants*; but the prayers of Mary are the prayers of *a mother*, and therefore, according to the holy Doctor, they are, in a certain sense, regarded as commands by her Son Who loves her so tenderly. It is, then, impossible that the prayers of Mary should be rejected.

Hence, according to Cosmas of Jerusalem, the intercession of Mary is all-powerful—*Omnipotens auxilium tuum, O Maria!* It is right, as Richard of St. Laurence teaches, that the Son should impart His power to the Mother. Jesus Christ, Who is All-powerful, has made Mary omnipotent, as far as a creature is capable of omnipotence; that is, omnipotent in obtaining from Him, her divine Son, whatever she asks. Hence St. Bernardine of Siena was able to say that all are subject to the power of Mary, and God Himself obeys her.

St. Bridget heard our Saviour one day addressing the Blessed Virgin in the following words: "Ask from Me whatever you wish, for your petition cannot be fruitless." My Mother, ask of Me what you please; I cannot

against thee, but also with those who do not ask favours of thee, says St. Bonaventure. Hence, as the same holy Doctor teaches, it is not possible that Mary should neglect to succour a soul that flies to her for protection; for she cannot but pity and console the afflicted who have recourse to her.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners! O great Mother of God, thou prayest for all; pray to thy Son also for me. Tell Him that I am thy client and that thou art my protectress. Tell Him that in thee after Him I have placed all my hope. Tell Him to pardon me, that I repent of all the insults I have offered Him. Tell Him to grant me in His mercy holy perseverance. Tell Him to grant me the grace to love Him with my whole heart. In fine, tell Him to save me. He does whatsoever thou askest. O Mary, my hope, I trust in thee. Have pity upon me.

Spiritual Reading.

THE GREATNESS OF MARY'S POWER TO OBTAIN FOR US FROM GOD ALL THE GRACES OF WHICH WE STAND IN NEED.

And the wine failing, the mother of Jesus saith to him: They have no wine.—(Gospel of Sunday. Jo. ii, 1—11).

In to-day's Gospel we read that Jesus Christ having been invited, went with His holy Mother to a marriage at Cana of Galilee. *The wine failing*, Mary said to her divine Son: *They have no wine*. By these words she intended to ask her Son to console the spouses, who were afflicted because the wine had failed. Jesus answered: *Woman, what is it to me and to thee? My hour is not yet come*. He meant that the time destined for the performance of miracles was that of His preaching through Judea. But, though His answer appeared

reject any prayer which you present to Me; "because since you refused Me nothing on earth, I will refuse you nothing in Heaven."

St. George, Archbishop of Nicomedia, says that Jesus Christ hears all the prayers of His Mother, as if He wished thereby to discharge the obligation which He owes to her for having given to Him His human nature, by consenting to accept Him for her Son. Hence, St. Methodius, Martyr, used to say to Mary: "Rejoice, O holy Virgin; for thou hast for thy debtor that Son to Whom we are all debtors; to thee He owes the human nature which He received from thee."

St. Gregory of Nicomedia encourages sinners by the assurance that, if they have recourse to the Virgin Mary with a determination to amend their lives, she will save them by her intercession. Hence, turning to Mary, he exclaimed: "Thou hast insuperable strength, lest the multitude of our sins should overcome thy clemency." O Mother of God, the sins of a Christian, however great they may be, cannot overcome thy mercy. "Nothing," adds the same Saint, "resists thy power, for the Creator regards thy glory as His own." Nothing is impossible to thee, says St. Peter Damian, thou canst raise even those who are in despair to hopes of salvation.

Richard of St. Laurence remarks that, in announcing to the Blessed Virgin that God had chosen her for the mother of His Son, the Archangel Gabriel said to her: *Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God.*—(Luke i., 30). From which words the same author concludes: "If we wish to recover lost grace, let us seek Mary by whom this grace has been found." She never lost divine grace; she always possessed it. If the angel declared that she had *found grace*, he meant that she had found it not for herself, but for us miserable sinners, who had lost it. Hence Cardinal Hugo exhorts us to go to Mary, and say to her: O Blessed Lady, property should be restored to those who lost it; the grace which thou hast found is not thine—for thou hast never lost the grace of God—but ours: we have lost it through our own fault; to us, then, thou oughtest to restore it. "Sinners, who by your sins have forfeited

the divine grace, run to the Virgin and say to her with confidence: Restore us to our property which thou hast found."

It was revealed to St. Gertrude, that all the graces which we ask of God through the intercession of Mary, will be given to us. She heard Jesus saying to His Divine Mother: "Through thee all who ask mercy with a purpose of amending their lives, shall obtain grace." If all Paradise asked a favour of God, and Mary asked the opposite grace, the Lord would hear Mary, and would reject the petition of the rest of the celestial host. "Because," says Father Suarez, "God loves the Virgin alone more than all the other Saints."

Let us, then, conclude in the words of St. Bernard: "Let us seek grace and let us seek it through Mary, for her petition cannot be rejected." Let us seek through Mary all the graces that we desire to receive from God, and we shall obtain them; for she is a Mother, and her Son cannot refuse to hear her prayers or to grant the graces which she asks from Him.

But, to obtain special favours from this good Lady, we must perform in her honour certain devotions practised by her servants, as follows:

1. To recite every day at least five Decades of the *Rosary*.
2. To fast every Saturday in her honour. Many persons fast every Saturday on bread and water; you should fast in this manner at least on the Vigils of her seven principal Festivals.
3. To say the *Angelus*, morning, noon and evening, and to salute her frequently during the day with an *Ave Maria*, a *Hail Mary*, particularly when you hear the clock strike, or when you see her image, and also when you leave or return to your house.
4. To say every evening the *Litany of the Blessed Virgin* before you go to rest; and for this purpose procure an image of Mary and keep it near your bed.
5. To wear the Scapulars of our Lady of Dolours, and of Mount Carmel.

6. There are many other devotions practised by the servants of Mary; but the most useful of all is, to recommend yourself frequently to her prayers. Never omit to say three *Hail Marys* in the morning, to beg of her to preserve you from sin during the day. In all temptations have immediate recourse to her. To resist every temptation, it is sufficient to pronounce the Names, *Jesus and Mary!* And if the temptation continues, let us continue to invoke Jesus and Mary, and the devil shall never be able to conquer us.

St. Bonaventure calls Mary the salvation of those who invoke her. And if a true servant of Mary were lost (I mean one truly devoted to her, who wishes to amend his life, and invoke with confidence this advocate of sinners), this would happen either because Mary was unable or unwilling to assist him. But, says St. Bernard, this is impossible: being the Mother of Omnipotence and of Mercy, Mary cannot want *the power*, or *the will*, to save her servants. Justly, then, is she called the salvation of all who invoke her aid. Of this truth there are numberless examples: that of St. Mary of Egypt will be sufficient. After leading for many years a sinful and dissolute life, she wished to enter the church of Jerusalem in which the Festival of the Holy Cross was being celebrated. To make her feel her miseries, God closed against her the door that was open to all others. As often as she endeavoured to enter, an invisible force drove her back. She instantly perceived her miserable condition, and remained in sorrow outside the church. Fortunately for her there was an image of most holy Mary over the porch of the church. As a poor sinner she recommended herself to the Divine Mother and promised to change her life. After her prayer she felt encouraged to go into the church; and behold, the door which was before closed against her she now finds open! She enters and confesses her sins. She leaves the church, and under the influence of divine inspiration, goes into the desert where she lived for forty-seven years and became a Saint.

Evening Meditation.

“PATIENT IN TRIBULATION.”

I.

And patience hath a perfect work. It is by patience that we gain Heaven. This earth is a place where we can gain merit; therefore it is not a place of rest, but of labours and sufferings; and it is for this end that God leaves us here that by patience we may obtain the glory of Paradise. Every one has to suffer in this world, but he who suffers with patience suffers less and saves his soul, while he who suffers with impatience suffers more and is lost. Our Lord does not send us crosses that we may be lost, as some impatient people say, but that thereby we may be saved and acquire more glory in Heaven. Sorrows, contradictions, and all other tribulations, when accepted with patience, become the brightest jewels in our heavenly crown. Whenever, then, we are in affliction, let us console ourselves and thank God for it, since it is a sign that God wishes us to be saved, by chastising us in this life, where the chastisements are but slight and short, so as not to punish us in the next, where the chastisements are terrible and eternal. Woe to the sinner who is prosperous in this life! It is a sign that God has reserved for him eternal punishment.

St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi says: “All sufferings, however great, become sweet when we look at Jesus on the Cross.” And St. Joseph Calasanctius: “He who cannot suffer for Jesus Christ, does not know how to gain Jesus Christ.” He, then, who loves Jesus Christ bears patiently all external crosses—sickness, pains, dishonour, loss of parents and friends; and all interior crosses—afflictions, weariness, temptations, and desolation of spirit, and bears them all in peace. On the

other hand, he who is impatient and angry when in tribulation, only increases his suffering, and adds to his punishment in the next life.

O my Jesus, 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 wilt. I love Thee, my dear Redeemer, I love Thee my God, and because I love Thee I wish to do whatever Thou wilt. O Will of God, Thou art my love! O Blood of my God, Thou art my hope!

II.

St. Teresa says: "the Cross is felt by those who drag it after them by force, but he who embraces it with a good will does not feel it." Hence St. Philip Neri also said that in this world there is no *Purgatory*. It is either *Heaven* or *hell*. He who bears tribulation with patience is in Heaven, but he who does not is in hell. But you will say: "What evil have I done that I should be thus persecuted? Why have I had to suffer such an affront?" O Christian, go and speak thus to Jesus Christ on the Cross and He will answer: "And I, what have I done, that I should have to suffer such sorrow and ignominy, and this death of the Cross?" If, then, Jesus Christ has suffered so much for the love of you, it is not much that you should suffer this little for the love of Jesus Christ. Particularly if you have ever during your life committed some grievous sin, think that you deserve to be in hell, where you would have to suffer much greater contempt and persecution from the devils. If also you should be persecuted for having done good, rejoice exceedingly. Hear what Jesus Christ says: *Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice sake.*—(Matt. v., 10). Let us be convinced of the truth of what the Apostle says, that he who would live united with Jesus Christ in this world must be persecuted.

O Jesus, I will always say in whatever shall befall me, *Thy will be done!* My God, thus hast Thou willed,

thus I will. My God, I wish only what Thou wishest and may Thy will be always accomplished in me. My Jesus, through Thy merits, grant me the grace always to repeat the beautiful dictate of love—*Thy will be done! Thy will be done!*

(Monday—Second Week after Epiphany)

Morning Meditation.

THE UNCERTAINTY OF THE HOUR OF DEATH.

Be you, then, also ready; for at what hour you think not, the Son of man will come.—(Luke xii., 40).

All know that they must die, but the misfortune is that many consider death at such a distance away that they lose sight of it. Even the old, the most decrepit and the most sickly flatter themselves that they will live three or four years longer. *At what hour you think not, the Son of man will come.*

I.

It is certain that we shall die, but the hour of death is uncertain. "Nothing," says the author who styles himself *Idiota*, "is more certain than death; but nothing is more uncertain than the hour of death." God has already fixed the year, the month, the day, the hour, and the moment, when I and you are to leave this earth and go into eternity; but the time is unknown to us. To exhort us to be always prepared, Jesus Christ tells us that death will come unawares, and like a thief in the night. *The day of the Lord shall so come as a thief in the night.*—(1 Thess. v., 2). He tells us to be, then,

always vigilant; because, when we least expect Him, He will come to judge us. *At what hour you think not, the Son of man will come.* St. Gregory says that for our good, God conceals from us the hour of death, that we may always be prepared to die. "Since, then," says St. Bernard, "death may take away life at any time and in any place, we ought, if we wish to die well and save our souls, to live always in expectation of death."

All know that they must die: but the misfortune is, that many consider death such a distance off, that they lose sight of it. Even the old, the most decrepit, and the most sickly, flatter themselves that they will live three or four years longer. But how many, I ask, have we known, even in our own times, to die suddenly—some sitting, some walking, some sleeping? It is certain that not one of these imagined that he should die so suddenly, and on the day he died. I say, moreover, that of all who have gone to the other world during the present year, no one imagined that he should die and end his days this year. Few are the deaths which do not happen unexpectedly.

Lord, the place in which I ought to be at this moment is not that in which I find myself, but hell, which I have so often merited by my sins! "*Infernus domus mea est*"—Hell is my house! St. Peter says: *The Lord waiteth patiently for your sake, not willing that any one should perish, but that all should return to penance.*—(2 Peter iii., 9). Then Thou hast had so much patience with me, and hast waited for me, because Thou didst wish me not to be lost, but return to Thee by repentance. My God, I return to Thee. I cast myself at Thy feet, and supplicate for mercy. *Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy great mercy.* Lord, to pardon me requires a great and extraordinary act of mercy, because I offended Thee, after I had been favoured with special light. Other sinners also have offended Thee, but they have not received the light Thou gavest me. But in spite of all my sinfulness and ingratitude, Thou com-mandest me to repent of my sins, and to hope for

pardon. Yes, my Redeemer, I am sorry with my whole heart for having offended Thee, and I hope for pardon through the merits of Thy Passion.

II.

When, therefore, Christian soul, the devil tempts you to sin by saying,—To-morrow you can go to confession—let your answer be,—How do I know but this will be the last day of my life? If this hour, this moment, in which I would turn my back on God, were the last of my life, so that I should have no time for repentance, what would become of me for all eternity? To how many poor sinners has it happened, that in the act of feasting on the poison of sin they were struck dead and sent to hell? *As fishes are taken with the hook,* says Ecclesiastes, *so men are taken in the evil time.*—(Eccles. ix., 12). The evil time is that in which the sinner actually offends God. The devil tells you that this misfortune will not happen to you; but you should answer him: If it should happen to me, what would become of me for all eternity?

O my Jesus, though innocent, Thou hast wished to die like a criminal on the Cross, and to shed all Thy Blood to wash away my sins. *O Sanguis Innocentis, lava culpas pœnitentis!* O Blood of the Innocent, wash away the sins of the penitent! O Eternal Father, pardon me for the sake of Jesus Christ. Hear His prayers now that He intercedes for me and makes Himself my Advocate. But it is not enough to receive pardon; I desire also, O God, worthy of infinite love, the grace to love Thee. I love Thee, O Sovereign Good, and I offer Thee henceforth my body, my soul, my liberty, and my will. I wish henceforth to avoid not only grievous but also venial offences. I will fly from all occasions of sin. *Lead us not into temptation.* For the love of Jesus Christ, preserve me from the occasions in which I would offend Thee. *But deliver us from evil.* Deliver me from sin, and then chastise me as Thou pleasest. I accept all infirmities, pains, and losses which Thou mayest be pleased to send me: it is enough

for me not to lose Thy grace and Thy love. *Ask and you shall receive.*—(John xvi., 24). Thou promisesest to grant whatever we ask; I ask these two graces—holy perseverance and the gift of Thy love. O Mary, Mother of Mercy, thou dost pray for me: in thee do I put my trust.

Spiritual Reading.

MARTYRS OF THE FAITH.

VIRTUES PRACTISED BY THE HOLY MARTYRS IN THE COMBATS THAT THEY HAD TO SUSTAIN AGAINST THEIR PERSECUTORS.

If the reading of the *Lives of the Saints* is a great means of preserving piety, as St. Philip Neri tells us, and as is taught by all the masters of the spiritual life, we shall find it yet more useful to read about the Victories the holy Martyrs gained by sacrificing their lives amid torments. Hence before relating their individual triumphs, we shall find it of great spiritual advantage to consider the principal virtues of which they gave proofs in their combats.

There is no doubt that the Martyrs are indebted for their crown to the power of the grace which they received from Jesus Christ; for He it is that gave them the strength to despise all the promises and the threats of tyrants, and to endure all torments even unto an entire sacrifice of their lives. So that all their merits, as St. Augustine writes, were the effects of the grace that God in His mercy imparted to them. But it is also certain, and even of Faith, that on their part the Martyrs co-operated with the grace which enabled them to win their victory. Innovators have blasphemed against this truth, saying that all the crimes of the wicked and all the good works of the just are the result of necessity; but the same St. Augustine gives them the lie when he says that if such were the case no reward or punishment would be just.

The Martyrs, therefore, acquired great merits, because the virtues of which they gave proofs in their combats were great and heroic. We shall briefly describe these virtues in order that we may imitate them in the midst of all the tribulations to which we may be exposed in this life.

We at first remark that the Martyrs were firmly attached to all the dogmas of the Christian Faith. In the early ages of the Church two false religions specially opposed ours: these were the religion of the Gentiles and that of the Jews. The religion of the Gentiles, by admitting several gods, furnished itself the proof of its falsity; for if the world had been under the dominion of several masters, it could not have maintained that regular and constant order which we see has been preserved for so many centuries up to the present time. This is evident even to the eyes of natural reason; *for every kingdom divided against itself shall be destroyed.*—(Luke xi., 17). Moreover, the very words of the idolatrous priests clearly demonstrated the falsity of their worship, since the actions that they attributed to their gods represented the latter as filled with passions and vices. This was how the holy Martyrs reproached the tyrants when the latter exhorted them to sacrifice to their idols: “How can we,” they said, “adore your gods, if, instead of offering us models of virtue, they exhibit to us only examples of vice?”

The religion of the Jews, although formerly holy and revealed by God, was at that time not less manifestly obsolete and false. In fact, in the Scriptures themselves which they had received from God and had preserved with so much care and transmitted to us, it was predicted that at a certain time the Son of God was to come upon earth, to be made Man and to die for the salvation of the world; that they themselves would put Him to death on the Cross, as they actually did, and that in punishment of this impiety they would be driven from their own kingdom, and without a king, without a temple, without a country, they would live scattered, and be wanderers throughout the world, abhorred and despised by all nations. These were predictions that

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were manifestly realized in every particular after the death of the Saviour. What rendered still more certain the truth of our Faith was the formation of a new people of God by the conversion of the Gentiles. This was known to have been announced beforehand in the Scriptures, and this was realized as soon as the Apostles spread throughout the world to promulgate the New Law preached by Jesus Christ. This event was an evident proof of the protection that God gave the Christian Religion; for how could those poor sinners, those publicans or fishermen, such as the Apostles were—men devoid of learning, of wealth, of every human assistance, and even persecuted by magistrates and emperors, have induced, without Divine assistance, so many Christians to renounce all their property, their honours, and generously to sacrifice their lives amid tortures the most excruciating that the power and the cruelty of the tyrants could invent?

Evening Meditation.

THE LOSS OF ALL THINGS IN DEATH.

I.

The day of destruction is at hand.—(Deut. xxxii., 35).

The day of death is called the *Day of Destruction*, because then is destroyed all that man has acquired; honours, friends, riches, possessions, kingdoms—all are then no more. What, then, doth it profit us to gain the whole world if in death we must leave all? All comes to an end at the bedside of the dying man. Is there any king, think you,—said St. Ignatius to Xavier when he sought to bring him to God,—who has taken with him into the other world even a thread of purple to mark his sovereignty? Has any rich man taken with him a single coin, or even one servant to

attend him? In death all is left behind. The soul enters eternity alone and unattended, except by its works.

Woe to me! Where are my works to accompany me to a blessed eternity? I can discover none but such as render me deserving of eternal torments!

Men come into the world in unequal conditions: one is born rich, another poor; one a noble, another a plebeian; but all go out of it equal and alike. Consider the graves of the dead: see if you can discover among the bodies which are there interred, who was a master and who a servant, who was a king and who a beggar.

O God, while others amass the fortunes of this world, may my only fortune be Thy holy grace. Thou alone art my only Good both in this life and in the next.

II.

In one word, everything on earth will come to an end. All greatness will end, all misery will end, honours will end, ignominies will end, pleasures will end, sufferings will end. Blessed in death, therefore, not he who has abounded in riches, honours and pleasures, but he who has patiently endured poverty, contempt and sufferings! The possession of temporal goods affords no consolation at the moment of death: that alone consoles us which has been done or suffered for God.

O Jesus, detach my heart from this world before death entirely takes me from it. Help me with Thy grace. Thou indeed knowest how great is my weakness. Permit me not to be any longer unfaithful to Thee, as I have hitherto been. I am sorry, O Lord, for having so often despised Thee. Henceforward I will love Thee above every good, and die a thousand times rather than forfeit Thy grace. But the infernal one ceases not to tempt me. In mercy abandon me not; leave me not to myself; permit me not to be any more separated from Thy love. O Mary, my hope, obtain for me the grace of perseverance.

this shall be the last day for you? *Delay not to be converted to the Lord and defer it not from day to day; for his wrath shall come on a sudden, and in the time of vengeance he will destroy thee.*—(Eccius. v., 8, 9). To save your soul you must give up sin. If, then, you must renounce it at some time, why do you not abandon it this very moment? Perhaps you are waiting till death arrives? But, for obstinate sinners, the hour of death is the time, not of pardon but of vengeance. *In the time of vengeance he will destroy thee.*

Ah, my dear Redeemer, Thou hast spent all Thy Blood, and hast given Thy life in order to save my soul, and I have often lost it by presuming on Thy mercy. I have, then, so often abused Thy goodness to offend Thee! By doing so, I have deserved to be suddenly struck dead, and to be cast into hell. In a word, I have been engaged in a contest with Thee. Thou didst treat me with mercy, and I offended Thee; Thou didst seek me, and I fled from Thee; Thou gavest me time to repair the evil I had done, and I employed that time in adding insults to insults. Lord, make me understand the injustice I have done Thee, and the obligation under which I am to love Thee. Ah, my Jesus, how could I be so dear to Thee Whom I chased away as often as Thou didst seek me. How hast Thou been able to bestow so many graces on one who has given Thee so much displeasure? From this I see the ardour of Thy desire to save me from perdition.

II.

Should any one borrow from you a large sum of money, you take care to get legal security for it. Who knows, you say, what may happen? Why are you not equally careful about the salvation of your soul, which is of far greater importance to you than all the riches of the earth? When eternity is at stake, why do you not say: *Who knows what may happen?* If you lose a sum of money, all is not lost; though in losing it your

Tuesday—Second Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

WE SHOULD SETTLE OUR ACCOUNTS AT ONCE.

The Lord wishes that we be not lost but saved, and therefore by threats of chastisement He unceasingly exhorts us to a change of life. He Who wishes you to take care does not wish to destroy.

I.

Except you will be converted, he will brandish his sword.—(Ps. vii., 16). Behold, God says in another place, how many, because they would not cease to offend Me, have met with a sudden death, when they least expected it, and were living in peace, secure of a life of many years. For when they shall say: *Peace and security, then shall sudden destruction come upon them.*

—(1 Thess. v., 3). Again God says: *Unless you do penance, you shall all likewise perish.*—(Luke xiii., 3). Why so many threats of chastisement before the execution of vengeance? It is because He wishes us to amend our lives, and thus avoid an unhappy death. He, says St. Augustine, who tells you to beware, does not wish to take away your life. It is necessary, then, to prepare our accounts before the day of accounting arrives. Dearly beloved Christian, were you to die, and were your lot for eternity to be decided before night, would your accounts be ready? Oh, how much would you give to obtain from God another year or month, or even another day, to prepare for Judgment? Why then do you not, now that God gives you this time, settle your accounts? Perhaps it may not happen—that

entire property should be lost, you may still have hopes of recovering it. But if at death you lose your soul, then you shall truly have lost all, and can never hope to regain it. You are careful to keep an exact account of all the goods you possess, lest, by dying suddenly, any of them might be lost; and if you meet with a sudden death, and find yourself in enmity with God, what will become of your soul for all eternity?

I am sorry with my whole heart for having offended Thee, O infinite Goodness! Ah, receive this ungrateful sheep, that casts itself sorrowful at Thy feet; receive it and bind it on Thy shoulders, that it may never more stray away from Thee. I will never again abandon Thee. I wish to love Thee; I wish to be Thine, and, provided I belong to Thee, I am content to suffer every pain. And what greater punishment can fall upon me than to live without Thy grace, to be separated from Thee, Who art my God, Who hast created me and died for me? O accursed sins, what have you done? You have made me displease my Saviour Who has loved me so tenderly. Ah, my Jesus, as Thou hast died for me, so I ought to die for Thee. Thou hast died through love for me—I should die through sorrow for having despised Thee. I accept death in whatever manner and at whatever time Thou art pleased to send it. Hitherto I have not loved Thee, or I have loved Thee too little. I do not wish to die in this state. Ah, grant me a little more time that I may love Thee before I die. Change my heart; wound it; inflame it with Thy holy love. Through that affection of charity which made Thee die for me, grant me this favour. I love Thee with my whole heart. My soul is enamoured of Thee. Do not permit me to lose Thee. Give me holy perseverance. Give me Thy holy love. Most holy Mary, my refuge and my Mother, perform the office of advocate in my behalf. Amen.

Spiritual Reading.

MARTYRS OF THE FAITH—THEIR VIRTUES.

It was still more marvellous to behold so many Gentiles embrace a Religion difficult to believe and difficult to practise. It was a Religion difficult to believe, for it taught Mysteries beyond the reach of human reason; for example, the Trinity of One God in Three distinct Persons Who have but one Nature, one Power, and one Will; the Incarnation of the Son of God Who came upon earth to die for the salvation of mankind; and many other Articles regarding Original Sin, the spirituality and the immortality of the soul, the Sacraments, especially the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. It was difficult to practise because the Religion of Jesus Christ commanded things contrary to the inclinations of nature corrupted by sin and repugnant to the libertinism in which the pagans were living, accustomed as they were to follow their passions and to give themselves up to the pleasures of the senses. Notwithstanding these obstacles, the Christian Religion was embraced by so many nations! From this universal consent of the nations St. Augustine argues the divinity of our Religion, saying that had not God illuminated by His powerful grace so many people—civilized and barbarian, learned and illiterate, noble and plebeian, all immersed in the superstitions of their country, imbued from their earliest years with maxims so opposed to the sanctity of Faith—how could they have embraced it?

Besides the interior lights of grace, there were many other causes that induced the people to embrace Christianity and to remain firm in professing it. Miracles contributed much to inflame their zeal; for from the moment in which the Apostles began to preach, the Lord caused miracles to abound in testimony of the Faith, as St. Mark says: *They preached everywhere, the Lord working withal, and confirming the word with*

content with enduring the pains that were inflicted upon them, they besought, they provoked the executioners and the tyrants, to obtain from them an increase of torture, in order that they might show themselves more grateful to God Who died for love of them.

Hence it came to pass, according to St. Justin, that in the course of three Centuries the whole earth was filled with Martyrs and Christians. "There is no nation, Greek or barbarian," writes the holy Martyr to Trypho, "that does not offer prayers and thanksgivings to the Creator of the universe by invoking the Name of Jesus Christ." St. Irenæus, in like manner, attests that at his time the Faith of Jesus Christ was extended over the entire world. Pliny, in his celebrated letter to the Emperor Trajan, declared that the Christian Faith was spread to such a degree that the temples of the gods were abandoned, and that victims were no longer offered to the idols. And Tiberian also wrote to the same Emperor that it would be unwise to put to death all the Christians, since the number of those who were anxious to die for Jesus Christ was incalculable.

Evening Meditation.

THE ABUSE OF GOD'S MERCY.

I.

There are two ways by which the devil endeavours to deceive men to their eternal ruin. After they have committed sin he tempts them to despair on account of the severity of Divine justice; while before they had sinned he encouraged them to do so by the hope of obtaining the Divine mercy. And he effects the ruin of numberless souls as much by the second as by the first artifice. "God is merciful," says the obstinate sinner to him who would convert him from the iniquity of his ways. "God is merciful." But as the Mother of God

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signs that followed.—(Mark xvi., 20). It is certain that the great miracles that had been wrought by the Apostles and their disciples contributed largely to the conversion of the world. In vain the adherents of idolatry tried to make men believe these prodigies were the effect of magical incantations: every one well understood that God would never permit them if they were to serve the purpose of giving support to diabolical agency or to a false religion. The proof of miracles was therefore a truly Divine proof by which the Lord confirmed the Christian Religion and the Faith of believers.

The Faith became further strengthened by the constancy of Martyrs of both sexes, of every age and condition; men and women, the aged and the young, the noble and the plebian, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, married and single. They were seen to renounce their homes, their parents, their titles, their fortunes, and everything they possessed, to embrace scourges, racks, fire, torture, and to encounter death under its most horrible aspects; and all this, not only with courage, but with joyfulness and thanksgiving to God, Who made them worthy to suffer and die for His love. St. Justin, who was himself a Martyr, confessed that this heroic virtue of the Christians had been to him a powerful stimulus to embrace the Faith.

The Martyrs received great courage in their sufferings from the desire of quickly arriving at the fruition of the promises made by Jesus Christ to His followers: *Blessed are ye when they shall revile you and persecute you. . . . Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven.*—(Matt. v., 11). *Every one therefore that shall confess me before men I will also confess him before my Father who is in heaven.*—(Matt. x., 32).

But what above all filled the Martyrs with courage and ardour and made them wish to die with their great love for their Divine Master Whom St. Augustine calls the King of Martyrs, Who wished to die on the Cross in pain and in desolation for the love of us, as St. Paul says: *He hath loved us, and hath delivered himself for us.*—(Eph. v., 2). Actuated by this love, they went with joy to suffer and to die for Jesus Christ; so that, not

expresses it in her Canticle, *His mercy is to them that fear him.*—(Luke i., 50). Yes, the Lord deals mercifully with him who fears to offend Him, but not with the man who presumes upon His mercy to offend Him still more. O God, I give Thee thanks for having made me sensible of Thy patience in bearing with me. Behold, I am of the number of those who, presuming on Thy goodness, have offended Thee again and again!

God is merciful,—but He is also just! Sinners are desirous that He should be merciful only, without being just; but that is impossible, because were He only to forgive and never to chastise, He would be wanting in justice. Hence Blessed Father Avila observes that patience on the part of God towards those who avail themselves of His compassion to offend Him all the more, would not be mercy but a want of justice. He is bound to chastise the ungrateful. He bears with them for a certain time, but after that abandons them.

Such a punishment, O God, has not as yet overtaken me, or else I had now dwelt in hell, or had been obstinate in my sins. But no: I desire to amend my life; I desire to offend Thee no more. Though I have hitherto displeased Thee, I am sorry for it with my whole soul. I desire henceforth to love Thee, and I desire to love Thee more than others, because Thou hast not shown the same patience towards others as towards me.

II.

God is not mocked.—(Gal. vi., 7). But He would be mocked if the sinner could go on continually offending Him, and yet afterwards enjoy Him in Heaven. *What things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap.*—(Gal. vi., 8). He who sows good works shall reap rewards; but he who sows iniquities shall reap chastisements. The hope of those who commit sin because God is forgiving, is an abomination in His sight. *Their hope, says holy Job, is an abomination.*—(Job xi., 20). Hence the sinner, by just such hope, provokes God to

chastise him the sooner, as that servant would provoke his master, who, because his master was good, took advantage of his goodness to behave wickedly.

O Jesus, such, I fear, has been my conduct towards Thee. Because Thou wast good I made no account of Thy precepts! I confess that I have done wickedly, and I detest all the offences I have committed against Thee. Now I love Thee more than myself, and I desire never more to displease Thee. Ah, if I should again offend Thee by mortal sin! Permit it not, O Lord, but rather let me die. O Mary, Mother of perseverance, do thou assist me.

Wednesday—Second Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

“BE YE READY.”

The Lord does not tell us to *prepare ourselves for death*, but to *be prepared*, when death arrives. Be ye ready! The time of death will not be the time to prepare ourselves to die well. To die well and happily we must prepare ourselves beforehand.

I.

Be ye ready. The Lord does not tell us to prepare ourselves, but to be prepared, when death arrives. When death comes it will be almost impossible, in that tempest and confusion, to tranquillise a troubled conscience. This, reason tells us: this, God threatens, saying that then He will come, not to pardon, but to avenge, the contempt of His graces. *Revenge is mine, I will repay.*—(Rom. xii., 19). It is, says St. Augustine, a just punishment, that he who was unwilling, when he

was able, to save his soul, will not be able when he is willing. But you will say: Perhaps I may still be converted and saved. Would you throw yourself into a deep well, saying, Perhaps I may not be drowned? O God! how sin blinds the understanding, and deprives the soul of reason. When there is question of the body, men speak rationally; but when the soul is concerned, they speak like fools.

Who knows, dear Christian, but this point which you read is the last warning that God may send you? Let us immediately prepare for death, that it may not come upon us without giving us time to prepare for judgment. St. Augustine says that God conceals from us the last day of life, that we may be always prepared to die. St. Paul tells us that we must work out our salvation, not only with fear, but also with trembling. St. Antoninus relates that a certain king of Sicily, to make one of his subjects understand the fear with which he sat on the throne, commanded him to sit at table with a sword suspended over him by a slender thread. The apprehension that the thread might give way filled him with so much terror that he could scarcely taste food. We are all in like danger; for the sword of death, on which our eternal salvation depends, may at any moment fall upon us.

Ah my God! who has ever loved me more than Thou hast? And whom have I despised and insulted more than I have insulted Thee? O Blood! O Wounds of Jesus, you are my hope. Eternal Father, look not upon my sins, but look at the Wounds of Jesus; behold Thy Son dying through pain for my sake, and asking Thee to pardon me. I repent, O my Creator, of having offended Thee. I am sorry for it above all things. Thou didst create me that I might love Thee; and I have lived as if Thou hadst created me to offend Thee.

II.

It is indeed a question of Eternity. *If the tree fall to the south or to the north, in which place soever it shall fall there shall it lie.*—(Eccles. xi., 3). If, when death

comes, we are found in the grace of God, oh! with what joy shall we say: I have secured all; I can never again lose God; I shall be happy forever. But, if death finds the soul in sin, with what despair will it exclaim: *Ergo ravimus!* I have erred! And for my error there will be no remedy for all eternity. The fear of an unhappy eternity made the Blessed Father Avila, apostle of Spain, say, when the news of death was brought to him: Oh! that I had a little more time to prepare for death! This fear made the Abbot Agatho, who spent so many years in penance, say at death: What will become of me? Who can know the judgments of God? St. Arsenius, too, trembled at the hour of death; and being asked by his disciples, why he was so much alarmed, he said: "My children, this fear is not new to me; I have had it always during my whole life." Above all, holy Job trembled when he said: *What shall I do when the Lord shall rise to judge? and when he shall examine, what shall I answer him?*—(Job xxxi., 14).

O Eternal Father, for the love of Jesus Christ, pardon me and give me grace to love Thee. I have hitherto resisted Thy will, but I will resist no longer, and will do whatsoever Thou commandest. Thou commandest me to detest the outrages I have offered Thee; behold, I detest them with my whole heart. Thou commandest me to resolve to offend Thee no more; behold, I resolve to lose my life a thousand times, rather than forfeit Thy grace. Thou commandest me to love Thee with my whole heart; yes, with my whole heart I love Thee, and I wish to love nothing else but Thee. Thou wilt henceforth be my only beloved, my only love. From Thee I ask, and from Thee I hope for holy perseverance. For the love of Jesus Christ grant that I may be always faithful to Thee, and that I may always say to Thee, with St. Bonaventure: "My beloved is one, my love is one." I do not wish that my life be employed any longer in giving Thee displeasure; I wish to spend it only in weeping over the offences I have committed against Thee, and in loving Thee. Mary, my Mother, pray for all who recommend themselves to thee,—pray to Jesus also for me.

Spiritual Reading.

“THE BLOOD OF MARTYRS THE SEED OF
CHRISTIANS.”

From the foregoing facts Clement of Alexandria subsequently inferred, that if God Himself had not upheld the Christian Faith, it could never have withstood the efforts of so many philosophers who endeavoured to obscure it with sophisms, or the violence of so many kings and emperors who laboured to extinguish it by persecution. The number of Christians, far from having been diminished by the slaughter of the Saints, became so wonderfully increased, that Tertullian said: “Our number grows in the same measure that you decimate us; the Blood of the Christians is as it were a seed.” He used the word *seed* because the Blood of the Martyrs was that which multiplied the faithful. Tertullian, indeed, boasted of this, and upbraided the tyrants with their impotency; since, notwithstanding all their endeavours to exterminate the followers of the Gospel, the streets, the Forum, and even the Senate, were filled with Christians. Origen likewise wrote: “It is a thing worthy of note and eminently calculated to excite wonder, the steady progress of the Christian Religion, in spite of the most untiring persecution and continual Martyrdoms.” “Greeks and barbarians,” continues this celebrated writer, “the learned and unlearned, voluntarily embraced it; from which we may conclude that its propagation is due to a higher than human power.”

Before the end of the Second Century, we are assured by Tertullian, that all nations (*universæ gentes*) had embraced the Faith of Jesus. He makes special mention of the Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, the inhabitants of Mesopotamia; of Armenia, and of Phrygia, of Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Cirenasia, and Palestine; the Gethuli, the whole of Spain, many of the

Galic tribes, Bretagne, the Sarmatians, the Dacians, the Scythians, and many remote nations, provinces and islands. Arnobius, who died a hundred years after Tertullian, adds to the list of those converted to the Faith, the Indians, the Sarii, the Persians, and the Medes; Arabia, Syria, Gallacia, Acaja, Macedonia, and Epirus, with all the islands and provinces from the rising to the setting sun. Besides those regions enumerated by Tertullian, St. Athanasius, half a century afterwards, mentions others. Writing to the Emperor Jovinian, he says: “Know that this Faith has been preached from the beginning, approved by the Nicene Fathers, and professed by all the Churches of the world—in Spain, in England, and in Gaul; throughout the whole of Italy, in Dalmatia, Dacia, Mysia, and Macedonia; in all Greece, and in all Africa; in Sardinia, Cyprus, Crete, Pamphylia, Lysia, and Isauria; in Egypt and Lybia, in Pontus and Cappadocia.”

Thus we see that, after the Ten Persecutions of the Roman emperors, which lasted for more than two hundred years, beginning from the first under Nero, the greater part of the human race, having abandoned the worship of false deities, had embraced the doctrines of Christianity. Finally, after so many struggles, it pleased the Almighty Disposer of events to grant peace to His Church under Constantine. This emperor was, after a miraculous manner, chosen by Heaven for the carrying out of the merciful dispensations of Divine Providence. Having first overcome Maxentius and afterwards Licinius, in the strong arm of the Lord,—for, as Eusebius relates, in whatever direction the *Labarum*, or Standard of the Cross, appeared, the enemy either fled or surrendered,—after peace had been established he forbade the Gentiles to sacrifice any longer to their idols, and caused magnificent temples to be erected to the honour of Jesus Christ. And oh, how glorious did not the Church then appear! Still more widely extending her blessed influence, and, with every new conquest, bringing additional joy to the hearts of her once persecuted children! Then ceased the torments of the Martyr, and with them the bitter calumnies of the idolater. Busy

multitudes of zealous converts were to be seen in every city destroying the idols they once adored, pulling down the ancient shrines of superstition, and erecting new Altars to the worship of the true God! The confines of so vast an empire were too narrow a limit for the active zeal of the great Constantine. He laboured to propagate the saving doctrines of Religion in Persia and among the barbarous nations he had subdued; nor would he, according to Eusebius and Socrates, grant them the friendship of the Roman Empire except upon the condition of their becoming Christians.

Evening Meditation.

THE EMPTINESS AND SHORTNESS OF HUMAN LIFE.

Holy David said that the happiness of this life is as the dream of one awaking from sleep: *As the dream of them that awake.*—(Ps. lxxii., 20). All the greatness and glory of this world will appear no more to poor worldlings at the hour of death than a dream to one awaking from sleep, who finds that the fortune he had acquired in his dreams ends with his sleep. Hence did one who was undeceived wisely write on the skull of a dead man: *Cogitant omnia vilesunt: To one who thinks, all things are worthless.* Yes, to him who thinks on death, all the goods of this life appear, as they really are, vile and transitory. Nor can that man fix his affections on the earth who reflects that in a short time he must leave it forever. Ah, my God, how often have I despised Thy grace for the miserable goods of this world! From henceforth I desire to think of nothing but of loving and serving Thee. Assist me with Thy holy grace.

And is it thus then, that worldly grandeur and sovereign power must end! Such was the exclamation

of St. Francis Borgia, when he beheld the corpse of the Empress Isabella, who had died in the flower of her youth. Reflecting upon what he saw, he resolved to bid adieu to the world, and to give himself entirely to God, saying: I will henceforward serve a master who will never forsake me. Let us detach ourselves from the goods of the present life before death tears us away from them. What folly it is to expose ourselves to the danger of losing our souls, for the sake of some attachment to this miserable world, from which we shall soon have to depart, for soon it will be said to us by the minister of God: *Go forth, Christian soul, out of this world!* O my Jesus that I had always loved Thee! How many offences have I been guilty of against Thee! Teach me how to correct my disorderly life, for I am willing to do whatever Thou pleasest. Accept of my love, accept of my repentance, in which I love Thee more than myself, and crave Thy mercy and compassion.

II.

Reflect that you cannot remain for ever in this world. You must one day leave the country in which you now reside; you must one day go out from the house in which you now dwell, to return to it no more. Think that many before you inhabited the same room in which you are at present reading; that they slept in the same bed in which you are accustomed to sleep: and where are they now? Gone into eternity. The same will happen to you. Make me to understand, O God, the injustice I have been guilty of in turning my back upon Thee, my Sovereign Good; and grant me sorrow to bewail my ingratitude as I ought. O that I had died rather than ever offend Thee. Suffer me not to live any longer ungrateful for the love Thou hast shown me. My dear Redeemer, I love Thee above all things and I desire to love Thee with all my strength during the remainder of my life. Strengthen my weakness by Thy grace. And do thou, O Mary, Mother of God, intercede for me. Amen.

O my sweet Love, have I, then, by my sins kept Thee in a state of affliction all Thy life long? Oh, tell me, then, what I can do that Thou mayest forgive me, for I will leave nothing undone. I repent, O sovereign Good, of all the offences I have committed against Thee; I repent, and I love Thee more than myself. I feel a great desire to love Thee. It is Thou that givest me this desire; give me, therefore, strength to love Thee ardently.

THE LIFE OF SORROW JESUS LED EVEN FROM HIS BIRTH.

The Prophet Isaias calls Jesus Christ *the man of sorrows*, because His life was to be full of sorrow. His Passion did not begin at the time of His death. It commenced with His life—a life of internal and external sorrows from beginning to end.

I.

Jesus Christ could have saved man without suffering and without dying; but no, He chose a life full of tribulations in order to make us know how much He loved us. Therefore the Prophet Isaias called Him *the Man of sorrows*—(Is. liii., 3), because the life of Jesus Christ was to be a life full of sorrows. His Passion did not begin at the time of His death, but from the commencement of His life.

Behold Him, as soon as He is born, laid in a stable where for Jesus everything is a torment. His sight is tormented by seeing nothing in the cave but black, rough walls. His sense of smell is tormented by the touch of the dung of beasts lying there. His sense of touch is tormented by the pricking of the straw that serves Him as a bed. Soon after His birth He is obliged to fly into Egypt where He passed several years of His childhood poor and despised. The life which He afterwards led in Nazareth was not less poor and lowly. Behold Him at length terminating His life in Jerusalem, dying on a Cross by dint of torments.

II.

Thus, then, the life of Jesus was one of continual suffering, and, indeed, a double suffering; for He had constantly before His eyes all the sorrows that would afflict Him until the day of His death. Sister Mary Magdalen Orsini, complaining one day before the Crucifix, said to Him: "O Lord, Thou wert on the Cross only for three hours, but I have suffered this pain for several years." Jesus answered her: "Oh, ignorant that thou art, what dost thou say? I suffered even from My Mother's womb all the pains of My life and My death." But all these sufferings did not so much afflict Jesus Christ—because He chose voluntarily to suffer them—as did the sight of our sins, and of our ingratitude for His great love. St. Margaret of Cortona was never satisfied with weeping over the offences she committed against God. Wherefore her confessor said to her one day: "Margaret, cease crying, because God has already forgiven thee." But she replied: "Ah, Father, how can I cease weeping, when I know that my sins kept Jesus Christ in a state of affliction all His life?"

It is only just, O Jesus, that I, who have offended Thee so much, should also love Thee much. Oh, remind me constantly of the love Thou hast borne me, in order that my soul may always burn with the love of Thee; that it may think of Thee alone, desire Thee alone, and strive to please Thee alone. O God of love, I, who once was the slave of hell, now give myself entirely to Thee. Accept me in Thy mercy, O Jesus, and bind me with Thy love, from this day forth. I will love Thee in

Thursday—Second Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

(For Twenty-Fifth of January).

life, and loving Thee I will die. O Mary, my Mother and my hope, help me to love Thy dear Jesus and mine. This favour alone I desire and hope from thee.

Spiritual Reading.

“THE HAND OF THE LORD IS NOT SHORTENED.”

True it is that from time to time divers heresies have sprung up in the Church, which have been productive of much evil; *but the hand of the Lord hath not been shortened.* Even in these latter days we have had authentic accounts of very considerable advances made by the Church, both among heretics and pagans. A learned author writes that ten thousand Arians have recently been converted in Transylvania. In Prussia a very large number of Catholic churches have been erected. In Denmark the public profession of the Catholic Religion is now tolerated. The missions in England are being carried on with very happy results. We have been assured by persons of authority and undoubted veracity, that in the East forty thousand Armenian and other oriental heretics have been received into the communion of our holy Church; that in Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and Chaldea the number of Catholics is every day increasing; and that during the last few years several Nestorian Bishops have abjured the errors of that sect. Finally, during the present Century a considerable number of pagans have been converted in India and China.

But to return to the Martyrs. The number of Christians who had received the Crown of Martyrdom previous to the accession of Constantine was almost incredible. Many authors calculate the number of those who had laid down their lives for the Faith to have been nearly eleven millions! So that if this number were equally distributed in the course of one year, thirty thousand would be allotted to each day.

Oh, the beautiful harvest of holy Martyrs that Paradise has reaped since the preaching of the Gospel! But, O God, what will be the confusion of the tyrants and of all the persecutors of the Faith on the day of General Judgment, at the sight of the Martyrs once so despised and so maltreated by them, when these celestial heroes shall appear in glory, extolling the greatness of God, and armed with the sword of divine justice to avenge themselves for all the injuries and cruelties exercised against them, as was foretold by David: *The high praises of God in their mouths, and two-edged swords in their hands to execute vengeance upon the nations; to bind their kings in fetters, and their nobles in manacles of iron.*—(Ps. cxlix., 6). Then shall the Martyrs judge the Neros, the Domitians, and other persecutors, and shall condemn them; yea, as we read in the Gospel of St. Matthew, *even to the exterior darkness, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*—(Matt. xxii., 18).

But it will be for us a subject of more profitable meditation to reflect upon another scene which the great day of general and irrevocable doom will present—the despair of so many Christians who, having died in mortal sin, will behold with unavailing anguish the triumph of so many Martyrs, who, rather than lose God, suffered themselves to be despoiled of all things, and underwent the most horrid torments that hell could suggest or tyrants inflict; while they, rather than yield a point of honour or forego a momentary gratification, despised the suggestions of divine grace and lost their souls forever!

Evening Meditation.

THE CONTEMPT WITH WHICH THE SINNER TREATS GOD.

I.

God Himself declares that the sinner treats Him with contempt and complains of it in these words: *I have brought up children, and exalted them; but they have*

despised me.—(Is. i., 2). I have brought up My children, I have preserved and nourished them, but with base ingratitude they have despised Me. But who is God Who is thus despised by men? He is the Creator of Heaven and earth; He is the sovereign, infinite Good, in Whose sight men and Angels are as a drop of water, or a grain of sand : *as a drop of a bucket . . . as a little dust.*—(Is. xl., 15). In a word, all things created, in the presence of His infinite greatness, are as though they were not : *All nations are before him as if they had no being at all, and are counted to him nothing and vanity.*—(Is. xl., 17).

Behold me, O God, a daring sinner who has presumed to despise Thy infinite majesty. But whilst Thou art infinite majesty, Thou art also infinite mercy. I love Thee, O Lord, and because I love Thee I am sorry for having offended Thee; do Thou have pity on me.

And, O God, who am I who have despised Thee? A poor helpless worm who have nothing but what Thou in Thy bounty hast bestowed upon me. Thou hast given me my soul, my body, the use of reason, and numberless other benefits in this world; and I have made no other use of them all but to offend Thee, my Benefactor. Nay, more; at the very time that Thou didst preserve my life, that I might not fall into hell as I deserved, I abused Thy goodness and forbearance. O my Saviour, how couldst Thou have had such patience with me? Wretch that I am, how many nights have I slept under Thy displeasure! But Thou wouldst not have me perish. I trust, O my Jesus, in Thy Blessed Passion that Thou wilt enable me to change my life. Let not that sacred Blood be lost, which with so much pain and sorrow Thou didst shed for my salvation.

II.

Man is a miserable worm that can do nothing; he is so blind that he knows nothing; so poor and naked that he possesses nothing. And this miserable worm voluntarily insults God! Vile dust, says St. Bernard, dares to provoke such tremendous Majesty!

O God, what have I done? Thou, my Redeemer, hast shown such regard for my soul as to shed Thy Blood for its salvation, and I have been so wretched as to allow it to perish for a mere nothing, for a caprice, for a maddening passion, for a miserable gratification, in contempt of Thy grace and love. Ah! if Faith did not assure me that Thou didst promise to pardon those who repent, I should not now dare to implore Thy forgiveness. O my Saviour, I kiss Thy sacred Wounds, and for the love of these Wounds I beseech Thee to forget the injuries I have committed against Thee. Thou hast said that when the sinner repents, Thou wilt forget all his ingratitude. I am sorry above every evil for having despised Thee, my sovereign Good; make haste to pardon me, as Thou hast promised; let me be quickly reconciled to Thee. I love Thee now more than myself; may I never more incur Thy displeasure! O Mary, refuge of sinners, succour a poor sinner who invokes thy assistance.

Friday—Second Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

ANGUISH OF THE DYING SINNER.

The poor dying sinner will be assailed, not by one, but by many causes of distress and anguish. Devils will tempt him, and his sins like so many satellites will say to him : *We are thy works; we shall not desert thee.*

I.

The poor dying sinner will be assailed, not by one, but by many causes of distress and anguish. On the one hand the devils will torment him. At death these horrid enemies exert all their strength to secure the perdition of the soul that is about to leave this world. They know that they have but little time to gain it, and that if they lose it at death, they lose it forever. *The devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, knowing that he hath but a short time.*—(Apoc. xii., 12). The dying man will be tempted, not by one, but by innumerable devils who will labour for his damnation. *Their houses shall be filled with serpents.*—(Is. xlii., 21). One tempter will say: Fear not; you will recover. Another: You have been deaf to the inspirations of God for so many years, and do you now expect that He will have mercy on you? Another will ask: How can you make satisfaction for all the injuries you have done to the property and character of your neighbours? Another: Do you not see that your Confessions have been useless; that they have been made without sorrow or purpose of amendment? How will you be able to repair them now?

On the other hand, the dying man will see himself surrounded by his sins. *Evils*, says David, *shall catch the unjust man unto destruction.*—(Ps. cxxxix., 12). These sins, says St. Bernard, shall, like so many satellites, keep him in chains, saying unto him: We are your works; we shall not desert you. We are your fruits, and we will not leave you; we will accompany you into the other world and will present ourselves with you to the Eternal Judge. The dying man will then wish to shake off such enemies; but, to get rid of them, he must detest them and return sincerely to God. His mind is darkened and his heart hardened. *A hard heart shall fare evil at the last; and he that loveth danger shall perish in it.*—(Ecclus. iii., 27). St. Bernard says that the man who has been obstinate in sin during life, will

make efforts, but without success, to get out of the state of damnation; and that, overwhelmed by his own malice, he will end his life in the same unhappy state.

My dear Saviour, assist me; do not abandon me. I see my whole soul covered with the wounds of sin; my passions attack me violently; my bad habits weigh me down. I cast myself at Thy feet; have pity on me and deliver me from so many evils. *In thee, O Lord, I have hoped; may I not be confounded forever.*—(Ps. xxx., 6). Do not suffer a soul that trusts in Thee to be lost. *Deliver not up to beasts the souls that confess to thee.*—(Ps. lxxiii., 19).

II.

Having loved sin till death, the sinner has also loved the danger of damnation. Hence the Lord will justly permit him to perish in that danger in which he has voluntarily lived till the end of his life. St. Augustine says that he who is abandoned by sin before he abandons it, will scarcely detest it as he ought; because what he will then do will be done through necessity.

Miserable the sinner that hardens his heart and resists the divine calls: *His heart shall be as hard as a stone and as firm as a smith's anvil.*—(Job xli., 15). Instead of yielding to the graces and inspirations of God, and being softened by them, the unhappy man becomes more obdurate, as the anvil is hardened by repeated strokes of the hammer. In punishment of his resistance to the divine calls, he will find his heart in the same miserable state at the very hour of death, at the moment of passing into eternity. *A hard heart shall fare evil at the last.* Sinners, says the Lord, have, for the love of creatures, turned their back upon Me. *They have turned their back upon me and not their face; and in the time of their affliction they will say: Arise and deliver us! Where are the gods thou hast made thee? Let them arise and deliver thee.*—(Jer. ii., 27). They will have recourse to God at death; but He will say to them: Is it to Me you have recourse now? Call on creatures to succour you, for they have been your gods! The

Lord will address them in this manner, because, in seeking Him, they do not sincerely wish to be converted. St. Jerome says that he holds, and has learned from experience, that they who have to the end led a bad life, will never die a good death.

I am sorry for having offended Thee, O infinite Goodness. I have done evil, I confess my guilt. I wish to amend my life, whatsoever it may cost me. But if Thou dost not help me by Thy grace, I am lost. Receive, O my Jesus, the rebel who has so grievously outraged Thy Majesty. Remember that I have been purchased by Thy Blood and Thy life. Through the merits then of Thy Passion and Death, receive me into Thy arms and give me holy perseverance. I was lost, Thou hast called me back: I will resist no longer: to Thee I consecrate myself. Bind me to Thy love and never permit me to lose Thee by again losing Thy grace. My Jesus, do not permit it. Mary, my Queen, do not permit it: obtain for me death and a thousand deaths, rather than that I should again forfeit the grace of thy Son.

Spiritual Readings.

THE MARTYRS TEACH US TO DESPISE THE WORLD AND TO LOVE THE FAITH.

From an earnest consideration of the illustrious examples of virtue which the Saints have given us during their Martyrdom, oh, how much is to be learned!

When we behold in devout meditation, *the utter contempt* in which the Martyrs held the world and all the allurements of its pompous vanities, we are taught *to despise the fleeting vanities and empty pleasures which it offers its deluded votaries*. Many of them, previous to having been put to torture, had been offered by the tyrants immense rewards, posts of honour and noble marriages, to induce them to abandon the

Faith. Yet they not only indignantly refused them, but willingly renounced the riches and honours which they already held, and offered themselves to tortures the most excruciating and deaths the most ignominious, in order not to lose those heavenly graces which a benign Providence fails not to impart to the servants of the Lord, as the earnest of the eternal blessings which shall be the recompense of their fidelity. To St. Clement of Ancyra the tyrant offered a great quantity of gold and precious stones if he would deny the Name of the Lord Jesus; but the Saint, raising his eyes to Heaven, exclaimed: "And is it thus, O my God, that men treat Thee!—to compare Thee to dust and gross!" The pontifical dignity was offered to St. Theodore of Amasea, as a reward if he gave up the Faith. The holy Martyr, ridiculing the proposal, replied: "Pontifical dignity! I am about to enjoy God forever in Heaven; and is it likely, think you, that I should prefer remaining on earth, to follow the trade of cook and butcher like your priests who offer sacrifice to false gods?"

From the example of the Martyrs *we learn also to place our hope in God, and to become daily more enamoured of the excellence of our Faith*: since in their constancy we cannot help admiring the wonderful power of God which enabled them to encounter torments and death with heroic fortitude and ecstatic joy. For without the interposition of the most powerful assistance from Heaven, how could persons of a delicate constitution, or in the tottering decrepitude of age, how could tender virgins and children be equal to tortures, the bare recital of which fills us with horror? Caldrons of boiling oil and liquid pitch; red-hot coats of mail; hooks to pull out the eyes and teeth; iron combs to tear off the flesh; fires quick to consume, or tediously to torture; scourging until bones and bowels appeared: beheading, quartering, lacerating, impaling—these were only some of the ingredients of the Martyr's cup.

St. Barlaam, a poor labourer of a village in Antioch, having evinced extraordinary fortitude during his sufferings, and been scourged until the executioners had exhausted their strength, was forced by the tyrant to

hold his hand over the flame that burned before the shrine of an idol. At the same time burning coals were placed with some incense upon his hand, in the hope that he might be obliged by the pain to let the burning incense fall upon the altar, and thus afford them the opportunity of asserting that he had sacrificed to the idols; but the constancy of the Saint was greater than their malice—he allowed his flesh to be burned to the bone, and expired in the effort.

St. Basil and St. John Chrysostom have eulogized this Martyr.

St. Eulalia affords another instance of the wonderful aid the Almighty gives to those who are devoted to His service. She was a youthful virgin, of only twelve years. The tyrant ordered her to be cruelly scourged, and then caused boiling oil to be poured into the wounds, and burning torches to be applied to her breasts and sides. During these tortures she ceased not to praise the Lord. Her joints were entirely dislocated, the flesh torn from her bones with iron hooks, and she was finally burned alive, having baffled the ingenuity of her inhuman executioners.

The Martyrdom, also, of St. Vitus and St. Agapitus shows us the wonderful assistance of grace, which never fails the servants of the Lord. The former when only fourteen years of age, was scourged, racked, and torn with irons. His father who was a Gentile, wept with anguish to see his son expire in such torments. "No, father," exclaimed the boy, "I do not die: I go to live with Christ forever!" St. Agapitus, also a youth, evinced the same fortitude. The tyrant threatened that he would place upon his head a red-hot helmet: "And what better fortune could await me," said the Saint, "than to exchange your instrument of torture for a heavenly crown?" Then the emperor ordered that red-hot coals should be placed on his head, that he be scourged, and suspended by the feet over a thick smoke. He afterwards had boiling water poured over his breast, and finally had him beheaded.

The triumph of divine grace in the aged was manifested in St. Simeon, who at the age of one hundred and

twenty endured the most excruciating tortures and expired on a cross, as is related by Eusebius of Casarea. St. Philip, Bishop of Hieraclea, in his decrepit old age, was dragged by the feet through the city, scourged till his bowels appeared, and afterwards burned alive. The venerable Martyr, till his last breath, ceased not to return thanks to the Lord Who had made him worthy to die for His glory.

Evening Meditation.

HE HATH LOVED US AND WASHED US FROM OUR SINS IN HIS OWN BLOOD.

I.

So, then, my Jesus, in order to save my soul, Thou hast prepared a bath of thine own Blood wherein to cleanse it from the filth of its sins. If, therefore, our souls have been bought by Thy Blood, *for you are bought with a great price*—(1 Cor. vi., 20), it is a sign that Thou lovest them much; and as Thou dost love them, let us pray thus to Thee: *We therefore pray thee to help thy servants, whom thou hast redeemed with thy precious blood.*—(Te Deum). It is true that by my sins I have separated myself from Thee and have knowingly lost Thee. But remember, my Jesus, that Thou hast purchased me with Thy Blood. Ah, may this Blood not have been given in vain for me, which was shed with so much grief and so much love!

By my sins I have driven Thee, my God, from my soul, and have merited Thy hatred; but Thou hast said that Thou wouldst forget the crimes of a repentant sinner. *But if he do penance . . . I will not remember all his iniquities.*—(Ezech. xviii., 21). Thou hast also said, *I love them that love me.*—(Prov. viii., 17). I pray Thee, therefore, my Jesus, to forget all the injuries that I have offered Thee, and love me; whilst I also will

now love Thee more than myself, and repent above all things for having offended Thee. Ah, my beloved Lord, for the sake of that Blood Thou hast shed for the love of me, hate me no longer, but love me. It is not enough for me that Thou shouldst only forgive me the chastisement I deserve, I desire to love Thee and to be loved by Thee. O God, Who art all love, all goodness, unite me and bind me to Thyself, and permit not that I should ever again be separated from Thee and deserve Thy hatred. No, my Jesus, my Love, let it not be, I will be all Thine, and I desire that Thou shouldst be all mine.

II.

He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death; even the death of the cross.—(Phil. ii., 8).

What great thing is it that the Martyrs did in giving their lives for God, while this God humbled himself to the death of the Cross for their love! To render a just return for the death of a God, it would not be sufficient to sacrifice the lives of all men; the death of another God for His love would alone compensate for it. O my Jesus, allow me, a poor sinner, to say to Thee with Thy true lover, St. Francis of Assisi: "May I die, Lord, for the love of Thy love, Who, for the love of my love didst deign to die."

Is it true, my Redeemer, that hitherto, for the love of my own pleasures, I, unhappy that I am, renounced Thy love? Would that I had died before I had ever offended Thee! I thank Thee that Thou givest me time to love Thee in this life that I may afterwards love Thee throughout all eternity. Ah, remind me continually, my Jesus, of the ignominious death Thou hast suffered for me, that I may never forget to love Thee in consideration of the love Thou hast borne me. I love Thee, infinite Goodness; I love Thee, my supreme Good. To Thee I give myself entirely, and by that love which caused Thee to die for me, do Thou accept my love; and let me die, destroy me, rather than ever permit me to leave off loving Thee. I will say to Thee, with St.

Francis de Sales: "O Eternal Love, my soul seeks Thee and chooses Thee for all eternity! Come, O Holy Spirit and inflame our hearts with Thy love. Either to love or to die! To die to all other affections, to live only to the love of Jesus!"

Saturday—Second Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

THE IMITATION OF MARY.

Now, therefore, ye children, hear me: Blessed are they that keep my ways . . . Blessed is the man that watcheth daily at my gates.—(Prov. viii., 32, 34).

Blessed is he who, like the poor who stand before the gates of the rich, is careful to seek for the alms of graces before the doors of the mercy of Mary! And thrice blessed is he who moreover seeks to imitate the virtues which he remarks in Mary, and more especially her purity and humility.

I.

St. Augustine says that to obtain with more certainty and in greater abundance the favour of the Saints, we must imitate them; for when they see us practising their virtues, they are moved all the more to pray for us. The Queen of Saints and our principal Advocate, Mary, has no sooner delivered a soul from Lucifer's grasp and united it to God, than she desires that it should begin to imitate her virtues, otherwise she cannot enrich it with the graces that she would wish, seeing it so opposed to her in conduct. Therefore Mary calls those blessed

who with diligence imitate her life: *Now, therefore, ye children, hear me; blessed are they that keep my ways.*

Whosoever loves, resembles the person loved, or endeavours to become like that person, according to the well-known proverb: *Love either finds or makes it like.* Hence St. Sophronius exhorts us, if we love Mary, to endeavour to imitate her, because this is the greatest act of homage we can offer her. "Let the child, then," says St. Bernard, "endeavour to imitate his Mother, if he desires her favour; for Mary seeing herself treated as a Mother will treat him as her child."

O my Mother, I love thee, but I fear I do not love thee as I ought. I know that love makes lovers like to the person loved. If, then, I see myself so unlike thee, it is a mark that I do not love thee. Thou art so pure, and I, defiled with many sins! Thou so humble, and I so proud! Thou so holy and I so wicked. This, then, is what thou hast to do, O Mary, since thou lovest me! Make me like thyself. Thou hast all power to change hearts; take mine and change it. Show the world thou canst do it for those that love thee. Make me thy worthy child.

II.

As the devotion most dear to Mary is to endeavour to imitate her virtues, it would be well, therefore, to propose to ourselves the imitation of some virtue that corresponds to her Festivals. As, for example, on the Feast of her Immaculate Conception, purity of intention; on her Nativity, renewal of spirit and to throw off tepidity; on her Presentation, detachment from something to which we are most attached; on her Annunciation, humility in supporting contempt; on her Visitation, charity towards our neighbour, in giving aims, or at least in praying for sinners; on her Purification, obedience to Superiors. And finally, on the Feast of her Assumption, let us endeavour to detach ourselves from this world, to do all we can to prepare ourselves for death, and regulate each day of our lives as if it were our last.

"Mary was such," says St. Ambrose, "that her life alone was a model for all. . . . Let the virginity and life of Mary be to you as a faithful image in which the form of virtue is resplendent. Thence learn how to live, what to avoid, what to retain."

O Mother of mercy, behold I, the most miserable of all men, have now recourse to Thy compassion in order that thou mayest grant me what I ask. Others may ask bodily health, worldly goods and advantages, but I come, O Lady, to ask thee for that which thou desirest of me and which is most agreeable to thy most holy heart. Thou who wast so humble, obtain for me humility and love of contempt. Thou who wast so patient under the sufferings of this life, obtain for me patience in trials. Thou who wast all filled with the love of God, obtain for me His pure and holy love. Thou who wast all love towards thy neighbour, obtain for me charity towards my neighbour. Thou, in fine, art the most holy of all creatures, O Mary, make me a Saint. Thou canst do all things, O my Mother, my hope, my love, my refuge, my help and my consolation. Amen.

Spiritual Reading.

THE MARTYRS TEACH US PATIENCE, THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER AND THE LOVE OF GOD.

From the *Patience* which the Martyrs displayed during their tortures, *we should learn to suffer with holy resignation the crosses and afflictions of this life.* Poverty, sickness, persecution, contumely, injustice, and all other evils are but trifling when compared with their sufferings. The reflection that it was the will of God that they should suffer for His love, was their only solace. We also in our tribulations should remember the necessity of resignation to the Divine will; and, calling to mind the more grievous sufferings of the

Martyrs, should blush to complain. St. Vincent de Paul used to say: "Conformity to the Divine will is a sovereign remedy for all our trials."

It may be useful here to remark, with St. Augustine, that it is not the *torture* but the *cause* which makes the martyr. Whence St. Thomas teaches that Martyrdom is to suffer death in the exercise of an act of virtue, from which we may infer that not only he who by the hands of the executioner lays down his life for the Faith, but whoever dies in order to comply with the Divine will, and to please God, is a Martyr, since in sacrificing himself to the Divine love he performs an act of the most exalted virtue. We all have to pay the great debt of nature; let us therefore endeavour in holy prayer, to obtain resignation to the Divine will—to receive death and every tribulation in conformity with the dispensations of God's Providence. As often as we perform this act of resignation with sufficient fervour, we may hope to be made partakers of the merits of the Martyrs. St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi, in reciting the *Gloria Patri*, etc., in the Office, always bowed her head in the same spirit as she would have done in receiving the stroke of the executioner.

The example of the Martyrs teaches us also to have *immediate recourse to the assistance of God* by earnest supplication, when we feel ourselves disconsolate or weak under affliction. Thus acted the holy Martyrs. As their torture increased they multiplied their prayers and secured the victory. St. Theodore, after a long endurance of his tortures, was stretched upon burning tiles; feeling the pain penetrating to his very heart, he besought the Lord to sweeten his sufferings and so persevered to the end. There have been on the contrary examples of Christians, who, failing to invoke the assistance of the Almighty, have fallen off from the confession of the Faith, and forfeited the glorious crown. An example is found in the Acts of the Martyrs of Japan. An aged man, having been condemned to a protracted Martyrdom, endured the torture for a considerable time, but failing to invoke heavenly aid, denied his Faith a few moments before he expired—a startling warning to

all, that perseverance in prayer in times of temptations and distress is that which alone can assure us the victory.

But the most important lesson that we learn from the Martyrs is to love God: *He who loveth not abideth in death.*—(Jo. iii., 14). We cannot manifest our love so well as by a willingness to suffer for His sake. St. Gordianus replied to the tyrant who threatened to put him to death if he did not deny the Name of Jesus: "You threaten death! But my greatest regret is, that I can die only once for Jesus Christ!" In a similar manner St. Procopius exclaimed to the tyrant, who was directing further tortures: "Torment as much as thou wilt, but know that to one who truly loves Jesus Christ, nothing is clearer than to suffer for His sake." "And did the Saints speak thus," asks St. Bernard, "because they were in a state of stupor or insensible to torments?" No, says the holy Doctor, it was neither stupor nor insensibility, but *their love of Jesus Christ* which caused them to esteem it all joy to suffer and to die for His glory. This ardent love of God is certainly the greatest spiritual advantage to be derived from the perusal of the Acts of the Martyrs; the recollection of their conduct will make us ashamed to repine under the tribulations Divine Providence sends us, and will strengthen us to receive them with resignation.

Evening Meditation.

"WHY WILL YOU DIE, O HOUSE OF ISRAEL?"

I.

St. Paul says that Jesus Christ, by dying for us, was made our justification: *He is made unto us wisdom, and justice, and sanctification, and redemption.*—(1 Cor. i., 30). "Justice," comments St. Bernard, "in the

washing-away of sins." Yes, for God, accepting on our behalf the torments and death of Jesus Christ, is obliged to pardon us by virtue of the compact made: *Him that knew no sin, for us he hath made sin, that we might be made the justice of God in him.*—(2 Cor. v., 21). The innocent One was made a Victim for our sins in order that forgiveness through His merits might of right belong to us. For this reason David prays God to save him, not only for His Mercy's sake, but likewise for the sake of His Justice: *Deliver me in thy justice.*—(Ps. xxx., 2).

The eagerness of God to save sinners was always immense. This eagerness led Him to reproach them with that cry: *Return, ye transgressors, to the heart.*—(Is. xlvi., 8). Sinners, enter once more into your own hearts; think of the benefits you have received from Me, of the love I have borne you, and offend Me no more. *Turn ye to me, and I will turn to you.*—(Zach. i., 3). Return to Me, and I will receive you into my embraces: *Why will you die, O house of Israel? Return ye and live.*—(Ezech. xviii., 31). My children, why will you destroy yourselves, and of your own free-will condemn yourselves to everlasting death? Return to Me and you shall live.

In a word, His infinite mercy induced Him to descend from Heaven to earth to come and free us from eternal death: *Through the bowels of the mercy of our God, in which the Orient from on high hath visited us.*—(Luke i., 73). But here we must be mindful of what St. Paul says. Previously to God becoming Man He was full of mercy for us; but He could not feel compassion for our miseries, because compassion implies suffering, and God is incapable of suffering. Now, says the Apostle, in order to be moved also with compassion for us the Eternal Word willed to become Man, capable of suffering, and similar to other men who are affected with compassion, so that He might be able not only to save us, but also to compassionate us: *For we have not a High Priest who cannot have compassion on our infirmities, but one tempted in all things like as we are, without sin.*—(Heb.

iv., 15). And in another passage: *It behoved him in all things to be made like unto his brethren, that he might become a merciful high priest.*—(Heb. ii., 17).

So, then, my Jesus, Thou art my God, and not being able to die as God, Thou hast been pleased to become Man capable of dying in order to give Thy life for me. My sweet Redeemer, how is it that, at the sight of such mercy and love Thou hast shown towards me, I do not die of grief? Thou didst come down from Heaven to seek me, a lost sheep, and how many times have I not driven Thee away, preferring my miserable pleasures before Thee! But since Thou dost wish to have me, I leave all; I wish to be Thine, and I will have none other but Thee.

II.

Oh, what tender compassion Jesus Christ has for poor sinners! This makes Him say He is that Shepherd Who goes about seeking the lost sheep, and on finding it He prepares a feast saying: *Rejoice with me, because I have found my sheep that was lost. And he lays it upon his shoulders rejoicing.*—(Luke xv., 4, 6); and thus He carefully keeps possession of it in His fond embrace for fear He should again lose it. This, too, caused Him to say He is that loving Father Who, whenever a prodigal son that has left Him returns to His feet, does not thrust him away, but embraces him, kisses him, and as it were, fairs away for the consolation and fondness which He feels in beholding His repentance: *And running to him, he fell upon his neck and kissed him.*—(Luke xv., 20). This causes Him to say: *I stand at the gate and knock.*—(Apoc. iii., 20); that is, although driven away from the soul by sin, He does not abandon her, but He places Himself outside the door of her heart and knocks by His calls to gain re-admittance. Hence He said to His disciples who with indiscreet zeal would have called down vengeance on those who repulsed them: *You know not of what spirit you are.*—(Luke ix., 55). You see I have so much compassion on sinners; and do you desire vengeance on them? You are not of My spirit.

Finally, this compassion made Him say : *Come to me, all you that labour and are burdened, and I will refresh you.*—(Matt. xi., 28). Come to me, all you that are afflicted and tormented with the weight of your sins, and I will give you peace.

Ah, my Jesus, make me know the evil I have committed, and the love which Thou desirest to have. But since Thou hast borne with me till now, permit me not to give Thee any more cause for sorrow. In flame me altogether with Thy love, and remind me always of all Thou hast suffered for me, that from this day forth I may forget everything; and think of nothing but loving and pleasing Thee. Thou didst come on earth to reign in our hearts; take, then, from my heart all that could prevent Thee from possessing it entirely. Make my will to be wholly conformed to Thy will; may Thy will be my will, and may it be the rule of all my actions and desires.

Third Sunday after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

“**BE NOT WISE IN YOUR OWN CONCEITS.**”

Be not wise in your own conceits.—(Ep. of Sunday, Rom. xii., 16—21).

The wise Christian looks to the future, that is, to the account he must render at the hour of death. Sinners think only of the present, and regard not the end for which they were created. *Oh that they would be wise and would understand and would provide for their last end!*—(Deut. xxxii., 29).

I.

Sinners are foolish; the Saints are truly wise. “A man not truly wise,” says St. Bernard, “who is not wise towards himself,” that is, by taking special care to secure for himself eternal happiness. Sinners think only of the present, but regard not the end for which they were created. Yet what will it profit them to gain all things if they attain not their last end, which alone can make them happy? *But one thing is necessary.*—(Luke x., 42). To attain our end is the only thing necessary for us: if we fail in that, all is lost. What is this end? *Life everlasting.*—(Rom. vi., 22). During life sinners care but little for the attainment of this end. Each day brings them nearer to death and to eternity; but they know not their destination. Should a pilot who is asked whither he is going, answer that he did not know, would not all, says St. Augustine, cry out that he was bringing the vessel to destruction? The Saint then adds: “Such a one runs well but off the right road.”

These are the wise ones of the world who know so well how to acquire wealth and honours, and to indulge in every kind of amusement, but know not how to save their souls. How miserable the rich glutton, who, though able to lay up riches and to live splendidly, was, after death, buried in hell! How miserable Alexander the Great, who, after gaining so many kingdoms, was condemned to eternal torments! How great the folly of Henry the Eighth who rebelled against the Church, but seeing at the hour of death that his soul would be lost, cried out in despair: “Friends, we have lost all!” O God, how many others now weep in hell, and exclaim: *What hath pride profited us? Or what advantages hath the boasting of riches brought us? All those things are passed away like a shadow.*—(Wis. v., 8). In the world we cut a great figure; we enjoyed abundant riches and honours; and now all is passed away like a shadow, and nothing remains for us but to suffer and weep for eternity! St. Augustine says that the *happiness* which

sinners enjoy in this life is their *greatest misfortune* for thereby their perverse will, an internal enemy, is strengthened.

In fine, the words of Solomon are fulfilled with regard to all who neglect their salvation: *Mourning taketh hold of the end of joy.*—(Prov. xiv. 13). All their pleasures, honours, and greatness end in eternal sorrow and wailing. *Whilst I was yet beginning he cut me off.*—(Is. xxxviii., 12). Whilst they were laying the foundation of their hopes of realizing a fortune, death comes, and cutting the thread of life, deprives them of all their possessions, and sends them to hell to burn forever in a pit of fire. What greater folly can be conceived than to wish to be transformed from the friend of God into the slave of Lucifer, and from the heir of Paradise to be, by sin, doomed to hell? For the moment a Christian commits a mortal sin, his name is written among the number of the damned! St. Francis de Sales said that if the Angels were capable of weeping, they would do nothing else but shed tears at the sight of the destruction a Christian who commits mortal sin brings upon himself.

Dear Jesus, have pity upon me! I have forgotten Thee, but Thou didst not forget me. O my God, enlighten me and assist me.

II.

Consider how great is the folly of sinners, who, by living in sin, lead even here on earth a life of misery and discontent. All the goods of this world cannot content the heart of man which has been created to love God, and can find no peace out of God. What are all the grandeurs and all the pleasures of this world but *vanity of vanities?*—(Eccles. i., 12). What are they but *vanity and vexation of spirit?*—(Eccles. iv., 16). Earthly goods are, according to Solomon who had experience of them, *vanity of vanities*; that is, mere vanities, lies, and deceits. They are also a *vexation of spirit*. They not only do not content, but they even afflict the soul; and the more abundantly they are possessed, the greater the anguish they produce. Sinners hope to find peace in

their sins; but what peace can they enjoy? *There is no peace to the wicked, saith the Lord.*—(Is. xlvi., 22). God gives peace to souls who love Him, and not to those who despise Him. Instead of seeking to be the friends of God, sinners wish to be the slaves of Satan who is a cruel and merciless tyrant to all who submit to his yoke. And if he promises delights, he does it, as St. Cyprian says, not for our welfare, but that we may be the companions of his torments in hell.

O my God, permit me not to become any more so blind as to prefer my own unlawful gratifications before Thee. I now detest them and I love Thee above all things. O Mary, my Mother, help me to love Jesus.

Spiritual Reading.

STRONG FAITH AND WEAK FAITH.

Jesus said to them that followed him: Amen, I say to you, I have not found so great faith in Israel.—(Gospel of Sunday. Matt. viii., 1, 13).

He that loves Jesus Christ believes all His words, and his Faith is most perfect whose love of God is most perfect. Whoever loves a person believes all that proceeds from the lips of that person; consequently the more a soul loves Jesus Christ, the more lively and unshaken is her Faith. When the Good Thief beheld our Redeemer, though He had done no ill, suffering death upon the Cross with such patience, he began at once to love Him; under the influence of this love, and of the Divine light which then broke upon his soul, he believed that this was truly the Son of God, and begged not to be forgotten by Him when He should have passed into His kingdom.

Faith is the foundation of Charity; but Faith afterwards receives her perfection from Charity. His Faith is most perfect whose love of God is most perfect. Charity produces in man not merely the Faith of the

understanding, but the Faith of the will also : those who believe only with the understanding, but not with the will, as is the case with sinners who are perfectly convinced of the Truths of the Faith, but who do not choose to live according to the Divine Commandments,—such as these have a very weak Faith; for had they a more lively belief that the grace of God is a priceless treasure, and that sin, because it robs us of this grace, is the worst of evils, they would assuredly change their lives. If, then, they prefer the miserable creatures of this earth to God, it is because they either do not believe, or because their Faith is very weak. On the contrary, he who believes not only with the understanding, but also with the will, so that he not only believes, but has the will to believe in God, the Revealer of Truth, from the love he has for Him, and rejoices in so believing,—such a one has a perfect Faith, and consequently seeks to make his life conformable to the truths that he believes.

Weakness of Faith, however, in those who live in sin, does not spring from the obscurity of Faith; for though God, in order to make our Faith more meritorious, has veiled the objects of Faith in darkness and secrecy, He has at the same time given us such clear and convincing evidence of their truth, that not to believe them would argue not merely a lack of sense, but sheer madness and impiety. The weakness of the Faith of many persons is to be traced to the *wickedness of living*. He who, rather than forego the enjoyment of forbidden pleasures, scorns the Divine friendship, would wish there were no law to forbid, and no chastisement to punish, his sin; on this account, he strives to blind himself to the Eternal Truths of Death, Judgment, and Hell, and of Divine justice; and because such subjects strike too much terror into his heart, and are too apt to mix bitterness in his cup of pleasure, he sets his brain to work to discover proofs, which have at least the look of plausibility, and by which he allows himself to be flattered into the persuasion that there is neither soul, nor God, nor hell, in order that he may live and die like the brute beasts, without laws and without reason.

And this laxity of morals is the source whence have issued, and still issue daily, so many books and systems of Materialists, Indifferentists, Deists, and Naturalists. Some among them deny the Divine Existence, and some Divine Providence, saying that God, after having created men, takes no further notice of them, and is heedless whether they love or hate Him, whether they be saved or lost; others, again, deny the goodness of God, and maintain that He has created numberless souls for hell, becoming Himself their tempter to sin, that so they may damn themselves, and go into everlasting fire, to curse Him there for ever!

Oh, ingratitude and wickedness of men! God has created them in His mercy, to make them eternally happy in Heaven; He has poured on them so many lights, benefits, and graces, to bring them to Eternal Life; for the same end He has redeemed them at the price of so many sorrows and sufferings; and yet they strive to deny all, that they may give free rein to their vicious inclinations! But no, let them strive as they will, the unhappy beings cannot wrest themselves from remorse of conscience, and the dread of the Divine vengeance. Oh, if they would but once forsake sin, and apply themselves earnestly to the love of Jesus Christ, they would then most certainly cast away all doubts about things of Faith, and firmly believe all the truths that God has revealed!*

The true lover of Jesus Christ keeps the Eternal Truths constantly in view, and orders all his actions according to them. Oh, how thoroughly does he who loves Jesus Christ understand the force of that saying of the Wise Man, *Vanity of vanities, and all is vanity*; that all earthly greatness is mere smoke, dirt and delusion; that the soul's only welfare and happiness consist in loving her Creator, and in doing His blessed will; that we are, in reality, no more than what we are before God; that

* St. Alphonsus published a dogmatic work, *The Truth of the Faith*, in which he clearly showed the folly of all the systems of modern unbelievers.—EDITOR.

it is of no use to gain the whole world, if the soul be lost; that all the goods in the world can never satisfy the human heart, but only God Himself; and, in fine, that we must leave all in order to gain all.

Charity believeth all things.—(1 Cor. xiii., 7). There are other Christians,—though not so perverse as the class we have mentioned, who would fain believe in nothing, that they may give full scope to their unruly passions, and live on undisturbed by the stings of remorse,—there are others, I say, who believe indeed, but their Faith is languid; they believe the most holy Mysteries of Religion, the Truths of Revelation contained in the Gospel,—the Trinity, the Redemption, the holy Sacraments, and the rest; still they do not believe *all*. Jesus Christ has said: *Blessed are the poor; Blessed are they that hunger; Blessed are they that suffer persecution; Blessed are you when men shall revile you and shall say all manner of evil against you.*—(Matt. v., 3—11). This is the teaching of Jesus Christ in the Gospel. How, then, can it be said, that those who believe in the Gospel who say: “Blessed are those who have money! Blessed are those who suffer nothing! Blessed are those who can take their amusements; and pitiable is the man that suffers persecution and ill-treatment from others!” We must certainly say of such as these, that either they do not believe the Gospel, or that they believe only *a part of it*. He who believes it all esteems it his highest fortune, and a mark of the Divine favour in this world, to be poor, to be sick, to be mortified, to be despised and ill-treated by men. Such is the belief and such the language of one who believes all that is said in the Gospel and has a real love for Jesus Christ.

Evening Meditation.

THE SAINTS ARE TRULY WISE.

I.

Let us be persuaded that the truly wise are those who know how to love God and to gain Heaven. Happy the man to whom God has given the *science of the Saints*.—Sap. x., 10). Oh, how sublime that science which teaches us to know how to love God and to save our souls! Happy, says St. Augustine, is the man “who knows God, although he may be ignorant of other things.” They who know God, the love which He deserves, and how to love Him, stand not in need of any other knowledge. They are wiser than those who are masters of many sciences, but know not how to love God. Brother Egidius of the Order of St. Francis, once said to St. Bonaventure: Happy you, O Father Bonaventure, who are so learned, and who by your learning, can become more holy than I can who am but a poor ignorant man. The Saint replied: “If an old woman loves God more than I do, she is more learned and more holy than I am.” At hearing this, Brother Egidius exclaimed: “O poor old woman! Poor old woman! hear what Father Bonaventure says. If you love God more than he does, you can surpass him in sanctity.”

It was this excited the emulation of St. Augustine and made him ashamed of himself. He exclaimed: “The ignorant rise up and bear away the kingdom of Heaven,” and what are we, the learned ones of this world doing? Oh! how many of the rude and illiterate are saved, who, though they know not how to read, know how to love God, and how many of the wise ones of the world are damned! Oh, truly wise were St. John of God, St. Felix of Cantalicio, and St. Paschal, poor Franciscan lay-brothers, who were unacquainted with human sciences but learned in the *science of the Saints*. But the wonder is, that, though worldlings themselves are

fully persuaded of this truth, and constantly extol the merits of those who retire from the world to live only for God, still they act as if they believed it not.

II.

Tell me, to which class do you wish to belong—to the wise ones of the world, or to the wise ones of God? Before you make a choice, St. John Chrysostom advises you to go to the graves of the dead! Oh, how eloquently do the sepulchres of the dead teach us the science of the Saints and the vanity of all earthly goods! "For my part," says the Saint, "I see nothing but rottenness, bones and worms." Among these skeletons I cannot distinguish the noble, the rich, or the learned; I see that they have all become dust and rottenness. Thus all their greatness and glory have passed away like a dream!

What, then, must we do? Listen to the advice of St. Paul: *This, therefore, I say, brethren: the time is short; it remaineth that . . . they that use this world, as if they used it not; for the fashion of this world passeth away.*—(1 Cor. vii., 29, 31). This world is a scene which shall pass away and end very soon: *The time is short.* During the days of life that remain, let us endeavour to live like men who are wise not according to the world, but according to God, by attending to the sanctification of our souls, and by adopting the means of salvation; by avoiding dangerous occasions; by practising prayer; joining some pious Sodality; frequenting the Sacraments; reading every day a spiritual book; and if it be in our power, by daily hearing Mass, or, at least, visiting Jesus in the Holy Sacrament of the altar, and an image of the most holy Mary. Thus we shall be truly wise and be happy for time and for eternity.

Monday—Third Week after Epiphany

Morning Meditation.

LET US HASTEN TO GIVE OURSELVES TO GOD.

To secure a happy death the Saints abandoned all things. They left their country; they renounced the delights and the hopes the world held out to them and embraced a life of Poverty and Contempt. *O ye sons of men, how long will you be dull of heart? Why do you love vanity and seek after lying?*

I.

David calls the happiness of this life *the dream of them that awake.*—(Ps. lxxii., 20). In explaining these words, a certain author says: The goods of this world appear great, but they are nothing: like a dream that lasts but a little and afterwards vanishes, they are enjoyed but a short time. The thought that with death all ends, made St. Francis Borgia resolve to give himself entirely to God. The Saint was obliged to accompany the dead body of the Empress Isabella to Grenada. When the coffin was opened her appearance was so horrible and the smell so intolerable that all had to retire. St. Francis remained to contemplate in the dead body of his sovereign the vanity of the world; and looking at it he exclaimed: "Are you, then, my empress? Are you the queen before whom so many bent their knee in reverential awe? O Isabella, where is your majesty, your beauty gone?" "Thus, then," he said within himself, "and the greatness and the crowns of this world! I will henceforth serve a Master Who can never die!" From that moment he consecrated

himself to the love of Jesus crucified; and he made a vow to become a Religious, should his wife die before him. This vow he afterwards fulfilled by entering the Society of Jesus.

Justly, then, has a person who was undeceived written on a skull these words: *Cogitanti vilescent omnia*. To him who reflects on death, everything in this world appears contemptible. He cannot love the earth. And why are there so many unhappy lovers of this world? It is because they do not think of death. *O ye sons of men, how long will you be dull of heart? Why do you love vanity, and seek after lying?*—(Ps. iv., 3). Miserable children of Adam, says the Holy Ghost, why do you not chase away from your heart so many earthly affections which make you love vanity and lies? What has happened to your forefathers must befall you. They dwelt in the same palace which you inhabit, and slept in your very bed; but now they are no more. Such, too, will be your lot.

My dear Redeemer, I thank Thee for having waited for me. What should have become of me had I died when I was at a distance from Thee? May Thy mercy and patience, which I have experienced for so many years, be forever blessed! I thank Thee for the light and grace with which Thou dost now assist me. I did not then love Thee, and I cared but little to be loved by Thee. I now love Thee with my whole heart, and nothing grieves me so much as the thought of having displeased so good a God. This sorrow tortures my soul; but it is a sweet torment, because it gives me confidence that Thou hast already pardoned me.

II.

Give yourself, then, to God before death comes upon you. *Whatsoever thy hand is able to do, do it earnestly*.—(Eccles. ix.; 10). What you can do to-day, defer not till to-morrow; for a day once passed never returns, and to-morrow death may come, and prevent you from ever more being able to do good. Detach yourself instantly from everything which removes, or can remove, you from

God. Let us instantly renounce in affection the goods of this earth, before death strips us of them by force. *Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord*.—(Apoc. xiv., 13). Happy they who at death are already dead to all attachment to this world. They fear not, but desire death, and embrace it with joy; for, instead of separating them from the Good they love, it unites them to the Supreme Good, Who is the sole object of their affections, and Who will render them happy for eternity.

O my sweet Saviour, would that I had died a thousand times before I sinned against Thee! I tremble lest I should hereafter offend Thee again. Ah! make me die the most painful of all deaths rather than permit me evermore to lose Thy grace. I was once the slave of hell; but now I am Thy servant, O God of my soul! Thou hast said that Thou lovest those that love thee—(Prov. viii., 17). I love Thee. Therefore I am Thine and Thou art mine. I may lose Thee at some future time; but the grace which I ask of Thee is, to take me out of life rather than suffer me ever to lose Thee again. Unasked, Thou hast bestowed upon me so many graces; I cannot now fear that Thou wilt not hear my prayer for the grace which I now implore. Do not permit me ever to lose Thee. Give me Thy love, and I desire nothing more. Mary, my hope, intercede for me.

Spiritual Reading.

THE MARTYRS TEACH US TO ACCEPT DEATH
ACCORDING TO THE GOOD PLEASURE
OF GOD.

PRAYING TO THE HOLY MARTYRS.

Death, which is the tribute that every one must pay, is the greatest of all our tribulations and makes not only sinners but the just tremble. Our Saviour Himself as Man wished to show the fear that He felt in the face of

