

# **St. GASPAR BERTONI**



**FOUNDER of the CONGREGATION of the  
SACRED STIGMATA of OUR LORD, JESUS CHRIST**

**SOME RUDIMENTS of his  
SPIRITUAL WRITINGS**

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**AUTHOR'S DEDICATION**

To my Stigmatine Confreres:

Fr. Samuel Chameal, Fr. Julius Delmaso, Fr. Lucian Orlando Giovanni,  
Fr. Peter Marchesini, Fr. Guido Mespilli, Fr. Camillo Santini,  
Fr. Louis Veronese –

Remembering our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary as Priests - and in memory of:

Fr. Lucian Dal Zoppo and Fr. Seraphin Piazzzi – who have preceded us in the Father's  
House.

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Fr. Charles F. Egan, Fr. Charles J. Grady, Fr. Carmen T. Russo,  
Fr. Giancarlo Mittempergher, Fr. Leonard Ferrecchia.  
For the Final Revision: Fr. John Rungruangkanokul.

Our gratitude goes to each one for making these writings of our Saintly Founder  
available in the English Language.

May these thoughts of our Founder be a guide in our following his footsteps towards a  
true spiritual Stigmatine charism.

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## **PREPARATION for the ELECTRONIC LIBRARY & COMPUTER NOTES**

**Fr. Joseph Henchey.**

[The material has been arranged in such a way for it to be of help for those who might want to download – and there may be references as well to the material already found on the web site]:

[www.st-bertoni.com](http://www.st-bertoni.com), under Writings & Works

[NB: The original title of this work in Italian is: *La Grammatica di Don Gaspare. Meditazioni quotidiane, dagli scritti di S. Gaspare Bertoni.*

In the English speaking world, this unusual title might lead some to think of Cardinal Newman's *Grammar of Assent*, published in 1870<sup>1</sup>. In the Introduction, Gilson writes:

*... [Newman's] Essay does not pretend to elucidate all the problems raised by [his] complex experience, but it is an attempt to facilitate for others their first initiation to the Grammar of a Language, which he himself had not found easy to learn ... Literally speaking, a Grammar is an art and science dealing with the structure of a certain language ... The first duty of a grammarian is to teach the parts of speech*

In seeking to be faithful to Fr. Bonetti's idea, this *Grammar* could mean the 'Fundamentals,' 'Basic Elements and Principles', of Fr. Bertoni's Spirituality – this is a kind of an 'anthology.' I have chosen the title for the web-site English edition: *Some Rudiments of [Fr. Bertoni's] Spiritual Writings*].

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<sup>1</sup> Doubleday Image Books. Garden City NY 1955, with Introduction by Etienne Gilson.



## **PRESENTATION**

It is frequent today to select special pages from an Author of a certain interest, assigning them to each day of the year, and harmonizing the choices with the spiritual climate of the various liturgical seasons.

This is precisely what Fr. Ignatius Bonetti has done with an intelligence moved by love, in this present volume. He has been a truly dedicated student of St. Gaspar Bertoni [1777-1853]. The ancients used to say: 'I fear the man of just one book!' The person who knows only one book however, can incite both respect and fear. Today the style is to devour books reviews and newspapers, with the style of using them, and then throwing them away. The end result is to hurry through the content of the texts rather superficially, and then forgetting all about them after some time. This may provide information, but does not help formation. However, one has spent a life time in fathoming the depths of the message of a single Author is in a position to offer you the most important pages, because he would be able to provide these for you to sip and relish, as is done for truly good wine. Rather than just wandering through time, this work is much like the old Latin saying: 'Don't ever let a day pass without at least a line!' Let no day pass without meditating on a text. This is truly what Fr. Ignatius has done here, by drawing on St. Gaspar Bertoni, from whom the Congregation of the Stigmatines has taken its origin.

I am very happy to present these pages, due to the personal knowledge that I enjoy that binds me to the author, and to his Congregation, present in the Diocese of Bari, where the men work with great dynamism.

The content of this book cannot be summarized in just a few well-chosen lines. However, I will be satisfied with just a few references, in order to move the reader to a more direct and prolonged contact with the texts being offered here, day by day, 'redeeming time'. As Paul said, and which was repeated by St. Gaspar, by making the good use of time which does not return again.

Whoever would run through even rapidly the titles of the individual pages would see unfolding a very rich gamut of spiritual themes: through Grace that allows us to be 'participants in the Divine Nature', to Joy: by passing through the austere path of penance. All the Christian virtues are touched upon, as the various cords of a harp, and the end result is a harmonious poem, in which Jesus Christ is chanted.

In Advent, as would be expected, the theme of expectancy of Christ dominates, and the yearning for holiness; while in Lent, there emerges the theme of Penance and the sense of sin, which lead to the feet of the Crucified. As is seen, this is not a contemplation that would move only on the emotional or sentimental level – rather this work provides a stimulus that shuffles all the cards of our lives.

In the Ordinary Time, the themes are broadened with a greater variety. This proceeds from the Liturgy, to the Church with her various subjects, through the

Christian virtues, in order to blossom in the 'devotions' that were the more characteristic of our Saint: the sacred Heart, the Stigmata of the Lord, the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph, seen particularly in the light of their Holy Espousals. The Holy Spouses have drawn in a particular manner the devout attention of St. Gaspar. This was proved to be what moved him to choose them as Patrons for his Congregation and propose them as model for the Christian life, especially for families.

I would like to bring out a few characteristic expressions that seem to me to be most significant: *to trust in God is a beautiful confidence!* This is the vibrant and convinced manifestation of a joyful and boundless trust, even to the complete abandonment into the hands of the Father. God is one Who never deludes you. Holy Abandonment is one of the fundamental components of Fr. Gaspar's spiritual teaching: that he was able to translate into a coherent life-style.

Fraternal Charity is looked upon as 'the best investment', i.e., the best manner for procuring your authentic interest, not only for a few days here on earth, but rather as that destiny that will know no end. 'I have only that which I have given' – is then noted thereafter.

And I also emphasize further the praise bestowed on 'simplicity', a virtue which merits, in my view, a particular attention: it is a matter of evaluating the most ordinary circumstances of life, without awaiting extraordinary interventions that are so rare, and of modeling oneself on an child, who receives all with simplicity and festively, because for such a person everything is new. And it is to the children such as these to whom Jesus has promised His Reign.

Fundamental in this teaching is that 'conformity to Christ Crucified', that recurs throughout the Saint's writings, as the source of his spirituality. To go to partake of these texts is like partaking of the pure waters of a mountain stream.

St. Gaspar participated personally in the Passion of Christ, by suffering in his own flesh and spirit for long years. As a result, he insistently invites all of us to contemplate in the wounds of Christ Crucified, the indelible signs of an indescribable suffering. These are also an indication of a boundless love, the price paid by Christ in order to acquire us for His Reign.

Rather than commenting on our own, I would like to explain to you, the reader, how this stream of spirituality has sprung up in the Church. Up until the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Christ on the Cross was figured as being crowned in glory, or as a priest vested in rich vestments: He was presented to be already Christ the Victor over sin and death. In this perspective, attention to His Passion, to the Stigmata, to the Pierced Heart, to His Precious Blood that was poured out, found very little space. The glory of the resurrection seemed to absorb the drama of the Passion.

However, beginning in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, especially in Cistercian circles. Then taken by the Franciscans, a way was opened up for a new manner of spiritual thought

– which then became known as ‘*Modern Devotion*’. This was more attentive to Savior’s humanity, and to the signs of His Passion. This would then be the root of the devotion – that is by now, classical – to the Sacred Heart. And from this developed devotion to the Most Precious Blood and to the Sacred Stigmata.

It is up to us today to bring together these two aspects: the Passion of the Crucified and the glory of the Risen Christ. These cannot be separated, much like the concave cannot be separated from the convex: Jesus is at one and the same time the ‘Suffering Christ’ and Christ the Victor: *through the Cross out into Light*, as the ancients also stated.

As for the rest, I leave it all up to your discovery. This will be much assisted also by the rich Table of Contents and Analytical Index, which will allow you to excavate from within the texts themselves. It is a beautiful opportunity to follow along in a spiritual adventure. This is a journey that is full of fascination. The poor realities of this world – as St. Ignatius of Loyola noted – seem to provide for the moment a great pleasure. But when in exhaustion, you abandon them, you find yourself empty and disillusioned. When, though, you undertake the adventure along the ways of the spirit, then the joy that is ignited for the moment, continues even afterwards, and even tends to become greater and more intense. Just try it to believe it! And, so, have a good journey along the paths of the Gospel, under the guidance of a saint, who precedes you and leads you by the hand.

**† Mariano A. Magrassi, OSB**  
**Archbishop of Bari-Bitonto**

## INTRODUCTION

Gaspar Bertoni is one of those saints who are noted not only for the perfection of their spiritual life, but also for the fact that they were chosen by the Lord to be teachers of holiness in His Church.

He was to carry out his spiritual teaching with various classes of people – with people who listen to his sermons, with the youth of the 'Marian Oratories', with the clerics of the seminary, and the priests of the diocese, with the religious men and women of various congregations, and above all with the members of the congregation he founded.

It was natural that these latter, who were the privileged chosen ones of the activity of St. Gaspar, should understand with greater clarity the meaning and the value of his teaching and to be aware of the need to give faithfully the practical application. The chronicles of the congregation clearly point out the zealous attention with which the sons of St. Gaspar used to follow faithfully the directions of their Founder, as expressed in his words and his example. 'Fr. Gaspar,' writes Fr. Giovanni M. Marani, the first successor chosen to lead the congregation used to repeat often in his Venetian dialect, 'acted in this way, or he taught us this.'<sup>2</sup> Whenever he had to speak regarding the activity of someone who was not toeing the mark, Fr. Marani would use this good-natured expression: 'My son, you lack the **grammar** of Fr. Gaspar!'<sup>3</sup>

We see then that Fr. Gaspar, so to say, had his own **grammar**. Obviously, we are not speaking of a book, but rather of his spirit, his style of life, of a collection of his teaching and behavior, which by word and example had the power to convey to whoever came in contact with him a safe rule to follow on the road of holiness. With this colorful expression, which reflects the scholastic surrounding to which the community of the Stimmate lived for so many years, Fr. Marani clearly pointed out the 'teacher's' flavor of the spiritual personality of St. Gaspar.

The purpose of this book is to present the **grammar** of St. Gaspar, hence, the title.

First of all, it is an anthology of his writings. Some are of the sermons he gave to parishioners, others are meditations and instructions taken from the many courses of spiritual exercises and retreats that he gave to the clergy or to various groups of seminarians; writings from his spiritual diary, or spiritual journal; from his correspondence, from the constitutions he wrote for his religious family. We have included other selections, which were not composed by him, but in a certain sense he made them his own, transcribing them from other authors, such as Fr. Alphonsus Rodriguez, and the Benedictine, Fr. John Mabillion, and are included in his manuscripts.

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<sup>2</sup> Cause of Canonization, *Positio super virtutibus*, Vol. 2. Roma 1960, p. 22.

<sup>3</sup> Fr. Joseph Stofella, *P. Giovanni M. Marani*. CS II, p. 124.

Regarding the literary ownership of the texts in this collection, at this point, a general observation should be made. The greater part of the passages are definitely original and properly, St. Gaspar's. But, we cannot ignore the fact that he himself stated this intention 'of not saying anything of his own'<sup>4</sup> regarding the meditations that he gave in the seminary and during the spiritual exercises, but to rely completely on the Bible, on the fathers of the Church, on the theologians and spiritual writers, so much so that the meditations and instructions of St. Gaspar are to a great extent a collection of other people's writings. Even in his sermons to the people he made use of the writings of the best classical preachers especially those of the Jesuit, Fr. Paul Segneri. From the innumerable citations quoted from other authors, especially those from the Fathers of the Church, as a general rule St. Gaspar mentioned the sources. But this was not always the case, for sometimes the citations appear to be fitted to the meaning he has in mind. However, we have adopted the criterion of indicating here, as pertaining to the ***Grammar of St. Gaspar***, the texts, that are found in his manuscripts, even those from various sources.

Besides the texts that in some way belong to St. Gaspar included in the ***grammar***, are some testimonies given about him by his contemporaries, that are more organized and incisive, and they point out to us the master of holiness, who taught with his own example besides his words. We have also taken the liberty to include a few other selections written by some of the first sons of St. Gaspar, who were very faithful to his teaching and close to his spirit. They are sermons given when they were substituting for him on themes that are dear to the spiritual tradition of our Stigmatine family - themes, such as the Sacred Stigmata, the Holy Spouses, Mary and Joseph, themes which St. Gaspar spoke about many times, but left nothing written of these sermons.

The subject matter of this ***Grammar of St. Gaspar*** has been distributed into various sections according to the season of the liturgical year. This should serve as a book of meditation. The first part corresponds to Advent and Christmas. In the second part you will find selections attuned to the spirit of the Lenten season. In the third part the same goes for the Easter Season. The texts that touch on themes of a general nature are found in the fourth part, which corresponds to Ordinary Time, hence, this part is a bit longer.

The fifth part is made up of selective themes on various topics, some suggested by festivities in the calendar year, others presented for the choice of the reader, who can use them when and how he chooses. Thus the span of the liturgical year is covered – even though this is accomplished with a bit of liberty and without any rigidity – with the texts of the daily meditations drawn from the ***Grammar of St. Gaspar***.

One final word about the criteria necessary to follow in the entire course of this work. From the onset, we decided not to do a critical edition of St. Gaspar's writings,

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<sup>4</sup> *Meditations on St. Matthew*, MssB 7342. cf. further ahead, n. 8, note 2.

but rather a practical edition, which would be useful in this day and age of the texts which were written almost two centuries ago and were never intended to be published. Hence, there arose the need to adapt a little the literary form of the writings, so to speak, a sort of 'translation.' But, let me make it clear that this was always done with careful respect for the texts, and with the sole purpose of rendering the contents more understandable today.

A cordial word of thanks to those who have helped me in various ways to bring this work to reality. In a special way, thanks to my confreres, Fr. Bruno Facciotti and Fr. Pasquale Cavallo, who encouraged me to have this ***Grammar of St. Gaspar*** published by the Dehonian Press of Bologna.

We hope that the spiritual teaching of St. Gaspar Bertoni, which is distinguished for being deeply rooted in the gospels, hence is perfectly suited for our time, will be favorably accepted by devout Christians, and will produce substantial results of holiness and missionary zeal.



## FOREWORD

The identification of the texts in this book has been arranged with the following criterion:

For each meditation the source, or sources, are indicated, whenever several texts are combined with other closely related topics, their source is also identified. As far as possible, sources are identified as coming from the Bible, the Fathers, and others on which St. Gaspar relied.

For the writing of St. Gaspar that have been published in their entirety: ***Spiritual Journey, Correspondence, Constitutions*** - recourse is had to the various volumes that have been printed. Likewise, a collection of his Early Sermons has been published under the title, ***Pages of a Christian Life***. Reference to this book should be made as far as possible for the selections of these sermons. Also his **Retreat Meditations** and **Instructions** are printed in the **CS** collection, in an incomplete form and with a certain liberty in the translation. From time to time, we refer to this 'collection' when the occasion arises.

For testimonies about St. Gaspar, we refer to the documents, ***Positio super virtutibus***, and to the ***Summarium Additionale***, and to the monumental biography in six volumes written by Rev. Nello Dalle Vedove.

Below are the principal works on which the documentation is based with the dates, abbreviations and initials that are found in the footnotes.

<b>MssB</b>	<b><u>Manuscripts</u></b> of St. Gaspar - 5 volumes, compiled by Fr. Luigi Benaglia
<b>CF</b>	<b>Constitutions</b> – compiled by Fr. Joseph Stofella, Verona 1950.
<b>EP</b>	<b>Correspondence</b> – Compiled by Fr. Joseph Stofella. Verona 1954.
<b>MP</b>	<b>Spiritual Journal</b> - Commentary by Fr. Joseph Stofella, Roma 1962 – translated by Giancarlo Mittempergher. Pretoria 1993.
<b>PVC</b>	<b>Pages of a Christian Life</b> – by Fr. Joseph Stofella. Vicenza 1947
<b>CS</b>	<b>Collectanea Stigmatina</b> - 4 volumes, Documents & Studies. 1957-1964.
<b><i>Positio super Virtutibus</i></b>	Documents relating to the Process of Canonization
<b>SA</b>	<b>Summarium Additionale</b> – Documents relating to the Process of Canonization

[NB: Among the Documents contained in the ***Summarium Additionale***, note worthy are the following:

- n. 20: ***Miscellanea Lenotti***. [pp.106 -195];
- n. 26: ***Life of the Servant of God. D. Gaspar Bertoni***. Verona 1858 [pp. 288-578], written by Fr. Gaetano Giacobbe. This is the first biography written about St. Gaspar.

**BERTONI, St. Gaspar Bertoni** - Written by Fr. Nello Dalle Vedove.

- **Vol. I: *Early Life of Ven. Gaspar Bertoni* – 1971.**
- **Vol. II: *Life and Thought of Bl. Gaspar Bertoni* - Part I 1975**
- **Vol. III: *Life and Thought of Bl. Gaspar Bertoni* - Part II 1977**
- **Vol. IV: *Gaspar Bertoni & the Stigmatine Community* – Part I 1981**
- **Vol. V: *Gaspar Bertoni & the Stigmatine Community* - Part II 1984**
- **Vol. VI: *Gaspar Bertoni & the Stigmatine Community* – Part III 1991**

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[The numbers refer to the Meditations]

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# **St. GASPAR BERTONI**



**FOUNDER of the CONGREGATION of the  
SACRED STIGMATA of OUR LORD, JESUS CHRIST**

**SOME RUDIMENTS of his  
SPIRITUAL WRITINGS**

**SEASON OF ADVENT & CHRISTMAS**

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SOME RUDIMENTS OF HIS SPIRITUAL WRITINGS**

**ADVENT & CHRISTMAS**  
**Part 1 [## 1 - 48]**

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## SEASON OF ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS

### WAITING FOR CHRIST

#### 1: Christ is Coming. Let us revive our waiting.

Christ is coming. The Savior is about to be born. Holy Mother Church is in these days awaits Him, desires Him, and longs for Him.

What does it mean that here we are all cold in our affections; that we pass through these days of Advent so happy and so joyful in waiting and in a lazy indifference; that being solicitous to untie ourselves to the Church, we are satisfied at most to agree with her exteriorly, by a superficial and languid ritual celebration?

Unfortunately, attachment to worldly things keeps our spirit impeded; the pleasures of the senses have taken away our heart, reducing it to a deplorable slavery. Yes, we believe in heavenly things, but we don't love them. We profess them exteriorly, but we don't enjoy them intimately. What a wonder, then, if we don't desire them, if they interest us very little?

O God! It is indeed now time for us to shake off this coldness, that we lift our spirit on high, accepting the invitation of the Prophet to see the joy that comes from God ***Look to the east, Jerusalem! Behold the joy that comes to you from God!*** [Ba 4:36]. This is the object to which we all must apply the attention of our mind.

Some already know by experience how beautiful and joyful the coming of the Savior is, since they have their heart warmed by divine love. But I, who am cold, and others like me, have need to pray so that we may succeed in persuading ourselves that even the most miserable sinners can participate together with the just and the saints in this waiting for a joy that is so pure and sublime.<sup>5</sup>

#### 2: Waiting for Christ and our poverty

At first sight, one comes to think that only saints and the just are in a position to await truly with joy the coming of Christ, not sinners, who have within themselves too much deformity and lack of similarity.

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<sup>5</sup> Sermons preached by Fr. Gaspar in the early years of his ministry, n. 26: 'The Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.' **MssB 946-948. PVC, pp. 225, f.** These sermons are a collection of 41 discourses given by Fr. Bertoni between Sunday, June 8, 1800 – when he was still a deacon – and Sunday, December 13, 1807, in his parish church of St. Paul in Campo Marzio, Verona. Regarding these sermons, prepared with extreme care and completely spread out to be recorded, his first biographer, Fr. Cajetan Giacobbe, testifies that they constitute 'a precious treasury of oratorical art and divine learning'. [SA, p. 565]. The sermon on the Advent of Our Lord Jesus Christ, from which the meditations of this chapter have been taken, was delivered on December 9, 1804.

That's not so. In fact, it can be said that in a certain sense sinners are in a position to enjoy it more than the just themselves: **the Son of God comes from heaven to save that which was lost** [Mt 18:11]. He Himself says that He has come to search out sinners and not the just: **I did not come to call the righteous but sinners** [My 9:13]. The name that He took becoming man, the name announced by the angel, is Jesus, that is, savior. **He will save His people from their sins** [Mt 1:21]. To us sinners, oppressed by the misery of our faults and shamefully held in slavery by our vices, the visit of the King of Heaven has been announced and directed that He wishes to free us with His grace and enrich us with His precious gifts. We must, therefore, feel with greater pleasure the approach of that day so longed for, happy and auspicious for us above every human imagination. That misery of ours which first confounded us so much and made us almost despair, now we see it becoming a reason for rich hopes. And all those who knew our old misery will admire the wisdom and power of God Who knows how to call those things that are not, as those which are [cf. Rm 4:19] and to choose the most abject and despicable creatures of the world to confound the most strong.

Let each one of us say: 'Rejoice, my poor heart, in the mercy of the Lord and He will satisfy all your desires.' **Take delight in the Lord, and He will grant you your heart's requests** [Ps 37:4]. To You, O Lord, I have lifted up my hopes. I trust in you, and I will never be put to shame for having hoped in You [cf. Ps 25:1]<sup>6</sup>.

### **3: The wonders of God's love**

Let us be well aware of this: just as we are accustomed to love only those things in which we perceive some appearance of beauty and good, and seeing in ourselves only malice and ugliness, we imagine that it is almost impossible that God can love us. It seems an exaggeration that the Word of God would descend as the passionate lover of our soul, with the most tender and affectionate invitations, to call us to **His chaste and spiritual nuptials**. But every difficulty vanishes when we think of the difference that exists between our love and that of God. Our love is caused by the good that it finds in the object it loves. Because of this, we love only the good that lives in a person. The love of God, however, is not caused by the love that can be in us, but instead He causes it in us<sup>7</sup>. For this reason, God loves also things that do not exist, in order that they may come into being. He loves souls that are deformed by sin in order to adorn them, and reform them with His grace.

Let us look at the facts which are irrefutable. Who were those great saints who received the first fruits of the Spirit in the early years of the newly founded Church? Who were those unconquered martyrs, those illustrious confessors, those first Christians who were so fervent? They were once pagans, slaves of the power of darkness. They adored rocks, metals and wood. Their life and their habits were full of

<sup>6</sup> Early Sermons, n. 25. 'The Advent of Our Lord Jesus Christ'. **MssB 949-957. PVC pp. 226-229.**

<sup>7</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 20, a. 1.

confusion. St. Paul said this to them: ***You were once in darkness because your vices and superstitions, but now you are a light in the Lord*** [cf. Ep 5:8].

How did they pass from the obscure abyss of sin to the luminous heights of sanctity? The Word of God came to make Himself man, in order that the pagan world, so blind and immersed in sin, might become **a beautiful spouse**, adorned with virtue and immaculate. The grace and kindness of Christ our savior, was made known to them and appeared to them. Thus, there is a prodigious change, worthy of the right hand of the Most High Lord.

Who of us, upon hearing this, will not recover the greatest hope of being able to climb, with the grace of the Savior, ever higher than before when it had eventually fallen with its sins, if, as it appears from the history of those first Christians, ***where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more*** [Rm 5:20]<sup>8</sup>.

#### **4: How to prepare ourselves to receive the Savior**

The favorable time is already approaching; the days of our salvation are now very near [cf. 2 Co 6:2]. A gentle and happy hope has already been born in our hearts, and joyful affections of exaltation, love and desire now move our spirits. Now, having reflected on the resolution to 'wait for the joyful coming of the Savior', the time has come to reflect on the manner of putting that resolution into practice.

Whoever rushes to meet Christ with longing, should, when he nears Him, join with His good desires the pledge, in fact, the effective step of abandoning and leaving completely the crookedness of his habits and the proud haughtiness of worldly thoughts. Besides this, on facing Christ, he should become confused because of his past life, and become ashamed of his sins, confessing them with humble penitence.

May our Lord Jesus Christ give us the grace to do that especially in the Advent Season, to the end that, when our souls have been brought into His house, and He has deigned to join them to Himself by grace in this life, and to glory in the next, we, here on earth, and also in Heaven, can congratulate one another on the change in our happiness, and at the same time praise His mercy<sup>9</sup>.

### **THE CHRISTIAN IDEAL**

#### **5: Vocation to holiness**

God, Who has given us being and life, with his creating hand, has brought us into the world with this purpose: to know, love, praise and serve the Author of all good, and to promote His glory in this world, so as to merit a glorious reward and perfect happiness in Heaven.

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<sup>8</sup> Early Sermons, n. 25. 'The Advent of Our Savior, Jesus Christ'. **MssB 955-961. PVC, pp. 230, f.**

<sup>9</sup> o.c., **MssB 962-969. PVC, pp. 231-234.**

Purchased with the Blood of the Son of God, adopted as sons of the King of Heaven, and made sharers of the divine nature by the gift of grace, we are no longer 'ours' but 'God's', to serve Him alone. We are no longer slaves of flesh and blood to take pleasure in perverse longings, but of the Spirit to allow ourselves to be led gently by its impulses and its dictates. We are no longer of the earth to serve the world, but of Heaven to work and live like saints.

How many Christians, on being invited to bring themselves closer to God, that is, to serve Him in their state of life with greater perfection, retreat from Him, struck with fear. They look on their spiritual life as an object of sadness and distress. Thus, they show clearly by their own experience how many errors anyone is exposed to he, who wishes to judge the matters of the spirit from a purely earthly perspective. That is a huge deception. Many do not consider the interior consolation in which the true servants of God abound, so much more gentle as it is still more secret. This is ***that hidden manna which no one knows except the one who receives it*** [Rv 2:17]. This is that ***continual feast*** [cf. Pr 15:15] which a soul enjoys in the security and peace of the heart. This is that conversation with uncreated Wisdom that is so kind from whom every weariness and even bitterness have been excluded [cf. Ws 3:6]. How great is the goodness, O Lord, which you have in store for those who fear you and serve you [cf. Ps 31:20].

The time is short, and the appearance of this world will soon have its end. Shall we wait for the night to catch up with us before we begin to work? Shall we wait until the Bridegroom arrives, before we provide more oil for our lamps which are almost out? Shall we wait until He invites us to the wedding before we begin to weave the cloth for our wedding gown?

***Behold, I am coming soon and I will bring with Me My recompense*** [Rv 22:12]. That soul will be happy that will be well adorned and disposed to receive Him. Come, she will hear; come My Spouse, receive the crown which your Lord has prepared for you from all eternity. ***Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come, share your master's joy*** [Mt 25:23]<sup>10</sup>.

## **6: Holiness is for everyone**

God calls everyone to serve Him; indeed, all can and it is fitting that each one aspire to sanctify himself in his state of life. The spiritual commitment must be lived in a different way by a cloistered religious and by a lay person in the midst of the world; in a still different way by a priest in the exercise of his ministry and by a father of a

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<sup>10</sup> Early Sermons, n. 5: 'Devotion'. **MssB 632-648. PVC, pp. 200-203, 205, f.** This Sermon was preached on April 20, 1802. It is one of the richest in ascetical content: in it, Fr. Bertoni even with a certain dependence on the first chapter of 'Philothea, or Introduction to a Devout Life', of St. Francis de Sales, reveals himself by his own personal profound investigations as an authentic teacher of the spiritual life' [BERTONI 2, pp. 146, f.].

family in running his house; and surely different by a virgin consecrated to God and by a wife who is bound to her husband.

Devotion has wings to fly up to Heaven and feet to walk on earth. Although constantly in action, it knows how to rest peacefully with its heart in God. Its eyes are on guard to plan, to conduct itself in temporal matters, but it has another more acute vision that never loses sight of its final destiny, in order to consult with God in its every action, and to direct all things to His glory. With its lips, devotion speaks to men; yet, in the secret of its heart, it never ceases to praise and bless the Lord. So, while it has contact with the world, it keeps its soul in Heaven. And drawing God to itself out of love, devotion discovers Him and possesses Him in an outpouring of peace, and thus enjoys Paradise here on earth.

From this comes that admirable sweetness that clothes all actions. From this comes that unchangeable sameness of spirit. The world sees nothing that sets it apart, nothing out of the ordinary in its goal, in its action, or in those duties that are proper to its function. So it is surprised when it is called upon to love, in devotion, something that is special and divine which it does not understand.

In prosperity, devotion doesn't get puffed up; in bad times, it does not give way to sadness. It rejoices in the happiness of others, as if it were its own. It divests itself of every singular whim, and has a respectfully appreciation of the talents of others, provided they are honest. Devotion willingly consoles those who are troubled in spirit. Open-minded with friends, it helps everyone without expecting anything in return. It awaits a reward only from God, Whom alone it is happy to serve<sup>11</sup>.

## **7: God is faithful: He does what He promises**

***God is faithful and by Him you were called to fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ Our Lord*** [1 Co 1:9]. What a grandiose thing St. Paul says here, what an immense gift he announces to us! We have been called to communion of life with the only-begotten Son of God. And how? By the Father. Called by Him, not introduced by our own initiative.

And because he has announced a grandiose thing, he also adds a certain proof that does not allow contradictions. He says in fact: ***God is faithful***, that is, true. That which He promised, He does. He has promised to put us in communion with His only begotten Son because He has called us precisely to this. His gifts, therefore, and the vocation He has given us, are without regret. Those things which God has promised surely have given to us as long as we do not pull away.

Even if we have been called to hard and bitter matters, it would be unpardonable to pull ourselves away. But He calls us to holiness, to liberation, to good things prepared for us that neither the eye has seen nor the ear heard. It is God Himself Who calls us. What excuse can they give who do not run to Him?

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<sup>11</sup> Early Sermons, n. 11: 'Devotion'. MssB 639-642. PVC, pp. 203, f.

Unless it is due to our fault, God never takes back the help that He has begun to give, and has promised to continue to give, as long as we persevere and reinforce ourselves in faith and communion with Christ. He never abandons us unless he is abandoned by us<sup>12</sup>.

## **8: Aspire to the greatest charisms**

The greatest gifts of grace belong in a special way to the vocation of the Church's ministers. To these, if they do not place obstacles in the way, on His part, God is prompt in giving an abundance, the first fruits, and the richest of these gifts, which afterwards, through their ministry, He bestows and spreads among His people, as it has been said: ***I will lavish choice portions upon the priests, and my people shall be filled with My blessings*** [Jr 31:14]. Even more often than not, those gifts belong in a special way to the vocation of those priests who, with a new spirit, have been called by the Holy Spirit, the innovator and restorer of all things, to renew and restore His Church on the indefectible rectitude and the strength of the First Rock<sup>13</sup>.

But it is not inconvenient to any Christian, who is called to enjoy the beatific vision in Paradise, to aspire humbly and without presumption in this life to the better and essential gifts of grace and charity, in conformity with the invitation of sacred Scripture: ***Strive eagerly for the greatest spiritual gifts*** [1 Co 12:31].

This is how God strongly attracts the souls He has chosen for a sublime communion with Him. Nonetheless, sometimes He may do this with a leap, as He did with St. Paul: yet, more often He does it with steps. There are very few who

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<sup>12</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3386-3389**. Fr. Bertoni preached the Spiritual exercises many times to the Clergy – beginning from September 1810 – both in the Seminary of Verona and at the Stimmat: and for this ministry, he t The Meditations of this first The Meditations of this first traveled to Mantua, where he gave two consecutive courses together with Canon Louis Pacetti. The material is subdivided into two sections, Meditations [MssB 2173-2687] and Instructions [MssB 2688-3808]; all of them were presented with absolute fidelity to the Ignatian method and with the rule of saying nothing about himself, to give room for the texts of the Word of God.

<sup>13</sup> Meditations on First Kings, n. 16. **MssB 5469-5480**. The Meditations on *Primum Regum* - which is really First Samuel by today's more common numeration - make up the first series of Sunday and Festival Meditations given by St. Gaspar in the Diocesan Seminary, beginning from November 18, 1810, after he had been named Spiritual Father. In elaborating upon his reflections on the biblical text, St. Gaspar follows the traces of the highly allegorical commentary composed by St. Gregory the Great in the work acknowledged as authentic for the most part in *Primum Librum Regum*, and he develops chiefly the theme of vocation to the pastoral ministry. The Meditations of this first series, number 73 [MssB 4853-7340]. The texts of two other series have been preserved: 41 Meditations on the Gospel of St. Matthew –**MssB 7341-8153**], based on the Commentary of St. John Chrysostom [Homilies on Matthew], and 13 Meditations on Genesis, c. 1. [MssB 4618-4852], still under the guidance of Chrysostom. [Homilies on Genesis]. This is the source of this **GRAMMATICA 8** – St. Gaspar often referred to the Pope as the *First Rock*.



understand what God would do with them, if He was not impeded by them in His plans. We cannot imagine what God would do with us, and how much He would work in us, and through us, if we had not placed an obstacle to His grace, but had put ourselves freely and totally in His hands<sup>14</sup>.

## **9: Holiness and charity**

***So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God*** [1 Co 10:31]. Love for God and the search for His glory is what gives true meaning to a Christian's life. In the 'Holy of Holies' of the temple in Jerusalem, every object was made of gold, or gold-plated. Thus, every work of a Christian must be love, or done through love. Not paying much attention to the result of our work, but rather to the will of God gives us great peace, even if the results obtained, or even the work itself does not correspond fully to our expectations. God will not require an accounting of the results obtained, nor of the consistency of our work, but rather if we have done everything we could in conformity with the talents we have received. The Lord does not look at the 'how much', but rather on the 'how.' He applies to all the criterion with which He valued the offering of the widow, who ***from her property has contributed all she had*** [Mk 12:44].

***So, be imitators of God as beloved children and live in love, as Christ loved us and handed Himself over for us*** [Ep 5:1]. 'One should be suspicious of a love that seeks selfish advantage by expecting something else besides loving itself. It is a weak love, a love which becomes feeble, or almost extinguished because its self-advantage is waning away. It is an impure love, a love which aims at something other than giving love. Pure love is not for sale; it is free like that of the **Spouse**. It is satisfied with itself; it doesn't seek any other reward beyond the object itself which it loves. This is enough; this is pleasing and for itself. Fruit of love is love itself. I love because I love. I love for love.'<sup>15</sup>

## **10: Perfection and simplicity**

Holiness consists not so much in doing extraordinary things, as rather in doing well in ordinary things and things that have to be done<sup>16</sup>. I take great delight in hearing of the peace of your heart, the nest of the Holy Spirit, and on smelling from afar the sweet fragrance of that good perfume of Christ, with which He shows that He is in your

<sup>14</sup> **NB: Web-site Note:** this is a principle often expressed by St. Gaspar in his *Spiritual Diary*: **MP** February 14, 809; July 15, 1809; May 18, 1811.

<sup>15</sup> Synopsis from Rodriguez, **MssB 8845-8851**. The text between quotation marks is from St. Bernard. *In Cant.*, Sermon 83, 3. PL 183, 1182. Fr. Bertoni, together with his friends, Fr. Matthew Farinati and cleric Cajetan Allegri, in the first years of his priesthood, had written a pamphlet, or synopsis of the celebrated work of the Spanish Jesuit, Fr. Alfonso Rodriguez, *Exercise of Perfection and of Christian Virtues*. [cf. **BERTONI 2**, pp. 259-266; 275-187]. In 1840, he then published a new edition of the Italian translation of the work, revising the text and presenting it with an editorial preface [cf. Correspondence, pp. 379, f.].

<sup>16</sup> Retreat Meditations, **MssB 348**

soul, through the means of the grace of His charity and devotion. This makes me happy sufficiently more than if you reported to me the greatest enterprise of the world.<sup>17</sup>

Recall always that saying which is everything to us: *buseta e taneta*. 'Be Humble, Be humble!<sup>18</sup> And indeed you will be pleasing to the Lord, Who, while seeming in the eyes of men to have drawn you out, in reality leaves you with in your own *buseta e taneta*. In truth, this is what our Lord Christ said to us in other words: ***Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven [Mt 18:3].*** Since the Lord has given you grace greater than any treasure whatsoever, to reduce you to the littleness, the humility and the simplicity of a child, see that you always remain in this happiness: ***Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth [Mt 5:3-5]***<sup>19</sup>.

## **11: Desire for perfection**

***The first step toward wisdom is a very earnest desire for her [Ws 6:17].*** The road to perfection must start out from the heart; it is not something that can be learned by force. If someone doesn't want it, neither diligence nor the means placed in action by others to realize it will be enough. To the sister who asked him what one must do to attain perfection. St. Thomas Aquinas answered simply: if you will it – if you will it, you will be saved. If you will it, you will make profit. If you will it, you will be perfect. When a person has a great desire for progress and growth in virtue, God takes so much please in this that He endows him and fills him with every gift of grace. ***To the thirsty, I will give a gift from the spring of life-giving water [Rv 21:6].***

There are, however, some who with words make good resolutions and desires, but they don't attempt to put them into practice, nor do they take it upon themselves to fight seriously. In such a case, real desires and authentic resolutions are not made, but rather just 'wishful thinking', in which 'one would like', but does not really will it. Those who have similar 'wishful thinking' can be compared to soldiers in a painting, who stand with the sword directed against the enemy, but they never deliver a blow.

Effective proposals are needed ***You have been told, O Man, what is good, and what the Lord requires of you: only to do right, and to love goodness and to walk humbly with your God [Mi 6:8]***<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> This passage with those that follow in the present Meditation, are part of a Letter sent to his spiritual son, Fr. Louis Bragato, who in 1835 was chosen as Confessor and Chaplain of Maria Anna of Savoy, Empress of Austria. Of the cherished correspondence exchanged between Verona and Vienna, only a few fragments have survived.

<sup>18</sup> The Venetian dialect saying – which means: 'Little hole, little den' – making reference to a child's game: but has an evident reference to humility and a hidden manner of acting.

<sup>19</sup> Correspondence, pp. 309, f. Letter of **October 21, 1835**.

<sup>20</sup> Selections from Rodriguez. **MssB 8813**.

## **12: Holiness is a priority task**

Perfection is our only end. On the day of judgment we shall be asked not what we have read or written, but what we have done; not how well we have spoken, but how holily we have lived. ***Seek first the kingdom of God and His justice, and all these things will be given you besides*** [Mt 6:3].

Let us observe this principle faithfully: that spiritual tasks, with regard to progress in holiness must always occupy first place, and should not be neglected for any reason. No matter how many and how substantial are the works concerning our office, or even imposed by obedience, it is never in conformity with the will of God that our spiritual duties be neglected. It is not obedience to the will of God that places obstacles to this faithfulness, but negligence or insufficient care that we often have regarding matters of the spirit<sup>21</sup>.

We should never offend some virtue in order not to damage some project. Many are deceived in this regard. Experience teaches that [if we do that] the project is damaged and sometimes destroyed. On the other hand, when virtue is safeguarded, God intervenes with His protection, and the project is confirmed, or should we say, improved<sup>22</sup>.

In particular, let us try to be faithful in giving God the time that we have assigned for prayer. If sometimes it is not possible, due to an unexpected urgency, to pray at the appointed time, it is right to have a certain hunger and desire to make up and fill the gap as soon as possible. Just as when one happens to be deprived of food, or sleep because of some unforeseen duties, an attempt is made at all costs to make up for this, and the necessary time is found. Likewise, it is God's will that we do the same with prayer<sup>23</sup>.

## **13: Holiness: a global task**

***Everything must be done properly and in order*** [1 Co 14:40]. We note that first word, ***everything***. We must complete all our duties relative to acquiring perfection. Not some 'yes,' and the majority 'no'; not the majority 'yes' and the minority 'no'; not

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<sup>21</sup> Selections from Rodriguez. **MssB 8811**.

<sup>22</sup> Spiritual Journal. **July 9, 1809**. By the title of 'Spiritual Journal' is indicated a spiritual journal that Fr. Bertoni kept from July 1, 1808 until June 26, 1813. Among Fr. Bertoni's writings it is the one that best reveals the personal characteristics of the Saint's spirituality. The period of time that it covers is very limited, five years in all, and with large empty spaces. The style presented is customarily very concise: yet, that writing is quite precious, both for the testimony it gives on the spiritual life of Fr. Gaspar, and for the teaching it contains. Fr. Divo Barsotti does not hesitate to say that 'a small book of these dimensions remains one of the great documents of the Italian spirituality of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.' [D. Barsotti, *Teaching of the Saints*. Rome: 1971, pp. 23, ff.. **BERTONI 2**, pp. 617, ff..

<sup>23</sup> Selections from Rodriguez, **MssB 8810; 8812**.

the smallest, neglecting the more important; not the more important, neglecting the smaller. In fact, take into account the small matters!

He who is faithful in a small matter will also be faithful in large matters. And instead: ***He who wastes the little he has will be stripped bare*** [Si 19:1]. A constant drop bores a hole into the rock, and a spark produces a conflagration. ***He who fears God does not neglect anything*** [Si 7:18].

God Himself has taught us these truths. However, it is not enough only to hear them; it is necessary to put them into practice<sup>24</sup>. It is not enough to listen to the Word of God, putting into practice only certain things as we please. Even Herod listened to John the Baptist, and put into practice some of his teachings as he pleased, not, however, in that which concerned his predominant passion<sup>25</sup>.

Woe if we begin from childhood to live carelessly! Little by little the first fervor is lost, and we fall into the weakness of spirit, tepidity, and laxity<sup>26</sup>. While it is true, on the other hand, that noting the fervor of young people, the whole Church, in particular those who are already advanced in the way of perfection, feel lifted up in the fervor of prayer and want to cultivate a closer union with God<sup>27</sup>.

I felt an inspiration to fight against small defects, as I did on other occasions against the big ones. I felt the determination to rise toward virtue with all diligence. The time in which I can serve God and promote His glory, and sanctify myself is running out more and more<sup>28</sup>.

#### **14: Let us make progress always**

It is said of Jesus ***that He advanced in wisdom, age and favor before God and man*** [Lk 2:52]. ***Whoever claims to abide in Him ought to live as He did.*** [1 Jn 2:6]. But if he advances and I stop, I do not get by any means near Christ; rather, I distance myself from Him.

Not to move forward in the ways of the Lord means to go backwards. We find ourselves in the middle of a rushing stream. If we stop there, and make no effort to go upstream, there is always the danger to being carried downstream. If one does not wish to withdraw, he must force himself to advance.

<sup>24</sup> Retreats to the Acolytes, **MssB 4440-4443**. In 1810, Fr. Gaspar also had the duty of preaching the monthly retreats in the College of Acolytes: an ancient institution founded in 1440 for the formation of clerics destined for the liturgical service in the Cathedral. Eleven instructions are preserved [**MssB 4440-4614**], mostly concerning the theme of Sloth: suggested also by an admonition given to his clergy by the Bishop Liruti, in his Pastoral Letter of December 1810. [cf. **BERTONI 3**, pp. 178. ff.; 194, ff.

<sup>25</sup> Spiritual Journal, **February 19, 1809**.

<sup>26</sup> Retreats to Acolytes, **MssB 4444**.

<sup>27</sup> Meditations on ***Primum Regum***, n. 12. **MssB 5259-5260**.

<sup>28</sup> Spiritual Journal. **October 8, 1808**.

In the concrete, it's better to set oneself on the way to perfection, not so much in general terms, but rather in detail, fighting to conquer our predominant passion or to acquire the virtue that we lack the most. Just as in school, the pupil is not admitted to the higher course, unless he has already passed the lower ones; so, too, we cannot wait from the Lord for the higher gifts of grace unless we have corresponded to the earlier inspirations.

The same holds true for the struggle against sin and vice. ***He who wastes the little he has will be stripped bare*** [Si 19:1]. Big falls start with small ones.' I dare say something surprising', says St. John Chrysostom, 'but it seems to me sometimes that we must pay attention to avoid sins which seem small and negligible rather than to the grave sins, because the grave sins already frighten us, while the lesser sins run the risk that through negligence we may cause our spiritual ruin.'<sup>29</sup>

## LIFE OF GRACE

### **15: The beauty of grace**

Let us walk in the new life [Rm 6:4]. The newness of the life is nothing else than the state of grace, something desirable in itself. Although the grace of God to make itself loved has many qualities, and all of them excellent, let us pause here now and meditate on one in particular: its beauty.

'There is a hidden and secret beauty of much greater power than that which is perceived by the senses, a spiritual beauty, which can be seen only by the mind.'<sup>30</sup> We have all seen it, because our heart was attracted to it and, as it were, taken by violence and bound up. This is the beauty of virtue. But we cannot stop here.

Grace is in an even higher order with respect to virtue. Virtue, which indeed attracts the heart so strongly, is in fact only a natural perfection of the soul, while grace is a supernatural quality and completely heavenly.

If I were to say that a soul in grace possesses such an excellent beauty that it comes very close to, and in fact, equals, that splendid and most pure beauty which is proper to spiritual beings, namely, the angels, I would be saying little, because the truth is that grace is a sharing in the very nature of God. It would, therefore, be necessary to know the beauty of God to have a real idea of the beauty of a soul in grace.

We speak of sublime matters, because the things to which we have been called are truly sublime. Called not only in the sense that promises have been made to us that are very exalted, but in the sense that we also are in possession of such precious gifts, according to the words of St. Peter: ***He has bestowed on us the precious and***

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<sup>29</sup> Selections from Rodriguez. **MssB 8819-8823**. The text of St. John Chrysostom has been taken from his 'Homilies on Matthew', 86, 3. PG 58, 767.

<sup>30</sup> St. Augustine, *Treatise on John*. 3, 21. PL 35, 1405.

**great promises, so that through them you may come to share in the divine nature** [2 P 1:4].<sup>31</sup>

## **16: Communion with the Divine Persons**

**Our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ** [1 Jn 1:3]. Thus St. John exalts the nobility of the **Church**, the **Spouse of Christ**, in which we become **sharers of the Divine Nature** [2 P 1:4]. It is this same mystery that St. Paul celebrates with astonished amazement when he says: **God is faithful, and by Him you were called to fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ, Our Lord** [1 Co 1:9].

All believers, therefore, are in communion with Christ and with God and by faith, hope and charity. This communion becomes stronger and intimate the more faith, hope and charity are strengthened in them, and the more closely they seek to conform themselves to the life and conduct of Christ and engage themselves in spreading the Gospel in the world, just as the Apostles did. They were the first to live in the most perfect manner that divine communion, for they worked and suffered much for Christ, and spent their lives entirely for the glory of God and the salvation of their brethren.

This communion is a true fellowship with God. Friendship implies a reciprocal love and a mutual exchange of goods. Now, the relationship that exists between God and the faithful soul is precisely of this nature, according to the teaching of St. John, and there is certainly nothing like this that truly manifests the marvelous and divine dignity of a soul in grace.<sup>32</sup>

## **17: To live in grace**

It is proper to know the admirable gift of divine grace, which has raised us above our nature, and has made us sharers in the very nature of God, and has placed us in this supernatural and divine order to which we have been called to work with our spirit, because we have to consider it a grave danger to descend even a little from this sublime order to return to our natural manner of thinking and of acting.

The theological, that is divine, virtues are precisely in that supernatural order. Since these virtues revolve around God, to know Him as faith, to depend on Him as hope, and to adhere to Him as charity – the less we think, or depend, or focus on creatures, the more these virtues will take on power and develop. From this a need arises for a very keen and well-defined diligence to preserve and increase these theological virtues, which are an exalted and supernatural gift of God, through which we have an intimate and familiar communication with His Divine Majesty.

The mercy and goodness of God are wonderful. If He sees that we, through human frailty, waver in those heights and are about to fall into our human lowliness, He puts His hand like **a loving Mother** under her sons [cf. Ps 37:24], so that they will

<sup>31</sup> Early Sermons, n. 15. 'The Beauty of Grace'. **MssB 714-723. PVC, pp. 120-123.** Preached on January 1, 1803.

<sup>32</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3379-3381.**

not suffer harm, and with gentleness and power, He brings them relief. Let us, therefore, exclaim with the Psalmist, ***For me, to be near God is my good. I have made Him my Refuge*** [Ps 73:28]<sup>33</sup>.

### **18: Grace: a capital fund to protect and increase.**

Whoever has contemplated, even for a little time, the beauty of divine grace, cannot but feel a fire of pure love and fervent desires alive in his heart. If the grace of God is in us, what resolutions should we not make so as not to lose it ever! With such frankness and holy zeal, should we not decide to remove those occasions which, even remotely, tend to destroy it.

Moreover, if we have already wisely provided for this, how should we not force ourselves with divine help to increase and develop it more each day? ***The path of the just is like a shining light that grows in brilliance until perfect day*** [Pr 4:18]. The Lord has prepared little steps in our heart, like a ladder, in order that we may always climb up without every stopping until we finally arrive to see the face of God in heaven.

Lord, renew our spirit. Grant that it is directed anew by that rightness in which you have created it, elevating it to higher hopes in you, so that everyone can experience, ***How good God is to the upright; the Lord, to those who are pure of heart*** [Ps 73:1]. And finally, no longer under the veils and in the obscure shadow of faith, but with unveiled face, according to what you have promised, may we contemplate you, to love you, and possess you for all eternity. O true center, only Purpose and Last End<sup>34</sup>.

### **19: Grace and the Sacraments**

The soul without grace is like a dry field because of the heat of passion, the winds of temptation, and accordingly produces no fruit or struggles to do so. It is necessary to irrigate it, and its water is grace. Just as near a garden a river must flow, so, too near the soul a river of grace must flow. But the river of grace flows continually in the Church after the grace of Christ, who has merited for us the health-giving water.

The gardeners, near whose gardens the river flows, dig some channels and forcing the waters of the river into them, bring it about that the water that is brought into the gardens, quenches the thirst of all the grace, flowers, bushes and plants. We know that God has made some channels through which the water of grace can pour upon us. These channels are the sacraments. When we receive the sacraments, God opens these channels over us. God doesn't ask anything else of us except that we open our hearts up with the necessary dispositions, and that we don't obstruct these

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<sup>33</sup> Correspondence, pp. 35, ff. Letter of **December 11, 1812**. It is one of the first letters written by Fr. Gaspar to Leopoldina Naudet [1773-1834], Foundress of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Family. The correspondence between Fr. Gaspar and the Servant of God took place between the end of 1812 and 1834.

<sup>34</sup> Early Sermons. 'The Beauty of Grace'. **MssB 731-737/ PVC, pp. 126-129.**

channels by sin or contrary dispositions. What is required of us is that we offer the necessary dispositions and not hinder the entrance of grace, but rather to favor it. The more we open up our heart, the more we are disposed, so much more abundant will the gift of grace be.<sup>35</sup>

## TEMPLES OF GOD

### **20: Our heart is a Temple of God**

God wishes to consecrate our heart by making it a temple where He resides. St. Paul says: ***Do you not know that you are the temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you? The temple of God which you are is holy*** [1 Co 3:16, ff.]. In fact, as much as one can say that God is everywhere by His immensity, He nevertheless dwells in a special way in the heart of the just, to whom He not only communicates grace with all its gifts, but the Holy Spirit Who is the Author of every grace and gift.

Here, therefore, is this soul which God Himself has chosen for Himself as a pleasant and delightful temple, or palace, to reside in and to delight in. ***I found delight in the sons of men*** [Pr 8:31], that is, to converse with them in the deepest recesses of their heart. It is here that He calls us with a gentle invitation: Come, free yourselves from anxious cares, and empty yourselves of worldly affections, and you will find how good and know your loving God is.

How fortunate is this soul! Having found its love within its own heart, it can indeed say: ***My beloved is for me and I for Him!*** [Sgs 2:16], ***and I shall never let Him go!*** [Sgs 3:4]. What peace and serenity must this soul enjoy! St. Paul had already foretold it by saying that the just would possess great peace [cf. Rm 5:1]. It doesn't enjoy it only now in the present, but also in anticipation of the future, since, as the Apostle continues, ***We boast in the hope of the glory of God*** [Rm 5:2]<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> 'Manner of receiving Penance worthily'. **MssB 130-131**. It is a catechetical instruction given to the boys of the parish of St. Paul in Camp Marzio by Fr. Gaspar while he was still a seminarian, in 1798.

**[NB: Web-site Note: Fr. Bertoni compared the Adige River in Verona to Christ, and the canals built into the fields to be like the sacraments, carrying life-giving water.]**

<sup>36</sup> Early Sermons, n. 8: 'Our heart made the Temple of God'. **MssB 576-579**. PVC, pp. 302-304. This Sermon was given on Sunday, December 13, 1801, for the celebration of the transfer of the Holy House of Loreto, whose Feast was then fixed by the Liturgy for December 10<sup>th</sup>. In fact, the title of the Sermon is: 'The Holy House transferred in our heart, or our heart made a Temple of God.' the suggestive terms with which young Fr. Bertoni introduces the sermon on the Divine Indwelling are worthy of our attention: *If it is true that all our sufficiency comes from God, and that of ourselves we are incapable of producing a thought that is good, I do not know to whom to attribute the origin of a holy thought that was formed in my mind and remained there with me afterwards, always with great constancy; to have to communicate it on this day to all this devout audience.* [MssB 575]. Effectively this mystery of the Divine Indwelling in the soul of the just is one of the chief points of Fr. Bertoni's spirituality. [cf. BERTONI, 2, pp. 122, f.]



## **21: The Divine Indwelling and the Spousal Chain**

The Spirit of God, by making a soul share in His love, sanctifies it, and therefore, it approaches the soul as to a very cherished **Spouse**; it dwells in her, works in her, and takes delight in her.

If great honor is due to churches because they are the material temples of the divine majesty, how much more will a living temple, that is all splendid, and in which the most chaste and sublime **nuptials** between God and the soul take place, be honored by men and angels? ***I will espouse you***, He had already made this known through His prophets, ***in fidelity*** [Ho 2:20] in justice and in love. These are the precious gems with which He adorns her. What if we also want to see the robes of this heavenly **Spouse**? St. Paul tells us: [O God how splendid!] ***Put on the Lord, Jesus Christ*** [Rm 13:14].

What beauty, then, can be compared to that of a soul that God Himself adorns to make her His **spouse**? I lack the proper colors with which to paint her. Full of amazement, I will say with the Apostle Paul that whoever is united to God with a steadfastness so close becomes one spirit with Him through loving transformation<sup>37</sup>.

## **22: United with God, we can boast even in tribulations**

What happiness to have God within us! He is the Supreme Good that can perfectly replenish all our faculties, because in Him all perfection have been collected and all the resources capable of satisfying every heart according to its particular needs are found. Therefore, in Sacred Scripture He presents Himself as the ***hidden manna*** [Rv 2:17], and He says: ***Take delight in the Lord, and He will grant you your heart's requests*** [Ps 37:4].

The tribulations of this life, as much as they seem to place an obstacle to the free course of heavenly consolations, do nothing in reality other than to unite them to a greater supply, and they double the impetuous capacity, until finally they overflow. On account of this, St. Paul, in the name of all the just says: ***We boast of our affections, knowing that affliction produces endurance, and endurance, proven character, and proven character, hope. Hope, then,*** [O God, what beautiful words!] ***does not disappoint, because the love of god has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us*** [Rm 5:3-5]. Who can mistrust His love? ***Cast your care upon the Lord and He will support you*** [Ps 55:23]. God is liberal in our needs, a light in our doubts, a consolation in our suffering, a rest in our toils, our support, our strength and our peace.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Early Sermons, n. 8: 'Our heart made the Temple of God.' MssB 580-584; PVC, pp. 305-306.

<sup>38</sup> o.c., MssB580-582. PVC, pp. 30-4-306.

### **23: I stand at the door and knock**

Facing the invitation of the Lord Who wishes to make His temple in us, perhaps some soul, through excessive timidity, tends to draw back, thinking that certainly all these things are very beautiful, but are not for her.

I understand this: we are preoccupied with grave sins and our own misery. Yet, if only we could see Christ Himself standing at the door of our heart and listening as He asks to enter! Let us open the Scriptures and see what is written in the Book of Revelation, and hear the very words of Christ: ***Behold, I stand by the door and knock*** [Rv 3:20]. Yes, He is standing at the door of the heart, and what heart if not of the sinner, for He is already in the hearts of the just, well received, and as a peaceful owner?

He knocks at the door of the heart with many inspirations and much urging to place before our eyes the greatest happiness which can be attained through His grace. Yes, He is knocking. ***If anyone opens the door for Me, I will enter his house.*** He speaks like a guest who comes at night, that means, having forgotten every offense and rejection, he wishes to live with the soul in the grand familiarity of friendship.

He does not merely say: 'I will come' – but, also: 'I will dine with him and he with Me'; that is to say, I will allow Myself to treat him with much confidence, familiarly enjoying myself with him as among friends. He will do the same for Me in this wonderful chamber of heavenly pleasures, using my sacraments, because I shall not disdain to receive Him at my table.

Now we see that Christ always speaks as a Guest, but quite rich and generous, who upon entering another's house, brings more gifts than he receives. O love! Yes, you have conquered. Our lack of sensitivity has no more excuses to deny entry into our heart to such a tender lover who asks to enter, and asks only to make us happy<sup>39</sup>.

## **GOD WITH US**

### **24: Christ is born for us. Come, let us adore Him**

Let us devoutly prostrate ourselves with the lively faith of the shepherds before our Infant King. ***Let us go up to Bethlehem*** [Lk 2:15] to adore Him. Let us ask that He receive our prayer and uniting it to His first whimpering, present it in the perfume of sweetness to His Eternal Father, to the end that as we intend with good will to glorify Him in Heaven, so also may He deign to bestow on us peace on earth. ***Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth on those on whom His favor rests*** [Lk 2:14].

Lord Jesus Christ, since you were born in this valley of tears, you have opened the ears of Your humanity to hear our weeping, and the eyes of Your body to cry for our sins. Open the eyes and ears of my heart so that I can understand Your words and

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<sup>39</sup> o.c., MssB 585=587; PVC pp. 306-308.

do Your will. In Your birth You have not come as a stranger, but as our Lord, **among Your people** [Jn 1:11] with full right to dictate the law. **Hide not your commands from Me** [Ps 119:19].

But, to understand the wonderful spirit of Your love much light is needed. Well, then, **You are the true Light that illumines every man** [Jn 1:9], and, even if we are darkness, **Your light shines in the darkness** [Jn 1:5]. In order that afterwards it may not happen to us that **The darkness has not overcome it, open my eyes that I may consider the wonders of Your Law** [Ps 119:18]. All this is Your free gift; therefore, we ask you for it<sup>40</sup>.

## **25: Late have I known You, late have I loved You**

Since the day of His birth, Jesus Christ has shown us in Himself the greatest poverty, sorrow and rejection. Hence, these are the only true goods<sup>41</sup>.

Let us move on. Let us say good-bye to the empty beauties and transient goods of this world, so as not to love anything but Him. Praise Jesus, our only love. Let us often have this loving name on our lips. Seeing in it the **portrait** of our most amiable Lover, we will recall to Whom we have given our heart today, so that we will be able to refuse it courageously to whoever tries to snatch it away from Him.

Here I am at Your feet, my Jesus. Yes, here is a soul, who, to run after so many curious vanities, has abandoned You, Supreme Good, the only Object worthy of my love. 'Late have I known You, ancient beauty, late have I loved You, eternal goodness<sup>42</sup>.' But now I cannot go on without knowing You; I cannot go on without loving You. My soul is all Yours. Wash it, clean it, adorn it, make it a worthy **Spouse** for you. Yes, it is all Yours<sup>43</sup>.

In my three Christmas Masses: recollection and experience of the great benefit of my vocation. What a great blessings it is to be stripped of everything created in order to seek God alone. How God honors and loves His humiliated Son. O what a debt is ours to do for Him at least in part what He has first done for us<sup>44</sup>.

## **26: Jesus Christ, true God and true man**

'When I say the name, Jesus', says St. Bernard, 'I propose to myself a man Who is most perfect, most holy, adorned with every beauty and virtue; and this same man I also propose to myself as God, Omnipotent, the Greatest Good and infinite. It is

<sup>40</sup> Meditations on *Primum Regum*, n. 6. MssB 5047; 5097-5098.

<sup>41</sup> Spiritual Journal. **March 13, 1809.**

<sup>42</sup> St. Augustine, *Confessions*. Book 10, c. 27. PL 32, 705.

<sup>43</sup> Early Sermons, n. 3. 'The Name of Jesus'. MssB 423-424; PVC, pp. 241, f. We possess two Sermons of St. Gaspar on the Holy Name of Jesus, both given on the Second Sunday after Epiphany: the first – from which the meditations of this chapter have been taken – in 1801; the second, in 1802.

<sup>44</sup> Spiritual Journal. **December 25, 1808.**

because of this that the name of Jesus is honey on my lips, melody on my ears, and gentleness in my heart.<sup>45</sup>

The angel who brought the name Jesus from Heaven said: ***You are to name Him Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins*** [Mt 1:21]. Now I seem to see much in this Name, that is, to see the Savior, the Mediator between God and man, who satisfies the divine justice for the sins of all the world.

St. Cyril asks this: 'How can this Person be called Savior of the world if He is not God? In fact, if Jesus is not of infinite dignity, equal to that infinite God Who was offended by our sins, it cannot be understood How He paid a satisfaction equal to the offense. Therefore, Jesus is God!'<sup>46</sup> 'But, if He is solely God', adds St. Augustine, 'how will He be able to be Mediator between God and man? Otherwise, it would have been God to give satisfaction to Himself, not the man-sinner to an offended God.'<sup>47</sup> The Name Jesus, therefore, insofar as it shows us the Savior of the world, gives us a man Who is at the same time God, with all the perfections that belong both to His divine nature and to His human nature.<sup>48</sup>

## **27: Jesus, the most passionate and tender Lover**

In Jesus we see the Savior, that is, God, **Who for us men and for our salvation came down from Heaven and became man** [Nicene Creed]. He has given His life to free us from our sins that had rendered our soul a slave of the devil, worthy of damnation. He washed this soul with His blood, adorned it with His grace to crown it finally with His glory. What else is there to see in all this if not the most passionate Lover?

It is proper to passionate lovers to love so forcefully that no difficulty checks them, no danger beats them down, and not even death frightens them. Unmindful, as it were, of themselves, they suffer, dare, and do everything to please and unite themselves to those they love. Sometimes it happens that love completely blinds them to the point that they don't even see those defects by which the object loved has been made despicable in the eyes of all except their own. Again, the same ingratitude with which their love is quite often returned does not extinguish their flames, but it rekindles them even more. Well, then, Jesus is such a Lover.

Notice that this Lover in order to recover His Beloved says: ***Not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the Precious Blood of Christ*** [1 P 1:18]. And if the soul should fall again into the hands of the infernal enemy by sinning, Jesus will return every day to offer the same victim on the altar, and He will wash the soul with his Blood of which he opens a perennial font in the bosom of His Church.

<sup>45</sup> St. Bernard, Sermons on the Canticle of Canticles, 15, 6. PL 183, 847.

<sup>46</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, Book on the Trinity, 13. PG 75, 1166.

<sup>47</sup> St. Augustine, On the City of God, Book 9, c. 15. PL 41, 268, f.

<sup>48</sup> Early Sermons, n. 3. 'The Name of Jesus'. **MssB 408-411, PVC, pp. 235, ff.**

What do you demand, my Jesus, with so much love? Only that it [the soul] love Me and agree to My chaste **nuptials**. I have decided to go to her in person, and in order that the refulgence of my rays might not make her shy to talk with Me, I have found the manner of hiding Myself under the veil of the sacrament, and of entering furtively, as it were, the center of her heart, where we can speak on the level of one on one. Here I stand waiting for her to consent to My desires<sup>49</sup>.

## **28: Jesus, the most lovable Person**

Jesus is the most perfect Man, Whose beauty, seen also from a distance in spirit by the Prophet, made him exclaim: ***Fairer in beauty are You than the sons of men*** [Ps 45:3], and that: ***Grace is poured out upon Your lips***. In His mind have been stored ***all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*** [Col 2:3], a holiness so perfect that it challenges its adversaries to accuse Him of even the shadow of fault.

Do we love the gentleness and goodness of heart? Ah, lovable heart of my Jesus, gentle, kind, lovable, clement, merciful, who has ever found You slow to take pity on his miseries, or hard to accept his requests, or severe to grant him pardon for his sins?

O Jesus, all lovable! Now I am not amazed that Magdalene, having her gaze fixed on You, has forgotten both loves and her lovers so as not to be able to love others than You, and not see and hear others except You and You alone. She has indeed taken the better part, and it will not be taken from her [cf. Lk 10:42]. What else will she do in Heaven?

In fact, what else will even we do if not to see God - seeing Him, loving Him - and loving Him to be blessed? But, in seeing Jesus, do I not also see my God? By loving Jesus, do I not also love my God? That God so perfect in every class of perfections who alone is sufficient to make blessed all the saints by His sight? And who else will, therefore, be the object of my love, if not Jesus?<sup>50</sup>

## **CHRISTIAN NEWNESS**

### **29: Blessed are the eyes that see what you see**

***Blessed are the eyes that see what you see*** [Lk 10:23]. These are words addressed by Christ to His disciples, not only to those present, who were the apostles and the others who followed Him, but also the future disciples among whom we are ourselves.

Our lot in fact is not inferior to theirs. What did they see to be called blessed? ***With your eyes you shall see your teacher*** [Is 30:20] as it was foretold by Isaiah. But in the same place it was predicted for the People of God that ***no longer will your***

<sup>49</sup> Early Sermons, n. 3. The Name of Jesus. **MssB 414-418; PVC pp.237-239.**

<sup>50</sup> Early Sermons, n. 31. 'The Name of Jesus'. **MssB 412-413; PVC, pp. 236, ff.**

**Teacher hide Himself** [ibid.]. And to us Christ promised: *I am with you until the end of the world* [Mt 28:20]. Does it mean that those **who knew Christ according to the flesh** [2 Co 5:16] will be more blessed than we who, **according to the flesh, now know Him so no longer?** [ibid.]. On the contrary, I read: **Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed** [Jn 20:29].

How, therefore, are **blessed the eyes that see?** There are two ways in which Christ can be seen with the senses and with faith. In the first way Christ was seen also by His enemies, but such a sight, far from making them blessed, was seen also by His enemies, but such a sight, far from making them blessed, made them more miserable. **If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin**, says Jesus, **but as it is they have no excuse for their sin** [Jn 15:22]. In both ways, with the senses and with faith, the Apostles saw Him, and therefore their eyes merited being called blessed. In the second and more perfect way, that is, by faith, we see Him now. Therefore, even if we lack the sight of the senses, we are blessed nonetheless as they are.

What blessedness is ours that God has called us **into His wonderful Light** [1 P 2:9] **among those who have been consecrated by faith in me** [Ac 26:18], **that has illumined the eyes of the mind** [cf. Ep 1:18], **and justified our hearts by means of His law of faith** [cf. Ga 2:16]. To sum it up, we see how happy our state is in His Gospel and in His Grace<sup>51</sup>.

### **30: The glory of our state**

In the Law of the Gospel, two things must be considered: 'The principal thing', says St. Thomas, following St. Augustine, 'is the Grace of the Holy Spirit, and it is given by means of faith in Christ. The other is the letter, or the writing of the Holy Gospel, in which everything which pertains to grace is contained.'<sup>52</sup> Now, just as everything is constituted and defined by that which is principal in it, so it must be said that the New Law is, first of all, the same grace of the Holy Spirit given to the faithful, which St. Paul calls the 'Law of Faith' [cf. Rm 3:27], Law of Spirit and of life in Christ Jesus [cf. Rm 8:2]. 'What are these Laws of God written in our hearts,' says St. Augustine, 'if not the same presence of the Holy Spirit?'<sup>53</sup> Consider how much the glory of our state is exalted.

<sup>51</sup> Early Sermons, n. 20. 'The Law of the Gospel' **MssB 818-831; PVC, pp. 23-25**. This Sermon was preached on August 20, 1803. It appears, right from its title, as one of the more challenging ones for St. Gaspar, and it is in fact one of the richest in theological content. His biographer, Fr. Nello Dalle Vedove, judges it also as one of the 'more fundamental and revealing of his spirituality' [BERTONI 2, pp. 252, f.]. In the solid theological optimism which appears in all the text, it is probably the deep root of the practical attitude of trust in God, and of holy abandonment and unchangeable joy that characterizes the spiritual life and teaching of St. Gaspar.

<sup>52</sup> St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, q. 106, a. 1.

<sup>53</sup> St. Augustine, 'On the Spirit and Letter', c. 21, 36. PL 44, 222.

In the Old Law, the Hebrews had temporal promises, worldly riches, visible wealth. And that was good for them, because they were 'servants', thus God promptly paid their wages every day. We are 'sons' and, as such, our Heavenly Father offers us no longer a daily wage, but prepares us for the inheritance that belongs to us. Since the wage-earner can show in his hand his payment, would we say that he is richer than the son who waits for his inheritance, to whom the Father says: 'Everything that is mine, is yours?' Certainly not.

And if there is someone, even among Christians, who in this life esteems more some part of present wealth than future glory, I don't wonder, since, as St. Augustine says, in the Law of the Gospel, there are very many who, Christians in name, but not in spirit, live under the Law, not in grace, and belong to the Old Testament, which begets slavery<sup>54</sup>.

But those who truly belong to the New Testament understand well and enjoy hearing that which Augustine cries to each one of them: 'You are not called to embrace the earth, but to acquire heaven, not for an earthly but heavenly happiness, not to worldly success, to fleeing prosperities, but to an eternal life with the Angels<sup>55</sup>'.

### **31: The reign of God on earth**

Our richness lies not only in the right to our future inheritance, we have already on this earth the possession of many very outstanding goods.

We possess in fact a thing whose price cannot be found, in comparison with which gold or silver cannot stand, and which surpasses in value all the exalted things that are greatly prized and admitted by men [cf. Ws 7:9; Pr 8:11]. And this is 'wisdom', which is proper to all those who have received the Spirit and the infusion of His Gifts, or the anointing of the same Spirit, as St. John says [cf. 1 Jn 2:27].

What then shall we say about the charity poured into our hearts [cf. Rm 5:5]? The angel of the Apocalypse speaking of it to the Angel of Laodicea, who was in fact lacking in it, even though well supplied with earthly riches, expressed himself thus: You say: 'I am rich and affluent and have no need of anything', and yet you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked. I advise you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may become rich. [Rv 3:17-18]. And in another place: ***Were one to offer all he owns to purchase love, he would be roundly mocked*** [Sgs 8:7].

We can well say to all those who belong to the New Law in Christ: ***In Him you were enriched in every way, you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ*** [1 Co 1:5, 7]<sup>56</sup>.

<sup>54</sup> Idem. Third Sermon on Hagar and Ismael. PL 38, 32.

<sup>55</sup> Early Sermons, n. 30. 'The Law of the Gospel' **MssB 824-831.PVC**, pp. 26-29. The last citation from St. Augustine is from his Sermon 296, 6, 7. PL 38, 1356.

<sup>56</sup> Early Sermons, n. 20. 'The Law of the Gospel'. **MssB 832-834**.

### **32: For the Christian, every day is a feast**

Christ invites us: ***Come to Me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, for my yoke is easy and My burden light*** [Mt 11:28, 30]. 'It is not heavy', comments St. Augustine, 'for one who loves; however, it is heavy for one who does not love.'<sup>57</sup> To one who loves, everything is easy, everything is sweet.

Adversities, for the love in which the New Law consists, are easily tolerated by those who are faithful followers of the same Law<sup>58</sup>. For the rest, what is there that is more gentle and pleasing than love? What is smoother than to be guided and directed by the Spirit of Love? This is the characteristic sign of those who in the New Law have received the adoption as sons: ***For those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God*** [Rm 8:14].

***Where the Spirit of God is, there is liberty*** [2 Co 3:7]. True liberty, holy liberty, liberty for which Christ has freed us [Ga 5:14], according to ***the oath he swore to Abraham, our father, and to grant us that, rescued from the hands of enemies, without fear we might worship Him in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.*** [Lk 1:74-75].

This, therefore, is the happy state of those who live on the holy mount of God, that is, in His Church, planted with the Blood of His Son, of those who belong to the New Law of His Gospel<sup>59</sup>.

## **THE FOLLOWING OF CHRIST**

### **33: Holiness and the following of Christ**

Perfection which has its root and fulfillment in charity consists in the conformity of our life with that of Jesus Our Lord. And because this Divine Father began to work and to teach [cf. Ac 1:1], it must be said that we have been called to imitate His actions, no matter how special and incomparable in excellence they may be, just as they are expressed in His teachings.

That charity which because of the Holy Spirit has been given to us, is poured out into our hearts [Rm 5:5], from the moment of our birth, and still like a child, makes us resemble Christ, according to His precepts and with the works of every virtue. This is the common perfection of the Gospel, necessary for all the sons of God, members of the Church, regenerated in the life of His Gospel. This same charity, when it is nourished, grown, and made adult, conforms us to Christ according to His counsels,

<sup>57</sup> St. Augustine, 'On Nature and Grace'. c. 69, 83. PL 44, 289.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. St. Athomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*. I-II, q, 107, a. 4, S 2UM.

<sup>59</sup> Early Sermons, n. 20, **MssB 836-840. PCV, p. 31, f.**



with the exercise of the heroic virtues. This is the perfection proper of the saints who are recognized by the Church as heroes, and as apostolic men<sup>60</sup>.

We must transform ourselves into the image of Jesus<sup>61</sup>. We must do this so that our Heavenly Father may see in us an image of His divine Son<sup>62</sup>. Ask for the grace to follow Him and to have true zeal for His glory and for the salvation of souls. If anyone wishes to serve me, let him follow Me<sup>63</sup>. O what a debt is ours to do for Him, at least in part, what He has first done for us<sup>64</sup>.

### **34: With Christ at every cost**

The highest degree of Christian perfection consists in being in this disposition: to have a sincere longing to imitate Jesus Christ and to be conformed to a poor God, a **crucified God**, a humiliated God, so that poverty is preferred to wealth, suffering to pleasures and humiliation to glory. This must be done in such a manner that even if one is obliged to live in a state of human grandeur, just the same he should cultivate an interior and continual tendency that brings him towards poverty. This means to have the spirit as Jesus Christ.

How sublime this degree, how perfect, how excellent! Whoever gives himself to God in this way will not be judged, but will judge others. But how distant I feel from you, my Jesus! I understand this when I see the horror that I experience for crosses and humiliations. And this makes me see also that I do not truly love You, o my Savior, because if I loved You, I would wish to imitate You, and I would love what You love. No, my God, one cannot love You without loving crosses and humiliations. And similarly, one cannot love these crosses without loving You, by the fact that only Your love can inspire us with feelings so elevated and contrary to nature.

I offer myself, Lord, to follow You, but it is necessary that You draw me to Yourself, notwithstanding the contradictions of my proud reason and my senses: ***Draw me after You and we shall run*** [cf. Sgs 1:4].

Grant, o my Jesus, that I love You, so that I love Your inseparable companions: suffering, humiliation and poverty. Let it be my pleasure to renounce all the pleasures of the world, not to boast, with Your Apostle Paul, except in the humiliations of your

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<sup>60</sup> Panegyric of St. Francis. **MssB 1797-1798**. This discourse was given probably in two parts: the morning and the evening – October 4, 1808, in the Church of St. Firmus Major in Verona. In composing the eulogy of the Saint of Assisi – to whom later he will always be specially bound – particularly after he will have founded his Institute at the Church of the Stigmata of St. Francis - St. Gaspar takes the occasion to present as it were a systematic treatise on the theme of the following of Christ. [**BERTONI 2**, pp. 746, ff.].

<sup>61</sup> Spiritual Journal. **February 26.1809**.

<sup>62</sup> o.c., **July 30, 1809**.

<sup>63</sup> o.c., **February 29, 1809**

<sup>64</sup> o.c., **December 25, 1808**.

Cross [cf. Ga 6:14]. Finally, may Your poverty and Your suffering be my only riches, and may they take in me the place of everything, O my adorable and loving Jesus<sup>65</sup>.

### **35: The radicalism of the Gospel**

A strong [inner] movement to follow Our Savior more closely at the cost of life through poverty and humiliations<sup>66</sup>. Great tenderness toward the son with much lively faith, and a great desire for union and association with His pains and humiliations and a petition for grace to suffer and to be rejected by him<sup>67</sup>.

This is how St. Francis follows Christ, not closely, but by His side; not near, but united; indeed, not only united but transformed. Francis does not seek for consolation, for the delights and the gifts of Christ; he seeks Christ. Christ naked on the Cross, in His ignominies, in poverty. And this [he sought] right from the beginning of his journey; thus, beginning where others barely manage to reach their goal. ***Whatever gains I had, these I have come to consider loss, because of Christ*** [Ph 3:7]. For this he leaves, refuses and rejects everything. Because he wanted nothing less than Christ, and Christ wholly entire<sup>68</sup>.

***Whoever serves Me must follow Me*** [Jn 12:26], imitating Me in the manner of living. One must make a sketch of what happened in the life of Christ, following Him even to death. the young man, whose eyes the Holy Spirit has opened, and who feels a strong and ardent desire to glorify God not only with deeds, and wishes to follow Christ with the closest imitation of His life and to be next to Him in the Passion itself, trampling human respect and even hating his own life: this person has the most beautiful disposition of a priestly vocation<sup>69</sup>.

### **36: To form the design on the Prototype**

He walks undoubtedly in the presence of Christ who in everything looks to Him and aims at directing his own life on His example, recognizing that he has come on earth to offer us in His humanity the image of the New Man<sup>70</sup>.

The Servant of God, behind close doors, prays in secret [cf. Mt 6:6]. And with that the Lord explains the way in which to obtain, preserve and increase His spirit. Beautiful in this regard is the image of St. Gregory. Whoever has a small flame lit, but weak, and is afraid it can't keep burning, shelters it from the wind and nourishes it with

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<sup>65</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2577-2579. CS I, pp. 210, ff.**

<sup>66</sup> Spiritual Journal. **September 25, 1808.**

<sup>67</sup> O.c., **September 27, 1808.** It is worth the bother to reveal the chronological coincidence between the two notes of the Spiritual Journal given here and the period in which St. Gaspar was preparing the panegyric honoring St. Francis.

<sup>68</sup> Panegyric of St. Francis. **MssB 1869.**

<sup>69</sup> Meditations on ***Primum Regum***, n. 14. **MssB 5350.**

<sup>70</sup> **ibid., MssB 5372.** It is a thought taken from St. Gregory the Great. **First Kings**, Book 2, 41. PL 79, 107.

what is necessary, with little twigs, cutting wood and dividing it into small, minute pieces<sup>71</sup>. Therefore, keep your heart recollected, and in it guard the Spirit received through prayer. Read the Gospel often, and examine the sayings and deeds of Christ the Lord in detail, and by reflection and discussion apply to yourself what helps you most in the circumstances in which you find yourself. Form yourself on that model in which all the saints found inspiration.

Do you wish a beautiful model also as do beginners who train themselves in drawing? Take the life of a saint and from it you have the advantage to comfort yourself and direct yourself right up to the perfect ability to form the design on the Prototype, that is, on the life of Christ our Savior, Author and Perfecter of our faith Heb 12:2. And entrust yourself utterly to God and keep your eyes ever toward the Lord, for He will free your feet from the snare [Ps 25:15].<sup>72</sup>

### **37: A perfect follower of Christ: St. Francis**

Perfection, which is born of charity and ends in charity, consists in conformity to Jesus Christ. Perfect conformity to Jesus Christ is the characteristic of the sublime holiness of St. Francis.

To speak of this most holy hero is to speak of the most perfect spirit of penance; of the most sublime spirit of the Cross, and of the most inflamed spirit of love toward Christ crucified. These words of Christ in the Gospel are well applied to him: ***If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself*** [Mt 16:24] – this is the spirit of penance. ***Let him take up his Cross***, this is the spirit of the Cross. ***Let him follow Me***, this is the spirit of love. These are the beginnings, the progress and the fulfillment of holiness. All this is to speak of St. Francis. He managed to become, as it were, the same spirit as Christ, so that he too could say: ***Yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me*** [Ga 2:20] by a complete and perfect transformation of love. He reached a point where he lost everything of himself, to find himself completely in Christ, in such a manner that St. Francis can no longer be found except with Christ, or even more, in Christ. I would say that St. Francis could barely be distinguished from Christ, despised like Christ, poor like Christ, wounded like Christ. A saint so highly transformed by love, could only die of love<sup>73</sup>.

### **38: Apex of the following of Christ: spousal love**

A great many people follow Christ for temporal reward. But the mercenary having reached the door is paid and remains excluded from the house. Many follow Christ as servants, through fear, they follow but from a distance, and standing far away, they do not share in the secrets of their Lord. ***The servant does not know what his master is about*** [Jn 15:15].

<sup>71</sup> St. Gregory the Great. *Moralia* of Job 25, c. 7, 15. PL 76, 328.

<sup>72</sup> Correspondence, p. 313. Letter to Fr. Bragato, **June 4, 1836**.

<sup>73</sup> Panegyric of St. Francis. **MssB 1796-1871, *passim***.

Some follow Christ as sons, through a love rather interested in their inheritance. But the sons are often more loved than loving, and they despise their father if he gives orders contrary to their tastes, even though they are reasonable and useful, but difficult and arduous. ***Sons I have reared and raised, but they have disowned me*** [Is 1:2].

A few follow Christ as friends, who base their love on the reciprocal exchange of gifts, but if the gentle influence of these gifts stop and is substituted instead by sharing in the misfortunes of a friend, they abandon him. These very people who had been called friends by Christ' ***abandoning Him, fled*** [Mt 26:56]: ***All search for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ*** [Ph 2:21].

Very few follow Christ as lovers, wherever He may go, whether to Tabor, or to Calvary, and attracted by His perfume, run after Him. However, they don't succeed in keeping up with Him, but with leaps, just like a giant. ***Like a giant joyfully runs its course*** [Ps 19:6]. But the Bride, an adult in the School of Love, is not drawn by his perfume, but by the right hand of the Spouse. Holding tightly to Him and supporting herself on Him, she proceeds at an equal pace, and with Him she does not run but flies, ***supported by her Beloved***. [Sgs 8:5]<sup>74</sup>.

## SPOUSAL LOVE

### **39: Only one spirit with the Lord**

The soul that loves God is called a **spouse**. These two names, groom and bride, indicate the greatest union between two people. The groom and the bride have everything in common: the house, the table, bedroom, their very persons. ***A man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife and the two of them become one body*** [Gn 2:24].<sup>75</sup>

Happy is that soul which merits hearing these words addressed to her. Happy is the person who will know how to be so vigilant and attentive to the Spouse's visit and to open immediately when he arrives and knocks at the door. If anyone of us ***in the early morning turns his heart to the Lord Who has created him and prays before the Most High and opens his mouth in prayer*** [cf. Si 39:6, ff.] and strives afterwards to prepare the way of the Lord and to smooth the street for our God [cf. Is 40: 3], will he not surely receive from the Lord His blessing and mercy from God his Savior? [Ps 24:5]. He will certainly be visited and the time of his visit will never be ignored. Therefore, the watchful soul will discover the **Spouse** even from a distance and will recall the desire she had for him who advances in haste, and suddenly will know him when he is near and really present. It will know how to distinguish with inexpressible joy the eye that contemplates it, and to hear the voices of exultation and love with which he calls it.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Panegyric of St. Francis. **MssB 1866-1868**.

<sup>75</sup> St. Bernard, Sermon on Canticles. 7, 2. PL 183, 807.

<sup>76</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3399-4001**.

#### **40: The visit of the Spouse**

*“My lover speaks and says to me, ‘Arise, my friend, my beautiful one, and come!’”* (Sg 2:10). These words are addressed to the Church, Spouse of Christ, not though in an exclusive way, as each one of us – all of us are Church – may also participate of the same gifts. Actually, all of us, without any distinction, are called to receive these gifts as inheritance.

Happy is the soul who deserves to hear, as if addressed to her, these words. Happy is who know how to be always watching and alert to the visit of the Spousal, in order to welcome Him, immediately, when He arrive and know at the door. If any of us *“... is to rise early to seek the Lord, his Maker, to petition the Most High...”* (Si 39:5) and strive to open *“the way of the Lord and a highway for our God”* (Is 40:3), perhaps will not be able *“to obtain blessings from the Lord, and justice from his saving God”?* (SI 24:5). It is evident that she will be visited and will never forget this visit time.

Actually, a very watching soul will be able to see the Spouse even when still distant; will guess His will while walking in a haste; immediately will note Him, when next, and present as well. She will know how to distinguish, with unspeakable joy, His eyes that contemplate her, and to listen to the words of encouragement and love, with those she is called.<sup>77</sup>

#### **41: Visits and proofs of God's design**

***You observe the man with each new day and try him at every moment*** [Jb 7:18]. With that, God makes us understand that in His visit He helps our hearts to progress in virtue, and then, leaving us for a time, allows us to be tempted.

He does this because if, after granting us virtues we were not shaken by temptation, we would be induced to glory in those virtues as if they were solely a conquest of our own. Therefore, with the purpose of seeing that our spirit keeps the divine gifts, and at the same time may come to recognize its own fragility and weakness, God, by visiting it with His grace, elevates it to the heights of virtue, and then retiring, makes it see how weak it is in itself.

This is confirmed by some episodes related in sacred Scripture. Elijah visited at dawn by God, opens the skies with His word; then, immediately afterwards, seized by the fear of the Queen Jezabel, felt so weak before that woman that he had to flee to the desert [cf. 1 K 19:3]. Thus, St. Paul, carried up to the third heaven, penetrated the secrets of Paradise, but then found himself struggling with his flesh, and felt the weight of another law in his members, and he laments that his spirit should be tortured by this inner rebellion [cf. 2 Co 12:1, ff.].

Accordingly, God visits in the morning, and immediately after His visit, He puts the soul to the test, since in granting His gift, carries the soul on high, and withdrawing

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<sup>77</sup> “Exercises” and “Instructions”, MS 3006-3011. This excerpt is from St. Bernardo: “In Song of the Songs, Sermon 57,3”. PL 183, 1051.

for a while, lets man see to himself. We shall always experience this condition until that time when, freed radically from the stain of sin, we shall arrive at the state of the promised incorruption<sup>78</sup>.

#### **42: The secrets of divine love**

We must never forget that divine word which tells us that He, Whose delights are to be with us, because of the special love He has for us [cf. Pr 8:31]. With His loving providence plays with the souls that He loves most, ***playing on the surface of the earth***. Furthermore, we will do well, as the Apostle Peter points out to us, to turn our attention to that word as to a lamp that shines in a dark place [cf. 2 P 1:19].

We should not wonder that the Lord hides Himself and at the same time reveals Himself, as if with a ray for His knowledge, because this beloved Savior of souls ***stands right behind our wall, gazing through the windows, peering through the lattices*** [Sgs 2:9]. But, if we wish to see His face unveiled, even in this world, that is, to have a clear knowledge of Him and His goodness and of His Providence around us, He ardently strives to see our face, for He continues to say in that same Song of Songs; ***Show me your face*** [Sgs2:14]. If we strive to hear His voice, He also desires to hear ours more. ***Let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet and your face lovely*** [ibid.].

O wonderful secrets of divine Love! O deep abysses of His charity! When will it come about that we will be so abandoned like ship-wrecked survivors in this immense sea, so as not see any more the shores of this wretched land of ours? To sum it up: ***Happy is the man who takes refuge in Him*** [Ps 34:9]<sup>79</sup>.

#### **43: Respond to the invitation of the Spouse promptly**

***I rose to open to my lover, with my hands dripping with myrrh... I opened to my lover, but my lover had departed, gone*** [Sgs 56].

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<sup>78</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3038-3041**. This selection is taken from St. Gregory, Moralia, 3, c. 29, 48. PL 75, 83.

<sup>79</sup> Correspondence, p. 28. Letter to L. Naudet, **November 26, 1812**. This elevated mystic consideration refers to a concrete situation. The Bishop, Innocent Liruti, who wanted Fr. Bertoni to become Spiritual Director of the Seminary, had thought to relieve him from the office of Chaplain of the Work of Mother Naudet. A formal decision had not yet been made, but word had reached the Servant of God and produced the effect of an authentic cudgel blow: also because of a certain secrecy from which she felt excluded and which left everybody in a painful uncertainty. By way of testimony, it is proper to mention here also the few lines that follow in the same letter to L. Naudet in the cited passage: 'For the rest, I do not doubt at all that the Lord will give plentiful light to your prudence in transacting this business. As far as I'm concerned, it seems to me to be so disposed in the Lord in the Lord to go wherever He tells me. 'Go', meaning to obey, as when he tells me to 'Come'

In the **Spouse** of Canticles, we can recognize the soul which is drawn by Christ to a greater perfection and to **the mission for the conversion of others**, but who does not obey promptly; but rather, with hesitation and delay. In the end, having repented of that sloth, she presents herself to her **Spouse**, offering myrrh, which is mortification, and penance in reparation for her sloth. But the Beloved goes away from her and no longer gives her that heroic grace which the soul had rejected when it was first offered, but now gives a minor one. He denies to her the spiritual joys and consolations and that fruit, the conversion of souls, that she would have obtained if she had promptly obeyed the invitation of Christ.

The **Spouse** somehow punishes the sloth and delay of the **Bride**, compelling her to remain waiting, and just as, when He wished to introduce Himself, she was not ready to accept Him and to bring herself to meet Him, so He, in His turn, does not accede to her wish with any speed.

What harm sloth produces, and how much fatigue it costs those who have given in to it is also seen by what is said afterwards with regard to the **Spouse** of the Canticles. After she hesitated and did not open the door immediately for the **Groom**, she was forced not only to go to the door, but to run through the city, stumbling on the guards by whom she was wounded [cf. Sgs 5:6-7]. Thus, with great difficulty she finds her coveted **Spouse**, but if she had obeyed promptly to the invitation, she would have been able to avoid these misfortunes<sup>80</sup>.

## CHRISTIAN JOY

### **44: To serve the Lord with joy**

God loves those who serve Him happily and give everything they can [cf. 2 Co 9:7], not with sadness as misers, nor through necessity, or force like tax-payers, but with a prompt and joyful spirit.

Usually, we are inclined to serve voluntarily and joyfully when the Master we serve is a person of great dignity and worth, when he doesn't order difficult or weighty commands, when he prays well, giving abundant recompense for the service received, and treats his dependents with kindness. But all these things are realized in a most perfect manner in God. In particular, **His commandments are not burdensome** [1 Jn 5:3]; in fact they are light: **My yoke is sweet and my burden light** [Mt 11:30].

And also, if in the service of God much fatigue, tribulation and suffering are encountered, everything becomes easy and light with the help of divine grace, and with the hope of heavenly glory. The recompense, then, that the Lord reserves for us is greater than we can ever imagine, or hope for. Because, in addition to the richness of the gifts which He gives us in this life, He will afterwards give us Himself, as He already promised to Abraham: **Do not fear, Abraham, I am your shield and your recompense** [Gn 15:1].

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<sup>80</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3027-3031**,

And yet how many are those who serve God with sadness of spirit! They remain reluctant and see everything black, ready to pass judgment on this person, or that one, about everything they have to make bitter comments, they make huge trials and prefer harsh sentences. It is a diabolical vice that brings on so much uneasiness!

The true servant of God will make every effort to cast out of his spirit this diabolical sadness that takes away spiritual consolation, and renders them hateful to God and to their neighbor, and burdensome to themselves<sup>81</sup>.

#### **45: Spiritual consolation**

Spiritual consolation is a free gift of God. Because of this gift, acts of virtue are easily performed – in fact, with delight and zest, with the heart inflamed with affection, while the deeds of the flesh become insipid and bitter.

Spiritual consolation brings with it above all else peace, interior quiet, joy, light and clarity in the knowledge of divine matters, elevation of the mind, and hope fixed on God, and fervor of charity.

Part of spiritual consolation is also that just evaluation of earthly realities through which it knows how to despise the glory, display and vanity of the world, and at the same time it learns how to reject the errors proper to worldly mentality which lead one astray from the search of the true sense of life, after the example of St. Paul, who considered everything **as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord** [Ph 3:8]. The soul, visited by the consolations of the Holy Spirit, despises even the terrors of the world, those terrors that are the result of violence, swindle and cunning. Faith and hope are stronger than all worldly terrors.

Spiritual consolation brings us also to praise God for His incomprehensible judgments, and for the designs of His Providence, as well as for all His gifts of grace. It stimulates the desire to serve God, not by force, but by devotion, with strength and humility, not searching for one's own interests, but those of Christ. Finally, it inflames in the heart an ardent zeal to procure with every means the glory of God, and to fight, with all its strength, for the victory of Christ<sup>82</sup>.

#### **46. Fervor and joy**

In difficulty, the human soul is strengthened, and in idleness, it is weakened, because good works are the food of the soul. **My food**, says the Lord, **is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work** [Jn 4:34].

Therefore, we see how all the servants of God who exhaust themselves in praying, meditating, preaching, and in the other activities which redound to the glory of God and the salvation of others, are happy, rich in spirit and full of spiritual gentleness. While on the contrary, the tepid are afflicted, sad, annoying toward their

<sup>81</sup> Retreats to the Acolytes. **MssB 4538-4554.**

<sup>82</sup> Meditations on *Primum Regum*. Nn. 8, 9, 10. **MssB 5042-5178, passim.**



neighbor and themselves. Because of the dryness of their spirit, prayer, meditation, and every other spiritual activity become a nuisance to them, and they turn to search for worldly pleasures.

These are like the sons of Israel who lamented and murmured due to their fatigue. They became tired of that most delicate food, the manna, while they missed the onions of Egypt. Just as those ungrateful people despised that heavenly and delicate food and desired cheaper things, so also are the lukewarm who are tired of spiritual foods and delights, and desire worldly pleasures. People such as these cannot even turn themselves to show any understanding and compassion for their neighbor, because they are hard and dry. Ah, miserable ones, how they are lacking in good works, which form, instead, the delight of fervent souls<sup>83</sup>.

#### **47: How to defend interior peace**

Be of good spirit and put all your trust in God; thus it will be well placed and will produce more fruit than one could expect.

Hide yourselves, if you can, from those people who hinder, or disturb the time of your recollection, or your duties, and learn wisely how to find a place for yourself for comfort and rest in body and spirit. Then you too, may be able to say: ***I am sleeping, but my heart is awake*** [Sgs 5:2]. Attach yourself in every way to that tranquility and undisturbed peace, free from every form of disdain and of bitterness, which St. Paul recommends so much [cf. Rm 12:18]. Seek nothing but the kingdom of God and His justice [cf. Mt 6:33]. Find your delight in the most holy will of God, and conform yourself to it.

For the rest, may the Lord console you and reward you for your fatigue, your alms-giving, and your mortification. Store up for yourselves good merits for eternity. Everything comes to an end, and ends quickly, but eternity never ends. That which is not eternal is not anything, as St. Teresa says<sup>84</sup>.

Let us do our part according to the grace that God gives us. God will certainly do His part, and I do not wish to know what He intends to do. I am satisfied in believing firmly that God can do whatever He likes, and He always does the better thing, even if He is very distant from our little views and sometimes even contrary. ***I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall ever be in my mouth*** [Ps 34:2]<sup>85</sup>.

#### **48: An Apostle of Joy: St. Zeno**

The countenance of St. Zeno was always happy, his brow always serene, his look always peaceful, his lips always smiling, his speech always gentle, his look

<sup>83</sup> Retreats to Acolytes. **Mss 4532-4537**.

<sup>84</sup> St. Teresa of Jesus. *Life*, 20, 26. Works Rome 1969, pp. 200, ff.

<sup>85</sup> Correspondence, pp. 324, f. Letter to Fr. Bragato, **May 11, 1841**.

always pleasing and composed, always joyful and modest, always lovable and venerable.

Since charity, both in prosperous and in adverse affairs, is always content, so it is always happy. Indeed, this is the characteristic of charity: cheerfulness which is nothing other than a sign of a good and devoted will, and therefore, it is also the flower and ornament of every virtue. Again, this is the reason why it is much loved by God, and without it our gifts are not acceptable to Him [2 Co 9:7]. As it is dear to God, thus it is dear to all, and to the Veronese in a special way, it should have been most dear to see it in the countenance of their St. Zeno. Since by nature they had a happy and pleasant character, they would not have easily adapted themselves to manners that were dissimilar to their own. Those former citizens of ours were accustomed to the cruel and popular games of paganism and to the same of vices. They could not find in themselves their original peaceful cheerfulness until that day when they saw it suddenly, like a miracle, in St. Zeno. They felt immediately enraptured to love it and to strive to acquire it again. The joy of St. Zeno was a perennial source of even made others cheerful at the very sight of it.

But should this man have ever been troubled? Yes, indeed, and very much so. Should he not have found himself ever in distress? Certainly, and quite frequently. But, all this was outside of him, while interiorly he was nourished by that hidden manna that no one recognizes except those who receive it. Because those who know how to conceal themselves in God consider as nothing all their tribulations, as if they didn't belong to them.

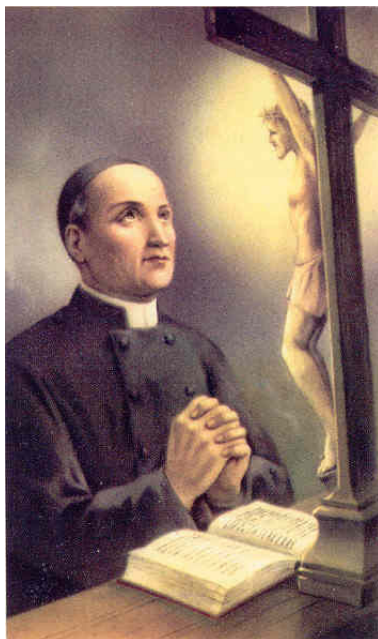
Furthermore, the cheerfulness of the countenance of St. Zeno wounded their hearts and was like a dart that was noted for its efficacy. What kind and how great was the effect of this dart was well discerned by the great number of pagans, who, every year, during the Easter celebration, were baptized by St. Zeno, so much so that the entire city was led to baptism through his work.<sup>86</sup>




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<sup>86</sup> Prayer in honor of St. Zeno. **Mss B 2082-2085**. In August 1839, solemn festivities were observed in Verona in honor of St. Zeno, to celebrate the finding of the Holy Patron's body, which occurred in March of the preceding year. St. Gaspar was among the speakers appointed for the occasion: and he delivered the panegyric on Sunday, August 14, 1839. We are talking about a powerful discourse, accurately prepared in his rather troublesome conditions of health: and that stirred much admiration [cf. **BERTONI 5, pp. 646 ff.**]. On that occasion, St. Gaspar also had occasion to give another exceptional proof of his humility. When the secretary of the Bishop came to ask him for the manuscript of the panegyric so that it would be published, he dodged saying that it was not worth that honor. He acceded only by obedience to the bishop; but in handing over the pages, his eyes rimmed with tears. [ib., p. 659].

# **St. GASPAR BERTONI**



**FOUNDER of the CONGREGATION of the  
SACRED STIGMATA of OUR LORD, JESUS CHRIST**

**SOME RUDIMENTS of his  
SPIRITUAL WRITINGS**

**LENTEN SEASON**

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## SEASON of LENT

### PENANCE

#### **49: Toward the Lenten fast with cheerfulness**

Let us prepare our souls to accept with cheerfulness the Lenten fast and abstinence. This is an invitation that may seem a little strange; nonetheless, it is important that whatever is proposed to us by law be done by us with joyful promptness, as if by personal choice. And it will be this, if we don't allow ourselves to be convinced by appearances. But, if we reflect well on the reasons for things, with a tranquil mind, we shall then see that the Lenten fast and abstinence, together with the other penitential practices that accompany them, are among the most certain and powerful remedies to defend or recover spiritual well-being.

The case of Nineveh is a sufficiently convincing proof of the value and efficacy of these remedies. The situation of the city was so compromised that a prophet sent expressly by God had already predicted that within a short period of forty days the city would be buried under its ruins. But the inhabitants convinced themselves to seek a remedy for their sins by fasting, and then the situation changed. God was appeased and they obtained pardon.

In the Gospel it is related that the disciples one time turned to Jesus in sorrow, after having attempted to cast out the demons from a person who was possessed by them. Jesus gave us His answer the following reason: ***This type of demon is not cast out except through prayer and fasting.*** [Mt 17:21]. Even more, prayer itself, which is absolutely necessary, takes its power to operate from fasting. Prayer with fasting is a good thing [Tb 12:8]. In fact, fasting makes the mind nimble, prompt, free, and gives it wings to ascend to God.

Let us, therefore, put aside complaining that prayers return unanswered, and that temptations increase more every day, and that we don't know anymore to what means we should have recourse to free ourselves from our weaknesses. Let us keep well in mind that there, where even the most powerful exorcisms are appropriate medicine.<sup>87</sup> Fast so that you may not sin. Fast because you have sinned. Fast so that you may receive the gifts of the Lord. Fast so that what you have received may remain with you.<sup>88</sup>

#### **50: Medicine for the soul and also for the body**

The usefulness of fasting is not restricted to the sphere of the spirit, as if there remained for the body only that little bitterness and disagreeableness that the most effective medicines usually give. Fasting is a useful remedy, in fact a necessary one, even to keep the body healthy and prolong life. ***Through lack of self-control many have died, but the abstemious man prolongs his life*** [Si 37:31]. This is the way it is.

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<sup>87</sup> Early Sermons, n.16.

<sup>88</sup> **Spiritual Journal.** March 10, 1810

That enjoyment, that delight between banqueting and drinking, that never knowing how to say 'no' to some satisfaction of the appetite, this is what weakens the body, corrupts it, and brings it to a premature death. While it is mortification, sobriety, and abstinence that keep it healthy and preserve it and makes it strong. If this is how things stand, and the Lenten fast is not only a useful remedy, but one necessary for the health of the soul and body, why shouldn't we greet it happily and full of joy?

We are Christians. By His example Christ has given us strength to accept this remedy with good will. He who for forty days kept such a strict fast. Let us consider the saints, how much they did, undertook and suffered for the health of their souls, Let us not imitate children who refuse the most effective medicines because they leave a bitter taste on the tongue.

With these thoughts let us direct our soul to greet holy Lent with much happiness, to the end that, well purified by means of fasting and abstinence, and adorned with solid virtues, we are made worthy to celebrate with good results the Easter of the Lord here on earth, and to be admitted afterwards to the eternal Easter in heaven<sup>89</sup>.

### **51: Indispensable condition for following Christ**

***Whoever wishes to come after Me must deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me*** [Mt 16:24]

***Let him deny himself*** - this is the spirit of penance. The effect of this spirit is to change the whole man. On the outside by denying his own things, and by changing them, and this is the last difficult point. He denies by leaving himself, this is quite difficult. He leaves himself who stops living according to the old sensual life of Adam, and lives according to the new spiritual life of grace. This is realized because man is induced by such a spirit of penance to loathe what he formerly loved and to love instead what he formerly loathed. Actually, a good penitent, one who truly denies himself, is, for example, the person who once was intemperate has not become very abstemious, the person who formerly was subjected to impurity, now becomes very chaste; the person who was once stingy, now becomes exceedingly generous.

***Let him take up his Cross.*** The true follower of Christ takes up his cross, not compelled as was Simon of Cyrene, but freely, totally spontaneous. He drags it not only through a sense of duty, or as an imposition, resigning himself, and possibly even with reproaches and complaints, but with gratitude, and interior joy, while nourishing in himself the love of suffering for Christ.

***And follow Me.*** It is the spirit of love to follow Christ. Each person can, according to his capacity, arrive at this summit, or at least to look at it with desire, so as to arrive there in his own time according to the divine plan.

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<sup>89</sup> Early Sermons, n. 16. The Lenten Fast. **MssB 748-754. PVC pp. 266-270**

These are the beginnings, the progress, the attainment of holiness<sup>90</sup>.

## **52: The three crosses**

No one can pass through this life without a cross. We can choose from among three crosses. The first is that of Christ' the second is that of the good thief; and the third is that of the bad thief

In the first, there is glory; it belongs to the innocent, those who most resemble Christ.

In the second there is consolation; this is proper to penitents, who by exercising patience do not lose resignation or peace.

Whoever does not choose one of these two crosses must necessarily take the third, that of the bad thief, who had to suffer more and without merit. His cross served him as a ladder to descend into the abyss of hell.<sup>91</sup>

Here on earth penance is short, light and useful. In hell, it will be extremely long, enormous and useless. He who does not repent in this life will have to repent uselessly in the next.<sup>92</sup>

Oh how the just soul, once it has entered glory, will bless the penance practiced on earth, so little to suffer, so much to rejoice. On the other hand, the condemned soul will curse its pleasures, its false friends, and the sins it has committed. '***What fools we were ... we had our fill of the ways of mischief and of ruin; we journeyed through impassable deserts, but the way of the Lord we knew not.*** [Ws 5:4-7]. One of these two destinies must affect us. What stupidity on the part of those who know this through faith, but do not care to make provisions while they are alive; in eternity, penitence does not help except to increase desperation<sup>93</sup>.

## **53: Mortification**

Do nothing unless for the glory of God and His holy love; this will make you despise the world and ban all vices.<sup>94</sup> We must wean ourselves from doing our own will and do everything as if moved by the will of God with the intention of pleasing and loving Him.<sup>95</sup> Our mortification should be total, not leaving any passion alive voluntarily.<sup>96</sup> When we act under the instinct of nature, even for a single moment, we prevent God from acting, and we give way to the activity of a creature<sup>97</sup>. 'I cannot',

<sup>90</sup> Panegyric on St. Francis. **MssB 1845-1846; 1856; 1865.**

<sup>91</sup> **Spiritual Journal.** March 18, 1809.

<sup>92</sup> o.c., March 15, 1809.

<sup>93</sup> **Spiritual Exercises** of 1806. **MssB 3891-3892**

<sup>94</sup> **Spiritual Journal,** July 14, 1809.

<sup>95</sup> o.c., July 16, 1809.

<sup>96</sup> o.c., May 2, 1809.

<sup>97</sup> o.c., July 15, 1809.

spoken by spiritual people in the matter of mortification sounds bad enough, because in God we can do everything. Some do not want to mortify themselves with the excuse that certain difficulties are 'crosses' sent from heaven. So, under a false pretext, they are complacent with their defects as if they were heaven's will<sup>98</sup>.

For the rest, we must not overburden ourselves with excessive penances and activities.<sup>99</sup> Regarding penance, there should be only this universal rule for all the confreres: that in food, clothing, and other necessities of life, they should be content with whatever is distributed or granted to them by their superiors. Everyone will accept willingly whatever is distributed or granted to them by their superior will impose in the Lord; even more he should desire for more and ask often for more as far as his strength and the grace of god suggests. It pertains to them to determine whether to permit or moderate them<sup>100</sup>.

Above all else those who lack interior mortification, and yet desire external mortification should be advised to refrain from the latter. In this way, they will be eager to develop the internal mortification as a compensation for not exercising external mortification<sup>101</sup>.

#### **54: A great penitent: St. Francis**

Let us consider the profound change that came about in the life of St. Francis of Assisi. He was a man who had been rich s short time before, with his eyes, hands, work bent on piling up riches in the business world. Now this same man suddenly goes to the door of a church, standing in the midst of a crowd of poor people, dressed as a poor man, in clothing he had received from a poor man, in exchange for his former rich clothes, and now he is all desire, all ardor, all zeal in search of poverty. But where did such a change of behavior come from? From a still more surprising change of feelings. ***Whatever gains I had, these I have considered a loss because of Christ*** [Ph 3:7].

Not this alone, but assisted by divine inspiration, the Saint still advanced and arrived at judging as loss, not only what formerly he esteemed as gain, that is, riches and pleasures and worldly renown, but all the other things that are not Christ, such as high position in society, eagerness of his genius, abundance of talents and other

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<sup>98</sup> o.c. August 31, 1808.

<sup>99</sup> o.c., September 13, 1808.

<sup>100</sup> ***Original Constitutions 43-44.*** Fr. Gaspar had closely collaborated with other Founders – especially with Fr. Anthony Rosmini and Leopoldina Naudet – in the drawing up of the Rules for their respective Institutes. Around 1840, he dedicated himself to writing them for his own Institute. And he did it like a saint: putting prayer in the first place to obtain the light of the Holy Spirit. *Pray well for all of us, and for what I am writing, drop by drop...* he writes to Fr. Bragato on May 11, 1841 – *If the Lord wishes it and it turns to his honor* [[cf. **Correspondence**, p. 325]. For the juridical establishment, the Constitutions of Fr. Gaspar are inspired in large measure by the rules of the Jesuits. But the spiritual and ascetical component with which his legislative text is notable, is his [cf. **BERTONI**, 6, pp. 115, ff.

<sup>101</sup> **Spiritual Journal**, *September* 28, 1808.



similar goods, always for the same reason, for Christ. Then the very strict mortification that St. Francis imposed on himself was most impressive: food was so scarce as hardly able to keep him alive, very little sleep, and that taken with his body stretched out on the ground after having become very tired by preaching, his body clothed in a poor habit, one intentionally rough which made him suffer both the cold weather and the warm, and tormented by hair shirts, flagellations and prolonged fasts.

To sum it up, Francis knew how to live his earthly life like a continual martyrdom, on the cross with Christ. ***The world has been crucified to me and I to the world.*** [Ga 6:14]. Truly, love never says: 'Enough!'<sup>102</sup>

## PENANCE AND CHARITY

### **55: Your fast becomes food for the poor**

the most appropriate and characteristic feature of charity is this: ***It does not seek its own interests*** [1 Co 13:5] In fact, whoever loves someone with true friendship must always seek the benefit of his friend. But, the person who seeks in his friend his own benefit and pleasure, does not love his friend, but himself.

Which one of us is disposed not to give his life out of love for his neighbor, as the saints do, but to give freely the surplus of those riches which so often are squandered, to help his brother who sometimes languishes from hunger? It would not be other than the simple commandment! Who is one of them, then, who through zeal for the salvation of others takes care to ***help his neighbor according to his own possibility*** [Si 29:27] with the discreet use of fraternal correction, at least by good example and prayer? It would not be anything else, without by any means surpassing it, than the rigorous precept with which God ***has charged each one of us to the care of our neighbor*** [Si 17:12].

Let us therefore move forward. Let us propose to ourselves, insofar as these charges oblige us by precept, to begin living that charity which is principally characterized by the fact that we do not seek our own good, but whatever is useful for our neighbor<sup>103</sup>.

### **56: Charity involves sacrifice**

Charity requires that I know how to rejoice with those who are joyful and to weep with those who weep [Rm 12:15]. But isn't it true that I have offended charity and, perhaps, continue to offend it? I pretend that it is shown to me, but up to what point do I put it into practice toward persons to whom, for many reason, I am in debt?

Instead of doing to others all the good that is in me, perhaps I envy what is done for them, and perhaps on certain occasions I tend to oppose them, and become

<sup>102</sup> Panegyric of St. Francis. **MssB 1847-1859.**

<sup>103</sup> Early Sermons, n. i6.

an obstacle to them. Instead of foreseeing their needs and helping them even in matters that are not strictly demanded by duty, it may have occurred to me to become quite difficult in the exercise of my office in granting that which is owed. Instead of getting involved with those who are troubled, have I not perhaps sometimes reached the point in showing a sort of malicious happiness, or has it happened that I myself became the motive for it?

Jesus Christ has expressly pointed out that we shall be treated by his Father just as we have treated His and our brothers. According to this measure, what can I hope from God, and with what assurance could I ask Him to bestow on me the abundance of His graces?<sup>104</sup>

### **57: The demands of fraternal charity**

Charity, says St. Paul, in the first place is patient to endure the defects of one's neighbor. It is kind to win for Christ the souls of others with gentleness. Longing for their eternal salvation and every good thing, it does not envy at all their prosperity. In order not to give them any obstacle on their way to salvation, precaution is taken lest it does anything wrong. It does not boast of any talent of mind or body, and it absolutely avoids belittling others. Furthermore, to serve them devotedly it is solicitous for their advantage and does not seek its own interests. When provoked by insults, it is not irritated, and does not take vengeance. It thinks no evil of anyone, but interprets everything in the best way, keeping to the truth, and only seeks correction. Crying over the sins of its neighbors, as though its own, it does not rejoice in injustice, takes pleasure in truth and rejoices in the virtues of others.

Finally, charity covers everything, believes everything, hopes for everything, and supports everything for the love of others, when it is a matter of doing that is truly good for them, knowing how to do that with great pleasure to God for the love of Whom it is gently pushed to love others [1 Co 13:4-7].<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Parish Mission at St. Firmo Major. **MssB 4217-4221**. In the month of May 1816, from the 4<sup>th</sup>- 26<sup>th</sup>, there took place in the central church of St Firmo Major, the preaching of a great parish, city-wide Mission, under the direction of the celebrated Apostolic Missionary, Canon Louis Pacetti [1761-1819]. Fr. Gaspar had the duty of presenting a daily meditation. 'Due to his preaching,' attests his contemporary, Fr. Camillo Bresciani, 'he was considered equal to the Roman Apostolic Missionary, Pacetti, who was already worn out by giving Missions. Fr. Gaspar was equal to Pacetti in the polish of his expositions, and he surpassed him in smoothness and in persuading the audience to put into effect the proposed reform' [cf. **BERTONI**, 3, p. 675]. His biographers emphasize the great value this experience had for Fr. Gaspar's life and for the plan of the Congregation. Having received the title 'Apostolic Missionary', he later proposed as the end of his Congregation, *Apostolic Missionaries at the service of Bishops* [CF # 1; **BERTONI** 4, pp. 99f.].

<sup>105</sup> Early Sermons, n. 6. 'Charity towards one's neighbor'. **MssB 527-528**. **PVC pp. 175, f.**

## PENANCE AND PRAYER

### **58: My God and my All!**

***To You I lift up my eyes, Who are enthroned in heaven. Behold, as the eyes of servants are on the hands of their masters, as the eyes of a maid are on the hands of her mistress, so are our eyes on the Lord, our God, till He have pity on us*** [Ps 123:1-2]. Let us not take our eyes from the Lord, but continue our prayer uninterruptedly until with grace and mercy He has granted us that understanding which we need.

***Have pity on us, O Lord, have pity on us, for we are more than sated with contempt*** [v. 3]. Let us realize that our defects, imperfections, and failings that make us more worthy of mockery and contempt in our own eyes [for the little we know of ourselves] are, in the eyes of God who sees everything, presented as a most convincing reason to His heart to grant us grace and mercy. 'For we are more than sated with contempt.' This is the prayer of a truly generous soul, which conquers and forces the heart of God. This is truly to lift God up so much. To sum it up, it is prayer worthy of one who has a heart made according to the heart of God, like the heart of David.

O great God! How good You have been and condescending for the love of us miserable creatures! When will it come about that we love you with all our heart, and know You, and hold You for what You are! My God and my All! ***[Imitation of Christ. Book 3, c. 34]***<sup>106</sup>.

### **59: The one thing necessary**

Our Lord assures us that only one thing is necessary. ***There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part [that is, to attend only to this thing], and it will not be taken from her*** [Lk 10:42] all the rest in fact are nothing more than trifles.

It seems that the Lord is acting like certain gentlemen of this world who keep for themselves the most important business, while leaving the administration of domestic matters to the prudent supervision of their wives, and they don't want to hear a word about this. In fact, at the first hint about this, they are quick to say 'you do it, you do it and all will be done well.'

In fact, this is what our Lord aims at in His provident care: to make us live spiritually, to spiritualize everything so that we don't take into account everything that falls under the senses, and raising ourselves above everything, we love so much in Him and surrender to His infinite goodness and mercy, that we need to remove ourselves from this no matter what happens and mercy, that we need not remove ourselves from this no matter what happens here below. This is our better good, and

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<sup>106</sup> **Correspondence.** P. 45-47. Letter to L. Naudet, written at the end of 1812, or the beginning of 1813.

with this, the Lord fully concerns Himself, using every care. His goods which are then those which we have offered and consecrated to Him, He leaves us to administer with our meager prudence, as it were, He doesn't want to hear a word about them.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today [Heb 13:3]. Yesterday, He informed us and directed us to suffer with courage, and today He gives us the courage and the patience necessary to support every trial for His glory. ***I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall ever be in my mouth.*** [Ps 34:2].<sup>107</sup>

## **60:     Distractions, temptations and dryness**

If we are bothered by distractions in our prayers and meditation, we should not be discouraged and give up praying, but we must persevere just the same. Let us keep ourselves in the presence of God notwithstanding our distractions, and because of this let us not reduce the time designated for prayer. We must be able to recognize and humbly to offer to God in prayer our miserable condition which does not allow us to lift up our heart to God perfectly as we would like to, and to say with the Psalmist: ***My heart fails me. Deign, o Lord, to rescue me. O Lord, make haste to help me.*** [Ps 40:13-14].

Even the devil does all he can to disturb souls that pray. But we, while assaulted by temptation, shall persist in our holy desire and endeavors, certain that our desire and endeavors will be put into account of the fruit of prayer. Even if we do not succeed in freeing ourselves completely from the annoying thoughts instigated by the Tempter, nonetheless we shall receive from God the reward of those endeavors; in fact, if one does not consent to the temptation, straightaway an advantage will be obtained from that trouble.

It can also happen that in praying and meditating we do not experience any relish and taste of devotion and suffer from interior dryness. If, however, we maintain ourselves equally faithful to the practices of piety, seeking on our part to complete them in the best way possible, we can rely on the goodness of the Lord who accepts them with kindness. The Lord is especially pleased with that service which His elect offer Him at their own expense<sup>108</sup>.

## **SIN**

## **61:     Grace and sin**

Who are we Christians? Let us not look around, inside and outside ourselves. Let us enter into our most sublime being.

By nature we are a very clear image of the divine countenance. We are the lords appointed by God so that all creatures will serve us. The very heavens, with the splendor of their light, are destined to serve us.

<sup>107</sup> **Correspondence.** P. 48. Letter to Naudet, January 9, 1813.

<sup>108</sup> **Retreat Meditations. MssB 3420-3422.**

Then by grace we have been elevated to the same order of the divine nature, in which we participate. We are sons of God. Christ is our Brother. We have been declared God's heirs. Our souls are spouses of the Holy Spirit. Has He not given them an exceedingly rich deposit of precious gifts? Were not the angels, princes of heaven, destined to guard them here on earth? What more? Has not the very Son of God descended from heaven, putting on our nature to live with us?

Shall we not then look back with indifferent eyes and with a calm spirit at these lords of earth, these heirs of heaven sons of God and spouses of the Holy Spirit, subjecting themselves to the shameful slavery of sin and of the devil? Shall we not blush in the face of such unworthy slavery? Where is the noble and gentle character of our spirit? And for how long will we remain vilified by these chains, accepting that these monstrous tyrants should rule over us?

Let us think seriously how to recover our liberty, our authority and our glory<sup>109</sup>.

## **62: The offense to God**

Because sin is an offense against the infinite majesty of God, it possesses a certain infinity of evil and such an abyss of deformity that it cannot be amended adequately by an act of submissiveness on the part of any creature. Since we creatures were unable to pay this incalculable debt, the Lord came to pay it, and having become man, He wishes to take upon Himself, through an excess of love, the satisfaction of such a burden, for which an infinite treasure of merits was necessary. Even more, we know that, strictly speaking, to do this, a mere sigh that Christ, the God-man, would have sent to Heaven, would have been sufficient. But, to make us see His aversion to sin better, and to urge us to perceive the gravity of evil by the price of His medicine, He loaded on Himself so many external and internal sorrows that no human mind exists which is capable of fully understanding them.

Let us contemplate the Crucified Christ, tormented in all His members and in all His senses by every sort of people, He Who had a Body so delicate and sensitive. One should say that the life of Christ could not endure such suffering. Yet He did it so as to suffer the more. He Who has performed so many miracles to lessen the sufferings of others!

Sin is, therefore, not an empty evil like a pastime. When we do we return to crucify Christ: because to wish to compensate the offense according to strict justice, a satisfaction no less than that offered on Calvary is needed. An attempt is made to nullify, on the part of the sinner, the force of Jesus' Passion and make it inefficacious in the order of salvation<sup>110</sup>.

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<sup>109</sup> **Early Sermons**, n. 23. Freedom from sin and the Devil. **MssB 901-903; 913. PVC pp. 33-36.**

<sup>110</sup> Mission at St. Firmo Major. **MssB 4104-4107.**

Whoever wants to know what sin really is should put himself before the Crucifix and learn what it really is<sup>111</sup>.

### **63: The death of the soul**

Just as the soul is the life of the body, so God, through grace, is the life of the soul. **He is your life** [Dt 30:20]. And just as the body dies if the soul leaves it, so also the soul dies if by mortal sin God is put at a distance by it.

Let us for a while consider more closely the reality of this death. Life is mostly manifested by movement and activity. Now what does the soul in sin to gain merit in the supernatural order? And how does it move itself on the road that leads to the goal of eternal happiness? Sin eliminates even the ability to operate in the order of grace, and therefore also the right to all merit, because everything is done without God. St. Augustine says: 'Just as the soul as long as it is in the body gives it vigor, beauty, movement and the functioning of the various members, likewise as long as God is in the soul, He confers on it wisdom, piety, justice and charity<sup>112</sup>, which is the root of merit. St. Paul says: ***If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing*** [1 Co 13:3].

In addition to this, let us reflect on the fact that sin directs us step after step to a second death, which is even more tragic, that is, to lose eternal life for which man was created, and to bury him in *Gehenna*, in the inextinguishable fire [Mk 9:43], ***where there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth*** [Mt 8:12].

A most unhappy situation is that of those who live in sin. The soul is dead. Who can raise it up? It is furthermore condemned to eternal death!<sup>113</sup>

### **64: Consequences of sin**

Who brought into the world all the evils that triumph here? The sin of Adam. **God made man straight** [Qo 7:29], master of himself and the other creatures, and man, by rebelling most foolishly against God, lost his peaceful dominion over them. Therefore, if sin, right from the start, was that traitor which plundered the world in its beginning, putting itself, as it were, at the head of that numberless army of disasters

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<sup>111</sup> **Early Sermons**, n. 4. 'The Passion'. **MssB 497. PVC p. 288.** Fr. Gaspar preached twice on the Passion on Good Friday evening. The first was on April 3 1801 – and the second, with the same text a little more developed, on April 4, 1806.

Among the sermons preached in his early years in the priesthood, it is presented as one of the better prepared, and can be considered also as a document of that wisdom of the Cross characteristic of Fr. Gaspar, which was testified by his biographer, Fr. Gaetano Giacobbe: '.. Regardless of how much he knew, he never wished that it deviate from the sublime wisdom of knowing his Crucified Lord..' [cf. **SA**, p. 518]. [cf. elsewhere in the **GRAMMAR nn 87-96; 292-300.**

<sup>112</sup> St. Augustine, *Tractatus in Ioannem*. 19, 12. PL 35, 1550, etc.

<sup>113</sup> **Early Sermons**, n. 33. 'The sweetest benefit of Penance'. **MssB 1196-1200.**

which afflict it, it is logical to think that afterwards it is still the same sin to introduce every evil thing in our homes. Actual sin produces proportionally in individuals the same effects that original sin produced in the human race. This is, therefore, the true source of all our evils, although people take every measure to return to the sources of this murky Nile that floods us with fullness of anguish.

Naturally, with this, one would not want to say that there is an immediate relation between individual sins and our sufferings. The harm that sin immediately produces is the loss of spiritual goods. In effect, it takes away sanctifying grace, which is the life of the soul, and along with grace, it takes away the infused virtues, the merit of good works accomplished, and the right to eternal life. It indeed takes away calmness and peace, leaving behind a cruel remorse which poisons every joy of the sinner. At any rate, it remains true that virtue ***exalts a nation, but sin is a people's disgrace*** [Pr 14:34]. In a crowd it is not the one who collides with us most; it is those at a distance that push us to make room for themselves. Sins give the shove to many great evils, and just as they have turned upside down other times, people and places, they have even more the effect of putting a house upside down. Let us introduce piety into a house, and we shall introduce every good thing. Let us throw out sin and we shall throw out of it every evil<sup>114</sup>.

## **65: The struggle against sin**

***My son, if you have sinned, do so no more, and for your past sins pray to be forgiven*** [Si 21:1].

If you have fallen into sin, which is like a mortal wound for your soul, the first remedy necessary for salvation is the pledge not to do it again. Because, unfortunately, there are many who, when they have committed a sin, despair for their loss of innocence and grace, and allow themselves to embrace every kind of transgressions and turn back in the mire of intemperate pleasures.

***Do so no more*** - both because the repetition of sin is a new wound of the soul, and whoever has received a wound takes good care not to get another, and because it's easier to cure one single sin than two or three or even more, just as it is easier to cure a single wound than many; likewise, because in the repetition of the sin, there is obstinate pride and lust of spirit that offends God grievously and makes more difficult both the cure of the one who has fallen and the pardon of his fault.

***Pray for the faults committed, so that they may be pardoned.*** This too is necessary in order to remedy sin. It is not enough to obtain pardon, but also not to sin again and to correct one's conduct of life, just as if penitence were not anything else than a simple coming to one's senses. There is also need to repent, and to beg pardon with sorrow and humility. The sins in fact remain unless they are pardoned<sup>115</sup>.

<sup>114</sup> Mission at St. Firmo Major. **MssB 4109-4131.**

<sup>115</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2994-2997.**

**66: Deliberate venial sin**

With reference to the soul of one who has committed venial sin, it is like a blemish which certainly does not take away the intrinsic beauty of sanctifying grace; however, it does take away its splendor. And if we think how beautiful a soul is in grace, how can we consider lightly any lessening of such splendor?

Venial sin, then, is opposed to the will of God. While it is still not contrary to the end of the law, which is charity, it does not keep that same law with the perfection owed it, and as such it dilutes the fervor of charity. An evil that is opposed to the perfect completion of God's plan certainly cannot be called a slight evil. Our Lord did not consider it such. He offered to the Divine Majesty His torments, His Blood, and His death, not only in reparation for the mortal sins of all mankind, but in reparation also for venial sins.

In addition, venial sin is not of little importance, but very significant for its effects. The most dangerous effect of venial sin is that it disposes one to mortal sin. It disposes indirectly by removing the defenses and by taking away the embankments that hold back the flood of evil, thus mitigating the exercise of virtue, and accustoming the will to oppose the Divine Will in small matters, which is like a slide that brings one eventually to more serious infractions. But venial sin also disposes us to mortal sin directly, in so far as that with it, we put such attachment to vain matters, so that, not to abandon that which is vain, we arrive at doing also that which is effectively wicked. This is seen above all in certain cases in which venial sin has the same matter as mortal sin, and differs from it only in quantity; as, for example, in theft and slander. To sum up: venial sin is often distinguished from mortal sin only in something small from the large. It is a spark, but if the devil succeeds in blowing on it, there isn't any fire that can't be kindled by it<sup>116</sup>.

**TEPIDITY****67: The ailment and its remedies**

***I have not found your works complete in the sight of God*** [Rv 3:2] – works devoid of spirit, charity and zeal. You are like a tree in bloom, but sterile [Mk 1:13, ff.] that has the appearance of piety but not its fruits and works. You are not constant in persevering in accomplishing good. If you do some good work, you do not perform it with the right intention, but through self-interest or vainglory, with sloth and tiredness, polluting it even with certain acts of behavior that cannot be recommended.

A little for God, a little for the devil; a little for Christ, a little for the world; a little for the flesh, and little spirit; a little vanity, a little devotion; a little iniquity, a little charity; a few prayers, a few curses. The spirit of Christ becomes polluted by the mixture with the spirit of the world; faith with maxims of the world; Christian charity with

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<sup>116</sup> Mission at St. Firmo Major. **MssB 4134-4148.**



an image of honesty that is simply pagan. Your works will even be able to appear good before your eyes and those of the world and men, but not in the eyes of God.

To overcome this state, apply yourself to listening to the word of God and try not to pay heed to the maxims of the world. Be faithful to solid tradition and to the teaching authority of the Church. Do not let yourself be seduced by false novelties. Overcome worldly respects and fear, and the distorted reasoning of a false philosophy, which is raised against the Church. Follow faithfully the humble teaching of Christ preached by the successor of St. Peter. Keep your eyes well open and don't fall asleep or doze off. Do penance because there are many sins and great danger of sinning.

**Whoever has ears ought to hear what the spirit says to the Churches** [Rv. 3:6], not that which the flesh says, or the world, or the so-called philosophies, but the Spirit that rests on **the lowly and afflicted man who trembles at my word** [Is 66:2], and **withdraws from all pretense and hypocrisy** [Ws 1:5].<sup>117</sup>

**68: Would that you were hot or cold!**

**To the angel of the Church of Laodicea, write this: I know your works** [Rv 3:14-15], works that you do not know and have not wished to know them. I, therefore, shall show to you what they are, and not what your self-love makes them appear to you. You are neither cold nor hot [ibid.]. Whoever stands wavering between virtue and vice would like to live a holy life and flee from sins, but has not decided completely to fight generously, and he fears the effort of virtue. **Because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.** [ibid., v. 16].

Tepidity is more dangerous than the coldness of that sinner who is disposed to recognize his sin. Often we see the case of cold people and sinners who are converted and reach levels of true spiritual fervor, something that is not seen in those who live in lukewarmness. The negligence of the tepid soul and the false peace in which it lives, being joined together, result in falling from that drowsiness into mortal lethargy. After all, lukewarmness shows itself in a certain sense more dangerous than the coldness of sin, because it has its roots in the worst of all vices, that is pride and presumption. You say: 'I am rich and affluent and have no need of anything' [ibid. v. 17]. This is characteristic of the lukewarm: to confront themselves not with the Gospel, nor with the teaching and example of the saints, but with the worldly. **Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name and cast our devils in Your name and perform many miracles in Your name?** [Mt 7:22]. But, the Lord will answer: **I never knew you; depart from Me, you evildoers** [id. V. 23].

**I advise you to buy from me gold refined by fire, and white garments to put on, and ointment to smear on your eyes** [Rv 3:18]. Gold purified by fire is

<sup>117</sup> Mission at St. Firmo Major. The Letter of God – **MssB 4019-4027**. This is a comment on Rv 3:1-6, that is, on the letter addressed to the *Angel of the Church of Sardi*. According to the last biographer of Bertoni, he established himself in the preaching of the Mission at St. Firmo Major [BERTONI 3, pp. 672, ff.].

charity, burning and purified from every form of hypocrisy and contamination with human passions. The white clothes are innocence and purity of life. The ointment is humility which makes man see clearly his evil deeds and shows him the need of divine help and therefore the need to merit this help by means of a holy and fervent life<sup>118</sup>.

## TEMPTATION

### **69: How temptation comes**

God allows it, and He always does it for a good end; that we are tempted to the spirit of evil, that is, from our own self-love, carnal or worldly, and by the devil.

We should keep in mind that ordinarily the evil spirit of the devil seeks to join with the human, carnal spirit within us, that is, with disordered love for pleasures, with worldly attraction for material possessions and honors with pride. And if he finds in that soul that he wishes to tempt a point of support, he undertakes a very dangerous internal war. However, if he does not find a sufficient point of support, since the soul seeks constantly to purify itself by collaborating with grace, then the evil one seeks accomplishes outside. And it seeks them preferably in those people who are closer to the soul being tempted, and often times in those to which the soul is bound by special bonds of friendship, confidence and even of obedience.

It can also happen, for example, to take a young man away from the intention to consecrate himself entirely to God, the evil one makes use of some priest of little fervor, a worldly man, whom the young man in all simplicity approaches to receive advice and orientation.

Lord, in these trials, You have a purpose, and the devil has one opposed to Yours. You have the intention of purifying our defects and making us correspond better to our vocation. The devil instead wants to make us fall into infidelity and know clearly the designs of Your loving Providence, and also to thwart the plots of the adversary, so that we may obtain that, even though these trials, our spirit reinforces its faithfulness to You and our resolution to correspond better to the vocation to which are called<sup>119</sup>.

### **70: God knows how to draw advantages from temptations**

If Divine Providence, which orders everything to our good, and permits the devil to tempt us, it also limits the power of the temptation, not allowing us to be tempted beyond our strength [cf. 1 Co 10:13], and besides furnishing us interior aids, it also disposes exterior defenses to the end that by cooperating with grace, we succeed in triumphing over it. Moreover, there is always the maternal vigilant care of the Church,

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<sup>118</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3201-3216.**

<sup>119</sup> Meditations from *Primum Regum*, n. 11 and 12. **MssB 5186-5205.**

Spouse of Christ, which the Lord fills with zeal for the protection of her sons, and with light to guard them in the struggle. In fact, God with this same loving Providence and with the motherly care of the Church, thanks also to our cooperation, knows how to carry the experience of the temptation to a happy ending: ***With the trial, He will also provide a way out, so that you may be able to bear it*** [1 Co 10:13].

A first advantage of temptation is the strengthening of virtue, the acquisition of greater firmness in good, and the commitment and effort for a more perfect style of life that is truly pure. All this is reinforced by a strong exercise of mortification.

Another advantage is derived from the experience of temptation, and this is the knowledge of discretion. The soul already acquires this knowledge during the temptation itself by taking cognizance of its own strength, and determining the level of virtue acquired by examining it as if the touchstone. ***One never put to the proof knows little*** [Si 34:10].

There is still a third advantage derived from temptation. It is the fullness of consolation with which God accompanies the victory of the faithful soul, together with the fruit of good example which is offered to others. God then abundantly compensates for the fatigue experienced during temptation, even granting a special gift of humility and spiritual fervor<sup>120</sup>.

## **71: Preparation for temptation**

Those who sincerely seek God in their lives must know that their combat is a continual provocation for the malice of Leviathan [cf. Jb 3:8].

In fact, those who live in sin are subject to the will of the devil and are possessed by him as by a special right, and their proud sovereign dominates their hearts with undisputed power in peaceful security. But when the spirit is inflamed with the desire for God, when it abandons the drowsiness of its negligence, and, mindful of its inborn liberty, rebels against the slavery of the enemy, this same enemy feels despised and cannot tolerate the revolt of its slave against it. Then it ignites itself with anger and girds itself for the struggle. It places temptations of every kind against the rebel, and tries with all its offensive arms to pierce through that heart which for some time it felt it possessed by a peaceful right.

Thus the Leviathan, which seemed to be sleeping, as it were, when it rested in the heart of the sinner, now comes awake by the provocation to battle, having lost the peaceful right of its perverse domination. ***Son***, says Scripture, ***when you come to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for trials*** [Si 2:1]. Thus, made free, he must be disposed to undergo difficult blows in the struggle who served peacefully as a slave in prison under tyranny<sup>121</sup>.

<sup>120</sup> Meditations from *Primum Regum*, nn 11 and 12. MssB 5206; 5242-5265.

<sup>121</sup> Retreat Meditations. MssB 3000-3002.

## **72: Practical suggestions**

***Flee from sin as from a serpent*** [Si 21:2]. If you had had the strength to resist, at this time temptations would be over<sup>122</sup>.

Temptations return if we have given in the first time because God wishes to give us the occasion to obtain that profit which we lost before<sup>123</sup>.

We have to prepare for greater temptations both to remedy defects committed and to arrive at where God wants us to arrive<sup>124</sup>.

Those who do not follow the inspirations God gives them to run away, and protect themselves from some danger, deserve to fall into it<sup>125</sup>.

Great temptations are matter and means of great sanctity, provided we have courage and fortitude<sup>126</sup>.

There are also certain temptations which are chased away by not taking them into account, even by making a show to yield to them, for example, if permission is granted to a good and fervent person who is tempted to leave his own Religious Institute, to enter a more austere one<sup>127</sup>.

## **CONVERSION**

## **73: The return of the Prodigal Son**

Let us picture the prodigal son at the foot of an oak tree, while he is guarding a herd of swine which he looks at thoughtfully, weak from the lack of food, tattered and squalid, in the act of thinking about his return.

He is induced to return to his father's house first of all due to the feeling of his actual misery. He contrasts his past state with his present. He has been reduced from a rich man to a poor one and it took only a few months to reduce him to such poverty and misery, and he fell into evil. He is moved to return also by remorse and repentance for the faults he committed. In his heart he recalls the memory of the goodness of his father and he contrasts it with the unworthiness of his conduct.

Before starting out on his journey, the prodigal son meditates on and figures out the manner of his return. He proposes to present himself to his father with a sincere confession, without any excuses or justifications. ***I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him: 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and you.'*** [Lk 15:18]. The disgust that he feels toward himself brings him to humiliate himself. ***I no***

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<sup>122</sup> **Spiritual Journal. July 29, 1809.**

<sup>123</sup> o.c., March 27, 1809.

<sup>124</sup> o.c. September 13, 1808.

<sup>125</sup> o.c., September 9, 1808.

<sup>126</sup> o.c., August 21, 1808.

<sup>127</sup> o.c., July 18, 1808.

**longer deserve to be called your son** [ib. v. 19]. He proposes for himself from then on austerity of life and penance. **Treat me as one of your servants.** What a change in a young man who was formerly unruly, presumptuous and engulfed in pleasure. This is how sorrow works in a repentant soul, a sorrow that should also work in me.

I, too, shall rise and return, not to my master or judge, but to my Father. If I have lost the title of son, He has not lost that of Father. I will find Him full of goodness and tenderness for me. I am certain that He Himself will come to meet me and make my return to him more easy and that He will grant me the forgiveness of my sins, and will then constantly help me on the road to perfection. Many others after having lived like me in sin, or lukewarmness, became true models of perfection and saints.

I can firmly hope that He will bestow profusely on me His consolations, even without my asking for them. He will know how to compensate me well and reward the victory that with His grace I will have acquired<sup>128</sup>.

#### **74: The resurrection of the soul**

If sin is the death of the soul, repentance is its resurrection. In fact, it reconciles us with God Who is our life, and thus life is given back to us. What then is more precious and more esteemed than this life that is given back by penance, that is a participation in the very life of God?

The sentence of eternal death already thundered against the sinner is transformed into a right to eternal life. Yes, indeed, eternal life is the sweetest fruit of conversion. God Himself assures us of this: ***I do not wish the death of the sinner, but that he be converted and live*** [Ezk 33:11]. Certainly penance makes the man: ***An heir in hope of eternal life*** [Tt 3:7] because from being a slave to sin, it makes him the adopted son of God. It makes him son because it makes him just, and from being an enemy of God, it places him again in His friendship, and forms him in His grace. This is well represented to us in the parable of the Prodigal Son. When the sinner, after much going astray, returns penitent to God's feet and says: ***Father, I have sinned against heaven and You*** [Lk 15:21] that good and loving Father receives him, and gives him the kiss of peace and immediately orders that the best robe be put on him, which is the nuptial garment of charity and grace. He puts on his finger a ring that is the pledge of faith and the seal of the Holy Spirit, a heavenly supernatural banquet is prepared: the Body and Blood of Christ His Son and our savior, with which He nourishes, reinforces and recreates him.

Not only this. Often repentance brings it about that man, rising from sin, receives a grace greater than that he had before, through which it often happens that ***Where sin increased. Grace overflowed all the more*** [Rm 5:20]. In fact we can say with certainty that by penance the sinner very often receives from God a greater

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<sup>128</sup> Retreat Meditations. MssB 2434-2446.

supply of grace than the innocent according to the word of the Gospel: ***The last shall be first*** [Mt 20:16].<sup>129</sup>

### **75: Repentance and trust**

I read in the Gospel about the leper who prayed: ***Lord, if You wish, You can make me clean!*** [Mt 8:2], and touched by Christ, he was immediately cured. I also read about the centurion who met Him, and said: ***Lord, my servant lies home paralyzed, say only the word and my servant will be healed*** [Mt 8:6-8], and in conformity with his faith, at that very instant the servant was cured. These two miracles have made me reflect that there isn't any ailment of our spirit, no matter how serious and apparently incurable, that, by means of recourse to the grace of the Lord, cannot be promptly and even prodigiously healed.

If we don't succeed in taking away the leprosy of sin, and if our heart does not rise from the bed of worldly pleasures in which it has lain perhaps for many years, the cause is solely within us, in our weakness, in our sloth, in our lack of trust. How deplorable it is to see that so many Christians, realizing their sad state, don't know how to decide to get themselves out of it effectively. I would like to try to bring into these despondent spirits, difficult though it may be, trust and confidence.

How is it possible to despair rising from one's special sins, even to arrive higher than the point from which one has fallen, and to succeed in being perfect Christians and even saints? To God, nothing is impossible, nothing difficult. If the devil could make someone fall into the misery of sin, will not God cause him to rise and repair the damage? Let us pay attention to what happens when we lack trust in God. We do more harm to Him by mistrusting Him than we did by sinning against Him.

Whoever has fallen into serious sins and has even multiplied them as much as he wants, but has not arrived at the point of denying God and His attributes of mercy and omnipotence, he has no reason to despair, in fact, know how he can keep his eyes lifted to His merciful Lord until he is moved to mercy<sup>130</sup>.

### **76: Believe in the pardon of God**

This is what all the tricks of the devil aim at: to take trust away from our spirit because this can save us: ***In hope we are saved*** [Rm 8:24]. But someone will think that it is true that God can pardon us, however, the point is something else. Will God, the Supreme Justice, always be disposed to turn toward us a serene and kindly countenance after so many faults by which we have provoked His wrath?

I understand the point. There are people who tend to measure the indignation of God with the measure of man. Thus, mercy may fall into an error that results highly

<sup>129</sup> Early Sermons, n. 38. 'The most sweet fruit of penance'. **MssB 1200-1203.**

<sup>130</sup> Early Sermons, n. 27. 'The desperation of the conversion of one's self.' **MssB 992-996; PVC pp. 37-39.**

dangerous for us and insulting to God. If the indignation of God were similar to the passion that disturbs man, there would be no reason to fear that it is not impossible to put out a fire of such vast wrath as that stirred up by our sins. But because in God there is not even the shadow of passion, and wherever He punishes us, it is not through anger, because He always has a loving care for us, we can in every case take courage and trust in the value of penance. Let us persuade ourselves that God loves us even when he is most angry, and if He threatens us because we have distanced ourselves from Him, it is because He wishes greatly to draw us to Himself. Let us think better of God after we have seen how He, through love for us, did not spare His only-begotten Son, but has seen how He, through love for us, did not spare His only-begotten Son, but has given Him over to the most cruel torments and an ignominious death to redeem us from our sins. And if for thirty-three years the Word made man has run after sinners who were fleeing from Him. If He still continues to send His messengers calling them, exhorting them, offering His mercy, how will He be able to reject us? No, it is not possible.

God never rejects a sincere repentance, even if the man has fallen into the abyss of all evils – rather, He accepts him, embraces him, and helps him to get up and recover his former dignity<sup>131</sup>.

## **77: Conversion and peace of heart**

***Return to Me, with all your heart,*** says the Lord through the mouth of Joel, ***and I will repay you for the years when the locust, the grasshopper, the devourer, and cutter have eaten*** [Jl 2:12, 25], when your passions reigned over you.

What consolation for a penitent sinner to find himself so rich after so much misery! What joy to see oneself surrounded by such great glory after so much ignominy! How pleasing must good health be after having experienced sickness. How dear is life after the sorrows, the distresses, and the agony of death! No more recourse, no more sadness, no more fears. A most sweet peace in the heart, an undisturbed calm in the heart, and unspeakable tranquility in the spirit. This is the fruit of penance, so sweet to taste in thought, how much more to taste it by experience.

Let us therefore turn our hearts to God immediately and sincerely. Considering our mistakes and misguided ways, let us have for them a very lively displeasure, a very strong displeasure, and a very strong detestation, and the most definite aversion.

Let us decide with all resolution and constancy to correct our life seriously and to make our behavior better. With renewed hope, or rather, with sure trust to obtain pardon, let us confess to the priest all the faults committed, ready to give the satisfaction owed to God and men.

Thus, our stoles washed and re-whitened in the Blood of the Lamb that same immaculate Lamb, Jesus Christ, who came to take away the sins of the world [cf. Jn

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<sup>131</sup> Early Sermons, n. 27. 'The desperation of one's own conversion'. **MssB 997-1000. PVC 39-41.**

1:29], we shall make ourselves worthy to go to meet Him, and to be admitted by Him to share in all those gifts that He carries with Him, and of His very heredity. ***They will walk with me dressed in white, because they are worthy*** [Rv 3:4]<sup>132</sup>.

### **78: Conversion is less difficult than it seems**

If St. Paul considered every tribulation light which he suffered in contrast to that immense weight of glory to which he aspired [cf. 2 Co 4:17], why will not the calming of our passions be something lighter?

We are not urged to those dangers, to that daily death, to those beatings, to those prisons, or to those discomforts which the Apostle had to suffer, but only to free ourselves from slavery to sin and to return to the life of grace.

Why should we wish to lose heart and let ourselves be taken in by mistrust? Those merchants who seek their riches far off over the sea often experience shipwreck. And yet they begin again with courage right from the start and carry on in their uncertain and dangerous voyage. Why don't we, who are certain of a happy ending, begin the same voyage again? Will we remain with our hands in idleness to consider our losses uselessly, without repairing them with all solicitude? Many holy people also fell and they fell grievously. David fell, St. Peter fell, and also many others. But, because of this, did they remain beaten and prostrate? No. In fact, they rose again with greater vigor, and became even more holy than they were before.

In the ailments of the body, hope is never given up. Why therefore should we lose hope in those of the spirit that are never without a remedy as often as those of the body? If it were true that the person who sins grievously cannot recover anymore, I would say that no one, except for a very few, perhaps, would set his foot in paradise. In fact, however, we see that the most illustrious saints were those who first had fallen, for example, besides St. Peter, there was Mary Magdalene and St. Paul. Inasmuch as that ardor which they had first exerted in doing evil, afterwards they changed to do good. It is for this reason that the devil uses all his strength to block conversion. He knows well that if they begin the task and are converted, they cannot be stopped any more, and aware of their debt, they engage themselves with such fervor to follow Christ that they often surpass those who live in innocence. ***The last shall be first*** [Mt 19:30]<sup>133</sup>.

### **79: God also supports the first steps of conversion**

God manifests His goodness in the highest degree as soon as man takes the first steps on the way to conversion, even though these are still uncertain and imperfect, since He does not reject them, but even rewards them with plentiful recompenses. This is how He Himself speaks of His people through the mouth of the prophet Isaiah: ***Because of his sins I had to strike him, hiding my face from him.***

<sup>132</sup> Early Sermons, n. 33: 'The sweetest fruit of penance'. **MssB 1206-1210.**

<sup>133</sup> Early Sermons, n. 27. 'Despair in conversion of self'. **MssB 1009-1012. PVC, pp. 44, f.**



***Because of this he was sorrowful and he went away with sadness on the ways of his heart. But I suddenly healed him. I led him and I filled him with consolations [Is 57:17-18].***

The King Ahab had reached the highest point of impiety, and the blood of the innocent Nabot, betrayed while he was going to take possession of his vineyard, was still steaming on the ground. God highly displeased, sent His Prophet to the treacherous king to say to him: ***After murdering, do you also take possession? For this the Lord says: 'In the place where the dogs licked up the blood of Nabot, the dogs will pick up your blood too. I am bringing disaster upon you. I will destroy you and will cut off every male in Ahab's line... because of how you provoked Me... [1 K 21:19, ff.].*** Scripture adds that there was no one who surpassed Ahab in evil to than point that ***He seemed to have sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the Lord... he became completely abominable... [ibid. v. 25].***

Yes, this impious man, having heard the threats of the prophets, filled with terror, gave some signs of sorrow and humiliation. ***He put on sackcloth and went about subdued [ibid. v. 27].***

Well then, God could not withhold the impulses of his heart and he immediately sought His prophet, and said to him with feelings of compassion: ***Have you see how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Since he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the evil in his time. [ibid. v. 29].*** O boundless heart of mercy<sup>134</sup>!

### **80: Do not put off the resolution of conversion**

To postpone continually the decision and to wait for the opportune time is always a dangerous matter in any circumstance whatsoever, but it is most dangerous when it concerns conversion from sin to Christ.

Scripture warns us. ***Say not: I have sinned, yet what has befallen me? For the Lord bides His time. Of forgiveness be not over-confident, adding sin upon sin ... Delay not your conversion to the Lord, put it not off from day to day. For suddenly His wrath flames forth, at the time of vengeance, you will be destroyed. [Si 5:4, ff.].*** This is how dangerous it is to postpone one's conversion. Therefore, we are all urged by Scripture to want to be converted swiftly. One truth alone well meditated on is enough to save a soul.

Again St. Paul urges us: ***Or do you hold His priceless kindness, forbearance, and patience in low esteem, unaware that the kindness of God would lead you to repentance. By your stubbornness and impenitent heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself for the day of wrath and revelation of the just judgment of God, who will repay everyone according to his works: eternal life to those who seek glory, honor and immortality through perseverance in good works, but wrath and fury to those who selfishly disobey the truth and obey wickedness. Yes, affliction and distress will come upon every human being who***

<sup>134</sup> o.c., MssB 1000-1002. PVC, pp. 41-42.

***does evil, Jew first and then Greek. But there will be glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good, Jew first and then Greek. There is no partiality with God [Rm 2:4, ff.]***<sup>135</sup>.

## **SACRAMENTAL PENANCE**

### **81: Confession: a divine gift**

God, who is eager to pardon our sins and to re-establish us in His grace, calls us and invites us to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. But sometimes it happens that the thought of going to Confession stirs up in our hearts a certain feeling of fear and dismay. The devil himself enlarges and exaggerates these false apprehensions. He, who a little while before had taken away every shame so as to lead us more easily into sin, now doubles the sense of confusion and shame to keep us from confessing our faults.

Now God assures us – whenever we decide, with sincerity and true sorrow, to place all our faults at the feet of one of His ministers, to take away from us every confusion; in fact, to change it into authentic glory. Indeed it cannot be denied, unless we also deny our faith, that in the confessional God amply remits and totally cancels from our soul every stain of sin, however grave it might be, the real and only reason for shame, making the spiritual life flower in it again, which had been crushed by the harsh cold of sin.

In Confession, the soul is cleansed, purified, and once again adorned with a ray of that most pure light that the Word of God pours into it. God put on it the precious mantle of grace, puts on its head a crown interlaced with the jewels of all the virtues, and puts on its finger the golden ring of charity, so that it recovers noble gifts and rich treasures of merits that it had before sinning as a matter of fact, it can happen that, upon rising, it even acquires a degree of grace greater than it had before it had fallen through sin.

Why, therefore, be afraid to suffer confusion and shame there instead where true honor and an inestimable glory waits for us?<sup>136</sup>

### **82: Sorrow and resolution**

We know that the devil and sin are pressing us with a thousand scares, they threaten us, they urge us from all sides. They want us to understand that it is impossible to escape them, that the chains of our bad habits grow heavier and heavier, that the difficulties of living in the grace of God are insurmountable.

We know, however, that in the Sacrament of Penance, the Lord Himself comes to rescue us from the hands of our enemies, against whom He fights for us, and He gives us a guarantee of recouping our glory and our freedom.

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<sup>135</sup> Retreat to Acolytes. **MssB 4598-4605.**

<sup>136</sup> Early Sermons, n. 10. 'The sinner invited to Confession'. **MssB 616-618. PVC pp. 57, f.**

What is requested of us is to say 'I will', with all the strength of our heart and then we become free, because the very omnipotence of God comes to our aid. Let us, therefore, resolve. Let us be determined and make a decision. Jesus Christ, the glorious Victor, is already risen after having conquered sin and the devil by His own death. Let us increase the glory of His triumph by seeing to it that He conquers sin and the devil in each one of us. Let us say in our hearts: Accursed sin, I detest you! Accursed Devil, I renounce you! Accursed chains, detestable fetters, I want to shatter you forever. And you, my dear Jesus, my God, I surrender, I offer myself, I abandon myself to you<sup>137</sup>.

### **83: The sweet fruit of penance**

Reconciliation with God is a combination of all that greatest and most desirable good things.

It brings, first of all, the remission of sin, indeed of all sins. There is no crime, however enormous in evil and multiplied in number, that penance cannot cancel, and not just once, but always, and an infinite number of times. God Himself guarantees this: ***But if the wicked man turns away from all the sins he committed, if he keeps My statutes and does what is right and just, he shall surely live, he shall not die. None of the crimes he committed shall be remembered against him; he shall live because of the virtue he practiced*** [Ezk 18:21-22].

These are the infallible promises of the Lord, through the mouth of the Prophet Ezekiel. Later on, through the mouth of Micah, God assures us also that He is pleased at the sight of our penance, so much so that He promises to cast away all our iniquities and to hurl our sins to the bottom of the sea, in order that they be buried in eternal oblivion [Mi 7:18-19].

Shall we continue to doubt the divine promises? Truth cannot betray itself. St. John says: ***If we acknowledge our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrong-doing*** [1 Jn 1:19].

To remit all our faults in an instance, even as many as have been committed during many years of a sinful life; to obtain a complete and sure pardon, even if we have abused the Divine Mercy many, many times; to cleanse so perfectly our soul that there doesn't appear the shadow of any stain anymore, not even the most personal and hidden. This is the fruit of penance. Is this not only precious? Shouldn't it be exceedingly dear and desirable to all of us?<sup>138</sup>

### **84: The Confessor and the penitent**

The priest who sits in the Tribunal of Penance represents the Person of Christ Himself and takes His place. Now if Christ, far from rejecting any sinner who has recourse to Him, and who shows true signs of penance, always treats the publicans

<sup>137</sup> Early Sermons. N. 23. 'Freedom from sin and the Devil.' **MssB 913-918. PVC, pp. 35-37.**

<sup>138</sup> Early Sermons, n. 33. 'The sweetest fruit of penance'. **MssB 1189-194; PVC, pp. 95-97.**

with great affection, and lovingly accepts the tears of the poor Magdalene, and absolves the adulteresses already condemned to death, and promises to bring with him into paradise a thief who turns to Him on the Cross, after previously having cursed Him, how will His minister not treat the penitents who come to him with the same spirit of kindness and meekness? Will he perhaps show repugnance for someone who presents himself, hurt by those wounds on which the Divine Physician prepares to pour His own precious Blood with kindness and effectiveness, like a heavenly balsam?

Further, the Confessor is also a man like all others, subject to the same dangers of falling, surrounded by infirmities, rendered compassionate by the experience of his own falls and those of others, he himself is bound to present himself for the purification of penance to be absolved of his own faults. He knows very well the frailty of human nature, in fact he knows that even the most holy and spiritual men are exposed to fall sometimes gravely. He is in a position, therefore, to appreciate fully that gesture of humility that transforms the sinner into a just man in the same act that he recognizes his sin in conformity with the golden saying of St. Ambrose: 'Granted, that we are all sinners, he is most worthy of praise who is the most humble; he is more just who recognizes himself as most unworthy.'<sup>139</sup>

Therefore, the more serious the faults revealed, the greater the difficulties to overcome, the Confessor has that much more reason to console himself, seeing the efficacy of grace. He also has a good basis for believing that the penitent belongs to that band of the Elect whom St. John contemplates dressed in white before the Throne of God: ***Because they have washed their robes, and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb*** [Rv 7:14]<sup>140</sup>.

### **85: There is no distress in confessing**

After the Lord has freed a soul from sin, He wishes to take all defects away from it, likewise imperfections, and finally the disordered inclinations of nature.

But, because of this, we should not become worried about going to Confession. Also even when there are defects and acts of negligence, according to the teaching of the Council of Trent, it is not necessary to confess them, even though confessing them is always useful and devout.<sup>141</sup> In fact, Holy Communion remits them, as the Church teaches.

Again, any fervent act of charity is sufficient to wash them away. Since these are only the effect of a diminishing of charity, any fervent act of charity cancels them completely.<sup>142</sup> Let us therefore love the Lord with all our mind, with all our soul, with all our heart and all our strength, according to the great commandment of the Gospel, and the Lord will have nothing against us, just as we will have nothing against Him.<sup>143</sup>

<sup>139</sup> St. Ambrose, *On Penance*, Book 2, c.10. PL 16,540.

<sup>140</sup> Early Sermons, 'The sinner invited to Confession'. **MssB 62-623. PVC, pp. 59, ff.**

<sup>141</sup> Council of Trent, Session 14, c. 5. *On Confession*. Denz. 1680.

<sup>142</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q. 79, a. 4.

<sup>143</sup> Correspondence, Letter to L. Naudet. December 1812.

The shoot is not apart from the vine, but remaining in the vine, and indeed bearing fruit, the farmer prunes it so it will produce more fruit [cf. Jn 15:2]. When St. Peter heard that reproach: ***O man of little faith, why have you doubted?*** [Mt 14:13], he was not far off, nor on the way of becoming far off, but he was close to Christ and on the way of becoming even closer to Him, being lifted up by His right hand. He was at the point so coveted by the Spouse of the Canticles, ***Draw me after You*** [Sgs 1:4]<sup>144</sup>.

## **86: Saint Gaspar, Confessor**

The good that St. Gaspar accomplished through the ministry of Confession, was exceptionally great. In guiding souls he had an exceptional skill and a very special spirit of the Lord joined to the greatest prudence.<sup>145</sup> There wasn't a soul that, no matter how much it was ensnared in passions and vices, by having recourse to the charity of St. Gaspar, did not find in him the compassionate Samaritan, who with the oil and wine of his goodness did not succeed in healing every deep wound. Various pastors and priests did not find a better solution for certain difficult and intricate cases than to send their penitents to St. Gaspar.<sup>146</sup>

In hearing Confessions, St. Gaspar had an exquisite gentleness, and a kind manner, and he knew how to adapt the reflection, the advice, and the remedy to the type of persons before him. Whether it was a question of priests, distinguished persons, or the humble people of ordinary background, he knew just what to say that was best suited for each person. The reverence and respect he had for priests was particularly remarkable.

Once when he was unable to go personally to hear a priest's confession, because he was confined to bed, he sent a young confrere, with this recommendation: 'Please go, but remember to treat him with all respect, humility and reverence.'

St. Bertoni had the consolation of seeing that many souls, through his ministry and that of his confreres, were won over to God, put back on the right road, and many even directed on the way to perfection<sup>147</sup>.

## **IN THE SCHOOL OF CHRIST CRUCIFIED**

## **87: Being disposed to suffer with Christ so as to reign with Him**

Many times Christ wishes to reveal to His apostles, and on different occasions, the sufferings of His Passion and Death. The first occasion was when St. Peter made his splendid profession of faith by confessing that He was ***Christ, the Son of the living God*** [Mt 16:6]. The second, after He had cured the epileptic possessed by the devil, when ***all were astonished by the majesty of God*** [Lk 9:43]. The third occasion

<sup>144</sup> O.c., Letter to L. Naudet. November 16, 1812.

<sup>145</sup> *Miscellanea Lenotti*, SA pp. 157, f.

<sup>146</sup> G. Giacobbe, *Life*, SA, pp. 487, f.

<sup>147</sup> *Miscellanea Lenotti*, SA, pp. 158, f.

was when He had taken the Apostles aside as they walked along the way and said to them: ***Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they who condemn Him to death ...but He will rise on the third day*** [Mt 20:17-19].

With that the Lord wished to prepare His disciples to confront their sufferings courageously and constantly. It is significant that He revealed to them His coming passion at a time when He seemed to be most honored and exalted, either by the profession of St. Peter, or by the greatness of His miracles, thus preparing His Apostles in the days of glory and joy, for afterwards what would happen during the days of sorrow. He did this as though to say to them: *Since you want to follow Me, prepare also to suffer with Me, so that you will not fail in faith and love.*

Jesus, kind Teacher, where You go, I also wish to go, since to suffer with You is definitely to ascend and advance, not to descend. If I come to Your company, I have nothing to fear, for I will always have Your help close at hand. I wish to suffer with You in this Jerusalem on earth, so that I may reign with you in the Jerusalem of heaven<sup>148</sup>.

### **88: The most treacherous of betrayals**

It is nothing new to the world that an innocent person, or a virtuous, or beneficent one be betrayed by a friend and often by the one most benefited. Nonetheless, just as a person more innocent and more virtuous and close to Him than the traitor, Judas; thus it can be said that there was never before, and never will be after a betrayal so perfidious.

What a wound this must have been for the heart of Jesus. ***My soul***, He said, ***is sorrowful unto death*** [Mt 26:38]. ***If an enemy reviled Me, I could have borne it*** [Ps 55:13]. But that a man so dear to Me, to whom I know that I have done so much good this pierces My heart.

This is Jesus, without doubt the most strong and invincible person, who by His free choice, subjects Himself as man to sustain the weight of those sufferings which we also experience, with the purpose of making satisfaction for our sins. In truth, His sufferings are all the more heavy as the knowledge of His mind is more acute and the sensitivity of His heart more refined. The exceedingly strong resistance with which He opposes the attacks of the sorrow that afflicts Him does nothing more than to wring Blood from all his veins with such force as to make Him exclude blood copiously, an unheard of sign of a completely new sorrow, that is, of a sorrow that reaches the peak.

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<sup>148</sup> On Patience, consideration 2. **MssB 4402-4407**. In the manuscripts three noteworthy texts 'On Patience' may be found: '1. On Patience - Consideration; '2. On Patience - Consideration'. More than likely Fr Gaspar made use of them for Domestic Exhortations, begun in September 1842. He referred to them when he wrote to Fr. Bragato: 'I bring to your attention that from Monday on, I preach every day in the house in the new Chapel, after morning prayer.' [Correspondence, p. 234. Letter of September 26, 1842. **BERTONI** 6, p. 69.

**Friend, what did you come to do?** [Mt 26:50] Judas greets Him with a peaceful approach and places his hand on Jesus' neck to embrace Him. What will the heart of Jesus do now? How will He accept him willingly, how He will forgive and comfort him, granting him pardon! In effect, He does not reject him. He accepts him, He allows him to kiss Him. However, He adds: **Judas, are you betraying Me with a kiss?** [Lk 22:48]. Now we understand the extreme treachery of this betrayal. Judas had made this arrangement with the soldiers who had to arrest Jesus. In fact, at the signal agreed upon, they came to Him, bound Him and led Him away<sup>149</sup>.

Betrayed treacherously, by a disciple who had received so many benefits, who was an intimate friend of Jesus, who was so privileged, betrayed into the hands of His most cruel enemies for the miserable sum of thirty pieces of silver. Jesus sees that He will be betrayed by so many Christians and even priests so greatly benefited by Him! What sorrows to that Heart! What distress!<sup>150</sup>

### **89: The most unjust sentence**

Without experiencing an intense emotion, one cannot look at Jesus, innocent and alone, even abandoned by His own disciples, before the judges who are His very enemies. These are searching for witnesses, and in fact, pay them, so that they will swear falsely. They question Jesus, and, at the same time, deny Him the right to speak. If he is silent, His silence is considered as a confession; if He speaks, His mouth is closed with a blow. This is a tribunal where justice is completely overturned, and where only anger, wrath and confusion prevail.

But let us follow Jesus to the tribunal of the governor, a Roman, who is presumably more impartial and reasonable. Pilate, after having examined Jesus on the accusations brought against Him, and having made His innocence clear, ascertains that the Jews want Him dead only out of envy. He goes outside and protests that he can find nothing blame-worthy in Him; and even more, Herod to whom in the meantime he had sent Him, had also declared Him innocent. Therefore, Pilate declares that after having scourged Him, he would set Him free.

But how? If Christ has been declared innocent, how does one wish first to beat Him and then free Him? And yet, Pilate knows His innocence, has Him scourged. Not only does he deny justice to the innocent Jesus by condemning Him, the worst thing is that justice is denied Him even as a guilty person in the manner of inflicting punishment on Him. To those condemned the judge first defines the particulars of the scourging; but, Jesus is left to the sad discretion of the executioners.

One is reluctant to describe the atrocious mockery to which the innocent Jesus was subjected when the soldiers put on His head a crown of thorns, and mocked Him with pretended acts of worship as paid to a king who is a joke. One cannot say which is greater, the pain or the ignominy.

<sup>149</sup> Early Sermons, n. 4. 'The Passion'. MssB 432-445. PVC pp. 272-276.

<sup>150</sup> Retreat Meditations. MssB 2604.

Many innocent people, we know, have been condemned to death. But has there even been a case where the judge first declares that there is no cause for death in the accused person, and then condemns Him to death?<sup>151</sup>

While making the way of the Cross, at the First Station, I heard these words: 'If I, Who am innocent, allow myself to be condemned, why do you, who are guilty of a thousand faults, wish with such solicitude to be justified of everything in the sight of others?'<sup>152</sup>

### **90: The most atrocious torment**

The torture of Jesus exceeds and surpasses all tortures. Not in His hands and feet only, but in all parts of His Body, all wounded, He experiences the most acute pains at the same time. A flood of pain, that spurts and flows from every part of His Body and Soul, makes His Heart fail. Those pains so far surpass every human experience and estimation as the senses of Jesus are more perfect, and therefore more capable of suffering. His Body, formed by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, was most delicate and sensitive, while His soul, by the excellence of His mind, and the immense openness of His heart, was more than ever ready to perceive the reason for the suffering.

But, did not the question of love - the question comes spontaneously – diminish the pains of Jesus, or at least His interior sadness? That love which made Him say: *I thirst* [Jn 19:28], thirst for the salvation of souls, thirst to suffer more precisely for their salvation?

No! In fact, His pains increased beyond measure. Because if He assured them voluntarily to free us from sin, He assumed them likewise in such a measure that was proportioned to the greatness of the satisfaction that He intended to offer for our sins. There, He poured out from His veins all his Blood squeezing it under the press of a torment that is the most atrocious of all. Oh, all you who pass today on the way marked by My pains – Jesus seems to invite us – fix the gaze of your contemplation on me, and see if there is any suffering like My suffering [cf. Lm 1:12].<sup>153</sup>

### **91: The moral sufferings of Christ**

While Jesus was suffering so terribly, the executioners applied a special torment to Him, which I consider the torment of torments. Before His eyes they insult such tragedy, they mock His moans, and they laugh at His torments. And with this they go so far as to wound His spirit much more deeply.

What wound is more bitter for a loving Heart that sees death not only prepared for it, but feels itself insulted by the very people for whose salvation it is dying? What a

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<sup>151</sup> Early Sermons, n. 4. 'The Passion'. **MssB 447-456. PVC, pp. 276-279.**

<sup>152</sup> Spiritual Journal. October 24, 1808.

<sup>153</sup> Early Sermons. N. 4, 'The Passion'. **MssB 478-487. PVC pp. 284, f.**



deep wound in that Heart already wounded by the sins of all men! In a Heart that attributes to itself those sins as though they were Its own faults, with the most bitter contrition!

Even the thieves who were crucified with Him insulted Him. And what about Jesus? Hardly had one of them repented and recognized his error, Jesus said to him: ***This day you will be with Me in paradise*** [Lk23:43]. But this increases His sorrow. The thief is saved, and My people, My chosen nation, My dear disciple, Judas, is damned! Where is the usefulness of so much Blood that I pour out? To many, this Blood will serve as judgment, and this cross a scandal! In speaking this way, He sighs to heaven, then in distress, He looks down, and woe, He sees His Mother. At that sight, the bitter waters of loving compassion which had inundated the heart of His Mother turn in all their fullness from that most bitter sea to the heart of her son, which in turn already full to the brim, gives it back again.

Mary is weeping and John weeps with her. ***Woman***, Jesus says, ***here is the one who from now on will be for Me your Son.*** [Jn 19:26]. Then, turning to the disciple, He said: *This woman, whom I must leave, will be your Mother.*<sup>154</sup>

## **92: Contemplation of the Passion**

When we want to pray, we ought to begin with Christ and His passion. Then we need to let our spirit free to be attracted by God.<sup>155</sup>

Among the other fruits, and there are many, which you must take from the Meditation on the Passion, one is this: that you not only have to repent of your past sins, but you must also afflict yourself because unruly passions live in you that have contributed to crucifying the Lord.

Another fruit is that you ask Him for pardon for your faults and the grace of a perfect dislike toward yourself, so as not to offend Him again. In fact, ask that in compensation for His many sufferings for you, He grant you to love Him and serve Him perfectly in the future.

A third fruit is that with great determination you harass to death every disorderly inclination no matter how small it is.

The fourth fruit is that you force yourself with all your strength to imitate the virtues of our Savior, Who has suffered not only to redeem us by making satisfaction for our iniquities, but also to give us an example, and to encourage us to follow in His

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<sup>154</sup> Early Sermons. N. 4. 'The Passion'. MssB 479-483. PVC, pp. 282-284.

<sup>155</sup> Spiritual Journal. August 17, 1808.

footsteps. What must we do for Him who has suffered so much on our account: ***Who has loved me and given Himself up for me?*** [Ga 2:20]<sup>156</sup>.

### **93: Always with Christ Crucified**

What happened to Peter after the Lord had made the first announcement of His Passion merits the greatest attention. The generous Apostle had scarcely made his profession of faith in Christ, the Son of the Living God, following a special inspiration from heaven, then suddenly he had to show also the serious immaturity that had remained in him on the part of human nature. When Christ announced His approaching Passion, in fact, Peter burst forth in lively protest: ***God forbid, Lord, no such thing shall ever happen to You.*** Jesus showing how little he had understood the mystery of the Passion [Mt 16:22].

We know the answer of Christ, terribly harsh: ***Get behind Me, Satan! You are an obstacle to Me. You are thinking not as God, but as human beings*** [ibid. V.23]. As if to say: you have understood Me by admitting that I am the Son of God - now you are My adversary and tempter, because you are speaking against My Passion, by seeking to dissuade Me from it, but it is the will of My Father that I suffer. You are still far from the heavenly wisdom which knows and enjoys the things ordained by God, and you find yourself ensnared by human and earthly wisdom that judges according to the criteria of men. Come after Me, and learn to judge things according to My criteria.

From this, one sees the great esteem and valuation Christ has for His Passion and Death insofar as they were ordained by the will of God for the salvation of the world. We also see how He wants to have a great understanding of His sufferings and humiliations which we too must meet to serve and obey God, in such ways that whoever wishes us to deviate from that, even a good friend, and even one highly illuminated by God in other matters, we hold him to be a tempter and a rock of scandal. It is necessary to esteem and love what God esteems and loves, and abhor and reject what God abhors and rejects<sup>157</sup>.

### **94: Maintain within yourself the same sentiments of Jesus Christ**

The evangelists, referring to the prophecies of the Passion made by Christ to His Apostles, observe that they ***did not understand anything of this; the word remained hidden from them, and they failed to comprehend what He said*** [Lk 18:34], In fact, ***they were afraid to ask Him about the saying*** [Lk 9:45]

Actually, not all those who read the Passion, or hear it spoken about succeed in understanding it, penetrating it, or forming a real feeling about it for themselves, just as in their time, the Apostles, who were still imperfect, did not understand or penetrate it.

<sup>156</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2631**. This selection has been taken from the classic work of Lorenzo Scupoli, *Spiritual Combat*, c. 52 – which Fr. Bertoni puts at the end of his Meditation – cf. **CS I, pp. 228, ff.**

<sup>157</sup> 'On Patience', Consideration 2. **MssB 4412-4414**.

Having the right feeling of the Passion, penetrating its mysteries, collecting the fruit that it brings with it and the grandeur of the world. Thus when Christ announced His Passion to them, they were greatly saddened and lost heart, because they considered it unworthy that Christ would permit in Himself something of this matter.

From this comes the fact that I, too, when I meditate on the Passion, am dry and without feeling, because I prepare to meditate on this mystery with a disposition that is contrary to it. I shall ask the Lord that He grant me the gift of understanding His Passion, that He give me the right feeling for it, so that the desire of St. Paul: ***Have among you the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus*** [Ph 2:5] may be realized in me.<sup>158</sup>

### **95: The true meaning of compassion**

O Jesus, our love, we wish to approach Your bleeding body to make reparation by the just offering of our tears for the most atrocious injury that has been inflicted upon You.

We see Your body, lacerated by so many wounds, that they have taken away from it not only any beauty, but even the shape of a man. We see your head pierced by so many thorns, Your hands and feet so wounded, and Your side open. We wish to fix our gaze here and with the sorrow conceived by such a sight, we shall fill our longing of our heart, aware that we shall never be able to weep as much as we should.

O Jesus, this is the compassion which we wish to show to You. Now, speak to us and show us what we must do to console Your Heart which is so afflicted. We know well that nothing can bring You as much comfort as seeing in us that fruit for which You suffered in Your passion, which is to destroy sin and to stir up within us love for You.

We want to offer You a heart free of all disordered affection, and we wish to cast sin away completely from ourselves, in fact, even those defects which displease You most, and to set out on a virtuous way of life in conformity with Your will. No, we do not want our compassion to end in tears, but we pledge ourselves to console You by our deeds.

Give us now, with Your blessing, a pledge, as it were, that our tears are pleasing to You. We wait for an abundance of particularly efficacious graces from You, to the end that by coming to kiss Your wounds, and by mixing our tears with Your blood, we may be able to understand and put into practice in our lives what You ask from us for Your comfort.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> On Patience', Consideration 2. **Mss B 4409-4411**

<sup>159</sup> Early Sermons, n. 4. 'The Passion. **MssB 490; 464-466.**

**96: The Passion of Christ in the intimacy of the heart**

Christ revealed to the Apostles the sufferings and death that awaited Him to make them see how He always kept His Passion alive in His Heart, by continually relishing interiorly His bitterness, by drinking this Chalice which was painful, in such a way, that whenever He ate and drank, He preached and performed miracles and marvelous works, He always kept present in His mind the thought of His Passion. Even in the Glorious Transfiguration, He spoke of it with Moses and Elijah, as of something concerning which He spoke with pleasure, although it was certainly most bitter [cf. Lk 9:30, ff.].

He did all this also in order to move me by His example, so that I would keep His Passion always present in my mind, and to enjoy thinking about it, and speaking about it willingly, so that it would become like bread which is eaten with all other food.

My good Jesus, how can I not find pleasure in that to which You continually gave thought, and to speak of what You so often spoke about? This is my desire, O my Loved One. Make your sorrow like a little bouquet to put before my eyes, and in my heart, reminding me always of it and giving me courage for compassion and love for You more than for myself. [cf. Sgs 1:13], and I shall not take all Your sufferings in a bunch, but I shall consider them one by one, while I walk through this mortal life and I shall comfort myself with their perfume until I reach eternal life. <sup>160</sup>



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<sup>160</sup> 'On Patience', n. 2. **Mss B 3404-4406.**

# **St. GASPAR BERTONI**



**FOUNDER of the CONGREGATION of the  
SACRED STIGMATA of OUR LORD, JESUS CHRIST**

## **SOME RUDIMENTS of his SPIRITUAL WRITINGS**

### **EASTER SEASON**

#### **Part 3 [## 97 - 146]**

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**ST. GASPAR BERTONI  
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**EASTER SEASON  
Part 3 [## 97 - 146]**

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## SEASON of EASTER

### EASTER of the LORD

#### **97: From death to life**

During these past few days, we have completed our prayers of penance, and we have seen our purification fulfilled. So, today, we celebrate Easter. We feel that we too have risen with Christ, and walk in the newness of life. So let us hasten with the disciples to find Christ in Galilee.

From fear and contrition, let reach out with assurance and confidence for the mercy of God. From the joy and consolations of this world, through repentance and sorrow, which come from God, we now move forward to a holy joy, to a real spiritual joy in the Holy Spirit. We no longer experience as much pain when we recall our past offenses. Rather, we rejoice and are filled with the desire for eternal rewards. Happy are we today who share this feeling of joy together.

Let us move on our race to Heaven so as to reach that goal toward which we set out, without ever turning back, I don't mean in our stride, but even by glancing backwards at the miserable world from which we have detached ourselves.

***If then you were raised with Christ***, St. Paul solemnly declares, ***seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Think of what is above, not of what is on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden now with not of what is on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden now with Christ in God*** [Col 3:1-3].<sup>161</sup>

#### **98: Contemplation of the Risen Christ**

Let us imagine that we see Him as He appeared to His disciples, fully alive, with the scars of His wounds shining brightly, inviting us to Heaven, where He is about to return. Let us ask for the grace to share in this great joy with our Savior.

The glorious life that Christ assumed in His resurrection was truly a new life. If we desire that the resurrection be real and perfect in us, then we must transform ourselves into that new life, and bring about a change, a reform, both internal and external. ***Just as Christ was raised from the dead, we too might live in newness of life.*** [Rm 6:4].

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<sup>161</sup> Early Sermons, n. 38. 'Spiritual Life': **MssB 1297-1300**. PVC, p. 289. This sermon, which was delivered on Easter Sunday, April 5, 1807, is noteworthy because it shows the deep understanding of the Word of God, especially St. Paul. Fr. Nello Dalle Vedove states: 'The Resurrection of Christ was seen by the writers of that time as an historical fact of great importance; hence, they exerted all their efforts to preserve the apologetic value for our faith. Quite different is the kerygma contained in the Paschal Mystery of Christ, which becomes our Easter. In this sense, St. Gaspar seems to have been ahead of the times in the modern trend of evangelization' [BERTONI, 2, p. 534].

From the Risen Christ, who can no longer suffer, we should learn a cheerful indifference in all the events of our human life, a tranquility of spirit, which cannot change, and an extraordinary peace of heart.

The dazzling brightness that surrounds the new life of Christ should reflect in our mind that Christian wisdom which lifts it above all created things, and lets it see God Himself. From this, through prayer, a very clear and practical knowledge of all that concerns our perfection and salvation will result.

To all, the gift of 'agility' which carries the risen Christ from one place to another in a second, we must correspond with promptness and fervor in all our tasks, in order to accomplish good works and be pleasing to God.

To the gift of 'subtlety', which renders the body spiritual, and allows it to go everywhere, we must correspond with a life according to the spirit, a life of living faith, a faith that is free of all impression of sensible things. This kind of faith is the result of spiritual death.<sup>162</sup>

## OUR EASTER

### **99: Death to sin**

St. Paul teaches: ***Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus, and we could also add, and washed by the Blood of Christ in the sacrament of Penance, which is a painful Baptism, were baptized into His death? We were indeed buried with Him through Baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life*** [Rm 6:3-4]. What do we mean by death to sin? Never to sin in anyway. This was accomplished by our baptism. Penance has renewed our resolution. It has rendered us dead to sin. Now with great care we must carry out this resolution, so that, no matter what sin, or inordinate passion, or perverse desire suggests to us, we must be totally deaf, never following these suggestions. We must persevere motionless, as if dead.

A dead person does not talk about another; he does no harm or violence, speaks no calumny; he does not persecute anybody; he does not envy those who do good; he does not insult those who are bad; he does not give in to any lust of the flesh; he does not stir up the flames of hatred; he does not flatter the rich and powerful of this world; he is not moved by useless curiosity; and seeks not the powerful of this world; he is not moved by useless curiosity, and seeks not the applause of the world around him; he does not seek honors, and never seeks revenge for any offense. Pride does not puff up; ambition does not excite him; vainglory does not move him; the false riches of this world do not attract him; unbalanced rage or anger never upset him, and the delicate beauty of a face does not enthrall him.

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<sup>162</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2637-2640**. In this meditation, we have adopted the adaptation already made by Fr. Stofella in the study concerning the Retreat Meditations, as found in **CS I, pp. 230-232**.



This is what it means to be dead to sin, never to enjoy the things of this world, inordinate attachments, and the pleasures of the world and the flesh.<sup>163</sup>

### **100: Risen to New Life**

After speaking of a future resurrection, St. Paul demands another kind of resurrection, that is a new style of life in this world through a change in our habits. When someone who is dissipated becomes chaste, when one who is greedy becomes generous, when an angry person becomes meek, this is a resurrection here below, and is the beginning of a future one.

When you hear this new life spoken of, you should strive to become very different and make a great change in yourself. But it makes us cry when we think of how much virtue the Apostle demands of us, and then notice how weak we have become after baptism as a result of our becoming rooted in our vices. It is like after tasting the heavenly manna, we return to look for the inferior food of Egypt. How many times have we been strengthened through Penance and freed from slavery of sin, and then fallen again into our old habits of sin, and freely bound our hands with those shameful chains.

Now, however, since in this Easter time we have risen through grace and are dead to sin, how can we dare to abuse such mercy? Instead, why can we not persevere with great vigilance? Penance not only cancels our former sins, but also strengthens us against future ones. In this sacrament we have done our part through contrition, accusing ourselves, and expressing the desire to amend our ways, so then we must take care and be on our guard that we not become defiled again.

Once again St. Paul speaks to us: ***If we have grown into union with Him, through a death like His, we shall also be united with Him in the resurrection*** [Rm 6:5]. Just as the body of Christ which was buried in the earth brought about the salvation of the world, so we, buried in the sacrament of Penance, have brought about fruits of justice, sanctification and many other gifts. Later on we shall receive the gift of resurrection.<sup>164</sup>

### **101: Hidden with Christ in God**

***Your life is hidden with Christ in God***, says St. Paul [Col 3:3]. Now let us see in what sense this hidden life with Christ in God consists.

The new life granted to us is the life of grace that we possess, and it is the life of glory that we are looking forward to. Both are hidden from the eyes of the world.

The world ignores this new type of interior life, which is spiritual and holy, and even loathes it and considers it as something gloomy and dead. Further, this new life appears to the world wrapped in the humble form of mortification, of apparent sadness and tribulations. Grace, virtue, and divine gifts, which can be called the soul of this life,

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<sup>163</sup> Early Sermons, n. 38. The Spiritual Life. MssB 1304-1308. PVC, pp. 291-293

<sup>164</sup> o.c., MssB 1305-1308. PVC, pp. 293, f.

are wrapped in the center of the heart and spirit. St. Augustine says: 'The good are hidden because their goodness is hidden and the thing they love is neither visible nor corporeal, therefore their merits are kept secret like their rewards' <sup>165</sup> St. Gregory the Great clearly points out that whoever cultivates virtues, truly lives hidden with God. 'Whoever loves to mortify himself greatly rejoices in the rest he finds in contemplation. He appears to the world as a dead man, and he hides himself in the midst of interior love from all the troubles of this world' <sup>166</sup>

Thus we can see the true meaning of a man risen with Christ. Can he still enjoy the base things of this world? Can he seek for anything in this world except those heavenly supernatural things that he will love with in Heaven? ***If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Think of what is above, not of what is on earth*** [Col 3:1-2].<sup>167</sup>

### **102: Elements of the life of glory**

The life of glory, which we look forward to with hope, is understood even less by the world, because the world does not understand the glorious life to which Christ has risen, and is now living with the Father. This is why St. Paul says: ***Your life is hidden now with Christ in God. When Christ your life appears, then you shall appear with Him in glory.*** [Col 3:3-4].

St. Augustine illustrates this passage with an analogy. During winter, even that tree which is green seems to be dead, but when spring comes, its roots give life to the leaves, and it bears fruit again. Such is our life. It can be compared to winter at those times when Christ, our Sun, is far away from us, and is hidden from our eyes, surrounded by dark clouds. We are just like the plants that are dried up and without leaves, without any sign of beauty. Within us, however, we still have deep roots of charity which are alive and living in God, as is His life supporting soil. Summer will come when Christ appears in His glory, and then we shall live again in His resurrection and produce leaves and fruit which will be the glorious gifts of everlasting happiness.<sup>168</sup> St. Augustine exclaims: 'O most sweet Jesus, may this pact with you be strong. Let me die to myself interiorly, so that you alone may not live in me.'<sup>169</sup>

***Et I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me,*** cries St. Paul [Ga 2:20]. In another place he says: ***Our citizenship is in heaven,*** [Ph 3:20]. Again he tells us: ***But you are not in the flesh, you are in the spirit,*** and further: ***I long to depart from this life, and to be with Christ.*** [Ph 1:23]. These are the deep sentiments of a man who is dead to sin, who no longer enjoys the things of this earth. These are the profound sentiments of one who lives hidden with Christ in God, who searches only for

<sup>165</sup> St. Augustine, Commentary on the Psalms, 53, 3. PL 36:621.

<sup>166</sup> St. Gregory the Great, Morals in the Book of Job. Book 5, 5-6. PL 75, 687

<sup>167</sup> Early Sermons, n. 38. The Spiritual Life. MssB 1309-1312. PVC pp. 294-296.

<sup>168</sup> St. Augustine, Sermons on the Old & New Testaments. XXXVI, 4. PL 38, 216..

<sup>169</sup> id.

the things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. What sweet ecstasy of a soul carried away by the joy of these holy thoughts.<sup>170</sup>

### **103: To heaven, to heaven!**

To Heaven, then, let us turn our thoughts, to Heaven all our affection, to Heaven all our heart, for there is our treasure, our life. There we will find delights without thorns; pleasures without sadness; honor without envy. We will be filled with an abundance of divine consolations [Ps 36:9].

In the meantime, since our life is hidden, let us be crucified to the world and the world to us. Indeed let us mortify ourselves. St. Paul tells us: ***Put to death, then, the parts of you that are earthly*** [Col 3:5]. That is to say, since you are already dead to sin, persevere in this death through mortification. Mortify your passions, which, even after doing penance, come alive in many ways, and they are, as St. Paul explains: ***Immorality, impurity, evil desire, and the greed that is idolatry. Because of these the wrath of god is coming. By these you too once conducted yourselves, when you lived in that way*** [Col 3:5-7]. ***What profit did you get then from the things of which you are now ashamed?*** [Rm 6:21].

Do we want to turn back now? To dig up our sins? To become slaves? To spoil the overflowing redemption of Christ, and cancel out the price of his blood? Oh, no, no! To heaven, to heaven, to eternal life we are called. We are already on the way and making headway. Let us continue on, until we reach our goal, our heavenly homeland. From all eternity god has enrolled us as citizens of heaven. We are his servants, his heirs. Let us quicken our steps with enthusiasm, determined to reach our goal. Christ awaits us and has already prepared a place for us, even a throne.

To Heaven, then, to Heaven. ***If then you were raised up with Christ, set what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Think of what is above, not of what is on earth*** [Col 3:1-2].<sup>171</sup>

## **THE EUCHARIST – THE ETERNAL EASTER**

### **104: The Sacrifice of the New Covenant**

***Everywhere they bring sacrifice to My name and a pure offering*** [Mt 1:11]. This is that sacrifice which is totally pure and holy and is offered in every place on earth by all people. We know through faith that this pure and holy oblation is the sacrifice of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist. There is nothing in the whole world which magnifies the name of God and celebrates His glory so much as the Eucharistic sacrifice, in which Christ offers Himself as a victim to God through the hands of His priests.

<sup>170</sup> Early Sermons, n. 38. Spiritual Life. **MssB 1318-1322. PVC 297-299.**

<sup>171</sup> Early Sermons, n. 33. The Spiritual Life. **MssB 1318-1322. PVC pp. 297-299.**

The Eucharist is called incense above all because it is the sacrament of the Body of Christ burnt in the fire of charity on the altar of the Cross, on which He has softened the wrath of God with His sweet perfume, and reconciled man with God. The Eucharist not only represents, but really contains Christ immolated for us, burnt with sorrow and love as a sacrifice to God.

Incense symbolically stands for the fervent prayers and aspirations of both the priests who consecrate the Eucharist and the faithful who receive and consume it. The angels offer to God: **Bowls filled with incense, which are the prayers of the holy ones.** [Rv 5:8]. Therefore, let us leave that table like lions, spitting fire, ready to strike terror in the devils, with our minds and hearts filled with the love with which Christ, our leader, has inflamed us.

The Body of Christ is a truly pure and holy oblation that cannot be defiled by any unworthy act, or ill will, either on the part of the priest or the faithful. The Eucharist always maintains its purity and its sacramental purifying strength, even in those cases which the celebrant may not be worthy.<sup>172</sup> The Eucharist is able to cleanse us not only from sin, but even from the root of sin, of concupiscence, of temptations, of passions. It is capable of removing even the occasion of sin and to confer the strength to overcome them.<sup>173</sup>

### **105: The Sacred Banquet**

**Come, eat of my food** [Pr 9:5]. This is how the Lord invites us: behold the table I have prepared for you, that food on which the angels and saints of heaven nourish themselves. This is the same food I offer to you, pilgrims and exiles of the earth. **Take and eat, this is my body, this is my blood.** [Mt 26:26, ff.] With which I have redeemed you from your sins and from the slavery of your enemies.

Look at how much suffering, and what kind of death it cost Me to prepare this table for you. The best way to show your gratitude is to correspond to My desire that you constantly approach this table. To whom shall you go to receive life, if you do not come to Me, who alone is able to give it to you? Who will give you peace of mind, who will satisfy the desires of your heart if not I, who am your beginning and your last end? I am your Father, teacher, friend, and brother. And if you are sick, I am your doctor, I am your health, and one day, I will be your happiness and your glory.

If I were to sit here on a throne with all the splendor of my majesty, I could understand your timidity; but since I am hidden in the Blessed Sacrament and well known to people, why do you not approach Me with great confidence, knowing that My delight is to be with you? [cf. Pr 8:31]. Who does not want to hear these loving words and accept that moving invitation deep within his heart? Happy are they who listen to the divine voice; happier still are they who keep it and put it into practice<sup>174</sup>.

<sup>172</sup> cf. Council of Trent: Sess. XXII, c. i. Denz. 1742.

<sup>173</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3438-3443.**

<sup>174</sup> Early Sermons. N. 17. Frequent Communion. **MssB 770-772. PVC pp. 110, f.**

### **106: Spiritual medicine**

Some say that if we would consider ourselves worthy, then we could easily receive the Eucharist. But, we are sinners, full of imperfections, and far removed from that fervor that we notice in practicing Christians. Hence, we hesitate to receive it more out of fear of condemnation than for our salvation.

He who reasons in this fashion bases his actions on that saying of St. Paul: ***Whoever eats in an unworthy manner, eats his own condemnation.*** [1 Co 11:27, 29]. But, we need also to reflect on the advice that the Apostle adds: ***A man should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup.*** [ib]. From the constant practice of the Church these words have been interpreted with certainty in this sense: a man is obliged to examine his conscience, and if he is aware of any grave sin, he must hasten to cleanse his soul in the sacrament of Penance, with the firm resolution never to sin again. Having done this, without any fear, he may eat this Bread, about which St. Augustine says: 'Partake of It for It is bread, not poison.'<sup>175</sup>

Recall the warm reception given by the father of the prodigal son, who returned to him after dissipating his patrimony on bad habits. He confessed his sins, and immediately he received the most tender signs of affection. He was clothed in the finest robe, and brought into his father's house for a festal banquet.

Those who stay away from receiving this sacrament because they do not feel any sort of fervor act in the same way as persons who are cold, but do not want to approach the fire, unless they first warm up. But, the Eucharist, as St. John Damascene says: 'Is a lighted piece of coal that gets rid of the cold and lukewarmness'<sup>176</sup>. And those who keep away from the fire become colder likewise, those who, with different excuses stay away from the heavenly fire, find themselves spiritually frozen and hardened.

St. Bonaventure tells us: 'It is healthy and useful to man to receive this medicine frequently, and try to receive it with the greatest devotion. But, even if sometimes he feels dry and without any fervor, trusting in divine mercy, let him receive It with confidence. If he is unworthy, let him remember that it is all the more necessary to see the doctor the more you feel sick.'<sup>177</sup>

### **107: The right disposition**

Let us reflect on the table where we are seated at the Eucharist. That table which the angels look at with amazement and at which they dare not to look because

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<sup>175</sup> St. Augustine. Tract on John XXVI, 11. PL 35,1611.

<sup>176</sup> St. John Damascene, On Orthodox Faith. Book IV, c. 13. PG 94, 1150.

<sup>177</sup> Early Sermons. Frequent Communion. **MssB 764-769. PVC, pp. 107-110.** The quote from St. Bonaventure is found in the ***Perfection of Religious.***

of the splendor that radiates from it, at this table we are fed, and are changed into one body and one flesh with Christ.<sup>178</sup>

The great effect of this sacrament, as St. Thomas teaches, is to transform us into God, and to make us one with Him out of love.<sup>179</sup> What faith must be absorbed, what hope should strengthen us, with what charity must we be inflamed, with what innocence must we be adorned if we are to receive the Lord and be transformed mystically into Him?

If it be true that disposition must be of the same category as the form, as the philosophers claim, then undoubtedly a divine disposition is needed in order to receive divine food, a commitment to regulate life in such a way that it is supernatural and divine, radically different from carnal and mundane life. God alone should be the object of our will and intellect. God alone should be present during our conversations; God alone in all our actions. Nothing should remain that smacks of the world, that savors of the flesh and senses.

Let us examine our life, and if we notice that it is not what it should be because it is still influenced by the world, let us take steps to change our ways by diligent practice of virtue, and bring it to that point to which the Eucharist urges us.<sup>180</sup>

### **108: The attraction of love is love itself**

Jesus gave His Body and Blood, His very being, to His disciples to show the richness of His love for His people. Just as in the Incarnation He unites our flesh hypostatically to His divinity, so likewise in the Eucharist He unites sacramentally that same flesh and divinity to each one of the faithful who communicates, so that we become a divine person almost like another Christ and God.

Christ loved us to the end [Jn 13:1], that is, He loved us with the greatest everlasting love, leaving Himself entirely in the Eucharist, because He is always present to us, so that we might live in him, converse with Him, and let Him know about our difficulties, our temptations and all our troubles, so that we might seek and ask His help. ***I found delight in the sons of men***, as He says in the book of Proverbs [8:31].

Do we find our delights with Him, or do we find them in the world? Christ loved us in this manner in order to kindle in us joy and also endeavor to love Him ardently. Love is like a magnet: one loves because he is attracted by love. Let us give ourselves entirely to him, to Him, who being God, gave Himself entirely to us, and He does this every day. Let us give ourselves to Him without any reservation, to Him who has given everything to us without holding back anything of Himself.

St. Cyprian wrote during the time of persecution: 'The most difficult and bitter struggle is at hand. For this, the soldiers of Christ must prepare themselves with

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<sup>178</sup> cf. St. John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew. 82, 5. PG 58, 743.

<sup>179</sup> St. Thomas. *Summa Theologica*. III, q. 73, a. 3, ad 3m; q.75, a.1.

<sup>180</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3469-3472.**

undefiled virtue and with strong faith, recalling that every day they drink the chalice of the Blood of Christ, so that they may shed their own blood for Christ.’<sup>181</sup> It was this chalice that inspired St. Lawrence to face the flames, St. Sebastian the arrows, St. Ignatius the lions, and all the mother martyrs many other forms of torment. They did this to return love for love, life for life, their death for the death of Christ. It was the Eucharist that gave the martyrs strength and joy. That is the reason why during the time of persecution the Christians received Communion every day, and they even carried the Eucharistic Bread to their homes.<sup>182</sup>

### **109: Benefits to be gained from assiduity for the Eucharist**

When I recall in the Gospel the great devotion of the people, who, neglecting other concerns, followed Christ, and the gracious generosity with which the Master rewarded them by feeding them with the bread He had multiplied, I like to make a comparison with the devotion of the faithful toward the Blessed sacrament, and the great diligence with which these people approach the altar to meet their Lord and Master, who is present under the sacred species.

If we can admire the devotion of that first group, then we can esteem more the faith of these people of today, a faith that assures them with an absolute guarantee that they will find here that which their senses cannot see. Greater then is the gift of grace with which Christ responds to their love, since He does not just multiply earthly bread, but gives Himself as food to nourish their spirit abundantly. It is right to point out the example of these faithful ones for the edification of so many tepid Christians, who rarely, or as if by others’ force, approach Christ in the Eucharist.

One of the most frequent excuses alleged by those Christians who are not practicing is that their duties, such as taking care of their families, do not allow them either the time or the opportunity to frequent the sacraments more often. The thought comes to mind to ask them if these tasks keep them from sitting down each day at their earthly tables. Is not the Eucharist the food of the soul? **My flesh is real food, and My Blood is real drink.** [Jn 6:55].

Yet, if they were to approach Christ more frequently how much help they would find for their tasks and other earthly affairs! Uniting themselves to true wisdom, who is Christ, they would be well informed as to how to act with prudence and skill in their tasks. If only they would charge up their energy at this Powerhouse, they would feel invigorated, and be able to sustain the weight of the cares that overburden them, without feeling weighed down, in keeping with the promise of Christ: **Come to Me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest.** [Mt 11:28].

How true it is that our loving Savior not only enjoys conferring graces on souls, but also keeps a special eye on the worldly concerns of those who faithfully approach Him.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> St. Cyprian, Exhortation to Martyrs. C. 6. PL 4 686.

<sup>182</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2594-2599.**

<sup>183</sup> Early Sermons. N. 17. Frequent Communion. **MssB 756-762. OVC pp. 102-105.**

### **110: St. Gaspar's Mass**

He celebrated Mass with the greatest devotion, and he was upset when he was unable to celebrate Mass because of illness. Even when he was confined to bed, he wanted to assist at Mass every day. This was celebrated in the chapel next to his room. Likewise, he wanted to receive Holy Communion each day without fail.<sup>184</sup>

The Eucharistic celebration was the greatest pleasure of his heart. It was here that his spirit found a treasure trove of graces and spiritual gifts which seemed to transform him into another person. He longed for the blessed hour to celebrate mass, and when it was time, he was overjoyed.<sup>185</sup>

Those who had the good fortune to assist at his Mass relate that such was his modesty and devotion, such his recollection, it appeared as a form of rapture with God, that they were moved to compunction and affection of heart.

In fact, the composure and modesty with which he celebrated Mass, the distinct and careful recital of the prayers, the lifting up of his spirit, was evident, portrayed the image of a perfect priest, a real messenger of the Lord' [MI 2:7].<sup>186</sup>

### **111: Contemplation of the Eucharist – living experiences**

During the Eucharistic prayer of the Mass, I felt as though my mind opened up so that I recognized the One I was speaking with. Likewise I felt great devotion and an increase of love in my prayer. There followed certain outbursts of my heart toward God. It was just like a person who is surprised by a good friend he had not seen for a long time and then, when he does see him, he has the urge to embrace him.

Then came the desire that the vision would become brighter, and a longing to reach the Greatest Good. But since I was in public, and fearful of my vanity, I resorted to thinking about some grave sins. From this came the realization of His goodness and love, and I broke into tears which lasted until after Communion.

In the meantime faith and confidence grew apace with humility and loving reverence. Finally, at Communion time I felt greatly moved and experienced feelings similar to my first Communion day as a child, feelings that I had never experienced since that day. This recollection lasted for more than an hour, and actually remained with me through the evening.<sup>187</sup>

During Mass, I experienced brief but vivid impressions and a great feeling of the Divine Presence, confidence, love and the desire to be transformed into Him, so that Jesus would live in me and not I any more. This grace of union did not last beyond

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<sup>184</sup> G. Giacobbe, *Life of the Servant of God, Gaspar Bertoni*. 1858. SA p. 102-105.

<sup>185</sup> *Positio*, p. 121.

<sup>186</sup> *ib.*

<sup>187</sup> *Spiritual Journal*. October 9, 1808. Feast of St. Dennis – St. Gaspar's [31<sup>st</sup>] birthday.



Mass, but it returned as I was on my way to do an errand for family matters, just as when I was in Church.<sup>188</sup>

There was a rather vivid sentiment of reverent love for the presence of the father during the Canon of the Mass. It was accompanied by a loving confidence and love for the Son. At the Consecration, I experienced a sense of priestly dignity in representing the Person of Christ before the Father. Then followed an even greater tenderness and profound humility in holding Christ in my hands right after the Consecration. Here was the greatest good joined to the greatest evil, the Purest to the most impure; the Most Holy, to the greatest sinner. This feeling lasted until after Communion, and was followed by compunction until evening.<sup>189</sup>

## THE LIFE OF FAITH

### 112. The excellence of faith

I would like to raise my voice like a trumpet [cf. Is 58:1] and let the world know the reasons why I glory in my faith. They are reasons that are common to all those who participate in this glory. First through faith, the believer loves and glorifies his Creator. Second, through this same faith, he is then loved and honored by his Creator.

Thanks to our faith, we have from God a conscience and an appreciation that is proper to the Divine Nature, superior to the capacity of our human nature. The eye cannot see, nor the ear hear, nor has it entered into the heart of man those things that God has hidden from the wise and [prudent of this world, but by means of faith, He reveals them to the meek and humble of heart who fear Him and glorify Him and love Him by believing [cf. Mt 11:25]. God alone knows and understands Himself. We need to follow the inspirations He deigns to grant us humbly and gently. From God we have to learn what is needed to know God, because we know only what He Himself manifests to us.

Believing in self-surrendering that an intelligent creatures offers to his Creator, a self-surrender that is not stupid, or foolish, but reasonable, and hence, glorious for him who recognizes the most beautiful boast and adornment of his nature. Believing renders the intellect as a servant of faith [cf. 2 Co 10:5], but this servitude comes not from weakness or ignorance. No, it comes from a generous soul and from a truly rational thought, from a mind that is truly sublime and superior to the ordinary way of thinking. To believe of God things that are superior to our human intelligence requires great strength of soul, together with genuine and sincere charity.

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<sup>188</sup> o.c., October 25, 1808.

<sup>189</sup> o.c., December 11, 1808.

Certainly he honors God who follows the precepts that God manifests to him through his intellect, and those that He has written, so to speak, in nature. But the one who honors Him more is the one who elevates himself to Him through his faith.<sup>190</sup>

### **113: Difficulties of faith**

The glory of virtue increases much more when there are greater difficulties that oppose it. Now, then, he who believes needs a mind that is very strong in order to combat and put to flight all thoughts and reasoning that are contrary to the faith. It is a tough and dangerous battle that we must wage against our own reasoning. Our faith represses that arrogance of comprehending the incomprehensible. Faith makes us attentive and careful to study and meditate on the mysteries which are revealed by God. What glory here is to the faith that can lead the human spirit to the haven of truth, guiding it successfully amid so many reefs.

These are difficulties that are inherent to man. Now, while on the inside faith is battling against inane reasoning, on the outside a fight breaks out against innumerable adversaries. Hence, it is necessary as St. Paul says: ***There have to be heresies among you in order that also those who are true believers among you may be known*** [1 Co 11:19]. Against humble faith they use shameful irreverence, and often employ force and arrogance to crush the timid or use cunning and trickery to deceive the naïve ones.

However, we must admit that the greatest difficulty that man can experience in his belief comes from the very object of faith, namely, God. This may seem like a paradox, but it is from this that comes the greatest glory that we can render to God with our faith. St. Thomas teaches that what appears more certain in itself turns out less evident to us because of the weakness of our intellect which finds itself in the face of all these very evident truths just like a bat in the bright light of the sun.<sup>191</sup>

This is the reason why so many doubt some articles of our holy faith which are really very true in themselves. This happens not because there is little certainty, but because of the weakness of our intellect.

Who is that noble eagle with strong eyes that can stand the flash of such light, and can penetrate with a scrutinizing look into the depths of this inaccessible ocean? The spirit of faith. ***The Spirit scrutinizes everything, even the depths of God*** [1 Co 2:10].<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Fragment of a discourse on Faith: **MssB1552-1557**. This is a text of a sermon which was to be given on the IIIrd Sunday of November 1812. This sermon is incomplete because of a grave illness which in that year brought St. Gaspar to the brink of death [BERTONI, 3, p. 404].

<sup>191</sup> St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 1, a. 5 ad 1m.

<sup>192</sup> Fragment of a sermon on Faith. **MssB 1558-1568**.

### **114: Work with a spirit of faith**

To seek God alone, to see God in everything – this is to make oneself superior to all human things<sup>193</sup>. Seek God alone, and nothing else, neither consolations, nor self-satisfaction<sup>194</sup>.

We should not listen to the voice of our timid nature. God has shared His divine nature so that we would not live and work any longer according to our nature. We need to judge our strength not on the basis of our first nature, but on the second which was granted us by our adoption as sons of God. Let us take care then not to impede the strong and marvelous effects of our second nature with weak thoughts and affections of our first nature.

Let us allow God to enter freely and take possession of this heart which He loves so much and desires to unite with Himself. We know the time of His visit. Let us implore all creatures and our own senses not to bother our soul when it is at rest in the bridal chamber of the Lord. Nothing more is needed. In His own good time, He will bring forth fruit to precious, so lofty, so noble, worthy of such holy and sublime nuptials.<sup>195</sup>

## **CHRISTIAN HOPE**

### **115: Trust in God – it is a great trust**

Oh how the ways of God are different from the ways of men! If only we could learn them so as not to get lost. Like Abraham, father of all believers, we need to believe **hoping against hope** [Rm 4:18]. Blessed are they who close the eyes of their blurred vision when the most wise hand of God takes ours to lead us and to govern us! Our journey here below is short, but our stay in the house of the Lord will be eternal and unchangeable. ***The sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed to us.*** [Rm 8:18].<sup>196</sup>

Everything that God does is the best. O hands that are so wise, and how they work in secret. Let us trust Him always and we will never be disappointed. In so far as suffering is concerned, let us recall the words of Christ. ***I will show them how much he will have to suffer for my name.*** [Ac 9:16]. Take courage; take courage. This is the better portion that God reserves for those who are dear to Him, but it is not a morsel for everyone.<sup>197</sup>

Let us trust in God, for it is a beautiful trust, and let us distrust ourselves. ***But for me, to be near God is my good, to make the Lord God my hope*** [Ps 73:28].

<sup>193</sup> **Spiritual Journal**. July 30, 1808.

<sup>194</sup> *ib.* December 23, 1808

<sup>195</sup> **Correspondence**, p. 65 Letter to L. Naudet. Feb. 1813.p. 322.

<sup>196</sup> *o.c.*, p 322. Letter to Fr. Bragato, august 27, 1840.

<sup>197</sup> *o.c.*, p. 37. Letter to L. Naudet. December 14, 1812.

When it becomes necessary to **undergo many hardships** [C 14"22] with hope we shall have easy access to His glory for which our hearts continually desire, and in which our heart will find no rest until it rests in God for whom it was created.<sup>198</sup>

### **116: Deep calls unto deep**

Oh how great must our hope be in God! Not great only, but very great. ***They that hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar as with eagles' wings. They will run and now grow weary, walk and not grow faint.*** Pls 40:31].<sup>199</sup>

Let us recall these words of Scripture: ***Deep calls unto deep.*** [Pos 42:8]. The deep of light calls out to the deep of darkness; the deep of mercy calls out to the deep of misery. If our wickedness is great, the mercy of God is much greater. ***How great is your goodness, O Lord, which You have in store for those who fear You.*** [Ps 31:20]. He hides it not only from the eyes of the world, but even from those eyes who need to receive it, for they do not see it no matter how near it is and ready to rain down in abundance. Yet, when they come to it, taste it with its unspeakable flavor, and touch it in an inexpressible experience, they do not understand, nor, are they able to realize what it is, because of the weakness of their intellect.

God loves us with a great love, and it is so rich and powerful that it outdistances every kind of measurement that we can imagine about Him, about His goodness, His kindness, His love. Our expressions, even those strong ones, are mere trifles before such Majesty, and we cannot help being confused. Let us rise above all this and expand our hearts all out of proportion. As St. Bernard says: 'this Spouse comes to meet great souls, and He will strive to work great things in them'<sup>200</sup>.

### **117: Earthly life is a rough sketch of heaven**

Our Lord wants us to do His will on earth as it is done in Heaven, that means, not partially, but totally, and without anything getting in the way. In the short time before our being taken up into Heaven, let us live like angels, even though we are only men, and let us transform our stay here on earth into a rough sketch of Heaven. Our Lord came down from Heaven to show us how we should live on earth.

***How shall I make a return to the Lord for all the good things He has done for me?*** [Ps 116:12]. Here is the answer: ***The cup of salvation I will take up, and I will call upon the name of the Lord*** [v. 13]. Here is what will follow: generous patience and loving trust in prayer. ***My vows to the Lord I will say in the presence of all people*** [v. 14], and in His own good time will follow: ***Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of His faithful ones*** [v. 15].

<sup>198</sup> o.c., p. 323. Letter to Fr. Bragato. September 26, 1840.

<sup>199</sup> **Correspondence**, p. 24. Letter to L. Naudet, Nov. 16, 1812.

<sup>200</sup> o.c., p. 40. Letter to L. Naudet, Dec. 1812. The quote from St. Bernard is found in his Sermon 32 on Canticle 8. PL 183, 949.

It behooves us then to cry out with joy in the midst of our troubles. ***O Lord, I am Your servant, the son of your handmaiden*** [Ps 116:16]. Then freed from the troubles, chains, and restrictions of our defects and inclinations, let us continue our rapture of: ***You have loosed my bonds. To You I will offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving.*** Having tasted the hope of those first proofs of the fulfillment of the divine promises, with our hearts intoxicated with love and ready for the undertakings of God's glory, we shall repeat more with our actions than with our words: ***My vows to the Lord I will pay in the presence of all His people; in the courts of the house of the Lord, in your midst, O Jerusalem.*** [Ps 116:18].

May His holy name be blessed and glorified by our words and actions forever.<sup>201</sup>

### **118: Earthly goods – heavenly goods**

Earthly goods certainly exist. However, they are not adequate for our good and can never satisfy us.

They object of a heart, whose desires are almost infinite, cannot be anything less than an infinite God. How can we imagine that small and limited things can satisfy it? If our heart is as vast as the ocean, how can a few brooks fill the immensity of its desires? Oh! In Heaven, it is in Heaven that we will find something appropriate for our heart, a God who is infinitely good.

My God, only You ***will show me the path of life, the fullness of joys in Your presence, the delights of Your right hand forever*** [Ps 16:11]. It was for this that You gave me a heart that is insatiable, so that I would remember that it was for You alone that You created my heart, and it will not rest until it rests in You<sup>202</sup>.

Although we know that we must renounce the goods of this earth in order to gain those of Heaven, it would be insane to prefer the present enjoyments for those of the future. But this is not what was asked. God did not forbid Adam to eat all the fruits in paradise. He forbade him to eat from only one tree. So it is for us. Are the pleasures you enjoy good, harmless and honest? Enjoy them in peace.

But we must deprive ourselves of those false pleasures that are bad in themselves. When it is a question of depriving yourself of a dishonorable pleasure that dishonors your intelligence with its malice, when you should be enjoying other pleasures that are lawful, so much greater would your stupidity be to lose the everlasting goods<sup>203</sup>.

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<sup>201</sup> **Correspondence**, p. 44. Letter to L. Naudet. Dec. 21, 1812.

<sup>202</sup> St. Augustine *Confessions*, Book 1, c. 1. PL 32, 661.

<sup>203</sup> Early Sermon, n. 5. The Ascension. PVC pp. 11-13.

**119: Change the night into day**

Our beloved Lord always notes that it is not in vain that His real servants repeat with trust the words of holy Job: ***Change the night into day.*** [Jb 17:12]. David also said: ***For you darkness and light are the same*** [Ps 139:12]. Oh how much God is glorified in His gifts and in the humble faith of His servants! What tongue can possibly praise God as much as He deserves, and tell of the love with which He loves us, and cares so diligently for us, more than a mother for her children?

In the days of light, when God consoles us by showing His living face to us, let us get accustomed to trust completely in Him, even for those times when He is hidden from us, just like a mother who plays with her children. She enjoys having them hunt for her, calling out to her, and even sobbing and crying. Oh, how blessed is our Father. What will He do for us in Heaven, after we have passed through all our trials, if even now He shows us so much goodness? It is almost like He is playing with us on this inhabited world. Pr 8:30]<sup>204</sup>

***Happy the man who makes the Lord his trust*** [Ps 40:5]. Oh, how the word of God brings comfort to His faithful people. His goodness, His wisdom, His power – God offers all this help to the one who trust in Him. How can he not be blest? What can he lack, ***who dwells in the shelter of the Most High?*** [Ps 91:1]? Let us read this entire Psalm with great attention, and let us conclude with St. Paul: ***In hoe we are saved.*** [Rm 8:24].<sup>205</sup>

**LOVE GOD ABOVE ALL THINGS****120: Our heart is made for God**

God is the greatest good; we are miserable sinners. What is more fitting for the infinite Goodness, who is ready to share His perfection without any limits, than to find a soul who, on the one hand, is ready to receive every good gift, and, on the other hand, is completely deprived and wanting? Even among men, those who are really open-minded are happy to find, or to meet those who are not so rich as they are, but those who are poor and indigent, so that they may share with them their own riches. How much more does God act like this!

In fact, God is not content to wait for those who are in need; rather, He goes in search of them. He calls them, crying out loudly with the voice of Isaiah: ***All you who are thirsty, come to the water. You, who have no money, come, receive grain and eat. Come, without paying and without cost, drink wine and milk. Heed me, and you shall eat well, you shall delight in rich fare.*** [Is 55:1-3 Christ Himself declares: ***The Son of Man has come to save that which was lost*** [Mt 15:24], ***that they may have life and have it more abundantly*** [Jn 10:10].

<sup>204</sup> Correspondence, pp. 320-322. Letter to Fr. Bragato – August 27, 1840.

<sup>205</sup> o.c. p. 323. Letter to Fr. Bragato. September 26, 1840.

Our heart is made for God, and outside of God, there is nothing that can be compared to Him. In fact, what remains of those strong desires, those never satisfying longings for something that is good, for some pleasure which stirs up new cravings, if not the disparity, between the goods of this world, and the capacity of our heart, which is so great and almost infinite in its desires that nothing satisfies it, if not something infinite? <sup>206</sup>

### **121: Respond to love with love**

I call to mind how the God-Man, from the first moment of His life right up until his death, was so dedicated to the cause of the salvation of mankind, following the mandate from His Father and the inclination of His own love, that He gave everything of Himself for us. For us He became incarnate. He did not labor, He did not preach, He did not suffer if not for us. Finally He did not live and He did not die except for us, desiring that not one drop of His blood should remain in His veins because He wanted it to be shed completely for us. This was ***so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for Him, who for their sake died and was raised*** [2 Co 5:15].

I will also call to mind all those special graces that I received from God during my life. I will recall the hundreds of time that I received special providential care that kept me far away from many dangers, that saved me from many sins and the occasion of sin, and did not let me lie in the state of sin, and thus receive eternal damnation, but kept me close to Him as the object of His mercy.

With great affection, I will call to mind how much my god and savior has done for me, how much He suffered for me, and how many gifts He has showered on me. He has granted me grace, pardon, adoption, heredity, faith, hope and His love. ***He did not spare His own Son, but handed Him over for us, how will He not give everything else along with Him?*** [Rm 8:32].

Meditating on these things, I ask myself what must I do? There is no doubt that I am obligated to offer up my very being, all that I possess with the greatest affection. *Take, O Lord, receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will. All that I have and possess, You have given to me. To You, O Lord, I return it. All is Yours, dispose of it wholly according to Your will. Give me Your love and Your grace. For this is sufficient for me.* <sup>207</sup>

### **122: Love God in His creatures**

Not satisfied that He gave Himself to us with so many benefits, God continues to give us of Himself through all His creatures, to whom He never ceases to grant them life, their very being and all the gifts they possess.

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<sup>206</sup> Early Sermons, n. 12. The Love of God to be imitated in the Life of St. Aloysius. **MssB 658-661. PVC pp. 170-172.**

<sup>207</sup> Retreat Meditations **MssB 2654-2658.** This was taken from the theme: 'Contemplation as a Help to Spiritual Love', one that was developed from a text of St. Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*. nn. 230-234.

God is in His creatures above all through His essence, which is closer to their being than our soul is to our body. He is there through His power, and He gives them not only the power to operate, but He Himself operates in them, as the principal cause. God is also present in His creatures through His goodness and providence, governing them and directing them to the service of people, guiding all their activities for our welfare. He gives light to the sun, so that it may brighten us. He gives heat to fire, so that it may warm us; He gives taste to our food, so that it will nourish us.

So then, if God makes Himself known to us in all His creatures, we must look for Him in them. We must use these creatures properly for the glory of God and His service. Since God doesn't make use of His creatures except for our welfare, so, too, on our part, we must use them for His benefit. Whenever we experience the good things that happen to us through these creatures, such as the beauty of light, the comfort of heat, the taste of food, we should attribute all these benefits to God and thank Him who brings about so much good for us through them.

Hence, we are called upon to be grateful for all the good things we receive, and to give thanks to God from ourselves first, and then for so many people who are ungrateful and never give a thought to say thanks. It is only right that we be careful never to abuse these creatures, or to become excessively attached to them, or even to use them as a means of committing sin. That would be the epitome of ingratitude: to turn against God the good things He has given us. Finally let us not forget to offer our sacrifice to God, by reducing at times the use of things out of love for Him. ***We love God, because He first loved us.*** [1 Jn 4:19].<sup>208</sup>

### **123: Give yourself to God without reservation**

God has loved me so much that I cannot hold back on Him from now on. The very thought of this makes me tremble. Why should I not be all for God after the mercy He has shown me? How can I hold back anything for myself, since I have received everything from Him? My heart will never agree to such a choice.

When I consider how limited I am, and how much I could do for the glory of God by using everything of myself for His service, I blush at the thought of holding back anything. There is no security for me to follow a compromised way. I know very well that I would easily fall into terrible excesses.

Only those who give themselves entirely to God can hope to die peacefully. Only these will enjoy a happy and peaceful life. If you want to do much for God, you must belong completely to Him. If you hold back even a little from Him, you will be less able to do great things also for your neighbor.

This is the condition on which depends a living faith and a strong hope. If we ask God for these gifts with confidence, we will obtain them without fail.

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<sup>208</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2659-2662.** This is another aspect of Contemplation used to inspire Spiritual Love. [cf. Previous Note]



If it were possible to experience disappointment and sorrow in Paradise [this is a thought of St. Teresa], it would be that we have not done everything we could have for God. To have done everything, this will be the greatest consolation of the Blessed in Heaven. The one who has acted toward God in this way will not be judged, but will judge the others. The great commandment to love God with all our heart cannot be perfectly fulfilled except in heaven<sup>209</sup>  
Why has God given this commandment without any limit? Because in this life we must force ourselves to rise as high as possible toward perfection.<sup>210</sup>

#### **124: Let us love God**

Our soul is an adopted child of God, for it bears the imprint of His likeness and His clear image. Through grace, it was created superior to its nature, like God, and immortal. The angels consider it an honor to be of service to it. Christ is its brother, and with Christ it shares a heredity and a kingdom. Our soul adorned with so many great qualities, and of such high origins, to whom shall we espouse her? To whom, if not to the Divine Love?

God asks us to love Him, and He promises us eternal life, and gives Himself as a reward to those who love Him. He has preceded us with His love. Before we ever existed, He loved us. We were not even able to thank about Him, and already He had a tender love for us. He showered on us an abundance of good things both of nature and of grace, and we were not able to recognize this favor, and much less, the hand that bestowed these gifts.

Then finally we came to know Him, and repaid His goodness with the barest ingratitude. But He did not cease to love us, ingrates and enemies that we are, rather He seemed to increase His love for us. Let us look at the Cross. It speaks very clearly to us of how the God-Man has saved us with the price of His precious blood. So, then, to whom shall we give our heart, if not to God? Let us love God, let us love God.<sup>211</sup>

#### **125: St. Aloysius Gonzaga – a lover of God**

It is said that when St. Aloysius became aware of God when he reached the age of reason, he had already begun to love Him. We see him as a young lad searching for God in solitude in the hidden places of his own home. Just as God is ready to manifest Himself to whoever seeks Him in simplicity of heart, so Aloysius was careful not to let any thought or affection distract his mind or occupy his heart. To this end he guarded all his senses with rigorous care.

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<sup>209</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*. II-II, q. 184, a. 2 ad 2m.

<sup>210</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2580**. This was taken from a Retreat given by St. Claude de la Colombiere. [cf. **BERTONI**, 3, p. 159].

<sup>211</sup> Early Sermons, n. 12. The Love of God to be imitated after the example of St. Aloysius. **MssB 669-671. PVC pp. 173, ff.**

From his early youth, his spirit was raised to a very high contemplation of divine beauty, and as his knowledge increased, so did his love. His first Communion lit in his heart a flame of love for God, which blazed and burned to the point that it reflected in his eyes and on his face. With what great progress did this fire burn inside of Aloysius! The world tried to hold on to him in his life at Court, but his strong love opened up the way for him to leave there and unite himself more closely to God in religious life.

Here his love increased to such a point that in the few years here on earth, it is difficult to say whether Aloysius loved or rather God loved in Aloysius.

In his mind there was no one else but God. In his will and in his affections there was no one but God. Even all his exterior occupations not only were done for God, but in them there was a certain something of the divine that uplifted the hearts of those who observed them to think of sacred things with a much greater effect than any other means that we use to stir up our fervor. Look to what great heights the love of his God brought Aloysius.<sup>212</sup>

## ABANDONMENT IN GOD

### **126: How great is Your goodness, O Lord!**

The Holy Spirit attracts some souls to a higher perfection, such as total abandonment in God.<sup>213</sup>

Very few understand what God would do with them if He were not hindered in His plans by them.<sup>214</sup> This is true not only for individuals, but also for communities. On our part, we need great diligence in carrying out what is needed so that we do not place any hindrance to what God can and wants to do on His part: ***I feared, O Lord, Your work***, says the Prophet [Hab 3:2]. If we walk with diligence, and encourage others to walk together in a common bond, we will see works so magnificent from the hands of the Omnipotent God that we will not only experience bewilderment, but overpowered by confusion and amazement, we will be overwhelmed. ***How great is the goodness, O Lord, which you have in store for those who fear You, and which, toward those who take refuge in You, You show in the sight of men*** [Ps 31:10].

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<sup>212</sup> Early Sermons, n. 12. **MssB 662-666. PVC pp. 172, f.**

<sup>213</sup> **Spiritual Journal.** October 12, 1863.

<sup>214</sup> This maxim appears frequently in St. Gaspar's writings. Fr. Joseph Stofella says: 'This is the cornerstone of St. Bertoni's spiritual teaching. It is based on St. Ignatius [cf. BARTOLI, *Life of St. Ignatius*, Book 4, c. 37]: 'Very few understand what God would do with them if they placed themselves entirely in His hands, and let His grace work in them.'

St. Gaspar tended to synthesize the doctrine of his great teacher, but he gives to his thoughts a personal touch, calling everyone to complete correspondence with an impulse of love, so that he might conclude with an uplifting thought.

May the love of Jesus our Lord be the incentive that constantly encourages us and urges us on. **The love of Christ impels me**, [2 Co 5:4], since He runs with great strides to meet us. **Behold, I am coming soon**. [Rv 22:12]. **Come, Lord Jesus** [v. 20]. **The Spirit and the Bride say: 'Come', and let him who hears, say, 'Come'** [v. 17].<sup>215</sup>

Let us remember those two sayings of our Lord: the first, **Without Me, you can do nothing** [Jn 15:5], and the second one, **I can do all things in Him who strengthens me** [Ph 4:13]. Let us learn to await the outpouring of the Spirit and love according to the command of Christ [cf. Lk 24:49], then, clothed with virtue from above, we will find the impossible an easy to do.<sup>216</sup>

### **127: Blessed is he who loses himself in this abyss**

The Lord wants us to remember Him, and that all our thoughts and affections be rooted in Him. If, because of this, we forget other things, He will remind us of them, or in His Providence, He will bring about results better than we could have accomplished with all our thinking and remembering. In a word, we are always diligent when we love God.<sup>217</sup> Blessed is he who can forget all other things and never forget God.<sup>218</sup>

Blessed is he who loses himself in this abyss, who hurls himself into this ocean, desiring to be shipwrecked. A little child is never more secure than when he sleeps in his mother's arms, having abandoned all worries about himself. The child does not see, he does not hear, he does not speak, but his mother sees for him, hears and speaks for him, and whenever she wants to, she can wake him up, since she is so near to him.

We must not be satisfied to follow only the 'perfumes' of the Lord [cf. Sgs 1:3; 4:10], but we must ask with courage and confidence: **take me with You** [Sgs 1:4]. Then He will take us by the hand, and we shall feel our spirit close to God, and become one with Him. Then, not only will we walk and run, but jump with giant steps.<sup>219</sup>

A man of prayer undertakes those plans that the Lord assigns through His Providence. He does not anticipate or precede. Everything is in order, everything is tranquil. He is not hasty; he is not hurried. He waits for the proper time and circumstance. Thus he follows the Lord. But to receive the inspirations that assure, confirm and enlighten his conscience concerning God's plans, much prayer is needed.<sup>220</sup>

<sup>215</sup> **Correspondence**, pp. 61, ff. Letter to Naudet not dated.

<sup>216</sup> o.c., p. 96. Letter to Naudet. August 31, 1813.

<sup>217</sup> **Correspondence**, p. 96. Letter to Naudet, August 31, 1813.

<sup>218</sup> o.c., p. 31. Letter to Naudet, December 1, 1812.

<sup>219</sup> o.c., Letter to Naudet. August 31, 1813.

<sup>220</sup> St. Gregory the Great, *Meditation on Primum Regum*, n. 32 – **MssB 6192**.

## **128: Our life is in God**

Who is able to extol worthily, I don't say all, but even one divine benefit?

The basis of all is certainly our being, which was not given to us only once at our creation, but is renewed constantly with God's supporting activity. God keeps His creatures in existence, affirms St. Thomas, by continually giving them that life which would fall into nothingness if He were to withhold His action which is continuous and necessary.<sup>221</sup> Therefore, that omnipotence which God used to create us out of nothing, He continually uses to preserve us right up to this moment so that we can open our eyes and recognize the gift that perhaps formerly was not known and not sufficiently appreciated.

Together with our own existence, God gives us life. Have we ever noticed how many and hidden are the sources on which the life of our body depends? There isn't a machine that contains such a complex harmony of gears that are so subtle and delicate. Have you noticed how numberless are those accidents that occur in the course of life and are apt to bring on death? From the little that we know, let us imagine the careful and vigilant assistance that is required on the part of the Supreme Creator to maintain all temporal life. And if we recognize that this life of ours, which we have preserved until now, is His gift, then let us be mindful of our obligation to take good care of it.

O Great and Excellent Benefactor! What great care Your Goodness has for us! Now we understand the meaning of those words of the Apostle: ***In Him we live and move and have our being.*** [Ac 17:28]. We are in God as in the one who preserves us in life, giving it to us every single moment, and not only are we in Him, but we live in Him from the moment that He preserves in us that life which He has given us in our being.<sup>222</sup>

## **129: The gifts of God**

The principal gifts of God are those that pertain to the spirit and lead us to Heaven.

The first of these great gifts is faith, which God lavishly bestows on us even now. Isn't it a fact that without this free gift of mercy we would have been shipwrecked in the midst of the stormy waves of a raging sea, in the midst of violent winds, in the midst of so much wickedness? If we look at the customs of our times and those who have lost their faith, and recognize that we are more deserving to be deprived of such a grace, we shall appreciate as a great benefit of God the fact that we have been preserved in the faith.

Another gift, also very important, is preaching the word of God. This is the usual and most effective way to bring about the conversion of sinners, and the sanctification

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<sup>221</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*. I, q. 9, a. 2.

<sup>222</sup> Early Sermons, n. 21. Divine Gifts. **MssB 843-851. PVC pp. 129-132.**

of the just. It seems that God has doubled His gift of the Spirit to those who preach the Gospel. Never before have they spoken with greater fervor and freedom.

Let us be on our guard not to misuse such singular gifts. Let us be very careful of them, because if we do not change our ways soon, we will be very disappointed when we find ourselves abandoned, especially after the extended and patient concern that has been shown us. However, if we are resolved to dedicate ourselves completely to God and to do what we can to convert others, then we can expect to receive even greater gifts. If God is kind to those who are His enemies, how much more will He regard those who are reconciled to Him and are His friends?

Let us lift up our hearts and raise our voices and then this loving, infinite and unexcelled Goodness! <sup>223</sup>

### **130: God is good to us, even though we are unworthy**

Let us consider for a moment to whom God grants His greatest gifts, and so frequently. Is it to His obedient sons? To friends who are concerned with His honor? To His subjects who observe His laws?

If this were so, it would be a very big surprise that a Sovereign so powerful and exalted would lower Himself to be concerned about such poor lowly people. But that he would shower gifts and favors on those ingrates who have abandoned Him, and even on those who rebel against Him – this is beyond all amazement!

Is it not true that these very people are ourselves? Can we say that we really honor our Heavenly Father as we should? If we abuse Him publicly in every corner of the town, in every street, in every nook and cranny? ***Holy and awesome is His name*** [Ps 111:9]. Where is our obedience to His laws? What about us, who are dedicated Christians, we cannot easily say that we are not to be numbered among the rebels. Not only those who sin do wrong, but also those who omit their duty of fraternal correction. They also sin whose duty it is, and have the opportunity to halt some wrong doing, but do nothing to stop it.

In all humility, let us admit that we are sinners, and in our confusion we know that God continues to bestow His gifts on us nonetheless. Even though we are unworthy and deserving of punishment, God showers even greater graces upon us. <sup>224</sup>

### **131: For those who love God all things work out well**

God provides all the needed talents according to the scope of one's vocation. We should never have any doubts about this, not even when we are faced with difficult tasks. God does not hesitate to help us in small tasks or in big undertakings. These latter, under a certain aspect, are more worthy of His attention, even if it is true that for

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<sup>223</sup> Early Sermons. N. 21. Divine Gifts. **MssB 866-870. PVC pp. 1345-136.**

<sup>224</sup> o.c., **MssB 856-864. PVC p. 133.**

God, who is infinite, everything is small and of little account. On the other hand, every small thing of little account is very great when it is done for Him.<sup>225</sup>

Blessed are they who trust in Divine Providence. They have nothing to fear of anything upsetting their plans or of anyone putting obstacles in their way. Providence conducts everything to its proper end, sweetly, and at the same time, powerfully. It takes care of all things, both those that are pleasant and those which are unpleasant, and the will of men, whether they are good or bad, equally serve it. **All the Lord wills He does in Heaven, on earth, and in the seas in all the deeps.** [Ps 135"6]. **There is none that can resist Your power, o Lord** [Est 4:4]. **We know that all things work for good for those who love God** [Rm 8:28]<sup>226</sup>. We should not be surprised that He continues to work for our benefit when we see Him ascend the cross out of love for us.<sup>227</sup>

O how good is the Lord, how He exceeds all our praise! Therefore, we should never cease praising Him as much as we can, because He is happy to be loved, admired, and praised by us miserable little wretches. We must continue to hope that our misery will one day be changed into glory, and we will be like Him. May He be thanked, blessed, and loved forever.<sup>228</sup>

### **132: Walk on the waves**

Whoever finds himself in the midst of the waves, let him remember that the lord is with him, even though He is asleep on the boat. Let him remember the *Come* of Jesus to Peter [Mt 14:29], and how he was able to walk on the water. O most loving and hidden Providence of God! Who should fear, abiding in the hands of the Lord, and under His protection? [cf. Ps 90:1].

We find ourselves constantly in a sea of activity, of troubles, and yet we carry on. Even though at times we find ourselves in darkness, we trust that the good Lord will lead us to light.<sup>229</sup> You too must place your trust in God. It is He, with the bread cooked on the hearth, who enabled Elijah, who was afraid and worn out, to undertake a long journey. [cf. 1 K 19:7-8]<sup>230</sup>

Let us be sure to entrust our prudence to the loving Providence of God always and in every event. Thus it will redound to His glory. We must be sure that all our desires and interests are dedicated to Him. If we have the patience to wait, we will see all our desires not only fulfilled, but even exceeded.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> **Correspondence**, p. 46 – Letter to Naudet. January 9, 1813.

<sup>226</sup> o.c., p. 53. Letter to Naudet. January 15, 1813

<sup>227</sup> o.c. p. 85 – Letter to Naudet. April 15, 1813.

<sup>228</sup> o.c. p. 54 – Letter to Naudet. January 15, 1813.

<sup>229</sup> **Correspondence**, p.326. Letter to Fr. Bragato. Nov. 1842.

<sup>230</sup> o.c., p. 327. Letter to Fr. Bragato. April 11, 1848

<sup>231</sup> o.c., p. 156. Letter to Naudet. Dec. 1822.

He who trusts in the Lord will never be confounded, or embarrassed. But the Lord, our God sometimes brings about insults different from what we had planned, so that we understand that: ***Unless the Lord built the house, they labor in vain who build it.*** [Ps 127:1].<sup>232</sup>

### **133: The Lord makes the stars shine at night**

The works of the Lord have their trials, and thus God shows that it is He who guides and brings His works to fulfillment, holding back the hand of man through the difficulties He permits. Thus man humbly yields to the hand of Divine Providence, and sees that both perseverance and the outcome depend entirely upon it.

When it is night for us, it is day for Him, who knows very well what He must do. We must lift up our hands to Heaven when we do not know where to put them, nor what is better to ask of God. ***By night lift up your hands toward the sanctuary*** [Ps 134:1-12]. This is a lesson that God teaches everyone who frequents His school. ***And the night will shine as the day*** [Ps 139:12]. Here is another lesson our Father showed us from the beginning, drawing light from darkness, and, in His goodness, He is ready to explain this to us even today, transforming the darkness of our works into the adorable splendor of His glory. Meanwhile, ***Trust in the Lord and do good.*** [cf. Ps 37:3].

Let us never lose heart! IN Paradise every day will be bright. There we shall never lose sight of God. But, while we are on earth, night and day alternate. We continue on our journey. Even at night the Lord makes some stars shine. And if it happens that on a stormy night we pause for a while, walking by the sea, and turn our eyes to look at the waves, this does not mean that we have lost our way, but that we have hesitated a little. Then the Lord will chide us: ***O you of little faith, why did you doubt?*** [Mt 14:31]. At the same time He will sustain us with His right hand and then we will find ourselves safely in the hand of God. Blessed be the Lord!<sup>233</sup>

### **134: The Church – a Model of Abandonment to God**

This is how you should proceed: when the way is clear take a step forward, then wait to take a second step until little by little the way becomes clearer. If we are in doubt about certain aspects of our work, the Lord, with His gifts of hope, charity and consolation, will sustain us as we wait for the proper moment to begin our task. When all is clear, He will strengthen us to bring it to a conclusion.

This seems to be the way His Spouse, the Church, operates. Being assured of the help of the Holy Spirit, she doesn't stop seeking light in order to act. When she sees the way clearly, she doesn't stop working, studying, or consulting, so that she might proceed further operating in the open light. When she is impeded in her work,

<sup>232</sup> o.c. p. 253. Letter to Naudet. March 21, 1829.

<sup>233</sup> o.c., p. 31. Letter to Naudet. December 1, 1812.

she awaits the proper time, trusting in God. In both of these actions, her abandonment in God is always consistent. This is truly a perfect model for our own abandonment in the Lord.

What a beautiful virtue is this act of abandoning oneself in the arms of Divine Providence, when we ourselves cannot function. But it is a greater and more perfect virtue when, according to the order of Providence, we can and do function with our hands, and yet do not cease to abandon ourselves completely into His hands. This seems to be like the one who said: ***Yet I live, no longer I*** [and consequently, operate], ***but Christ lives in me*** [and, as a consequence works in me] [Ga 2:20]. And again: ***Whoever preaches, let it be with the very words of God*** [1 P 4:11].<sup>234</sup>

## FRATERNAL CHARITY

### **135: The deep roots of Christian charity**

Charity is above all a perfect friendship between us and God. However, in the sight of God, it extends to our neighbor, since he comes from God and belongs to Him. He was created by God in His own image, He was made His son and was redeemed with His Blood, and capable like us of obtaining eternal happiness.

***Now you are Christ's Body and individually parts of it***, St. Paul teaches us [1 Co 12:27]. Since we are all members, we must be concerned one for the other, for our temporal welfare, and more so, for our eternal salvation.

We note in our own body, how one member helps, supports, sustains, guides, defends, and nourishes the other, and from this mutual concern comes the health of the body as a whole and of each individual member. But let us suppose that each member looked out only for what was proper to itself. What would happen if the foot just stood still refusing to carry the other members, and what if the hand did not carry food to the mouth, and if the mouth, while enjoying the pleasant taste, did not send the food to the stomach, or the stomach kept everything for itself, thus depriving the other members of needed nourishment? What would happen? The body would die and so would all the members.

The same would happen to us if each one looked out only for what was his, even though we are one body in Christ and His members. What an amazing teaching! Therefore, we must look after each other [1 Co 12:25].<sup>235</sup>

### **136: Christian charity is kind**

***This is My commandment: love one another as I have loved you*** [Jn 15:12]. The charity of Christ contains different qualities that should serve as a model for us: it is kind, helpful and all embracing. If one of these qualities is lacking, it is not Christian charity. Above all, the charity of Christ is kind in everything He does. Even in His

<sup>234</sup> **Correspondence**, p. 98. MssB 9262-9265. Letter to Mother Naudet. October 26, 1813.

<sup>235</sup> Early Sermons, n. 6. Charity toward our neighbor following the example of St. Aloysius. **MssB 525-544. PVC 175-181.**



external manner, He follows a consistent standard and moderation. What did He not have to endure from a rude and unbelieving crowd? With what graciousness did He not deal with so many hostile spirits and adapt their ways so as to motivate them and win them over, indeed, to: ***become all things to all?*** [1 Co 9:22]. How much rejection He suffered without complaining, how much resistance and contradiction from His apostles, poor fishermen, without any education or refinement. What did it cost Him to train them! They had frequent disputes and quarrels among themselves. He did His utmost to make peace among them by living with them and sharing their company in spite of a certain distaste that they must have caused from time to time.

Thus Jesus was able to say in all truth: ***Learn from Me, for I am meek and humble of heart*** [Mt 11:29]. Let us learn how we too should be like Him.

What about me, have I learned to put up with the weakness of others? Others must also put up with mine. It would be an injustice to demand understanding and pardon from others, and not extend it to others myself. Any defects of others should serve to purify and strengthen my charity, not to weaken it. I must live with those people who have their own ideas, just as I have mine, with those who have their own hang-ups, prejudices and faults. It is not up to me to change those people. Besides, these things may never be solved. To maintain peace and charity, there is nothing to do except adapt myself to them as far as possible, and to win them over by my kindness.

***Blessed are the meek, they shall possess the earth*** [Mt 5:4]. That is, they will know how to reconcile hearts. A little more control over myself can prevent many troubles, and it is worthwhile to sacrifice oneself in order to stop them.<sup>236</sup>

### **137: Christian charity is helpful**

Christ used His Divine Power to shower His grace on those whose defects He had to endure with great kindness. ***He went about doing good*** [Ac 10:38], driving out demons, comforting the afflicted, healing the sick, raising the dead, announcing the kingdom of God, and wearing Himself out for the salvation of souls.

I am not able, as Jesus was, to perform miracles for my neighbor. However, there are occasions every day when I can help others. This is what Christian charity does. But do I possess the fervor and commitment needed for this? Or am I rather one of those who are indifferent, caught up only in their own affairs, incapable of making a sacrifice to please someone else?

If, because of my office, I have an obligation to help my neighbor, and to provide for his needs, how do I carry out this obligation? Do it do it willingly, with love and punctuality?

Jesus Christ clearly warned us that we will be treated by His Father in the same way that we have treated our brothers. Based on this, what can I hope from God, and

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<sup>236</sup> Mission at S. Fermo Major. **MssB 4217-4222.**

with what assurance can I pray that He will shower on me an abundance of His grace?<sup>237</sup>

### **138: Christian charity is universal**

The charity of Christ is wonderful in its extension. As He was sent by His Father to all people, and because of His Father He loved them all, He gave Himself equally to them all, loving them without any distinction or exception. Both Jews and pagans received from Him the same teaching and the same healing of body and soul. He never showed any disdain for the poor, the miserable, neither did He show any preference for the rich and powerful.

Even those who were openly against Him and were unkind to Him found Him ready to do anything for them that they expected. It was up to them to obtain all the graces of which He was the dispenser, provided they asked the Divine Lord. On His part, not only was He ready to do this, but He called them, invited them, and even looked for them.

What about me? If I do not strive to reach this goal in my charity toward my neighbor, then my charity is imperfect, or even false, because it is not authentic Christian charity. Christian charity motivates us to love our neighbor out of love for God and because of Him. This motive is not limited. To confine it to certain people only, without extending it to others, destroys it and absolutely annihilates it. For this reason, the Son of God and then the Apostles, when recommending to us the practice of charity as one of our more essential tasks, used a very general phrase: Love your brothers, love your neighbor.<sup>238</sup>

### **139: Fraternal Charity – the best investment**

O Lord! Today everyone looks not only for his own interests, his own pleasure, his own profit. ***They seek their own interests, and not those of Jesus Christ*** [Ph 2:21]. Even ourselves we seek for nothing more than what we need. Yet, when we think of it, we realize that we will never get what we need unless we take to heart the needs of our neighbor.

We are sure that all our benefits are in the hands of God and depend on Him. Have we ever reflected on the fact that God has linked our benefits to the care that we should care for our neighbor? This is how it happens, as we read in sacred Scripture. We find written in the Old Testament: ***He who gives to the poor suffers no want*** [Pr 28:27]. On the contrary, he who ignores the requests of a needy neighbor will experience want. In regard to spiritual benefits which are more desirable, speaking through the Prophet Isaiah, God Himself says that the soul of the one who is generous to his neighbor shall be like a watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail [cf.

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<sup>237</sup> Mission at S. Fermo Major. **MssB 4217-4222.**

<sup>238</sup> Mission at S. Fermo Major **MssB 1223-1225.**

Is 58:11]. Again, in the Book of Proverbs, we read: ***He, who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor, will himself also call and not be heard*** [Pr 21:13].

In the New Testament, the Gospel tells us: ***The measure with which you measure will be measured out to you*** [Mt 7:2]. In his letter, St. James says: ***Pray for one another that you be healed*** [Jas 5:16]. Then, having pointed out the efficacy of such a prayer, he concludes: ***Whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his ways will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins*** [Jas 5:20].

What further advice do we need that is clearer, more solid, and more explicit? Let us impress this clearly on our mind, that if we want to obtain our own benefit, we must also help our neighbor find his, and, as charity teaches us not to seek only our own interests, this is really the true, or rather, the only way to obtain it.<sup>239</sup>

#### **140: Judge not and you shall not be judged**

***Why then do you judge your brother? Or, you, why do you look down on your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God ... So then let us no longer judge one another*** [Rm 14:10-13].

Let us be on our guard not to suspect others, for this is poison to friendship. In fact, it is a hidden and very serious disease, which is capable of withdrawing us from God and wounding fraternal charity.

This is a form of pride. Maybe this is why so many people who are striving after holiness are so tempted. From humility flows simplicity which helps us to look at our own faults and see where we fail. ***Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own eye?*** [Mt 7:3]. If you happen to notice something that you find displeasing in someone else, look carefully to see if there is anything like it in your own life, if so, root it out. On the other hand, if you notice some quality that pleases you in others, check to see if you also have that quality if so, take care of it, and, if by chance you do not possess it, try to acquire it. If you wish to cultivate genuine charity toward your neighbors, weep for the faults they commit, and rejoice at the graces they receive, and for the progress they make. It is a beautiful thing to compete in having regard for one another, and as far as possible, to speak well of everyone, with deep humility to regard others more important than yourself, without seeking your own interests, but those of others [Ph 2:2-3]<sup>240</sup>.

#### **141: Charity and reconciliation**

Through charity God binds us together with our neighbor and with Himself, so that our best interest and that of our neighbor is the glory of God, and His Divine Majesty. ***That they may all be one*** [Jn 17:21]. Charity acts in such a way that united, or rather, made as one with the great number of our brothers, we become one with

<sup>239</sup> Early Sermons, n. 6. Charity toward our neighbor. **MssB 535-542. PVC, pp. 178-181.**

<sup>240</sup> cf. Rodriguez, **MssB 8853-8956.**

God. **As you, Father, are in me and I in You, that they may be in us as one** [Jn 20:21].<sup>241</sup>

If through human weakness any quarrel or misunderstanding should chance to spring up among you, let every care be taken by those involved to come to a reconciliation, so that by mutual satisfaction, they may return to the good graces of one another. St. Paul says: **Do not let the sun set on your anger** [Ep 4:26].<sup>242</sup>

Let us love each other with genuine charity. Let us be careful never to give the slightest offense either by unkind words, or much less by our actions. If, by the slightest chance, you are offended by another, try to bear it peacefully out of your love for Jesus. If it should happen through human weakness that you offend somebody, try to make amends as soon as possible, ask forgiveness, and show great kindness so that all bitterness and resentment will be avoided.<sup>243</sup>

#### **142: A Martyr of charity – St. Aloysius Gonzaga**

**Charity does not seek its own interests** [1 Co 13:5]. Among the characteristic notes of charity mentioned by St. Paul in his Hymn of Charity in his 1 Corinthians, this statement is most accurate and specific.

St. Aloysius has given us a truly outstanding example of this virtue. He did his at the time of the terrible plague that broke out in Rome. Forgetful of looking after his own life, he endangered it by caring and comforting those who were stricken by the disease. It was in the public hospitals where this sickness was rampant that he contracted the plague, and in a short time died. Truly, charity does not seek its own interests.

But even before this happened, this same kind of charity moved him to give up his desire of entering a monastery of contemplatives, so he entered the Company of Jesus, where through the constant practice of discipline, new battles prepared him to enter his chosen field, and to carry the weight of the hardest and most difficult missionary tasks for the good of his neighbor and the glory of God.

Dear Saint, set our hearts on fire with just a spark of your burning charity, so that a genuine flame will rise up in our hearts, and extend it in favor of our neighbor, and deserve to rise up even to Heaven, where in uniting itself to God, who is the immense Fire of charity, it may find blessed peace for all time.<sup>244</sup>

<sup>241</sup> **Correspondence**, p. 74. Letter to Naudet. March 6, 1813

<sup>242</sup> **Constitutions** of our Founder, n. 191.

<sup>243</sup> Taken from a pamphlet entitled: 'Constitutions and Rules for the Youth Congregation,' which was adopted by St. Gaspar for the Marian Oratory. [cf. **BERTONI**, 2, pp. 319-325].

<sup>244</sup> Early Sermons, n. 6. Charity toward our neighbor. **MssB 529-546. PVC pp. 176-183.**

### **143: The apostolic charity of St. Zeno**

How is it possible that this one man in so short a time could destroy and get rid of so much wickedness that had long dominated the world? In a word, it was his charity. This charity became apparent as soon as he arrived in Verona, and was evident in his humility and cheerfulness. Thus he was able to rout idolatry. It was his charity, made visible in his modesty and sanctity, that is, with all the heroic virtue and heavenly gifts, especially his wisdom, which constantly flowed from his mouth, that was able to wipe out all heresy.

This charity, which St. Zeno was able to transfer from his heart into the hearts of the faithful, put an end to whatever was left of former wickedness, and completely renewed and restored society. This great Father and Doctor truly brought about the very thing that he had written in beautiful sentence: **Caritas transit in populum = 'Charity flows into the People.'**

He loved his people and his people loved him. The Veronese saw in their Bishop so many virtues, such wisdom, and so much charity that they all placed themselves under his care and under his direction. This wise man gave the law to his flock, rather, he gave them that which constitutes the end or scope of every wise legislation, that is, charity, which should hold together all society in a strong, but sweet bond.<sup>245</sup> Mutual love based on courteous conversation binds them together by a mutual knot, and all society to its leader.

We can rightly say thinking of Isaiah [6:6, ff.], that St. Zeno was the angel, full of sweet charity, who was enlightened, active and effective, who took the burning coal of the divine word and touched the lips of those people whom idolatry and the Arian heresy had contaminated and divided. Thanks to that touch of the living fire of charity, they were renewed and reunited in confessing the name of Christ. The things with which our Doctor held the lighted coal to their lips was the Sacred Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, which he used to explain the true faith to his people. Thus, he was able to assure that the Church of Verona, under the inspiration of his teaching, was glorious and without any stain of vice, error, or any of its former defects.<sup>246</sup>

## **THE SPIRIT OF LOVE**

### **144: The guest in our soul**

***The love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us*** [Rm 5:5].

The Holy Spirit has been given to us with all the richness of His gifts, and, not only that, but also the very presence of Himself, and hence, the presence of the Holy Trinity. It is this friendship, established by the grace between God and man, that requires the presence of a friend, the Holy Spirit, in the soul of the just with the intent

<sup>245</sup> St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, q. 99, a. 2.

<sup>246</sup> Sermon in honor of St. Zeno. **MssB 2110-2121.**

to unite Himself to it in a very intimate way, and to live there as in a temple, where He may receive the homage of love, worship and adoration.

The Holy Spirit, together with the Father and the Son, come to reside in the soul of the just as in His own temple, and remains there in profound humility. The three Divine Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, come to us and we approach them. They come to us in the splendor of light, while we approach them, opening the eyes of our spirit, so that we may be enlightened from within. They come with the power of divine help, and we approach them, opening our ears in obedience. They come with the richness of their gifts, and we approach them with humility that prepares us to receive them.

In the divine plan, this indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our hearts is a reality that is not fleeing and temporary. It is permanent and everlasting.<sup>247</sup>

#### **145: How to welcome the Holy Spirit and His inspirations**

The Spirit of the Lord which came to Samson [cf. Jgs 14:6] likewise comes to the just man, so that he may accomplish spiritual and heroic deeds. Thus the Holy Spirit directs and governs our life just as a pilot directs his ship, or as a coachman drives his coach. Not only our body, but also our soul is subjected to the reins of the Spirit. The Lord desires that all the powers of our soul be subjected to the Spirit. Baptism and the sacraments are not enough. If you do not allow yourself to be guided by the Spirit, you will lose your adoption.<sup>248</sup>

Divine inspirations are like the heralds who announce the arrival of important people of this world. The heralds of Divine Majesty expect to be listened to and accepted, and we must follow what they tell us. When we have prepared everything according to their instructions, the Lord of Heaven and earth will come to visit us. Therefore, let us prepare a worthy place for such a guest!

***It is man's task to make his heart ready,*** say the Scriptures [cf. Pr 16:1]. Therefore, let us strive not only to be diligent in preparing our soul for the visits of the Divine Majesty, but let us the utmost and the most intense diligence, so that we will always be prepared.

***Let nothing prevent you from paying always,*** says the Holy Spirit [Si 18:22]. Guarding silence, being careful not to prolong your conversation unduly, avoiding all frivolity – this is how to have your ear ready to hear the sweet messages of our Creator.<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3332-3396.**

<sup>248</sup> Retreat Meditations, **MssB 3232.**

<sup>249</sup> **Correspondence**, p. 68. Letter to Mother Naudet. Feb. 28, 1813.

**146: The wind of Pentecost**

***Arise, north wind! Come, south wind! Blow upon my garden, so that its perfumes may spread abroad*** [Sgs 4:16].

If the north wind, that cold wind which causes everything to become numb and freeze, signifies the spirit of evil that invades the wicked and blocks out the seeds of goodness, then the south wind, which is a warm wind, is like the Holy Spirit, who, coming into the souls of the elect, frees them from all indifference, and makes them fervent in carrying out with enthusiasm everything that is good and perfect.

Let the wind fade away, and let the south wind come and blow through the garden of the Spouse and spread its perfume. Let the evil spirit depart from the Church, and from every soul; then let the Holy Spirit come in. When the Holy Spirit comes, He will stir up the fire and charity in our heart, and free it from the apathy of indifference.

Then the aroma will rise and spread, because with the coming of the Holy Spirit, the soul which was once cold and indifferent will be truly moved to do good works. Then soon the report of the good being done will reach your neighbors, and upon hearing this, they will likewise be moved to do good works. **Thus, through the work of the Holy Spirit, the aroma of virtue will spread abroad, a holy garden will blossom, and after the flowers have faded, much fruit, tasty and substantial, will flourish.**<sup>250</sup>




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<sup>250</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3013-3014.** This is an excerpt taken from St. Gregory the Great's work, on the *Song of Songs*, c. 4, 21. PL 79:515 ff.

# **St. GASPAR BERTONI**



**FOUNDER of the CONGREGATION of the  
SACRED STIGMATA of OUR LORD, JESUS CHRIST**

**SOME RUDIMENTS of his  
SPIRITUAL WRITINGS**

**ORDINARY TIME - GENERAL THEMES**

**Part 4 A [## 147 - 224]**

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**ST. GASPAR BERTONI**  
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**ORDINARY TIME – [A] GENERAL THEMES**

**Part 4 A [## 147 - 224]**

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## ORDINARY TIME OF THE YEAR

### GENERAL THEMES

#### THE CHURCH

##### **147: The Church, Bride of Christ**

Lord, You guide Your Bride with your right hand [cf. Sgs 1:3] while we follow in the aura of your fragrances [ibid], heeding the instructions that the Church presents to us by her words, deeds and by her commandments, which are all products of Your grace.

Lord, You draw all things toward the plans of Your adorable Providence with the tenderness and efficacy of Your grace: ***and I – once I am lifted up from earth – will draw all men to Myself*** [Jn 12:32]. This is the way You lead Your Bride, who is our Mother, the Church, and Your children and hers, who are ourselves.

But, You guide your Bride, as it were, by the hand: by the right, as it were, so that she not so much follows, but rather accompanies You. You share with her maternal care the achievement of Your paternal Providence over us. We, like delicate little children, are not able to keep up with You Who do not take steps, but jumps, and giant ones at that! [Ps 19:6]. We race behind You, trailing the fragrance of Your graces and following the teachings of our Mother. If we cannot follow You with the ardent affection of a Bride who has attained maturity in the school of love, we will tag after you with the first fruits of our most tender, youthful fervor.<sup>251</sup>

##### **148: The Church, mystery of communion**

The Church, the Bride of Christ, is a living image of divinity, presenting to us its principal feature: unity. ***Holy Father, keep them in Your Name that You have given Me, so that they may be one just as We are – so that they may all be one as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me*** [Jn 17:11, 21]. Unity through the fusion and binding of its parts constitutes both the unchanging beauty and the invincible power of the Church: beautiful as the moon, brilliant as the sun, terrible as an army arrayed for battle.

Christ's spirit flows down profusely from His Head, and it increases in whatever measure each one is disposed to accept it. If a hand is severed from the body, the Spirit, which emanates from the Head, and teaches each member through the body,

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<sup>251</sup> Meditation on *Primum Regum*. N. 7 **MssB 5004-5006**. One notes in this meditation, the deep, theological profundity of St. Gregory's approach to the truth of the Church. One can also notice the Church as the Spouse of Christ, and the Mystery of Communion, much before the time of the Church's institutional and juridical aspect [cf. Marginal Number 97]. His familiarity with Scripture, especially, St. Paul makes us aware of St. Gaspar's truly prophetic insight.

will not touch it, and so it will remain lifeless. If we want to receive the Spirit, which flows from the Head, we must strive to be united and cling to one another.

Therefore, we are assiduous in safeguarding unity in the Spirit by means of the bonds of peace<sup>252</sup>. ***In unfeigned love*** [2 Co 6:6], like those, who have nothing but charity, and perfect charity at that, on their tongues, while they separate themselves from one another and induce others to part from unity<sup>253</sup>.

There should be no diversity in doctrine, or divisions by parties among us, but a single spirit of faith should enliven all of us, because we are one body. There is only one supernatural end toward which we strive, just as there is only a single hope to which we have been called. There is only One Who has proposed this purpose to us, and guides us toward this goal. If there are many shepherds who tend us, they do so only by His authority, and in His Name: ***There is only one Lord*** [Ep 4:5]<sup>254</sup>.

#### **149: The Church, teacher of faith**

My Mother, the Roman Catholic, Apostolic Church teaches me, while God instructs my Mother. It is possible that I can run into some difficulty: for example, there is the doctrine of Divine Predestination and there is the doctrine of human freedom. How these two tenets are reconciled does not impact my faith; I left it up to theologians to investigate the problem. As for me, loyal [to my faith], it is enough to believe. I revere the Mystery, I respect the opinions of theological schools, I reject heresies.

Within the Church, the sovereign Shepherd redresses any deficiencies in faith and practices through the efficacy of exact interpretation of the sacred Scriptures and tradition. When St. Jerome found himself bewildered by the problem of understanding [the Mystery] of three Persons in God, he did not rely on the light of his own mind, nor on his prodigious erudition, but submitted himself to the authority of Peter's Chair.<sup>255</sup>

Peter has responsibility for all the flock: if a single shepherd is deficient, he hastens to correct and rescue him. The Rock is not wanting: ***You are Peter and upon this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not***

<sup>252</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3656-3675.**

<sup>253</sup> o.c., **MssB 3311.**

<sup>254</sup> Early Sermons, n. 35. 'The Rule of our Thinking and Acting.' **MssB 1238-1239. PVC, p. 261.** This sermon was preached on the Feast of the Epiphany [January 6, 1806]. It is presented as one complete tract on the Word of God. The title elderly manifests the profound attitude of St. Gaspar when meditating on the Word of God. It is an attitude of total submission to it, but [as a guidance] for his teaching, and as a pattern for the conduct of his own life. Fr. Divo Barsotti wrote: 'It is very difficult to find other spiritual writers who make such an extensive and proper use of the Scriptures. It is his whole interior life that is supported by the texts of the Scriptures. These are the guide, the Rule of his action. He models himself on them. From these he draws light and direction for his own journey.' [*Magistero dei santi*. Rome 1971, p. 74]. On this subject, compare *The Word of God. Rule of Thought and Action of Blessed Gaspar Bertoni*. By Joseph Furlani, CSS. Rome 1983.

<sup>255</sup> cf. St. Jerome, Letter 15 to Damasus. 2. PL 22, 355.

**prevail against it** [Mt 16:18]: they will neither prevail against the edifice nor against the stone on which it is founded, because if a stone of the foundation falls, the whole building falls. Peter authoritatively corrects with boldness and truth: **strengthen your brothers** [Lk 22:32]; and he does so with meekness in order to encourage repentance.

If I were to collide against this Rock, I could fracture my head; but, instead if I were to rest against it, I would be sheltered<sup>256</sup>.

### **150: How Christ governs His Church**

The fundamental means used by Christ to establish His Church are the Sacred Scriptures, prophecies and miracles. **Now this is eternal life, that they should know You, the only true God, and the One Whom You sent, Jesus Christ** [Jn 17:3]. Therefore, study of the Scriptures is the required way to know God and Jesus Christ. By means of the Scriptures, the Lord has given His Church as many strong protections as there are divine commandments, and as many weapons as there are counsels that lead to sanctity.

Christ, therefore, directs His Church by means of the teaching of Pastors, the preaching of priests, and the administration of the Sacraments. These means are efficacious in themselves, even when some who are entrusted with these ministries are not always exemplary. Even if priests, at times, perform them unworthily, they, nevertheless, fulfill God's will to nourish His faithful. They give life to others, at the risk of destroying themselves spiritually. The vanity and avarice of certain priests who preach, say Mass, serve in parishes, and having almost killed themselves with studies when they were young, still accomplish God's plans, even if they suffer their own damnation.

Christ guides and governs His Church even throughout periods of tribulation: **Amen, Amen, I say to you, you will weep and mourn, while the world rejoices; you will grieve** [Jn 16:20]. Our Savior has effectively placed on His holy Church the weight and suffering of His Cross, so that He can then enrich it with the most excellent gifts of heaven, **but your grief will become joy** *ibid*<sup>257</sup>.

### **151: The sufferings of Christ's Bride**

The Church, which is governed by the grace of her Spouse, in a powerful, but, at the same time, amiable manner, actively cooperates with that grace: and in a similar way, she governs and conducts herself. Because of the fact that she reaches the aim of her activity – that is, the perfection of grace in this life and glory in the next – especially through tribulations, it is useful to pause a little to consider the system of this admirable government, in which, both the Divine Providence of her Spouse, Who rules her, and the singular virtues of the Church stand out. It is by these that she comports herself in the manner that corresponds to her spirit.

<sup>256</sup> Meditations on *Primum Regum*. nn. 50 & 51. MssB 6789-6824.

<sup>257</sup> o.c., n.3. MssB 4890-4904,

It must be understood that the Church will never be free from tribulations. There are not only persecutions that are present, so to say, in wartime; there are also various sufferings that afflict her in times of peace. Let us mainly reflect on the hardness of heart of so many sinners, and on the perverse stubbornness prevalent among a great part of the chosen people. There are many unbelievers today, even among some priests who proclaim themselves modern, setting themselves up against the Church and against priests who remain faithful.

But, the Church offers [us] a tremendous lesson by her sufferings. She is afflicted, yes, but she does not permit herself to be preoccupied by distress. On hearing the voice of her Spouse, the Church tempers her afflictions with inner consolation. Moreover, we see that these hardships produce in the Church the effect of a renewed fervor in preaching and a more vital confidence in prayer. It should be said, furthermore, that from all this, a harvest of greater perfection in detachment from riches and worldly honors emerges.

O Lord, make us always conform to the spirit of the Bridegroom [Christ] and of His Bride [the Church], so that, accepting in the same way the sufferings of the Church, in view of the wonderful plans of Your Providence, we can reap the intended fruit of Your mercy<sup>258</sup>.

### **152: Persecution in the life of the Church**

Lord, You have called us to the House of Your Son, where by the words of the Apostle, You have predicted persecution: ***Anyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus can expect to be persecuted*** [2 Tm 3:12]. Help us to follow the example of the Holy Church, so that we may be in harmony with You. May we become sons who are not ungrateful, or unworthy, but rather faithful imitators of You, just as the Church is towards her Spouse. Help us to understand the spirit of your Bride, the Church, so that, knowing it, we will love it; living it, we will desire it; and desiring it, we will open our mouths to ask it of You and our hearts to draw it to ourselves.

Let us consider before all else the cause and the basis for persecutions. On one side, there is a zeal in the Church to convert mankind to the Gospel; and on the other, there exists sinners' obstinacy. The Church, for her part, contends in battle with prayer and with true preaching, which is the fruit of prayer. On the other side, the sinner fights back with a yearning to do harm to the Church, while cunningly probing to find it at fault. The Church, however, does not proffer any pretext: ***Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of slander falsely against you because of me*** [Mt 5:1].

Persecution then intensifies when the Church, on her part, reinforces the struggle by preaching with more ardent love and confidence in her proclamation of the Gospel. The opposite side then escalates its intolerance by going so far as to prohibit evangelization.

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<sup>258</sup> o.c., n. 4. **MssB 4909-4930.**

But, let us also consider the consequences of persecution. History tells us that not just a few persecutors were converted by means of the Church's patience. Thus, the Church's longing to further extend the Kingdom of God increases, and the stubborn resistance of some is largely compensated by the conversion of so many others<sup>259</sup>.

### **153: The Church's conduct during persecution**

The Church's enemies sustain their persecutions mainly by calumny. They claim that the Church is ambitious, attached to worldly goods, directly in opposition to true religion and the Gospel. But, she gives the lie to those calumnies, revealing in herself an absolute disdain for the spirit of the world, enduring tribulations with patience, conducting herself in a detached manner with sincerity and purity of intention, demonstrating how all her ministry is directed to the realization of God's Kingdom. The very fact that in the midst of persecution's travails, the Church perseveres in fidelity to her task of preaching the Gospel, with love and courageous strength, is an incontrovertible proof that she proceeds in truth and justice.

The Church's marvelous freedom is a great scandal to her enemies, often providing them with a pretext to intensify their persecution. But, the Church proceeds fearlessly on her path. By her inner most unalterable freedom she always gives proof of meekness, while she intensifies her humility and refines the spirit of disinterestedness, of self control, and purity of intention.

Lord, we have known your Church's sufferings, which equally portray Your admirable Providence and the prudent, virtuous conduct of Your Bride. We adore Your most wise dominion and we say that we will imitate Your spouse while complying in every way to your summons: ***If a man wishes to come after Me, he must deny his very self, take up his cross and ... follow in MY foot steps*** [Mt 16:24]. Help us to carry, and not drag the cross along: that we may do so willingly in order to boast in the same way as [St. Paul's words]: ***May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*** [Ga 6:14]<sup>260</sup>.

## **THE WORD OF GOD**

### **154: God has spoken**

Man is ordained to God as to an end that surpasses reason's comprehension. Now, this purpose must be known by mankind, if they are to direct their intentions and their actions toward this end.<sup>261</sup> However, only God alone is able to enlighten man concerning these truths which exceed and transcend human reason, which, moreover, are so necessary that salvation depends on them. ***Eternal life is this: to know You, the only true God, and Him Whom You have sent, Jesus Christ*** [Jn 17:3].

<sup>259</sup> o.c., n. 5. MssB 4933-4955.

<sup>260</sup> o.c. Mss 4942-4964.

<sup>261</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*. I, q. 1, a. 1.

Tertullian says that when one deals with the souls' salvation, man must turn to God and direct himself according to God's laws. There is no better teacher of salvation than the very author of salvation<sup>262</sup>.

Now, God has spoken. He has spoken in many ways through the Prophets, to the ancient Fathers, and finally, He has spoken through His Son to the Apostles. Moreover the Holy Spirit has spoken even more fully to them, instructing them concerning every truth pertaining to salvation: ***When He comes, however, being the Spirit of Truth, He will guide you to all truth [Jn 16:13].*** We have the books of the Prophets, we have the evangelical books from the Apostles: here, therefore, is God's Word revealed in the Scriptures.

Furthermore, the Apostles, communicated orally with their disciples, leaving to the Church a repository of many of these truths revealed to them. These truths are recalled by the common consensus of the Holy Fathers, by the authentic definitions of the ecumenical Councils, or of the Supreme Pontiffs, and through the universal understanding and usage in the entire Church: here, therefore, is God's Word revealed in Tradition. God has spoken: what more should we ask for? We have Eternal Truth to direct us, why should we allow the false opinions of men to deceive us?<sup>263</sup>

### **155: Christ, our Light**

We are directed toward Christ, that is, toward truth and life. ***I am the way, and the truth, and the life [Jn 14:6].*** But, this Truth, this Life, which is the ultimate goal of our desires, surpasses human intelligence. ***No eye has ever seen without You, o God, what You have prepared for those who love You [cf. Is 64:3].***

We have therefore to flee from the opinions and judgments of worldly wisdom, if we want to achieve this blessed goal; and, if we want to find the star, that is the infallible guide which will direct us to this goal. In fact, that star is the same Christ, who, because He is truth and life, is also the way to achieve eternal truth, and to arrive at the life to which we aspire. ***I am the way, the truth and the life [Jn 14:6].***

St. John goes on to say that Christ is the true light that shines on every man who comes into this world. He is uncreated Wisdom, the Word of God, and therefore, has the words of eternal life: ***Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life? [Jn 6:68].***

But, this teaching of the Word is difficult for human reason because it cannot comprehend it [cf. Jn 6:60]. It is necessary to step back and distance oneself from human reasoning in order to understand it. The star appeared to the Magi only outside Jerusalem, outside the halls of mundane politics. So, it is God's Word that is

<sup>262</sup> Tertullian, *De Anima*, c. 1. PL 2, 689.

<sup>263</sup> Early Sermons, n. 35. 'Guide for reasoning and acting.' **MssB 1216-1221. PVC, pp. 252-255.**

the only infallible guide for our thinking and our activity in order to reach the supernatural divine goal to which we are called<sup>264</sup>.

### **156: Sacred Scripture**

We not only have what is needed in the Holy Scriptures, but also what is more useful to understand what is good, to discern what is bad, to correct our habits, to rectify our attitudes: what else? – to become saints and experts in every good work [2 Tm 3:16, ff.]<sup>265</sup>.

When the Sacred Scriptures are meditated upon correctly, they engender appropriate ideas about these things because they are organized according to the order of Divine Wisdom which inspired them. They fashion one's spirit, developing it, and intrusting it. One learns to recognize God and His greatness and omnipotence. One learns to know what are the duties of a creature, namely, obedience to the Creator<sup>266</sup>.

God's Word in the Scriptures must be the principle of both our thoughts and of our actions if we want to arrive at truth and salvation. The Apostle admonishes us: ***Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teaching*** [Heb 13:9]<sup>267</sup>.

The purpose of teaching the Bible is to practice the truths contained therein. It is, therefore, imperative to meditate on them and to adopt them as a guide for our behavior. In order to read Sacred Scripture properly, it is necessary to be on guard not to bend God's Word to our own way of seeing things, but to seek instead to make our way of seeing things conform to the Word of God<sup>268</sup>.

### **157: How to read the Bible**

Sacred Scripture is not so easy to understand. Many of God's words cannot be understood by the human intellect because, even though God's words are clearer than the light of the sun, the darkness of human concupiscence stands in the way. Necessary purity to overcome this darkness can only be achieved by mortification of all disordered passions. Since this purity is so difficult to attain, it is necessary, in addition to diligence in the mortification of passions, to persevere in prayer, uniting oneself in the commitment to the faithful observance of divine law. With the help of prayer and charity, truth will be revealed to our eyes.

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<sup>264</sup> o.c., **MssB 1211-1214. PVC, p. 251.**

<sup>265</sup> o.c., **MssB 1222. PVC pp, 225.** [All Scripture is a breath of God and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and raining in righteousness].

<sup>266</sup> *Meditations On Genesis*, n. 3. **MssB 4650.**

<sup>267</sup> Early Sermons, n. 35. **MssB 1223. PVC p. 255.**

<sup>268</sup> Jean Mabillon, *Treatise on Monastic Studies*. This is the classic work of this Benedictine Scholar of 1600, that St. Gaspar summarized for L. Naudet. Cf. **BERTONI 3**, pp. 473, ff.]. **MssB 8944.**



The immediate dispositions for a profitable reading of the Bible are humility, simplicity and fidelity. Humility: by renouncing every ambition for fame or personal glory: ***Although You have hidden these things from he learned and the wise, You have revealed them to the child-like*** [Lk 10:21]. Simplicity: to be satisfied with those inspirations which the Father of Lights deigns to grant us. Often while reading the Bible we are hindered by our intellectual pretensions whenever we want to know and put up for discussion what should be simply accepted. Fidelity: so that we venerate truth, no matter whether it remains hidden from us, or whether it is clearly revealed to us. Thus, St. Peter was not scandalized like those in Capernaum at the apparently difficult words that Jesus used. [cf. Jn 6:99]. Perhaps Peter had already understood the secret of His discourse? No, he did not as yet understand, but he respectfully believed that those words which he did not comprehend at the time were nevertheless true.

There are two common enough faults that must be avoided: curiosity and undue haste. One derives from the other. Reading, we believe that we can quickly find the food right away, but this is not so; it is necessary to prepare for it. Certainly, the best grain is there but not without the chaff. If there is bread, it must first be baked. Perhaps we are not ready yet to eat. The first of the Holy Spirit is needed to bake it. It is prayer that enlivens and fires it up<sup>269</sup>.

### **158: Meditating on Sacred Scripture**

***All Scripture is inspired of God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, correction and training in righteousness so that the one who belongs to God may be competent and equipped for every good work*** [2 Tm 3:16]. It must be investigated with humility and with a boundless admiration for divine excellence. Scripture so greatly exceeds even the human talent of the most illustrious people as these same geniuses are so inferior to God. They see of that spiritual greatness only that much that God in His generosity deigns to reveal to them. No one is so perfect in knowledge that he cannot make further progress, because every human progress always remains below God's heights, He, Who has inspired Scripture.

Sacred Scripture seems to present itself to us like a vast forest, which, at first glance appears to be homogeneous, but then, little by little, as it becomes familiar, one sees how many plains and valleys it contains. We find that there is much to discover which previously we could not even imagine.

Moreover, it is so admirably ordered in such a way that while continuing one's search, one realizes that there always remains some shadowy area to explore further. There is no danger that while acquiring familiarity one will lose interest. Moreover, one reads it more willingly as it becomes apparent every day that there is more to comprehend, because it always offers us something new<sup>270</sup>.

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<sup>269</sup> This passage is from J. Mabillon: o.c., MssB 8940-4861.

<sup>270</sup> Meditation on *Primum Regum*. n. 1. MssB 4855-4861.

### **159: St. Gaspar and Sacred Scripture**

From the time he was a major seminarian, St. Gaspar had read and studied sacred Scripture many times. Once a priest he made it his principal dearest study. He always had the more applicable sacred texts ready at hand. This was his guide and his 'calling card.' In the various circumstances of life, these helped him to act with confident security and calm.

That which he himself practiced, he habitually encouraged others, who came to him, to do the same, to be solaced by his encouragement, counsel and conversation. They were left so impressed by the unction and efficacy of his sayings and scriptural quotations, that it seemed that God Himself spoke to them by His mouth.

All this became natural and spontaneous with him; it became part of his nature and his very life blood. It is no wonder, then, that up to the last years of his life, he always had the books of Scripture, and the writings of the Fathers at hand. All this is one of the greater legacies that he left to his sons. Not only did he recommend to them the loving study of God's Word found in divine scripture and Tradition, but he ordered that they should always be read and consulted in every circumstance, making it their constant meditation.<sup>271</sup>

He had read the works of almost all the holy Fathers and studied sacred Scripture with the help of the most renowned commentators. It seemed that both were transformed into his life blood, so much so that his speech, it may be said, became a fully scriptural language<sup>272</sup>.

### **160: God speaks through the Apostolic Tradition**

The same God, who speaks in the Scriptures, also speaks in the tradition that is found. God Himself has given us these holy, and at the same time, most learned Fathers as Shepherds and physicians to render His Elect more perfect, in order to complete the great work of salvation, and to build the Mystical Body, which is the Church. This was done so that we would not be like vacillating children, tossed about by every wind coming from the teaching introduced by malice and cleverness of men in order to entangle us in error [cf. Ep 4:14]. Moreover, St. Paul says: ***It is He Who gave Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers in roles of service for the faithful to build up the body of Christ.*** [Ep 4:11-12].

Whoever is truly wise, or wants to become wise, ***explores the wisdom of all the men of old*** [cf. Si 39:1], as the Holy Spirit tells us. The words of the wise goad us on: ***The sayings of the wise are like goads*** [Qo 2:11] which encourage a sinner to conversion: ***like fixed spokes are the topics given by one collector*** [ibid.]. The teachings that proceed from the counsels of the saints are firm and well grounded, like fastenings planted from on high. They are proffered through the unanimous consensus

<sup>271</sup> G. Giacobbe, *The Life of the Servant of God, Gaspar Bertoni*. Verona 1858. SA, p. 182.

<sup>272</sup> *Miscellanea Lenotti*. SA, p. 462.

of all the teachers and doctors by the one Shepherd, Who is Christ, Who is God. Although there were many who teach, the author of doctrine is only one, that is, the Lord.

***As to more than these, my son, beware*** [Qo 12:12]. Follow the foot-prints of the elders, do not deviate from their authority.<sup>273</sup>

### **161: The Magisterium of the Church**

It remains certain that the Word of God revealed in the Scriptures and in Tradition is the only infallible norm of our belief, our hope and of our actions if we want to find truth and attain salvation. What, then, will happen to the poor, ignorant people who cannot read the Scriptures? Furthermore is it enough for the learned to read the Scriptures? No, it is not enough for the learned to read the Scriptures. The Magisterium of the Church is essential for both the learned and for the unlettered.

The Church has authority to propound God's Word, to explain it, and to determine its proper meaning. The unlettered one need not despair; he has a living, visible universal teacher, the Catholic Church. The learned need not be presumptuous. He has over him a judge who is also living, visible, infallible and supreme; the Apostolic Roman Church. Does anyone perhaps, believe himself to be sufficiently instructed, so that he only needs the sharpness of his reasoning? 'We', says St. Augustine, 'believe in order to understand; we do not understand in order to believe'<sup>274</sup>; and what else is faith if not believing what is not seen?

Does anyone think that he is sufficiently holy so that all he needs is his own private inspirations? 'Let us be on guard against these arrogant tendencies', again St. Augustine exclaims, 'rather, let us reflect on what the same Apostle, Paul, even while directly instructed by the voice of God, and by the Holy Spirit, was, nevertheless, sent to a man to learn what he had to do, and Cornelius was entrusted to St. Peter to learn from his mouth that which he had to believe, hope and love.'<sup>275</sup>

We must depend on the shepherds which the Holy Spirit has elected to rule God's Church. From these legitimate shepherds we must expect to learn all that is explained and declared to be the true meaning of God's Word as revealed in the Scriptures or in Tradition, as the only infallible norm for our belief and actions. This we must faithfully and constantly follow if we want to attain the knowledge of truth, and to possess supernatural, eternal beatitude, which we hope for in God, and with God<sup>276</sup>.

### **162: The Word of God, font of all wisdom**

Attention and reflection on God's Word and on His works are the foundation of all true wisdom. If someone contemplates and pays attention to other things while

<sup>273</sup> Early Sermons, n. 35. **MssB 1224-1226.PVC, pp. 255-257.**

<sup>274</sup> St. Augustine, *Tract on John 40*, 9. PL 35, 1690.

<sup>275</sup> St. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*. 6. PL 34, 18.

<sup>276</sup> Early Sermons n.35. **MssB 1235-1240; PVC pp.260-262.**

neglecting to heed the Teacher of Truth, Who is God, he acts like those children who focus on their toys while their teacher is explaining a lesson in School: they learn nothing. There were so many philosophers in Athens and in Rome resembling ants who seemed intelligent and lived according to a well-regulated social organization but did not know the real meaning of life.

God is order, and His works are well ordered: **You govern all things justly** [Ws 12:15]. God is truth: **God must be true** [R, 3:4]. Go is omnipotent: **His Name is omnipotent** [Est 4:2]. Sinful man, on the other hand, is totally disorganized; he is a liar [cf. Rm 3:4]; he is weak, and like one who is reduced to nothing [cf. Ga 3:6].

If we listen to God, we will succeed to put order into our soul, mind and heart. We will all know truth, and we will walk with it as in a great light. We will stand our ground even if everything crumbles around us. If, on the other hand, we place our confidence in worldly men, in self-styled philosophers, or even theologians who do not have God for a Father, nor the Church for a Mother, we will find ourselves in chaos of disorder and bewilderment. We will end up walking in darkness, evening the shadow of death.

Seeing everything in God's light, we will then learn to care for both the things of heaven and of earth with proper regard and with due respect, for they are always God's works<sup>277</sup>.

### **163: The Word of God and the Unity of the Church**

Let us now proceed, walking worthily toward the goal to which we are called. ***I, then, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, with all humility, gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace*** [Ep4:1-3].

'With all humility': one must walk worthily in this vocation by submitting our intellect with humble respect in order to believe the Divine Word.

'With gentleness': by not opposing the authoritative judgment of legitimate shepherds, all of which come from the enemies of the faith, of peace, and of the Church.

'Bearing with one another through love': All of us, who walk together united by the same calling, should help each other with mutual love, each one by carrying the other's burden.

'Striving to preserve the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.' By the grace of God, we possess this unity in the Spirit, i.e., of the faith; it is up to us to preserve it. However, vigilance, solicitude, and diligence are needed to effectively safeguard it. It is maintained by means of the bonds of peace and charity if we remain

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<sup>277</sup> Meditation On Genesis. n. 4, MssB 4666-4672.

well unified and linked to one another by love. Then, all of us to unified, will have a great attachment to the shepherds of the Church, whom we must follow, especially the supreme Shepherd, the Roman Pontiff, the heart of unity.

The one God, the goal of our bliss, and Father of all, invites us to this blessedness. He transcends everyone by means of His truth to enlighten us in order to know it. In all things, He expects us to find it. He dwells in all of us by his grace, as the intimate Principle that moves us to seek it [cf. Ep 4:6]<sup>278</sup>.

## LITURGY

### **164: Faith and Worship**

Religion is the virtue by which we render due and supreme worship to God as Creator and Lord of all things. This worship is a testimony of the divine greatness, and at the same time expresses the submission of our whole being to God.

We are made up of body and soul. God, Who created the soul, has also formed out body. Therefore, if the Spirit recognizes its Creator, is it not right that the senses should acknowledge his greatness? And if the mind has the happy lot of being able to discover the marvelous beauty of his divine reality, who can forbid the tongue to see His praises, to proclaim His glory, to bless His Name? The heart rises to God, the eyes are raised towards the mountain from which help comes, and without my even realizing it, I find my hands lifted in prayer [cf. Ps 121:1]. Filled with consolation, I offer my Spirit to God as a sacrifice of delightful fragrance, and my body also exults in the presence of its members as a living host to serve God. ***My heart and flesh cry out for the living God*** [Ps 84:3].

When Christ affirms that ***God is Spirit, and those who worship Him, must worship Him in spirit and in truth***, [Jn 4:24], He certainly does not intend to condemn external worship, but to clarify that interior worship is preeminent. It is to this that religion principally tends.

An external devotion without the heart is a corpse of devotion. They should of devotion in the heart. This, and nothing else, is what Christ intended to express with those words<sup>279</sup>.

### **165: The Meaning of Signs**

The human mind must be led by the hand of sensible things to reach God. From this comes the need to use material things. It is by these visible signs that the

<sup>278</sup> Early Sermons. N.35. **MssB 1235-1240. PVC, pp. 260-262.**

<sup>279</sup> Early Sermons .n. 36. **MssB 1243-1256.** The defense of external worship made in this Sermon –October 5, 1806 – presented also a character of a particular actuality at that time because of the Jansenistic mentality widely diffused in the Veneto. St. Gaspar waged a great battle against Jansenism, for which he had to suffer. Fr. Nello Dalle Vedove affirmed that he was in the center of the Jansenistic controversy in Verona. [**BERTONI** 3, p. 554].

human mind becomes stimulated to perform proper spiritual acts of the soul through which it establishes union with God.

God desired to make Himself bodily visible in Christ Who came to earth to reconcile the world to Himself. The reason being that He was able to enter our hearts more easily through the faculties of the senses. Christ also instituted the Sacraments, and under these a material and sensible signs, He diffuses grace and charity in our spirit. When lost by sin, He restores it, increases it, and confirms it in the one who possesses it. Having abolished the ancient sacrifices, He made a new one that is perpetual. This, too, is perceived in the sacramental species which on the one hand hid the mystery, and on the other make it known in a more excellent way.

Yet Christ promulgates in the Gospel a new law, all spiritual and all love, which consists essentially in the grace of the Holy Spirit, and also orders that the internal affection of the soul be joined to the external expression of language, and the works made visible by the hand. The announcer of the Gospel, St. Paul, proclaims: ***For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved*** [Rm 10:10]. And Christ Himself declares: ***Everyone who acknowledges Me before others, I will acknowledge before My Heavenly Father.*** [Mt 10:32]<sup>280</sup>.

## **166: Participation and Testimony**

***Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Heavenly Father*** [Mt 5:16]. I have been blessed in secret by my God. I do not have to hide under a blanket of silence His secret favors. Also, ***I will bless the Lord at all times, His praise shall ever be in my mouth.*** [Ps 33:2], and I will invite my neighbors to rejoice and thank Him with me. Since I believe, for the same reason, I also speak [cf. Ps 116:10]. Nor do I hold the truth known by me as a prisoner of an unjust pretense, or in a timid shameful silence.

To each of us the Lord has entrusted the care of our neighbor. Therefore, let us manifest our religion, confess our faith, and express our devotion. The glory of God wants this, the usefulness to our neighbor obliges us, and our own interest demands it. We are called to defend the honor of our Father, to sustain the weakness of our brothers, and to increase in ourselves the great gifts of grace.

No human respect. We do not fear men, even when they ridicule us. We fear, however, ***him who can destroy both body and soul in Gehenna.*** [Mt 10:28]. We freely serve Him Who for many reasons is our Lord and has acquired the right to our fidelity. He was the first to receive humiliation and punishment, and in the end, will repay our service and have us sit with Him on His throne of glory<sup>281</sup>.

<sup>280</sup> Early Sermons, n. 36. **MssB 1252-1256.**

<sup>281</sup> Early Sermons, n. 36. **MssB 1257-1266.**

**167: The value of Liturgical Ceremonies**

The rites and ceremonies with which the Church has adorned her liturgical celebrations are really full of significance, and very useful, and not something indifferent. In fact, they are the exterior signs of piety and interior feeling. Besides, they are also a help and nourishment to this piety and interior feeling. Moreover, the ceremonies aid not only in nourishing feeling and sentiment, but also in understanding faith. St. Augustine makes it clear that he was impelled to accept the dogma of the presence of original sin in children before baptism by the fact that in the ancient rite of this sacrament the subjects were exorcised, and those present had to renounce the devil and his works, on their behalf<sup>282</sup>.

The excellence of the Christian religion, essentially spiritual, is not easy for us to perceive because we are made of body as well as spirit. Thus, the mysteries are not presented to us in their bare essentials, but, so to speak, they are dressed and adorned so that they appear to the senses in a light of an outer splendor, and then they are seen with greater ease and more accepted by our mind. One can say that the ceremonies represent for religious worship what salt is for good, or the outside for the marrow.

Finally, it must be remembered that the ceremonies are an integral part of divine worship. Man must worship God with body and soul, as it is instituted by the Church. 'Let us think, says St Cyprian, 'that we find ourselves in the presence of God, and it is the eyes of God that we should please even with the posture of our body and with the expression of our voice.'<sup>283</sup>

**168: Liturgical buildings and furnishings**

***Lord, I love the house in which You dwell, the tenting place of Your glory*** [Ps 26:8]. David amassed for his son much gold and silver for the construction of the majestic temple which was one of the marvels of ancient times. With greater reason ought we to embellish and enrich our churches, where the altars are reddened not by the blood of animals, but by Christ Himself, the Divine Immolated Lamb.

No comparison is possible between the palace of a grand person, even among the great ones of this world, and the house of God. Yet, those who are but a handful of dust often are resplendent by their magnificence and sumptuousness, both externally and internally. Meanwhile, the house where the King of Kings lives sometimes reeks of poverty and squalor, and to cover the bareness of its walls, they use the remnants of worn out wardrobes.

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<sup>282</sup> St. Augustine. 'Concerning the merits and remission of sin', c. 34, 63. PL 44, 146.

<sup>283</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3590-3595**. The passage cited is from St, Cyprian, 'The Lord's Prayer, 4. PL 4, 538.

Christ, Himself shows us how He desires the splendor of sacred temples. ***He will show you a large room that is furnished. Make the preparations there.*** [Lk 22:1]<sup>284</sup>.

On his part, St. Gaspar did not omit anything for the beauty and décor of what he needed for his Church at the Stimate. While he loved frugality at his table poverty in his clothing and furniture, for his own use and that of his followers, he wanted the very best and the most sumptuous for the divine table, the vestments of the priest who had to ascend the altar, the sacred vessels of precious metals.

He wanted the veils, vestments, linens, sacred vessels, furniture of every kind, and whatever was needed for the altar and for the celebration to breathe elegance, décor and propriety<sup>285</sup>.

### **169: The reason for images**

In the evening, while contemplating a picture of the Holy Trinity, I experienced great reverence and love for the three Persons. The Eternal Father, who had his arms outspread was explaining His mercy to me and communicating His gifts with ease<sup>286</sup>.

Images serve to inspire us to virtue, the same way that the arguments of spiritual people move us. Who can ever repeat the grandeur, the multiplicity and the attraction of those virtues which those good images present to us, and the silent, yet eloquent thoughts that enlighten us by seeming to enter our heart through the eyes? This is one real school of every kind of virtue for all ages, under all conditions, and in every time and circumstance.

Certainly, in order for an image to move us to devotion, it must have beauty and a pleasing expression of affection. In this regard, the Orientals put us to shame since in their paintings we notice a strict modesty and an extraordinary devotion, whereas in our case, certain images, painted or sculptured in a style often worldly, instead of moving us to devotion, provoke distraction, incite vanity, and sometimes give real and true scandal. However, the good result of nice images is confirmed by the common sense both of the learned and the unlettered, of the just and of sinners, of all who derive strong incentives to refute sin, to calm passions, and to love virtue<sup>287</sup>.

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<sup>284</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3582-3584.**

<sup>285</sup> Cajetan Giacobbe, *Life*, SA, p. 512.

<sup>286</sup> Spiritual Journal. August 24, 1808.

<sup>287</sup> Academic Oration on the special cult of images. **MssB 1517-1519.** A tract of a discourse delivered on April 18, 1806 – always in the Church of St. Paul in Campo Marzio – in defense of the special cult offered to the images of the Madonna and St. Anna, present in that Church, a cult that was particularly contested by the Jansenists [**BERTONI** 3,PP. 484, ff.].



## THE ROMAN PONTIFF

### **170: Where Peter is, there is the Church**

One must remember that with the invisible spirit of the Church comes a visible Head also; the spirit of Jesus Christ, not the human spirit, nor that of human reason, but one of faith. The Church is visible; therefore its head must be visible. Without the Head the body is only a trunk. We believe in the spirit of Jesus, and human reason comes to a halt. Thus, let us submit to the Head, removing all human presumption, if we wish to live and remain standing. It is impossible to live without the spirit, and without the Head it is impossible to live or to remain standing. A member without the spirit cannot live, but it is joined to the body and Head, it is able to stand and revive itself.

Those members cut off from the body, or Head, cannot survive, cannot stand, for they are impaired, they rot and are lost. There are also today some who have a great knowledge of the old time, who keep dragging their old ways, and do not recognize the spirit of the Church, nor its visible Head. But it is another thing to mention the old ways with the Spirit of God, which now become new, changed by the Spirit. Without the Spirit of God, they are old, stale, and rancid. It is the Spirit of God that makes all things new<sup>288</sup>.

The Roman faith is the faith of the Catholic Church. Wherever Peter is, there is the Church<sup>289</sup>. Where the Head is there is the whole Body. Whoever relies on error staggers, reels and falls. Whoever stands on divine truth is firm and serene. It wasn't any earthly power nor the Councils that founded the Chair of Peter. It was the Word of God Who created heaven and earth<sup>290</sup>.

O Lord, close the ears of our hearts to the voice of the serpent. Open our ears to the voice of Peter, so that our senses will never deteriorate, nor ever spoil the purity of our faith, so that we may show our spirit as a chaste virgin to You, who are the Spouse of Faithful souls<sup>291</sup>.

### **171: Let us listen to Christ and His Vicar**

When we treat of faith, not metaphysical or political controversies, we must submit to the authority of the Head of the Church, upon which is founded the House of God, and is the support and foundation of the truth. Let us listen to Christ and His Vicar. If we remain alone like Noah, who remained alone against everyone, we few will enter the ark, outside of which there is no salvation. Here note the words of St. Paul: But we if we or an angel from Heaven should preach a Gospel other than the one Peter through his successors teaches, do not believe him, for the punishment is

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<sup>288</sup> Meditation on *Primum Regum* n. 18. **MssB 5608-5647.**

<sup>289</sup> St. Ambrose, Psalms 40, 30.PL 14, 1134.

<sup>290</sup> Meditation on *Primum Regum*. N.30. **MssB 6160.**

<sup>291</sup> O.c. n. 35. **MssB 6311.**

eternal death and the separation from God [cf. Ga 1:8]. Rome is silent. She is silent because she has already spoken, reproved, annulled, cancelled all the Gallican doctrines, that are nothing else but the opinions of men even if they came from Bossuet. She is silent because if she speaks after ten or twelve Pontiffs have already spoken, there is nothing left except to excommunicate. She is lenient as God Himself is, waiting for one to recognize his errors and to seek forgiveness. ***Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both body and soul in Gehenna*** [Mt 10:28].

We must be very careful that we are not led astray, that we are not deceived in the simplicity of our hearts. Let us close our ears to the voices of those who lie, or deceive. Certainly truth has a price. But Christ our Lord paid a greater price. The salve should not be better than his lord. ***Amen, amen, I say to you, no slave is greater than his master*** [Jn 13:16]<sup>292</sup>.

## 172: The Successor of Peter, model for all pastors

The teaching and conduct of the Chief Pastor is the right rule for good spiritual government for all the Pastors of the Church, and, therefore, it is the source of common happiness for the faithful. The goodness and happiness in other Pastors in governing depend a great deal on how they conform their life to the way of virtue proclaimed by the Chief Pastor.

The Holy See has always spoken with clarity and freedom. It reproved and made known existing evils. If at times she has chosen a way of prudent and temporary pretense, never has she fallen for the flattery of the world's powerful ones and never in servile weakness. Here is a concrete rule for Pastors. He, who is distant from that criterion of judgment in evaluating things, even if at the beginning he may have some success, will soon become aware that he is deceiving himself. He who cuts himself off from the faith of Rome is outside the communion of the Church. Because the Church is nothing else but the union of pastors and faithful with Peter.

One cannot remain neutral, because the form of virtue and the conduct of the Holy See is governing our consciences becomes the true norm for good governing that is proposed to all pastors. So much so, that when they act in this manner they are all in agreement. The dogmas of faith are not opinions. What is proposed by Peter are truths that must be firmly believed.

Lord, give us the grace to be faithful with all our hearts to Peter. Let us lose our life rather than obedience. This is what Christ did<sup>293</sup>.

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<sup>292</sup> Correspondence, p. 262. Letter to L. Naudet, probably in September 1829. In February 1829, there appeared in the Diocesan magazine a Declaration by Archbishop de Quelen clearly inspired by the principle of Gallicanism. This was the reason why St. Gaspar wrote this letter and it explains his particular tone [cf. Fr. Stofella's Introduction to this letter, o.c., p. 261].

<sup>293</sup> Meditation on *Primum Regum* nn. 47- 48. **Mss B 6634-6707.**

### **173: The Pope and the renewal of Pastoral Ministry**

Because of the unfailing strength of the First Rock, we receive an invitation or general calling by the Spirit to confess Christ publicly before the world by words and deeds, without human regard or fear. ***I tell you, everyone who acknowledges Me before others, the Son of Man will acknowledge before the angels of God [Lk12:8].***

Whoever wishes to be My servant, follows me. ***Whoever serves Me, must follow Me [Jn 12:26]***, says Christ, imitate Me in the way of living. Let people see in us a copy of Christ and His Apostles. We must have the courage to follow Him to the bitter end, even to death. ***If anyone comes to Me without hating... even his own life, he cannot be My disciple [Lk 14:26].***

That youth, whose eyes have been opened by the Holy Spirit and who firmly rests on the First Rock, has a very strong desire to glorify God, not only in words, but also with his life, even to confess openly faith in His Son. He serves Christ by following him in strict imitation of His life. He desires to follow Him in His Passion, trampling on human esteem, even hating his own life. He is the one who is best disposed to become a priest.

***Lord, a steadfast spirit renew within me [Ps 51:12].*** Renew it from old and crooked ways which we have been following through our sins and our adherence to the maxims of the world helps us never to lose that divine spirit which you wish to impart to us<sup>294</sup>.

### **174: In the name of the Pope, a complete plan of reform**

It is through the unfailing strength of the First Rock that the creative Spirit manifests His plan of reform, or restoration for a holy ministry that foresees the end of the old spirit, above all, informing new ministers, and then in opening for the former ministry a way of reforming itself.

There is need for new ministers, formed with a new spirit by the Holy Spirit, Who renews and restores all things, to renew and restore her ministry. Through this the Church will shed the old human spirit by bringing to life a new and divine one through the firm and true foundation of the First Rock. The forming of new ministers according to the Spirit of God means that there is a need of educating our youth to a living faith, and a constant dedication to contemplation, so that they are able to focus on heaven and not on earth. Their intention should be focused on Christ, striving always to please Him, having Him as their model and conforming totally to Him.

Once the old ministry has been reformed, a new one must be formed. The Holy Spirit through the unfailing foundation of the First Rock acts to see that the old ministries are involved with: confessing the faith openly without uncertainty or fear, imitating Christ in His Passion, without the comforts of life even scorning death; joining

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<sup>294</sup> o.c., n.14. **MssB 5348-5350.**

with good priests to search together for God's glory, without being an egoist or attached to one's family, seeking heaven, and no longer worldly things or honors<sup>295</sup>.

### **175: How to put into effect the plan of renewal**

Those whom God has chosen to put into effect the reforms in ministry must be persons of prayer and recollection, besides being persons of wisdom and prudence. They should know when to start by making their plans and designs perfectly clear, so that they will not cancel any plan or design uselessly. The Lord remained secluded for thirty years before He began His Mission openly, thus teaching us how we should prepare. In this way, the risk of having to quickly undo what was done irresponsibly, will be avoided.

After prayer and prudence, the method of proceeding must be ascertained, and one must await from God the opportune time before acting. In the meantime, one should work to prepare the people involved, with kindness, imitating the Lord and His Providence, and following him. One should strive to highlight the beauty of virtue and the spiritual value that will be had. This will involve and attract people and imbue them with a new spirit. One ought to be very patient in reforming people, who are dominated by worldly spirits, helping them not to fall into desperation.

If one possesses a great deal of charity and true love, then it is the opportune time to move in fulfilling this renewal. ***But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high [Lk 24:49].*** This charity which comes from heaven is easily distinguished from false and earthly zeal.

The characteristics of charity are prudence, magnanimity and discretion: its activity is not rushed into immaturity and immoderation. In the same charity – which is also characterized by fortitude – will choose the most opportune moment and will not delay its action, due to human respect. In its own time, it finds avenues in the heart of righteous and upright people who appreciate it. It wins over the arrogance of perverse people, who learn to fear and respect it. The human spirit is timid and cowardly when confronted by true virtue and the Spirit of God. Therefore charity appears to be a great gift of God and His authentic witness<sup>296</sup>.

### **176: The Pope and the denouncing of abuses in the Church**

The channel to denounce and condemn the worldly spirit in the Church is the Vicar of Christ on earth. ***I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail, and once you have turned back, you must strengthen your brothers [Lk 22:32].*** This First Stone is straight and solid. In its indefectible integrity one sees and reproves the draftiness and lack of good spirit in other ministers of the church. Thanks to its absolute steadfastness the divine spirit is renewed or confirmed, where once it was wavering or even extinct.

<sup>295</sup> o.c., nn, 14 & 16. Mss 5365-5373 and 5511.

<sup>296</sup> o.c., n. 16 b. MssB 5515-5537.

Meanwhile, the other foundation stones of the hierarchy of the Church are solid and firm, in so far as they are supported by the First Stone. This Stone will reprove the abuse of the divine gifts, caused by the negligence and the weakness of certain pastors and expressed by the scandalous conduct of many priests. When, thanks to the manifestation of the good Spirit, on the one hand, one is able to know the greatness of the sacerdotal dignity and on the other, the abuses that some do with it, the faithful begin to experience a renewed feeling of veneration for the priesthood and at the same time, feel sorry for those who do not correspond worthily to their vocation. They are able to realize the great dignity of the priest, and also the greater ruin of those who fail.

O Lord, assure us with the light of your Holy Spirit, so that through the darkness of the world we can keep our eyes fixed on the integrity of that First Stone, which you have placed as the foundation, upon which all the other stones are made even. We are grateful that You have given this first indefectible rule in Your Church so that in the uncertainty of our thoughts, we can have a defense against all errors and a sure guarantee of the truth<sup>297</sup>.

### **177: Never against the Pope**

There have always been, and even today, under the pretense of reform, those who appear to be fighting against the evil spirit, but in reality, are fighting against the Church, always referring to the past. They declare that they want to remain in the Church; therefore, they react against the threat of excommunication, but they themselves have separated from the faith of the Catholic Church. God has allowed them to cut themselves off.

They appeal to the better years in the history of the Church, and they place their attention and their studies on those times, claiming that the Church of today is blind. But they are the blind since they do not see the light. They act as one who is blind, who in broad daylight says: 'Let the light in'. They have gone from the integrity of that Rock upon which they were founded. They are separated from the unity of the Church. They claim to be holy and perfect, relying on the pretext of their knowledge of the ancient traditions of the Fathers. They alone are the depositories of the true light. They, therefore, resist the voices of the real preachers of the Gospel, and even the voice of Peter, who throughout the centuries has always received great respect by being decisive even in the discussions of the Councils. Rome has spoken; the argument is ended<sup>298</sup>.

To bring about a real renewal in His Church, God makes use of holy preachers, who have been renewed by the Holy Spirit, and remain firm in their devotion to the First Rock. Through their efforts, God builds a new spirit removing the impediments to the newness of the Gospels, and preventing the risk of their becoming old.

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<sup>297</sup> o.c., n. 13. **MssB 5309-5336.**

<sup>298</sup> St. Augustine, Sermon 131, 10. PL 38, 734.

O Mary, beautiful as the moon, resplendent as the sun, formidable as an army in battle array, behold your army and that of your Son. Be favorable to them, so that they will have no fear of the enemy, but rely on your strength and on the power of Christ<sup>299</sup>.

## PRIESTS

### **178: The Priest and the faithful**

It is impossible to say whom here on earth God wanted to exalt more than priests. ***Thus should one regard us as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God*** [1 Co 4:1]. This is the proper attitude that Christian People should have concerning their priests, so that when they see a priest, they will say: There is a Minister of Christ, a dispenser of the divine mysteries, and ambassador of the great King.' St. Paul tells us: ***So we are Christ's ambassadors, as if God were appealing through us*** [2 Co 5:20].

Priests have given us new life through Baptism, and we have put on Christ, thus becoming members of that Body of which He is the Head. If we have grown and have been able to enjoy the riches of the Spirit, we owe this to the priest. It is the priest who feeds and nourishes us with the wholesome food of the Word of God. It is the priest who each day prepares the rich banquet, and distributes the Bread of Angels. It is to the priest that has God granted authority to remit sins: ***Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained*** [Jn 20:23]. If we remain secure in the peace of our hearts, if the enemy does not prevail against our spirit, if we are even threatened by the Divine Justice which we have provoked, we are still the recipients of His Divine Mercy. It is the priest who presents to God each day the official prayer of the Church, seeking peace and tranquility for all people.

By nature and birth, the priest is like everyone else. Yet he is superior to the laity, almost like an angel because of his office. Yet, he is threatened on all sides with the same tribulations, assailed by the same enemy, meets with the same dangers, if not greater ones. Just as the priest helps the faithful to attain their salvation, so, too, should the priest be helped to obtain his salvation through the prayers of the faithful. Oh yes, let us pray for priests!<sup>300</sup>

### **179: Chosen from the world**

***I have chosen you out of the world*** [Jn 15:19]. This fact of being distinct from the world signifies that we are not longer of the world. ***You do not belong to the world*** [Jn 15:19]. A priest must be separated from the world, detached from it crucified and dead to the world. Separated not by living in it, but by not sharing its spirit and sentiment. It is not enough to wear the garb of a priest which distinguishes him from

<sup>299</sup> Meditations on *Primum Regum*. N. 17. MssB 5571-5702.

<sup>300</sup> Early Sermons, n.13. Respect for priests. MssB 674-694. PVC pp. 183-190.

the world. One must have the spirit. How many priests have the worldly spirit! They are not even ashamed of dressing and living according to the standards of the world!

Detached from the world. How very sad that priest be, who in force of his priestly character, should be different and separated from the world, but in reality is not really separated from it. He would not have any consolations either from God or from the world. He would be a 'chimera' neither secular nor priestly. He would not be a secular because of his priestly character which distinguishes him from the world. He would not be priestly because he still belongs to the world.

Crucified to the world. ***The world has been crucified to Me, and I to the world*** [Ga 6:14]. If the world knows that I am a priest does not accept my principles, but I readily accept its axioms, then I am a priest in name only. ***If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a slave of Christ.*** [Ga 1:10]. If I wish to conduct myself as a true priest, and to be truly convincing, the world should be my cross, and I certainly should be a cross to the world, because of the difference in our sentiments and principles.

Dead to the world. It is not enough to be crucified, because one can be on the cross and still alive. One must be dead to the world both inside and out. The world to which I have to be especially crucified is within me. This is more dangerous than the one outside me, because this is made up of the three concupiscences mentioned by St. John: ***Concupiscence of the flesh, of the eyes and the pride of life*** [1 Jn 2:16]. We must be way of this world, since it is in me and part of me. One who is dead does not see, hear, feel, speak, become angry, or show pity. This is how I must be dead to my passions and to the inner and outer world<sup>301</sup>.

### **180: Sent into the world**

There is a widely diffused thinking among the people that the life of a priest is rather comfortable, tranquil and easy. But the truth is that he who wishes to follow the vocation of a priest must be ready to renounce all comforts and amenities, and to assume a hard and difficult life. He must be accountable from the moment he enrolls in the army of the Lord. He is not called to a life of comfort and pleasure but to hard work and worry. He has before him the example of the saints and the glory of the apostles. Let us recall our heredity, made up of many labors. St. Paul happily stated: ***I have toiled harder than all of them*** [1 Co 15:10]. It is a boast, but without a trace of vanity or weakness. Therefore, if it is true that he has labored harder than all, still the apostolic mission is not completed; there is still much more to do. Let us go out into the field of the Lord and we shall see very clearly how it is still full of bushes and thorns. Let us go out into the world. This is where we should work, for it has been entrusted to our care. Let us go into that field, not as land owners, but as workers, ***in toil and hardship, through many sleepless nights, through hunger and thirst and through frequent fasting*** [2 Co 11:27].

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<sup>301</sup> Retreat Meditations MssB 2264-2270. cf. also Meditations on *Primum Regum n. 5*, MssB 4964.

Where in face have we gone? Where is the spirit of the Apostles? Where are the modesty, the humility, the toil, and the zeal of the primitive Church? This was the vocation of the apostles and the dignity of the princes of the church. Thanks be to God that it has not all disappeared, not even in our time. Our era has also a Pius VII!

As a priest, I should never hesitate to imitate the example of the Apostles, and like them, reach out to the poor, to visit hospitals and prisons, to hear confessions of the uneducated, to take care of the wants of those in need, to give instructions to those who are unlearned, and to become all things to all people and to be zealous for their salvation<sup>302</sup>.

### **181: The laying on of hands**

The laying on of hands means that the one ordained is consecrated and offered to God as a victim. This was also the practice in the Old Testament. The priest laid hands on the victim that was to be offered to the Lord [cf. Ex 29:10]. What this rite meant was that by their hands and power, they handed the whole matter over to God. So, too, the children of the Israelites laid hands on the Levites, who were then distinct from the others, as they were offered and consecrated to God [cf. Nb 8:10].

Let priests realize that through the laying on of hands they are consecrated to the Lord in order to dedicate themselves entirely to Him, living no longer for themselves, but to sacrifice their own life in the sacred mysteries [cf. 2 Co 12:15] above all, in view of obtaining the salvation of their brothers and sisters.

The laying on of hands brought down the protection of God. Thanks to this, those upon whom the hands were imposed, were totally guided by God as His own sons. This protection gave them power and strength, and kept the power of evil from them.

The laying on of hands also recalls that those who receive Holy Orders carry out their ministry under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, upon Whom they can rely as guide in all their actions<sup>303</sup>.

### **182: Priestly holiness**

Detachment from the world, crucifixion and spiritual death are very high degrees of sanctity. Yet, we have to admit that this is only a part of the priestly vocation, which in some way is shared in common with religious. The religious are also called to sanctity, but with this difference, however, the religious fulfills his vocation by aspiring and tending toward holiness. But, the priest can only fulfill his obligation by being perfect and holy. The former is on the road to holiness, while the latter is in the state of perfection.

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<sup>302</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3756-3762.**

<sup>303</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB3801-3803.**



There is also another difference. The religious has more means to use: solitude, vows and his daily rule. The priest has nothing else in the world but dangers and distractions that are quite strong and intense. Perfection for the priest is a commandment. I was free to choose the priesthood or not, but since I am a priest, I can no longer renounce my obligation to be perfect.

God has chosen me to be a priest, and has separated me from the world. He has raised me as high as the heavens are over the earth by giving me the power over the Body of His Son. I call God down to the altar and He heeds my voice. How much sanctity is needed for this! How pure must those hands and those eyes be to be a witness of this mystery! How holy should that tongue be that pronounces these words! How holy should that heart be that receives his God!<sup>304</sup>

### **183: Union with Christ**

Every undertaking of sacred ministry, which is carried out in force of his vocation and priestly ordination, is the work of Christ. It is Christ Who baptizes, Christ Who absolves, and Christ who consecrates through the priest. Hence, we must be guided by the hand of the Principal Worker as a living, chosen instrument. Christ is the first and absolute Model of the priestly perfection. ***Be imitators of me as I am of Christ***, said St. Paul [1 Co 11:1]. The priest is like a sacred seal on which he must produce a real living image of Christ, so that, on his part, he may transfer that image to others. But the image of Christ and that of this corrupt world are not compatible. If I wish to make an impression of the one, the other has to be eliminated.

Let us prefer to have Christ, as the ***Pondus Cordis***, the center of our love, the scope of all our intentions. The priest is sealed with the character of Christ in that he might realize that he has been placed under His dominion in everything. Therefore, may the principle, the means, and the goal of our devotion be Him Who is the Principle, the Means and the goal of priestly power and action.

Let us always look to Him as the Way. Let us always seek Him as the Truth. Let us always love Him as the Life. Let us get close to Him because He Himself is the Way. Let us nourish ourselves from His fonts of truth and wisdom. Let us draw the water of life, let us drink it and become inebriated with it. ***Yet, I live no longer I, but Christ lives in me.*** [Ga 2:20]<sup>305</sup>.

### **184: Work in all ways**

***But you, be self-possessed in all circumstances, put up with hardship, perform the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry*** [2 Tm 4:5]. This means that a priest must preach, evangelize, both in word and in holiness of life. The faithful must see the priest as not seeking his own advantage and comfort, but because of the Gospel he is ready to meet at once all kinds of difficult sufferings, urged on with the

<sup>304</sup> Retreat meditations. **MssB2271-2277.**

<sup>305</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3426-3428.**

love of God. It is said of St. Cyprian that his Passion to preach was so strong that he desired martyrdom in the very act of speaking about God<sup>306</sup>.

We must follow Christ, our Leader, and also the Apostles who are our guides. Let us set this old and insensitive world on fire with our fervent zeal and endless charity, so that with the Apostles we may one day hear these words: ***Amen, Is ay to you, that you who have followed Me in the new age, when the Son of Man is seated on His throne of glory, you yourselves will sit on twelve thrones*** [Mt 19:28].

When the Divine Judge will sit to examine the life of each one and to decree his eternal fate, He will not ask about our wealth, or income, or even what culture we have possessed, but how did we use them, how many people we have converted and what means we used, how many poor people we have converted and what means we used, how many poor people have we fed, or refreshed, or visited, and to what extent did we face the dangers, the ridicule, the persecutions, the tribulations, in order to obtain all this. The world needs to witness authentic examples of a truly evangelical life<sup>307</sup>.

### **185: Holiness and Mission of the Priest**

We have been called not because we are the only ones to serve God, but so to act that our brothers and sisters also praise and serve God, so that together we might obtain our salvation.

But how can anyone make saints of others, if he himself is not holy? How can anyone rescue souls from the tendencies of this world, if he himself is not on solid ground of great holiness? The world, the devil war especially on those who have undertaken the mission of saving souls. How can one save himself from deception and temptation if he is not fortified with solid virtue?

We must be concerned for the good of not only those few souls who are near us, but also the souls of the whole world. This requires much prayer. St. Gregory the Great says: 'No one should presume to seek the priesthood if he has not acquired through prayer a great familiarity with God, so that he is able to bend the will of God to his, as Moses and Elijah did'<sup>308</sup>. ***Thus I have searched among them for someone who could build a wall or stand in the breach before me to keep Me from destroying the land, but I found no one.*** [Ezk 22:30]

***Receive the Holy Spirit, whose sins you forgive are forgiven them*** [Jn 20:22]. Behold a power all divine. *Who but God can forgive sins?* [Mk 2:7] Thus He has placed us between God and people, because on God's part we represent the people, on their part we represent God. The priest must be a heavenly man and earthly angel. We have to live to that degree of perfection that is called for by our

<sup>306</sup> Pontus. *The Life and Sufferings of St. Cyprian*, c.14. PL 3, 1554.

<sup>307</sup> Exercises and Instructions. **MssB 3763-3775.**

<sup>308</sup> St. Gregory the Great, 'The Rule of Pastors'. P. 1, c. 10. PL 77, 23.

vocation. The facility with which we assume these duties and the little spiritual care with which we perform them are not sufficient motives at the Last Judgment to exonerate us from giving an account of the holiness that these duties require.

In order to carry out our obligations, we must put an end to following our own ways and following more closely the ways of the Lord. Let us go forward with great concern, for we are people who carry an enormous burden – the burden of our sins, and even more, the care of all the world<sup>309</sup>.

### **186: Sacerdotal responsibility**

The dignity of the priesthood should make us tremble<sup>310</sup>. Let us take stock of our service before the Lord calls us<sup>311</sup>. Let us examine well how we occupy the chair as teacher of the people of God. Because it is not the chair that makes the priest, but the priest who makes the chair. It is not the place that sanctifies man, but the man who sanctifies the place.

The sin of a priest carries double malice. It causes many sins on the part of the faithful. Who can tell the damage to souls? The tendency to imitate is founded on the weakness of the imitator. He is accustomed to imitate bad examples rather than good ones, like a hammer bangs and destroys a statue more rapidly that it takes to make one. Thus it is, that the example tends to destroy virtue with greater force than when attempting to promote it.

This common power of every bad example becomes especially harmful when the example comes from a person who is well esteemed and more accepted because of learning. Since these not only teach sin by what they do but they also take away the good which is like a dam which prevents the spread of evil. A scandalous lay person is like a large stone that rolls on a field. The damage that it can do is limited. A priest that gives bad example is like a large stone that rolls down a hill, and because of the steepness of the hill, who knows what damage it will cause?

Let us look into ourselves and examine our conduct, and if, by chance, we find that we have cooperated in any way to harm the work of grace in our brother, or sister, let us hasten to remove the damage done to their edification. Let us rebuild the temple, which by our words or deeds, or by our imprudent actions, we might have caused to crumble<sup>312</sup>.

### **187: The Priest and the Eucharist**

Every day we receive Christ with the intention of becoming God-like, but in fact, we are not God-like men, and maybe not even spiritual men. In fact some priests are ashamed of this title. Instead they think of nothing else than to be a great preacher, a

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<sup>309</sup> Exercises and Meditations. **MssB 2278-2284.**

<sup>310</sup> Spiritual Journal. September 15, 1808.

<sup>311</sup> *ib.*

<sup>312</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3348-3371.**

man of culture, a man of talent, a man of business, or a social priest. In other words, priests involved with the world and the flesh.

O how sad! Woe to us if we do not recognize the Body of the Lord. Oh, what an accounting for so many Masses!

Certain priests never voluntarily remain with Christ. They do not even do so at the altar. Talking with Christ is something they leave to the pious faithful. They would rather speak of worldly things and events. If they speak of Christ, they do so, not because of Him, but as a duty. They do not consult Him in prayer, nor seek His help and protection. Meanwhile they are intent in seeking the protection and support of men. They confide in those who do not love them, or who even hate them, rather than in Christ Who loves them passionately.

The Apostles remained with Christ. St. John rested on His chest. They heard His sermons and followed Him into the garden. Here are the effects of Mass celebrated by a good priest: he enjoys spending time with Christ; he finds rest and peace in Christ; he is attentive to divine inspirations; he is able to silence the voice of the world and its passions; to follow Christ even in times of trouble. The apostles themselves would have had fewer temptations, if they had not been found wanting in prayer<sup>313</sup>.

### **188: To know and to do the will of the Father**

This is how those must act who are called to be spiritual fathers, and as members of Christ Whom they generate in people's souls by their preaching and through the administration of the sacraments. Faithful in thought and Action as Abraham; prudent, just, brave, and moderate as the Patriarchs. Moral science of theology, human or divine, is not sufficient. One needs the human and divine moral and theological virtues. **Whoever does the will of My Heavenly Father**, and not merely knows it, **is My brother, sister and mother** [Mt 12:50]. Peter was ignorant, and Paul rather unimpressive. Yet, the ignorant one and unimpressive one knew how to confound the philosopher and to silence the rhetorician.

Sad to say many priests are apostolically sterile, because they never attain any maturity of perfection. **Until we attain to mature manhood, to the extent of the full stature of Christ** [Ep 4:13]. They lack even the roots of charity, or they are dried up, because they have not nourished themselves with prayer. **Withered and dried up my heart, because I forgot to eat my bread** [cf. Ps 102: 5]. Cry not only for themselves but also for their children. Mothers and nurses who feed babies eat a lot and they are dispensed from fasting. Priests are dying of hunger, how can they feed their children?<sup>314</sup>

<sup>313</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2595-2600**

<sup>314</sup> Meditations on *Primum Regum* n. 2. **MssB 4876-4881.**

Pray, my dear Ecclesiastics, pray. Let us always be faithful to our meditation, so that we come to know how to behave in the house of the Lord<sup>315</sup>.

### **189: Like Jesus in the Temple**

Jesus remained in the temple of Jerusalem, and besides the time He spent discussing with the teachers, the rest of the time was spent in vigil before His Eternal Father, praying for the welfare of the world and for all the people who entered the temple. To His parents who found Him there three days later, and who expressed their anxiety, Jesus said: ***Did you not know I must be in My Father's house?*** [Lk 2:49]. We learn from this that His principal duty and all His concern are to be in the service of His Heavenly Father, without being distracted by other things.

So, too, the priest. ***We have to do the work of the One Who sent Me while it is day*** [Jn 9:4]. I need not be occupied with the world, the flesh, love of myself, or to seek after my own interests, or tastes, but with the interests of God and His good pleasure. For example, to hear confessions of the uncouth and unlettered may not be to our liking, but it is to God's.

Jesus remained in the temple to begin His work concerning the glory of God, such as His discussions with the teachers which he carried out with admirable modesty, humility, discernment and zeal. In this way, He gave us an example of the virtues that we should use in carrying out our priestly duties in the church.

We should enjoy carrying out these duties from our youth. If we do not begin while we are young, then as older priests we will be worn out and sluggish. We need to become young again. Even the elderly recite [at the beginning of the Mass] ***I will go to the altar of God, the God of my joy and gladness*** [Ps 43:4]. God wants me to be young always, not in years, but in fervor.

On the other hand, those who are young, should not judge, but respect the elderly. Christ knew more than the teachers, yet He did not teach, but questioned and responded. There are clerics who are very proud and brilliant in their studies who ridicule the elderly as being ignorant. How many priests labor without insight and prudence? Thus they keep on doing and undoing their work. How many are without zeal, except for their own interests? If they do not become like the Child Jesus, they will not enter the Heavenly Kingdom [cf. Mt 18:3].<sup>316</sup>

### **190: The priest and humility**

Let us learn from Christ to yield to others, indeed taking the last place. The prestige, honor, and the glory of a priest should be humility. St. Thomas was asked by what sign could one recognize a person of holiness and perfection. His answer was humility, abusing oneself, shunning honors and praise, accepting ignominy and injury.

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<sup>315</sup> o.c., n. 5. **MssB 4962.**

<sup>316</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2489-2493.**

The humbler person is at peace with everyone, the proud one is always in litigation. How many quarrels, what envy and jealousy among confessors about the accommodations, the confessionals, the penitents, and the order of precedence, with so much scandal to souls.

He fulfills every justice, who is able to anticipate everybody in showing esteem and honor, and who is able to support the offensive attitude of others. ***Bear one another's burdens, and so you will fulfill the law of Christ*** [Ga 6:2]. The highest justice and sanctity consist in this, that although he possesses the highest degree of virtue, he would like to be the lowest in humility<sup>317</sup>.

Christ wishes to repress in us the desire of showing off, which is so natural, and the root of all disorders. There is nothing more efficient to moderate in us this obsession to show off in the world and to distinguish us, than the example of a lonely God Who voluntarily remains unknown in the world. This example takes away all the pretext that I could have and which my self-love is so ably to suggest. It tries to deceive me into thinking that this is the glory of God and the salvation of my brothers, that this is a necessity in certain occasions, that it is most convenient, and that it serves to maintain charity, that sociability is necessary in life, that solitude is useless, that it hinders one from using the talents he has received. These are all specious reasons but vain ones. Am I to contribute more to the glory of God than Jesus Himself? Instead of the maxims that suggest this spirit of the world, Christ has come to teach me the way altogether different, that is, the love of remaining unknown<sup>318</sup>.

### **191: The priest and his relatives**

Jesus remained in the temple without letting His parents know [cf. Lk 2:23], because He did not want them to be a hindrance to Him in carrying out freely the work which was ordained for Him by His Heavenly Father.

There are priests, who, when they accept assignments, or in the discharge of their duties, let themselves be conditioned by the human ambitions of their relatives. But if the ambitions of his relatives are a risk to his priestly duties, he should recall what Jesus said: ***If one comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple*** [Lk 14:26].

Jesus wanted to show us how we should be detached from flesh and blood and from the worldly love of relatives, leaving them, and not hesitating to displease them whenever we need to dedicate ourselves with greater diligence to our heavenly Father. He also showed us that we should not remain with them any longer than necessary, if contrary to the will of God.

If there was a motive to think that relatives, or any other person in the world, were an impediment in fulfilling the will of God, either through ignorance or good faith,

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<sup>317</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2551-2554.**

<sup>318</sup> o.c., **MssB 2502-2503.**

or even a dishonest intention, it is better to leave without saying anything, even though this might bring them displeasure, or have them complaining about me. All the more should I trample on all this with a strong and determined spirit to fulfill the will of God. ***Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of Me*** [Mt 10:37].

Even more, if my parents or any other persons that I ought to love and respect as my own father, try to force me to do what is contrary to the law of God or the Church. ***We must obey God rather than men*** [Ac 5:29]<sup>319</sup>.

## **192: The temptations of a priest**

***Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and favor before God and man*** [Lk 2:52]. The priest is called to follow Christ and to grow in perfection. ***No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God*** [Lk 9:62]. People must also be able to see our effort for perfection.

But, in fact, where is our progress in perfection? We seek advancement in our career and in our assignments. But as regards virtue, perhaps we have regressed from where we were as clerics. What resolutions, what hopes we had at that time! And in regard to learning, we must admit that perhaps we knew more then.

Today many priests consider it a dishonor to despise openly the world [even though we do this in our preaching]. Oh God, what a shame! Thus, this crazy world gains honor, because many still slavishly respect it. Some priests feel that they give scandal if they make fun of the world. Blessed are these Scandals, St. Teresa would cry.

The desire for honors and dignities is the voice of priests. A terrible affliction in a priest would be vainglory and envy. And priests do not even confess these.

It is time to admit that the great snare is possessions to which many ecclesiastics are attached. Self-interest is another very subtle snare, which is hardly noticeable in a priest. Happy is he who can escape this snare. Thus, there are principally three grades of temptations: riches, honors and pride. Moved by these one risks the danger of falling into all other kinds of vices. The martyrs were strong in the face of violence, free in spirit and in the confession of their faith, because they were free of self-interest and love of life and of the world<sup>320</sup>.

## **193: The secular world and the priestly world**

We realize that the earth is nothing but a passage-way, a river which flows without stopping until it reaches the sea. What self-interest should I have in all that I observe? I see much agitation, grandeur, pomp, fortune, prosperity, whose splendor is dazzling.

<sup>319</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2483-2486.**

<sup>320</sup> Retreat Meditations **MssB 2496-2623.**

In the ecclesiastical state, I see certain status, certain tasks, certain privileges and diversity of duties which, though not understood by the secular world, yet continually provoke worldly sentiments.

But, above all, I should recall what was said by a saint: 'All this is not God; all this is not heaven; this is not my goal.' Therefore, I must be insensitive to all this, and not take account of it. In what innocence and freedom of heart could this disposition keep me! I would like to live like a true priest, because I would live as a man dead to the world, like **those of whom the world was not worthy** cf. Heb 11:38<sup>321</sup>.

'Obey', St. Gaspar told a newly ordained priest, 'obey your parents and be a reverent imitator of their virtues. Obey your bishop with submission of mind and heart. Obey the pastor of the Church to which you are assigned. Whatever the flesh or the world suggests, listen and follow Christ only, of whose mysteries you are now a dispenser, without heeding the secular or the priestly world.'<sup>322</sup>

## THE RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

### **194: Community and Communion**

Let all have as the aim and distinctive sign of their vocation that saying of our Lord Jesus Christ. ***This is how all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another*** [Jn 13:35].

If we must practice charity towards all, then we must practice it especially toward those who are our spiritual brothers, as the Apostle tells us: ***Whoever does not provide for relatives, and especially for family members, has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever.*** [1 Tm 5:8].

Let everyone keep before his eyes, as a norm of this harmony, that which is written in the Acts of the Apostles about the conduct of the first Christians, from whom all religious orders have their origin and form. ***The community of believers was of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions were his own, but they had everything in common, and they were distributed to each according to his need. They ate their meals with exaltation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying the favor with all the people*** [cf. Ac 4:32; 2:46, 48].

Let everyone to the best of his ability keep this union of charity and concord, shunning everything which is opposed to it, namely, dissensions and discords, all of which must be studiously avoided, keeping in mind the words of Psalm 133: ***Behold how good it is and how pleasant where brethren dwell as one***<sup>323</sup>.

<sup>321</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2643-2644.**

<sup>322</sup> Cajetan Giacobbe, *Life*, SA, p. 558.

<sup>323</sup> **CF ## 187-190.**



**195: The value of perfect observance**

In a religious community, where even the smallest rules are observed, there the spiritual strength of religious life will remain unchanged, and there will be peace among the brothers. But where even the least breaches of the rule are neglected, little by little the whole community is undermined and destroyed<sup>324</sup>.

In fervent as well as in relaxed religious communities, there are defects. In the former, they are corrected and considered abuses; in the latter, they are disguised and pass into use as custom<sup>325</sup>.

In a religious community, when each member does not attend diligently to his own perfection, the community cannot function properly; and if it operates, it does so without spirit and languidly<sup>326</sup>.

**196: Fraternal communion and a life of faith**

The growth of fraternal communion depends especially on our spiritual progress, for as true charity, that is, the love of God and Christ, increases, so also the union among the confreres is increased and perfected in so far as each one is united to God and to our Savior.

Because this bond of unity is especially strengthened by prayer and meditation, according to that saying: ***In my thoughts fire blazed forth*** [Ps 39:4]. Therefore this undoubtedly is the surer and sounder way of acquiring this unity.

Moreover, there is nothing which causes us to love another more than to perceive his special endowment of virtues and gifts of the Holy Spirit, and to contemplate him as the image of God painted with the most beautiful colors of grace. I, therefore, all strive to grow these virtues and gifts within themselves, and to consider them often in others, and if they regard others as superior to them, rejoice over their spiritual gifts, and give thanks to God; then, mutual charity will flourish among them in a wondrous manner<sup>327</sup>.

**197: Religious vows and charity**

One virtue never excludes another. Nor are they opposed to one another. When, however, it seems that prudence or charity requires a certain choice, there is little to fear that this might be in contrast with poverty; neither do they act contrary to

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<sup>324</sup> Spiritual Journal. May 24, 1810.

<sup>325</sup> o.c. July 22, 1808.

<sup>326</sup> o.c. October 11, 1808.

<sup>327</sup> CF ## 221-223.

the religious vows. The vows are only a means to charity, which is the end. It is the end that determines the way all the measure to all the means<sup>328</sup>.

Fraternal communion in a religious community is accomplished in great part through the bond of obedience. The same can be said of poverty and humility, or the contempt of worldly goods. Among temporal goods are honors and dignities, together with riches and the comforts of life. Contempt for the former, no less than for the latter, proceeds from the love of God. Moreover, the poor in spirit and the humble, since they honor all, are deeply moved by all.

The characteristic means, however, to promote fraternal communion is poverty. It is the highest degree proper to religious by reason of their vow. In the religious state all things are in common, hearts, minds, bodies, and everything necessary for subsistence and the way of life. In the Acts of the Apostles we read: ***the community of believers was of one heart***, and then adds: ***no one claimed that any of his possession were his own*** [Ac 4:32]<sup>329</sup>.

### **198: Dialogue and fraternal conversation**

Every day after meals, the confreres should gather together in the same place, if possible, to engage in familiar and friendly conversation. It is fitting that this be enjoined upon all without exception for motives of health, but mainly to foster charity. 'Friendship grows with conversation, and is destroyed by being habitually silent.' [Aristotle]. St. Teresa tells us: 'Charity increases through communication'<sup>330</sup>.

So, too, when confreres make frequent visits, the good religious should receive them not only with patience, but with joy. Even this, thanks to the exchange of conversation between the confreres, will contribute greatly to our daily relaxation<sup>331</sup>.

The principal end of conversation is the salvation of souls. For the most part, this is to be realized by conversing with others, speaking to them of divine things, kindly and prudently. Let the confreres realize that they derive much benefit from the conversations they hold among themselves, which quite often should be about the things of God<sup>332</sup>.

Keep in mind that the diversity of opinion is quite human. One should speak clearly, weighing one's words and in a serene manner. On the other hand, strife, rash judgments and the obstinate defense of one's opinion causes much displeasure. These must, therefore, be avoided by all with the greatest diligence<sup>333</sup>.

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<sup>328</sup> Correspondence, p. 174. Letter to L. Naudet. No date.

<sup>329</sup> CF ## 224-226.

<sup>330</sup> CF # 250.

<sup>331</sup> CF # 253.

<sup>332</sup> CF # 255.

<sup>333</sup> CF # 202.

In his Rule, St. Augustine admonishes: ‘One should never quarrel, or at least, end it as soon as possible, lest tensions lead to hatred, and a mountain be made of a mole hill.’<sup>334</sup>

### **199: Fraternal correction**

Do you feel the need to correct a brother? First of all, begin with weeping for your own sins and praying to the Lord; then take your brother aside and seek to admonish, counsel and exhort him.

Let us look at the example of St. Paul: ***For I fear that when I come, I will find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish; that there may be rivalry, jealousy, fury selfishness, slander, gossip, conceit and disorder. I fear that when I come again, my God may humiliate me before you, and I will have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, the immorality, and licentiousness they practiced*** [2 Co 12:20, 21].

Declare your affection for the person you intend to correct, seek to persuade him that in advising him of his faults, you wish to counsel, to cure, and not to judge or even less to denounce. If you wish to cure him, do not hesitate to embrace or kiss him. Doctors do this sometimes, especially when they have to treat of a difficult malady, and then they are able to get the patient to swallow the necessary medicine<sup>335</sup>.

From the dutiful and reciprocal obligation for the spiritual good of the confrere should arise the inclination and disposition of soul to give correction with great charity and at the same time to accept in the right spirit correction made by others<sup>336</sup>.

### **200: Snares of common life**

Let no one displease or offend his brother, even jokingly, either in public or in private. Let everyone beware of even nurturing in his heart any malicious and adverse sentiments against his brother.

The chief element of charity is to anticipate the mutual rendering of service, and in paying honor. On the other hand, the manifestations of domineering and of commanding cause alienation of souls. Let everyone abhor every tendency to command or to assume the air of dominating, for it savors of pride and offends charity.

If anyone, because of some duty assigned him, has to assume the role of leader, let him not be over-bearing, but rather indicate what has to be done. The advice of the Apostle [Ga 5:13] should be heeded: ***Serve one another in love***. Thus, what St. John Chrysostom said of the ancient monks may be verified: ‘Not one of them

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<sup>334</sup> **CF # 205.**

<sup>335</sup> Retreat Instructions. **MssB 2791-2792.** The quote is taken from St. John Chrysostom, Homilies on Law, 3. 5. PG 49, 54

<sup>336</sup> **CF # 264,**

is seen as the giver, or receiver of wrongs, or to give or receive commands, but all of them are numbered among those serving.<sup>337</sup>

## **201: Do not talk against one another**

Often self-love disguises detraction as zeal, charity, or the necessity of defending oneself or others. The real motive is passion. One has to pay the penalty for it to God and to shed many tears over it<sup>338</sup>.

What good can come from fasting and abstaining from meat when we devour our brothers? He who commits detraction eats the flesh of his brother, chews on the flesh of his neighbor. Thus, St. Paul speaking to the faithful says: ***If you go on biting and devouring one another, beware that you are not consumed by one another*** [Ga 5:15]. Let no one say that he commits detraction only when he utters what is false and when he slanders. When you backbite a confrere, even if what is said is true, you are culpable. The Pharisee in the gospel spoke the truth concerning the publican, because that is what he was, a sinner. Yet, this did not give him an advantage because the publican ***returned to his home justified, while the other did not*** [Lk 18:14]<sup>339</sup>.

The evil of detraction either in word or gesture should never be found among confreres for any reason whatsoever. Let everyone beware of even nurturing in his heart any sentiments that are not good or unfavorable to his confrere<sup>340</sup>.

## **202: Pay no heed to detraction**

One must not only avoid speaking evil of another, but must also avoid listening to a detractor. He should not listen to such talk, calling to mind the words of the Psalmist: ***Whoever slanders his neighbor in secret, him I will destroy*** [Ps 101:5]. Say also to our brother: do you ever praise anybody or do you ever say anything good about another? I willingly listen to nice things. But if you wish to speak evil, I intend to shut off this kind of talk. I will not be a party to this dirt.

What do I gain by learning that someone is not so good? It seems to me that from this I gain only harm and damage. Let us talk with him. Then, let us take to heart our own woes, and how we should render an account of our own sins. Thus, we would direct this curiosity and the desire to investigate to ourselves and to our way of living. What excuse can we have, or how can we obtain pardon if we never call to mind our own faults, while we curiously scrutinize others?

***Did you hear a bad word against your brother? Let it die within you; be assured it will not make you burst.*** [cf. Si 19:9]. How do we understand? ***Let it die***

<sup>337</sup> CF ## 193; 195.

<sup>338</sup> Spiritual Journal. August 9, 1808.

<sup>339</sup> Retreat Instructions. **MssB 2786-2790**. St. John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Law, 3. PL 49, 53.

<sup>340</sup> CF ## 193; 194.

**within you.** Extinguish it, bury it, do not let it come from you, or spread it. Above all, do not tolerate others speaking evil. If detractors know that we are more averse to them than those whom they are accusing, they would cease once and for all from this terrible habit, and they would correct their own sins. Since it is always true that detraction and calumny only generate hatred and discord, so too speaking well of others and giving praise are the principles of peace and friendship<sup>341</sup>.

### **203: The community of St. Gaspar**

‘Several pious secular priests gathered together in Verona about twenty years ago. They sought perfection for themselves by living a community life like religious, and working for the common good according to their possibility and circumstances. In spite of the fact that these priests perform their duties without fanfare and live humble, quiet lives, nevertheless they are well-known, greatly loved and esteemed as saints by the clergy and the people.

‘Their superior, Fr. Gaspar Bertoni, is a learned and pious man, who is able to rule his community kindly, yet firmly, so that only one spirit animates them all. They are one in all things.

‘If you speak to one of them, you will find that he is of the same mind and heart as the others. If you want to know what their principal characteristic is, it is a combination of humility, charity and affability.

‘They live a very poor and self-sacrificing style of life. Their rooms are simple and so is their furniture. Throughout the house one sees a cleanliness that is admirable. The small church has been marvelously restored and is remarkable for its cleanliness and decorum. The priests assigned to preach weekly and are available to hear confessions. They use their own house as a public school, where a good number of young people are educated free of charge.

‘They will not accept gifts of any kind from anybody. This detachment is very great and becoming to those priests. They are greatly revered by all. I do not know what other title to give them except that of *The hidden pearl of the Veronese clergy*.<sup>342</sup>

## **THE LAITY IN THE CHURCH**

### **204: The laity and holiness in the Church**

There are many lay persons in the Church who are more committed than many priests in responding to their vocation of being called to holiness. They lead a spotless life and accomplish good works. We can learn from such exemplary people. ‘The

<sup>341</sup> Retreat Instructions. **MssB 2793-2798**. St. John Chrysostom, ib.

<sup>342</sup> Louis Schlor, *Philanthropy of the faith*. Rome 1840. Cited in SA, p. 66.

unlettered', says St. Augustine, 'rise up and take Heaven by force, and we, with all our learning, still struggle with flesh and blood.'<sup>343</sup>

Hence, the reason for a priest to blush and to tremble on seeing so many of the laity in the midst of the world more occupied than he is in seeking spiritual perfection, and, in effect, being more perfect. How many are truly more mortified, chaste, humble and charitable<sup>344</sup>.

It can happen that a young man aspiring to the priesthood is scandalized in his vocation by a worldly priest who does not give good example. Yet, we clearly see how Divine Providence, at times, in such cases furnishes great help by the constant memory of real charity in the lives of many lay people. Thus, he is able to accept this help, overcoming the scandal given by worldly priests and unwilling to let lay people supersede him in perfection. This is a sign that he has a great disposition to become a priest.<sup>345</sup>

It is heart-breaking to see so much holiness in a lay person, and so much imperfection in a priest<sup>346</sup>.

## **205: The laity and the Apostolic Mission**

Not only priests, but under their direction the laity too can offer themselves to work in the organization of the Marian Oratories. They must cooperate in seeing that all goes well. This is what St. Gaspar did in his day. He made use of exemplary lay people to care for the good governing of the established oratories, and he entrusted them to be yeast in finding new ones.<sup>347</sup>

Some young people, who were well prepared, were used by St. Gaspar as bait to bring in those who were abandoned or far away from the Church, and the fishing was good. They succeeded, above all, to worm their way into the heart of the wayward youth, little by little, and convinced them by their example to enter the Oratory. Once there, having met St. Gaspar, they were drawn by him to become priests, to confess their sins, and to change their way of living. More than once they became exemplary Christians<sup>348</sup>. Many of these young apostles especially the zealous ones, had a real missionary spirit in their secular role, that could be the envy of any religious.<sup>349</sup>

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<sup>343</sup> *The Confessions of St. Augustine*. Book 8, c. 8. PL 32, 757.

<sup>344</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2240-2276**.

<sup>345</sup> Meditations in *Primum Regum*. N. 11. **MssB 5226-5228**.

<sup>346</sup> Spiritual Journal. **December 2, 1808**.

<sup>347</sup> Cardinal Louis diCanossa, Pastoral Letter on Oratories. Verona 1898. **BERTONI 2**, pp. 384, f.

<sup>348</sup> *Miscellanea Lenotti*. SA, p. 146.

<sup>349</sup> Cajetan Giacobbe, *Life*. SA, p. 346.

There was a special group, the cream and the back-bone of the Oratory, who possessed special virtues. St. Gaspar used their talents to send them here and there, wherever there was a need. The Director needed only to hint, and they were ready to act. This group was made up of young people and adults who enjoyed coming together to receive spiritual formation. When the others were out playing, they occupied themselves in reading the lives of the saints, or some other spiritual book, speaking of informative and edifying topics, concluding with some spiritual song<sup>350</sup>.

### **206: St. Gaspar and the formation of the laity**

After having spent the entire Sunday with the young people in various activities at the Oratory, St. Gaspar met in the evening at his home with the young people closest to his heart. This took place not only on Sunday evenings or the evenings of Holy Days, for soon he began to meet daily with these young people and the adults of the Oratory who were free from work. They passed these evening hours in spiritual reading and conversation. Everyone was able to express his viewpoint, or ask for explanations. St. Gaspar answered all promptly and graciously, and in such a way that he satisfied their every request. He left them well instructed and formed<sup>351</sup>.

At the Stimmate the Oratory flourished to such a point that neither the Church or the Chapel of the Conception was able to hold them. He formed a group of about thirty young people and adults from the best and most fervent ones, those who were noted by their recollection, their frequency in receiving the sacraments, their devotion and piety. This group met in his house in the Chapel of the Transfiguration. Here special instructions and stimulating topics about perfection were discussed.

Since this chapel was next to St. Gaspar's room, it would happen that at times that the priest assigned was unable to attend, because of his health, or some other reason, St. Gaspar even though he was old and ill, would come and deliver the homily. If he were unable to do this he would call this little chosen group into his room, and would deliver a short sermon, much to their edification and satisfaction<sup>352</sup>.

## **VOCATION TO MINISTRY IN THE CHURCH**

### **207: I have chosen you**

***It was not you, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain*** [Jn 15:16]. Jesus tells us: You did not choose Him as teacher and Lord, but I was the first to choose you and to call you. By My call and My grace I have made you My friends, My disciples, My apostles. In the parable of the vine and the branches He insists: as the farmer chooses the best vines to plant in his vineyard, so I, O Apostles, have chosen you to plant you in My Church as the best branches, made so

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<sup>350</sup> o.c., SA p. 351.

<sup>351</sup> o.c., SA, pp. 351-353.

<sup>352</sup> *Miscellanea Lenotti*. SA, p. 149, f.

by My grace so that you might produce a good crop of grapes, that is, of a faithful, numerous and well-formed people. [cf. Jn 15:1].

Christ speaks in this way to show the greatness of His love for His Apostles, because among all the other men, even those more noble and learned and more eloquent, He had chosen them as His apostles, making them His special friends and princes of His Church. Thus stimulating them to exchange their love and honor to Him in a true special and loyal way.

He has also intended to have His Apostles consider the eminent dignity of their condition and of their apostolic duty, so that they would commit themselves to correspond properly to a radical following of Christ.

Further, with the choice made first by Christ, He wished to give His apostles a lesson in humility, as if to say, I have called you to be my friends, and share with you my most intimate secrets. Because of this you should not be proud, since this is not of your own merit, but it is a gift on my part.

Finally, the Lord wishes to affirm that He alone has given the apostles their dignity, so that they would believe in everything that they possessed came from him, and that no one could ever hinder their mission of reaping a great harvest of souls in this world. He would always remain with them and would always guarantee their capability of producing fruit for the Kingdom of God<sup>353</sup>.

### **208: Great is the Lord's love for us.**

From all eternity God has loved us and decreed to call us. It has been a long time that the Lord has loved us, and we are incapable of fully understanding this. God has called us to a holy vocation, one that is capable of making saints out of sinners and enemies. If, indeed, He is so powerful in calling, and He calls freely out of His goodness, there is little to fear. When we were still far from Him, He saved us by His grace, even though we were His enemies. How much closer is He now, seeing that we are now doing our part!

God has saved us not because of our works, but by His design of love, and impelled only by His love. We are called to collaborate with this design of salvation with the strength that He gives us. The proclamation of the Gospel is not easy. It is bound on all sides by the turnover of so many worldly interests that tend to shackle or to box it in. Because of the Gospel we should be disposed to suffer, to accept adversities of all kind, with patience and courage. We should not distance ourselves from afflictions, but we should seek them, trusting not in our own weak power, but in the power of God which triumphs especially when we are weak.

We are sure that God, Who has called us to this struggle so that we can do battle and win for the cause of faith, will remain near and sustain us with all His power. For the sake of the Gospel we will succeed in sustaining generously and joyfully all

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<sup>353</sup> Retreat Instructions. **MssB 3238-3243.**



kinds of adversity, even those quite severe. Animated by faith, not in ourselves, or in our own power, but in God, we will immerse ourselves in prayer to Him. He will hear us and make us stronger than all our enemies, all our tribulations and all our persecutions<sup>354</sup>.

### **209: God has chosen that which is weak in the world**

St. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, says: ***Consider your own calling, brothers*** – that is the reason and the circumstances of your calling – ***not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many of noble birth.*** [1 Co 1:26]. We, too, are poor, without privileges, without nobility, without worldly culture. We know only a little theology and Canon Law. We can preach the doctrine of Christ and explain His Law with simplicity. We do not have the eloquence of great orators, or the prestige of the learned.

St. Paul affirms this [1 Co 1:17]: ***For Christ did not send me to preach the Gospel with the wisdom of human eloquence*** [that is, with the eloquence and refinement of oratory], ***so that the Cross of Christ might not be emptied of its meaning.*** Thus Christ willed that preaching should not be profaned and rendered useless. This would happen if men felt they had obtained the faith and consequently salvation through human eloquence, rather than from the Passion of Christ.

Nevertheless, the Apostle is right in admitting to the Christian community even those who were learned and important in the world. He did this, however, not because he needed them, but to avoid all forms of discrimination.

***Where is the wise one? Where is the scholar? Where is the debater of this age?*** [1 Co 1:20]. What philosopher was ever able to save or teach the real truth? All this was the work of poor fishermen. That which the philosophers with all their syllogisms were unable to do came about through the 'foolishness of what was preached', thus convincing everyone of the most sublime truths, making ignorant men the real wise ones. The poor and the ignorant believed and were saved. The testimony of the great wisdom of the preacher is the fact that the ignorant are instructed in lofty truths that lead them to mold their lives on these principles<sup>355</sup>.

### **210: Vocation is a chain of graces**

God never refuses anyone who wants to do battle under the banner of His Son, and who uses the means prescribed by Him, that is, prayer and mortification. Such a one will triumph in glory<sup>356</sup>. Recollection and the sense of the great gift of my vocation.

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<sup>354</sup> Retreat Instructions. **MssB 3297-3300**

<sup>355</sup> Retreat Instructions. **MssB 3266-3272**

<sup>356</sup> Spiritual Journal. **July 29, 1809.**

What is great blessing it is to forget and be stripped of all created things to seek God and Him alone<sup>357</sup>.

The grace of a vocation is an immense series of graces. This series can be broken, and to break it, does it take much? It is sufficient not to correspond. This chain and this series of graces from the Lord are broken at once when the soul refuses to correspond. Then what happens? It happens that everything regarding a vocation becomes annoying and difficult. In time they are either abandoned or not cared for. This should cause us to fear. One could even lose his vocation.

Beware of saying: Oh, I don't want to be so scrupulous. I don't want to be tied down; I don't need so much perfection. This is a sign that one does not have a real understanding of his vocation. Worse yet, if he begins to enjoy the things of the world, such as riches, honors and pleasures. It would be a sign that spiritual values nauseate him<sup>358</sup>.

### **211: Assuring the safety of a vocation**

On His part, God has done everything that is necessary. He has granted, and continues to grant His grace in order for us to follow Him easily. But now it's necessary that one's soul, in cooperation with divine grace, will carry out all that is expected of it: so that one will respond, deny himself, take up the Cross on his shoulders willingly, and through obedience, truly follow our Lord until death.

It is true that one's spirit must also be supported in its weakness, and comforted us in its sufferings. But notwithstanding this, it must be attentive, to engage itself with all care, working with fear and trembling in order to make certain of its own election by means of good works and by proof of sound virtue, in conformity with that saying from Sacred Scripture; ***Be all the more eager to make your call and election firm*** [2 P 1:10]. Because of this, St. Ignatius prescribed many years of waiting before one's definitive admission into the Society of Jesus, in order to definitely ascertain a subject's vocation with trials and evident proofs, which, from our Lord's view, appears certain and without a shadow of a doubt.

It is incumbent on the subject, on his part, to ensure this same vocation and election. Analyzing this, everything easily comes down to this: that one knows that he cannot rely on himself, but must trust in God; pray; and have both fear and love<sup>359</sup>.

### **212: The Church prepares a calling to consecrated life**

A vocation is the product of the Bridegroom's free election: ***It was not you who chose Me, but I Who chose you*** [Jn 15:6]. In arranging this election, His Providence

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<sup>357</sup> o.c., December 25, 1808.

<sup>358</sup> Retreat to Acolytes. MssB 4445-4446.

<sup>359</sup> Correspondence, p. 42. Un-dated letter to L. Naudet.

uses force along with gentleness [cf. Ws 8:1] committing one to the maternal care of His Spouse, the Church, with the free and full cooperation of the same elect.

Before all else, God preordains a remote preparation for a vocation to a consecrated life. Divine Providence brought us into the world endowed with various natural gifts; He has called us to the faith; better still, He has provided for us to be born in an environment which is permeated by faith; He allowed us to enter the Church by means of Baptism; then, He enriched us with virtues and gifts which were indeed suited by the ministry to which he destined us. We truly have ground to adore and thank the Lord, together with the obligation to pray for purification from our vices and to be reborn to a new life in Christ. God gives to everyone who is called to a particular state in life whatever is necessary for that state. He never is at a loss to do whatever is needed on His part.

Then, there is that commitment on the part of the Church, the Bride of Christ, which offers her prudent and carding help. The Church's commitment is revealed by her care for the chosen person's progress, both through activities and prayer no matter how long that journey continues. It unfolds like a mother's daily routine, who, early on, nurses her child, and then, weans him little by little as he grows.

In regard to activity, Mother Church, the Spouse of Christ, offers the candidate the milk of instruction and the most simple examples, so that he can begin to practice moral virtues. She weans him by helping him to progress in religious virtues, and brings to perfection by the practice of divine and theological virtues.

In regard to prayer, she nurses him by having him meditate on the mysteries of Christ's humility, and weans him by having him meditate on Christ's passion. She leads him to the temple, so that he will remain there, meditating on Christ's Resurrection and Divinity, in order that he will thereafter preach with fervor<sup>360</sup>.

It is our duty, therefore, to respond positively to so much solicitude.

### **213: The Church assists vocations to consecrated life to develop**

While the remote preparation for a vocation to consecrated life consists in commitment to Christian perfection, the proximate preparation includes, over and above this, a more specific involvement in the perfection of ecclesiastical service. This entails learning the science of the saints in order to convert sinners, to watch over the just, and to promote union with God.

The Church operates in this way to inspire a candidate with a strong resolution to imitate the saints: proposing their example and putting each, so to speak, in familiar contact with them. By the example of the Saints, the Church inspires desire in the heart of the elect to help one's neighbor and to intimately unite himself to God, purifying his intentions so that he will feel moved, not by worldly vanity, but, by the pure desire to please God.

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<sup>360</sup> Meditations on *Primum Regum*, n. 6. MssB 4961-4991

The Church's solicitude for a vocation to consecrated life is apparent early on in the case of adolescents. It endeavors to protect their innocence, to keep them away from the wicked, favoring their path to union with God in every way.

Divine Providence adds to the maternal care of the Church its grace, so that a candidate will generously offer his entire self to God, while doing so with great joy. The effect of such a gift of grace is the ability to give oneself entirely to God's pleasure, like a true apostle who does not seek his own interests, but those of Jesus Christ [cf. Ph 2:21], with a strong desire to grow in virtue and perfection<sup>361</sup>.

## **214: How to answer the call**

It is necessary to conform to God's Providence and the Church's motherly care with the simplicity of children, without weakness: as in the example of Samuel, who let himself be guided gently like a child [cf. 1 S 1:24; 3:1, ff.].

We must respond to the Church's charge of watching over a candidate's progress in the realm of action as he advances from virtue to virtue, from moral virtues to religious virtues, and from these to divine virtues. And, insofar as the progress of prayer is concerned, he must try to apply himself to meditation on the mysteries of Christ's life, and progressively on to His Passion and resurrection. All this is to be done methodically, not by leaps and bounds. It must always be based on Sacred Scripture, from where rules for action must derive, as well as inspiration for prayer.

Therefore, it is necessary to apply oneself diligently to the study of sacred Scripture. Providence will open our minds to understand God's Word in the most vivid light of His Wisdom.

Lord, grant that while we respond to Your grace and to the Church's solicitude, we shall be able to develop resolutions of dynamic virtues in order to help others by our ministry, and ourselves also by prayer. Grant that we may endeavor to seek a more profound knowledge of God in order to preach and to pray more effectively. Grant that we may strive to cultivate the purest inclinations to charity, devoid of all worldly ambition. Incline us to be always ready with prompt and generous execution of your plans, and that we may give ourselves without reserve to you, in order to grow by Your grace in virtue and wisdom<sup>362</sup>.

## **215: If the world hates you, know that it first hated Me**

I had a strong experience of that great gift which is to suffer anything for the love of God. ***Blessed are those persecuted for justice's sake; the reign of God is theirs. Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every***

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<sup>361</sup> o.c., **MssB 5007-5032.**

<sup>362</sup> o.c., nn. 6, 7. **MssB 5021-5041.**

***kind of slander against you because of Me. Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is great in heaven [Mt 5:10-12]<sup>363</sup>.***

After gently drawing the Apostles to Himself, Christ, knowing that it would be difficult for many of them, and that it would be unbearable indeed for these to be subjected to persecution, He proceeded, therefore, to encourage them: They have hated Me – the Lord seems to say – and because of this, I have gone before you and I have shown you the way. If you follow Me along the same path, you will be able to walk easily, moreover, you will do so with joy, knowing that if you are persecuted, you can count on Me as a friend, as well as a guide and model.

Christ strengthened the Apostles against the persecutions which threatened them, so that they would face them willingly, even to the point of boasting and glorying in them, understanding them to be what they are: true documents of Christian identification. Don't be surprised – Jesus wants to add - don't let your hearts be troubled when the world hates you, it hated Me before it hated you. Rather, be glad and rejoice because, in this way, you will be My imitators. On the other hand, just as the world's hatred could not harm Me, likewise, it will not harm you. The world will persecute you because you do not belong to it. You are not in agreement with its works; moreover, you are in conflict with them, just as I have been. Saying this, He implied: It is for this very reason that you will condemn this world's pursuits. And, without difficulty, you will gain greater advantages from My love, rather than injury from the world's hatred<sup>364</sup>.

## **216: Constant renewal of God's gift**

Just as fire needs kindling wood to burn constantly, so does grace need commitment on our part to cooperate. We are concerned her, as ministers, with that special grace which we have received to guide the Christian Community. It is incumbent on us to keep it alight, or otherwise, we will let it die out. ***Do not quench the Spirit*** [1 Th 5:19], St. Paul cries out. But, the spirit will be extinguished by sloth and negligence; while it will be nourished by watchfulness and attentive care.

It is up to us, as long as we become more fervent, and enrich ourselves with confidence, enthusiasm and joy.

It may happen that the zeal, charity and grace which we received in ordination, can, little by little, be weakened and become lethargic. A little because of human weakness and inconsistency, a little because of contrary motives, and a little because of laziness, and extinction may even result. It's necessary to revive and relight charity's flame, to encourage its growth and development again. In order to reactivate this fire, one needs prayer, the reading of, and meditation on God's Word, study, commitment to progress in virtue, and above all, zeal and application to obtain the salvation of those souls entrusted to our care, with greater diligence and generosity.

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<sup>363</sup> Spiritual Journal. **September 29, 1808.**

<sup>364</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3246-3249.**

With these resources the fire in our souls will be revived, our freedom of spirit which had been dozing and chained down will be awakened, and it will be possible to victoriously confront the world with its false loves, its errors and its fears. Having overcome egoism and eliminated fear, the fire of charity will flare up day by day, and will gradually spread<sup>365</sup>.

## CORRESPONDING WITH GRACE

### **217: I fear that Jesus will pass me by**

If the concern for our salvation depended on God alone, no one would be damned. But, since it also depends on our cooperation, and this sometimes is lacking, many damn themselves. It's a great danger to hear God's Word and not derive benefit from it<sup>366</sup>. It is not enough to hear the Divine Word, perhaps even while doing so with pleasure, or even putting into practice some instructions. Even Herod listened to John the Baptist, with pleasure, and was willing to put part of his advice into practice, but not those who dealt with his predominant passion<sup>367</sup>.

During this undertaking, then, when we are dealing with the divine call, it is necessary to seize the occasion, the moment. ***And they, straightway, leaving their nets followed Him.***<sup>368</sup> I fear that Jesus will pass me by<sup>369</sup>; on the other hand, when we cooperate with God's grace, we become worthy to receive an additional one<sup>370</sup>.

Very few understand what God would do with them, if he were not hindered in His plans by them.<sup>371</sup>

### **218: If one has good will, he has everything**

Three things are necessary to attain salvation:

- [1] Flee from small sins: ***...he who wastes the little he has will be stripped bare.*** [Si 19:1]. These are like little thieves who enter by a window to open the door for bigger thieves.
- [2] [Be realistically persuaded that one cannot enter heaven without the price of hard work and effort: ***... the kingdom of heaven suffers violence*** [Mt 11:12]. ***Strive to come through the narrow gate*** [Lk 13:24]. ***Whoever wishes to come after Me, must deny himself, take up his Cross and follow Me*** [Mt 16:24].

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<sup>365</sup> Ib., MssB 3281-3285.

<sup>366</sup> Spiritual Journal. February 22, 1809.

<sup>367</sup> o.c. February 19, 1809.

<sup>368</sup> o.c., December 7, 1808.

<sup>369</sup> o.c., September 15, 1808.

<sup>370</sup> ib.

<sup>371</sup> o.c., May 18, 1811.

[3] God will is needed to really be able to enter Heaven<sup>372</sup>. He, who has good will, has everything. But that will is not good if it refuses to do all that it can<sup>373</sup>.

Let us not rely on good intentions. Deeds, deeds!<sup>374</sup>

***The sluggard's propensity slays him*** [Pr 21:25]. Why? Because by not putting these wishes into practice, his soul is assailed by remorse and sets up its own condemnation<sup>375</sup>.

A fruitless intention is like a painting of those soldiers, or hunters, who, though they appear to be in the act of preparing to shoot, never wound or kill their prey. Weakness is often blamed. But, what should we think about an elderly man who, laying aside his cane, attempts to skate on ice like a boy? The devil is sometimes blamed. But, what can we say about a hired hand, who, eating out at a tavern, pays with grapevine poles bought by his landlord for his vineyard, then puts reeds into the ground in place of the poles, with the result that when a wind comes up, it upsets everything?

It's necessary to redirect our passion, to aim our love toward God, our interests toward eternal gifts, our hatred toward sin<sup>376</sup>.

## **219: Will and wishful thinking**

Many would like to follow Christ, but are not disposed to renounce everything. On the other hand, if they want to relinquish all things and to moderate their disordered affections, they do not select effective means to achieve their goal. They are like a sick person who wants to be healthy, but refuses medicine because of the discomfort and nausea it may cause.

These men have a temperament that is entirely contrary to a holy vocation and to the commandment of renouncing all things they never acquire that soundness of spirit and of eternal life, because these are not obtained by wishing alone, but by working for them: ... ***A person is justified by works and not by faith alone*** [Jas 2:24]. Even though it seems that they want to save themselves in reality, they do not want to. ***The soul of the sluggard craves in vain*** [Pr 13:4]. They want the goal but do not want to use the means needed to achieve that goal. They want virtue insofar as it is good, but do not want it if it proves difficult, so they abandon it. Therefore a lazy person doesn't deal with what is properly called the will, but with a mere wish. 'I would like to, but I don't want to.'

<sup>372</sup> Spiritual Journal. February 22, 1809.

<sup>373</sup> o.c., March 22, 1809.

<sup>374</sup> Retreat for Acolytes. MssB 4456.

<sup>375</sup> Spiritual Journal. October 21, 1808.

<sup>376</sup> O.c. cf. also Note in the CS under this date.

I will reflect within myself to determine, if by chance, I am also trapped by this deception: wishing for heaven apart from the perfection of my state; perfection without virtue, virtue without its practice, practice of virtues without mortification of their contrary passions, humility without humiliation; patience without suffering. O deceit, the gravest and fatal deceit! ***Sometimes a way seems right to a man, but the end of it leads to death*** [Pr 16:25]<sup>377</sup>.

Everything depends on a resolution to serve God under any condition whatsoever. One needs to guard against just daydreaming. Fanciful wishing is distinguished from willing by its effect: the former, when it encounters a difficulty, gives up, or weakens its resolve; the latter, stands firm and entrenches itself, and holds fast<sup>378</sup>.

## **220: Watch and pray**

Meditating on the event of Gethsemane, I considered how the disciples were sleeping while Jesus was agonizing and sweating blood for them. Even John who, shortly before, leaned on His breast, as well as the others, who had just partaken of communion! ***Watch and pray*** [Mt 26:41].<sup>379</sup>

The Apostles slept while Christ prayed. This is how we also behave: sleeping while Christ is suffering in His members. It's lack of prayer which gives the devil the chance to tempt the Apostles. They run away when the soldiers approach to arrest Christ. Divine grace is required to overcome fear. Therefore, prayer is necessary<sup>380</sup>.

***Watch and pray.*** Every admonition in the Scriptures and in the Gospel is summarized in this statement: ***Watch:*** This means you must be wide awake and in control of your powers. But you are unarmed. You cannot resist if you are attacked; you will be overcome. ***Pray:*** this means you are well armed, but dozing. If you are assailed, you will be stripped of your weapons, killed by deception. ***Watch and Pray:*** Here you have a man in full strength, and who is well armed. He cannot be overcome<sup>381</sup>.

## **221: Prayer and personal commitment**

The current world is an immense hospital of sick people. Everyone complains, but no one is healed, even though the remedy is at hand. It is prayer, which is often omitted, or is practiced poorly because the person who pleads is evil or asks for evil things. Insofar as one does not seek first the kingdom of God, one does not pray properly, he prays without perseverance.

<sup>377</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2528-2533.**

<sup>378</sup> Spiritual Journal. **July 30, 1808.**

<sup>379</sup> o.c., **July 5, 1808.**

<sup>380</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2615.**

<sup>381</sup> Spiritual Journal. **April 28, 1811.**



Daily, a knight begged for St. Ignatius; help by his prayers, but he nevertheless continued to lead a scandalous life. One day the saint asked the knight if he would help him carry a small table out of a room. The soldier positioned himself on one side to pull it, while St. Ignatius stood opposite holding the table motionless. The former tried to pull it again, but, the latter continued to hold it back. At a certain point the knight blurted out: 'If you want to carry this out, you've got to give me a hand.' Promptly the saint answered: 'You, however, my dear sir, have to give me a hand while I am praying to take you away from your sinful life.'<sup>382</sup>

The saints unite so much power and energy of soul that they are able to hold steadfastly against the obstacles placed in their way. This strength comes from an interior certainty that they possess following the divine will, and from this, living faith that nothing can impede God's carrying out whatever He has planned. They do not fear anything other than not corresponding with God's graces as they should<sup>383</sup>.

## THE FEAR OF GOD

### **222: The fear of God in the spiritual life**

The power of fear impels a man to turn to God, or impels him to unite himself more closely to God. Now, there are two ways that God may be feared: dread of just punishment, whether temporal or eternal, by which God punishes mankind's faults, or by being afraid of any fault which can separate us from Him. If we turn to God's mercy because of our fear of eternal punishment, while grieving for our sins, and abstain from further sin, this is servile fear, which is praiseworthy as the Council of Trent teaches<sup>384</sup>, and is inspired by the Holy Spirit. If we turn to God because we fear our faults, and cling ever more firmly to Him, this is called filial fear, and is, properly, a Gift of the Holy Spirit.

***Fear of the Lord is glory and splendor*** [Si 1:9], so says sacred Scripture. In the same way the other virtues will be honored and worthy of glory, becoming useful in peaceful times and powerful in times of strife. But, the Holy Spirit continues: ***He who fears God is greater than all others*** [cf. Si 10:20].

If we do not live in the fear of God, our house will fall, and it will do so quickly, even if it is built in heaven. In fact, St. Paul who could say ***our citizenship is in heaven*** [Ph 3:20], and who was really taken up to the third citizenship in heaven, feared that, after having preached to others, would himself be rejected [cf. 1 Co 9:27]. Now, those who did not know how to fear like him, even though they seemed to be like fixed stars in the heavens, ended up falling. Oh, how many there are who are

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<sup>382</sup> ib., **March 6, 1809.**

<sup>383</sup> Spiritual Journal, p. 104. This note concerns a holy soul [in the singular], perhaps applicable to St. Teresa of Jesus [cf. Fr. Joseph Stofella's note here]. We have allowed ourselves a transposition to the plural in order to emphasize the general meaning of this invaluable reflection.

<sup>384</sup> Session VI, canon 8. Denz. 1558.

exchanged the immortal splendor of their virtues for a crazed conflagration of impure affections, which makes them objects of scorn to fellow beings, but also a target of sneering and mockery by the very demons.

Let's not laugh at the fall of these mighty cedars, no! For we even wail like fragile cypress trees [cf. Zc 11:2], as we are struck by the horror or the harm others endure. Let us be enlivened with a mutual fear of falling as so many others have done. Moreover, God Himself has commanded us to do so. He tells the just: ***Fear the Lord, you, His holy ones*** [Ps 33:10]; and He orders sinners: ***Be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna*** [Mt 10:28]<sup>385</sup>.

## **223: The fear of God leads to conversion**

It is always difficult to free one's will from these disordered affections which hold it in bondage. It is indeed hard to change one's ways. But, by loving God, everything becomes much easier and convenient. On the basis of Sacred Scripture, we understand the fear of God makes conversion effortless, amiable, and prompt; inclining our wills, step by step, to this transformation.

Here's the first step: ***...He who fears the Lord, returns to his own heart*** [cf. Si 21:6]. By means of a deep anxiety of the worst evils that threaten a sinner in this life, even as it shall be more so in the next, the soul re-enters its inner self, gathers its distracted thoughts, and is inspired to come face to face with its unhappy state.

***The fear of the Lord is to hate evil*** [Pr 8:13]. While making us clearly see that sin is the cause of all these evils, the fear of God immediately leads us to detest and abhor sin.

***By the fear of the Lord man avoids evil*** [Pr 16:6]. The soul consequently stands aside from itself and holds back its attraction to evil and then begins to leave the path of vice. It may seem difficult to keep away from evil entirely because of the powerful temptations which the passions, not accustomed to suffer refusal, unleash in the soul. But, there is no reason to doubt. ***No evil can harm the man who fears the Lord; if he is subjected to temptations, he will be rescued from them*** [cf. Si 2:9].

This is the way to overcome temptations: ***the fear of God puts sin to flight*** [cf. Si 1:27]. After this victory the sinner hears in his heart something like a voice from heaven which says: ***You, who fear the Lord, hope for good things, for lasting joy and mercy*** [Si 2:9]. Based on this mercy, these are those that ***fear the Lord and prepare their hearts and humble themselves before Him*** [cf. Si 2:17]. Then, truly, thousands of Angel's voices will be heard, celebrating their conversion, and repeating: ***Salvation for those who fear the name of the Lord*** [cf. Mi 6:5]. After all, they will

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<sup>385</sup> Early Sermons. N. 2. 'Fear of God'. MssB 391-402. PVC, pp. 154-159.

have countless consolations in their hearts, proof of that mercy which from **age to age is given to those who fear Him**. [Lk 1:50]<sup>386</sup>.

## **224: Love overcomes fear**

It is proper for pious souls to fear a fault even when it is not really present. This is because they fear sin so much due to the great love they have for God, so that they do not even want to be subject to a shadow of sin, nor do they even want a trace of it about<sup>387</sup>. But, when we are assailed by vain fears, we will try not to give in to them, but to love Him to Whom we freely offer ourselves, ready to do whatever we know to be His will, not so much out of fear, but above all out of love. Love fears nothing, and because of this, once having put ourselves in this disposition of loving magnanimity, seeking the Lord's pleasure only, and having confidence in Him above all else, we can peacefully rest in him and in His goodness.

It may also be that we are not always clear on the question of certain fears. Well, in so far as we are assailed by these, let us take advantage of these occasions to grow in hope and love, while making stronger and more active attempts to seek divine aid and in order to act only for God, without any thought of self<sup>388</sup>.

Let us not fear. When our soul has confidence in God, we should fear only to be afraid<sup>389</sup>.




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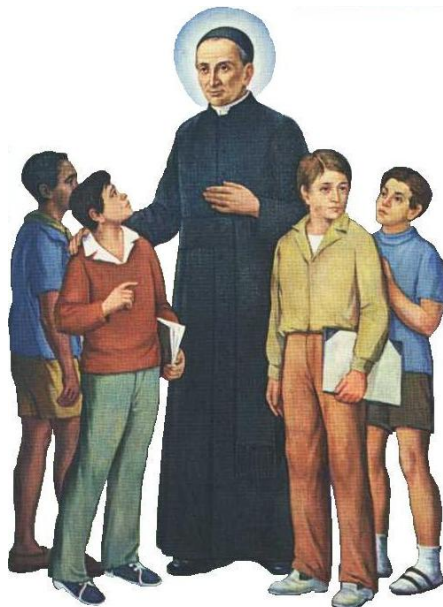
<sup>386</sup> Early Sermons, n. 2. **MssB 392-398**

<sup>387</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2591**.

<sup>388</sup> Correspondence, p. 73. Letter to Mother Naudet. Dated March 6, 1813.

<sup>389</sup> O.c., p. 102. Letter to L. Naudet, dated December 14, 1813.

# **St. GASPAR BERTONI**



**FOUNDER of the CONGREGATION of the  
SACRED STIGMATA of OUR LORD, JESUS CHRIST**

**SOME RUDIMENTS of his  
SPIRITUAL WRITINGS**

**ORDINARY TIME - RELIGIOUS PRACTICES**  
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**Part 4 B [## 225 - 280]**

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## ORDINARY TIME OF THE YEAR

### RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

#### PRAYER AND PRAYERS

##### **225: Breathing of our soul**

Prayer is the life of our life, and the soul of our soul; it is like breathing. ***I gasp with open mouth and I draw in the Spirit*** [Ps 119:131]. Just as we receive gifts of divine bounty every moment, so, in like manner, it is proper that our hearts be raised to God constantly.<sup>390</sup>

We strive to keep our spirits high, calmly leaning and resting on Him at all times, thereby spiritualizing all our actions and all our works. A mother will at times show her child an apple in her hands. Immediately the child is pleased to see the beauty of the fruit, and to imagine how sweet it tastes, but when the mother playfully raises it out of reach, the child becomes sad and the joy now turns to tears, since she is unable to grasp it with her hands, all the while the mother is teasing the child. What does the child do to obtain it? She hugs her mother and never stops begging, and this is how she obtains it.

With great loving confidence, we plead with our Lord: ‘Give us what You demand, and demand whatever You want of us’.<sup>391</sup> These words are entirely spiritual. How, what are we to do? ‘I gasp with open mouth and I draw in the Spirit [op. cit.]. To open one’s mouth in prayer is to draw in the Spirit’s abundance.’<sup>392</sup>

How this is possible in the concrete is shown to us by the Holy Spirit. ***Nothing impedes you to pray at all times*** [Si 1:22]; ***it is necessary to pray always, without tiring*** [Lk 18:1]; ***Pray without ceasing*** [1 Th 5:17]. Thus prayer will assist prayer, and the effort to do so will draw down greater abundance from the Spirit. And, this Spirit ***helps us in our weakness*** [Rm 8:26], so that we here on earth even now can offer that perpetual and perennial sacrifice and holocaust which is the same that the blessed spirits and saints in heaven offer before God. This is what all the servants of God have done as exiles and pilgrims on this earth. We can also achieve what they did with these same powers and help. Because this pleases God and redounds to His glory, and because He commands us, it is enough that it can be accomplished in this way, and that it be done<sup>393</sup>.

##### **226: One’s heart is always with God**

We must always act with a true spirit of faith; that is, whatever concerns the duties of our state should be performed with an intimate and lively conviction that these derive from God’s Will. Therefore, when we faithfully perform these activities, we

<sup>390</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3412.**

<sup>391</sup> St. Augustine, Confessions. Book 10, c. 29. PL 32, 769.

<sup>392</sup> Correspondence. Letter to L. Naudet, December 1, 1812.

<sup>393</sup> op. cit., letter dated December 1812.

are surely obeying God and doing His Will. This outlook is necessary because it is the very soul of every action. Otherwise, we will end up by working all night without catching anything [cf. Lk 5:5]: I have worked, I have worked; but I have not accomplished anything!

Let us accompany every action in this spirit. We can be in school, but our heart is with God; in Church and our heart is with God; we can be singing at table, walking, studying, sleeping, but our heart is always with God. When we are animated by this interior spirit, even our external manners will be characterized by that decorum, that composure, and by a modesty which is not pretentious, but being holy, will edify one's neighbor.

The Council of Trent teaches: '... there is nothing that is worth more in molding one's neighbor towards piety and God's worship than the life and example of those dedicated to the sacred ministry. From the moment that they are seen as those who have been raised from the domain of worldly interests to a higher realm, they attract the attention of others, who then will tend to look at them as models, drawing from them examples to imitate.'<sup>394</sup>

It is not enough to do things as others do; one must do them well. Christ **has done everything well** [Mk 7:37].<sup>395</sup>

## **227: Everything is Grace**

If we want to prepare a place within us so that the Lord will accomplish all the good He desires, we have to begin by being grateful for everything He has already done for us. Why is God so displeased with our ingratitude? Because it is like that fierce wind described by Ezechiel [cf. Ezk 19:12], which made a desert of a very fertile land which is the symbol of the benefits of God. God is displeased with those who render evil for good, not because of His own interests, nor even because it denotes a grave insult to Him, but because it constrains Him in a certain sense, to unproductiveness.

It seems impossible! Of a man helps our just a little, we feel obligated to him at all times. If an important dignitary shows us courtesy and benevolence, we tend to give him whatever we can. Yet, we do not act this way with God, who through the mouth of the Prophet, grieves: **Though I trained and strengthened their arms, yet they devised evil against me** [Ho 7:15].<sup>396</sup>

St. Gaspar habitually thanked God for everything, not only for favorable things, but even for adverse and painful events. He wanted his sons to acquire and practice this attitude of thankfulness toward God, so much so that he never avoided the opportunity of instilling it in their spirit. He would often say: 'May thanks be given at all

<sup>394</sup> Council of Trent, Session 22: 'De Reformatione'. Canon 1, *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*. Herder 1962, p. 713.

<sup>395</sup> Retreat to Acolytes. **MssB 4447-4449**.

<sup>396</sup> Mission at St. Firmus Major. **MssB 4067-4085**.

times to God for everything that He has done for us through His infinite Mercy.’ Praise be to Him Who has behaved toward us like a Father, which He truly is. Let us thank Him with all our hearts, chanting the *Te Deum* This is the way he trained his sons to be

## **228: The environment of prayer**

The Lord would like to speak to certain souls if they would only withdraw a little, because the world is making so much noise around them.<sup>397</sup> To receive the inspirations of God, we need solitude, calm, quiet and both interior and external silence; otherwise, the inspirations are not heard, or they will fade and disappear<sup>398</sup>.

***It is man's duty to prepare his own soul*** [Pr 16:1], Scripture says. Consequently we must not only try to be assiduous with Divine assistance to provide for our soul's encounters with His Divine Majesty, but also use the uppermost, purest and excellent care to keep it constantly prepared. Observance of silence, avoiding long discussions, evading frivolous conversations – all mean having one's ear ready for the sweetest inspiration of our Creator<sup>399</sup>.

St. Gaspar always walked in God's presence, which is the reason why you would often have seen him with his hat in hand. From time to time, he would demonstrate certain devout behavior and such strong but tender sentiments of compunction, that it became noticeable in the outward brilliance of his eyes, in the composure of his face and person, so that he inspired devotion and comfort, visibly demonstrating the spirit of the Lord with which he was imbued<sup>400</sup>.

## **229: Living experience of prayer**

I experienced a very vivid awareness of the immense debt owed to God by reason of creation and the redemption, both during prayer and when not in prayer<sup>401</sup>.

Meditation on the Incarnation. Sentiments of gratitude to the Most Holy Trinity and conformity with Jesus Christ. I was obliged to love God even before He became man: how much more at this time!<sup>402</sup>

During Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, I felt sentiments of much tenderness, love and offering. I felt how Christ draws our hearts to Himself, just as He said: ***I will draw all men to Myself*** [Jn 12:32]; and how all good things, knowledge, and sweetness that there is in creatures, are all His. Because of these only He must be praised and loved<sup>403</sup>.

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<sup>397</sup> Spiritual Journal. **March 23, 1809.**

<sup>398</sup> o.c. **July 23, 1809.**

<sup>399</sup> Correspondence. Letter to L. Naudet. **February 28, 1813.**

<sup>400</sup> *Miscellanea Lenotti*. SA, p. 188.

<sup>401</sup> Spiritual Journal. **September 28, 1809.**

<sup>402</sup> o.c. **September 27, 1806.**

<sup>403</sup> o.c. **March 16, 1809.**



Reading about the interior presence of God, that is, how God is within us, I realized that there is no need to go outside ourselves to find Him. Having food at home, it would be foolish to go about seeking it elsewhere; there being no need to go hungry. I found so much sentiment and great recollection, which lasted sometime afterwards, and a great desire to please His Divine Majesty in all things<sup>404</sup>.

### **230: The Liturgy of the Hours**

Praying the Psalms is a duty of great importance for the spiritual life. Unfortunately, we do not take this into account sufficiently. We are so attentive and exacting when occupied with our affairs, but, when it comes to practicing our liturgical prayer we run the risk of doing so in a routine manner; our mind distracted, perhaps letting it become preoccupied with other considerations.

St. Bernard warns us: 'When we participate at the Divine Office, we must seriously consider how we ought to comport ourselves in the presence of God and His angels. We must endeavor to chant the psalms in such a way that our hearts should be in harmony with our voices.'<sup>405</sup> St. Cyprian insists: 'How can you ask God to listen to you, if you take no care to listen to yourself? How can you want God to remember you at the very moment you call on Him, when you forget yourself at the same time.'<sup>406</sup>

So, let us listen to the voice of the same Psalmist who invites us to praise God in freedom: ***Freely will I offer you sacrifice; I will praise Your name, O Lord, for its goodness*** [Ps 54:8]. 'I praise God, and I delight in that same praise,' St. Augustine comments; that which is praised and that which is loved is freely given. What does freely given mean? That God is sought for Himself, not for some other reason. Leave everything else aside, be concerned for Him alone, love Him freely. Lord, I will praise Your name because it is good. Not for anything else, only because it is good. Perhaps one could say, 'I will praise Your name because You have given me fertile fields, gold, riches, dignity?' Praise God only because He is God. This is truly praising God.'<sup>407</sup>

### **231: St. Gaspar and the Divine Office**

I prayed the Divine Office with great devotion and for the Glory of God<sup>408</sup>. The Divine Office was recited by him with the greatest devotion, and towards this end he had devised a method. He would always faithfully observe everything prescribed by the rubrics, pronunciation, interior devotion, as well as external decorum. He always

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<sup>404</sup> o.c. **October 13, 1808.**

<sup>405</sup> St. Bernard, *In Canticles*. Sermon 7. PL 183, 809.

<sup>406</sup> St. Cyprian, *De Oratione Domenica*. C. 31. PL 4, 539.

<sup>407</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3520-3529.** The latter citation is from St. Augustine. *Enarrationes in Psalmos*. Ps 53, 8. PL 36, 626.

<sup>408</sup> Spiritual Journal. **August 24, 1808.**

recited it even when sick, and only omitted it during his last days in obedience to his doctor<sup>409</sup>.

He considered the recitation of the Divine Office not only as his principal duty, but above all, as a sweet conversation with God, endeavoring as often as possible to observe the proper times of the daily canonical hours<sup>410</sup>. The community recitation of Matins and Lauds, as well as Vespers and Compline, was a practice that was observed in St. Gaspar's time<sup>411</sup>.

St. Gaspar's devotion while reciting the Office was never routine, nor did it last just a short time, rather, he cherished it constantly with growing intensity up to the end of his life. He was also well nourished through the deep and tireless study he derived from the sacred Scriptures, with which the divine prayers are interwoven<sup>412</sup>.

## MEDITATION

### **232: The soul of meditation**

The essence of mental prayer appropriately consists in an intimate conversation with God, our Lord.

This is accomplished, above all, in order to praise and bless Him for what He is in Himself, to thank Him for the gifts and graces He has given us, by practicing that way of praying suggested by St. Paul: ***Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, sing and praying to the Lord in your hearts. Give thanks to God the Father always and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. [Ep 5:18-20]. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another, singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts [Co 3L16].***

Another purpose of mental prayer is to request graces that we need. The way to talk to God is, therefore, the way that a son talks to his father, the manner that a poor person entreats a rich and merciful man, the way one who is sick addresses a doctor, the student a teacher, the bride, her husband.

During meditation it is also worthwhile to converse with ourselves, according to the Psalmist's suggestion: ***Bless the Lord, o my soul; and all my being, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, o my soul, and forget not all His benefits [Ps 103:1-2]. Why are you so downcast, o my soul? Why do you sigh within me? Hope in God! For I shall again be thanking Him, in the presence of my superior and my God [Ps 43:5]***<sup>413</sup>.

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<sup>409</sup> *Positio*, p. 123.

<sup>410</sup> Cajetan Giaccobbe, *Life*. SA, p. 332.

<sup>411</sup> Testimony given by St. John B. Lenotti, reference from the biographical notes of the same Fr. Lenotti, as quoted by Fr. Joseph Stofella. CS III, p. 195.

<sup>412</sup> Cajetan Giaccobbe, *Vita*. SA, p. 331.

<sup>413</sup> *Retrat Meditations*. MssB 3179-3188.

**233: Meditation according to St. Ignatius' method**

Mental prayer, or meditation, is an exercise of a soul's interior faculty concerning facts revealed by Faith. It is a simple practice. If, morning and evening, we habitually use the faculties of memory, intellect and will when we are concerned with sensible objects, then why can't we raise ourselves up a little to consider eternal things with the help of grace?

Memory, above all, calls to mind God, our Father, with whom we want to speak and deal with. We then will recall the mystery which we want to meditate upon, while considering it briefly and as clearly as possible in terms which faith uses in teaching us, articulating it in various steps.

The intellect, then, proceeds to reflect on the mystery, attempting to determine its depths and to derive important and practical convictions to present to one's will. This task which the intellect performs is particularly demanding because it is rather difficult to fix one's attention on only one thing, focusing on God, without being diverted to other thoughts.

It is up to the will to draw certain affections from these concepts, such as love towards God, and confidence in His mercy, sorrow for sin, and humble acknowledgment of one's sinfulness. One should also form positive good resolutions, keeping in mind that without these good resolutions, meditation would become merely a scholarly exercise rather than a prayer. Finally, one turns to God in a conversational exchange, like a friend to a friend, to ask for His grace, to address one's real sentiments, and one's needs and to obtain help and guidance<sup>414</sup>.

**234: Wind and oars**

When the Holy Spirit moves us with one of His special inspirations, everything becomes easy and gentle, because He keeps our memory engrossed, enlivens our reasoning, sends us a deluge of reflections, excites our affections and guides our conversation with God in an orderly manner. He controls the tasks of our mental prayer perfectly, so that we only have to cooperate with him with little effort on our part.

But, when we don't have this special assistance, we must exert ourselves to using our free will, with the help of Divine Grace, which, of course, is never lacking. We have to use our soul's faculties in order to exercise their specific capabilities. In this way, we may move the same Holy Spirit to come to our assistance with his exclusive power.

Spiritual men who have dedicated themselves to prayer cannot always expect to be like sailing ships with the wind at the stern, cruising along effortlessly. However, it is well that they adapt themselves rather like galleys, who are moved along both by the wind and with the power supplied by oarsmen. When the beneficial wind of Divine

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<sup>414</sup> o.c. **MssB 3117-3162.**

inspiration is lacking, they have to navigate with the oars of their own soul's faculties, aided by Divine Grace. This method of praying often is more fruitful even though it does not always please us<sup>415</sup>.

### **235: Practical suggestions**

Certain spiritual persons begin this task in reverse, that is, they begin by doing external works of charity fervently. These actions, however, are only naturally motivated, and have little of real charity in them. Their efforts may even seem to indicate certain signs of contemplative prayer, which, however, are only apparent, as can be detected by their inconstancy and brevity, and by the lack of positive effects, which, instead, accompany authentic contemplative prayer. These should, therefore, change their method of prayer and begin over again, trying to base their actions on a solid foundation; that is, not on external charitable good works, but in interior inspiration. This method will produce in its own good time, well-seasoned and mature fruit of real charity.

Moreover, interior inspiration, above all, must be supported by a stricter discipline of obedience to spiritual guidance, and by a form of more practically prayer, which will stir up the will<sup>416</sup>.

Insofar as one's preparation for meditation is concerned, interior sentiment and recollection are more important than the workings of his intellect and reasoning. Interior sentiment knows how to pick out a subject in an instant, without jumping from one thing to another. It focuses on its principal object, without, however, going ahead by leaving the will behind; it uses the will as a companion, and sometimes the will becomes its guide. Our reasoning depends on our power, even with God's help. Our interior sentiment depends on God, even when we agree with it. The former is employed by human beings on earth; the latter resembles more that which will occur in Heaven in a perfect way<sup>417</sup>.

### **236: Enriching meditation assiduously**

It is important also to examine ourselves on our methods of making our meditation, reflecting on the manner of its preparation and how it is developed; on the inspirations received and on resolutions that we made. We must also evaluate those distractions that inevitably come our way, and that aridity of spirit that we may often suffer.

As for distractions and aridity, it is important to determine whether or not we have given them occasion to develop. Then, too, have we been guilty of neglect during our preparation, or in applying ourselves? Perhaps we were engaged in useless chattering just before beginning? Did some kind of a disordered affection interfere, or

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<sup>415</sup> o.c. **MssB 3151-3152.**

<sup>416</sup> Spiritual Journal. **November 16, 1808.**

<sup>417</sup> Correspondence. Letter to L. Naudet, **March 6, 1813.**

could it be that an excessive concern for worldly affairs intervened? Conduct such as this has the effect of distancing spiritual thoughts and affections from our hearts. It is like smoke forcing bees from their hives!

By determining what is wrong, it is possible to correct it by fighting against its cause. Moreover, let us come before God humbly, confessing how just it is that manna should not rain down on those who prefer to eat the coarse food of Egypt. Even in the case that we believe that this dryness of soul does not come from any fault of ours, but that it is a test the Lord sends to strengthen our souls in virtue, it is always a good thing to humbly abandon ourselves to the Divine Will. We, therefore, should guard against shortening the time dedicated to prayer. On the other hand, we must seek to prolong it, in order to prevail, and to do so with greater generosity.

An effective way to appreciate meditation, as well as to quickly avail ourselves of its fruitful effects, is to take notes of those more vivid inspirations, and those more important resolutions, so that when we read over what we have written down, it will be that much easier to put them into practice. It is like a gardener who, during a drought, will use water that has been stored during a period of more abundant rain<sup>418</sup>.

### **237: Faithfulness to daily meditation**

St. Gaspar was always united with God, thanks to meditation. That which he practiced so faithfully, he recommended to everyone, with the utmost fervor and especially to all who were consecrated to the Lord.

He advised its practice to the young men of the Oratories which he founded. Many of these, above all, his first students and companions, accomplished marvelous deeds by means of these sacred exercises.

However, for his religious community at the Stimmate, it was not a matter of advice or exhortation, but, above all, a duty, and a strict one at that. He would have tolerated the omission of any other task, but he never excused them from meditation. At times, if a particularly important obligation impeded them from meditating at the established time in the morning, he expected them to discharge this duty for the prescribed length of time as soon as possible<sup>419</sup>.

He highly recommended meditation, and sought every way he could to inspire his confreres to do so before Mass, notwithstanding their duty to hear Confessions. If it wasn't possible he expected that part of it should be done then, and the rest be completed later.<sup>420</sup>

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<sup>418</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3189-3192.**

<sup>419</sup> Cajetan Giacobbe, *Life*. SA p. 507.

<sup>420</sup> *Miscellanea Lenotti*, SA, p. 189.

## EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

### **238: A spiritual balance**

God prefers to speak as a Father rather than as a Judge. Let us take account of our service now, before the Lord exacts it from us<sup>421</sup>. We need to do the same thing for our sins as we do in our business transactions every day. Calling upon our conscience, we must take into account our actions, words and thoughts. We have to determine what resources were used up for worthwhile and useful things, and what was wasted instead to our loss. How many conversations were used in complaining, or in shameful language, and in offensive words? What thoughts evolved into improper glances? Which of our choices have turned out to be spiritually damaging, whether committed by our hands, by our tongue, or by our eyes?

Let us, therefore, be diligent in denying ourselves these inopportune expenses. Moreover, in place of these bad transactions, let us rather secure things that will bring us profit. In place of inconsiderate words, let us use prayer; in place of improper glances, let us put alms and fasting. For, if we continue to spend our efforts so poorly, without saving anything, and are careless about restocking our storerooms, we will find ourselves reduced to misery, and run the risk of falling into the ultimate punishment<sup>422</sup>.

In order to make an examination of conscience well, you need to select a saint with the same calling as yours as if he were a mirror. All that is lacking in contrast to his perfection are defects to be corrected<sup>423</sup>.

### **239: How to make an examination of conscience**

A good examination of conscience requires these five components:

*First.* Thank God for all the benefits we have received, so that when we compare these gifts with our defects and our sins, we have the opportunity to experience our own confusion and therefore, will be able to repent our failings<sup>424</sup>. As for the first step in the examination, that is, the thanksgiving, while prostrate on the ground in the presence of Heaven, I felt a great awareness of divine presence, and of love and offering<sup>425</sup>.

*Second.* As for the grace to know well our sins and defects; to have the strength to rid ourselves of them. ***More torturous than all else is the human heart, beyond remedy; who can understand it? I, the Lord, alone probe the mind and test the heart, to reward everyone according to his ways, according to the merit of his deeds*** [Jr 17:9 - 10].

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<sup>421</sup> Spiritual Journal. **MssB September 15, 1808.**

<sup>422</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2760-2762.**

<sup>423</sup> Spiritual Journal. **July 30, 1808.**

<sup>424</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2741.**

<sup>425</sup> Spiritual Journal. **October 27, 1808.**

*Third.* Ask your soul for an account of fault committed. Recall these failings exactly and have the courage to ask: Why have you done this or that? If your soul avoids answering, and begins to delve into the affairs of others, say to it clearly that you have no intention to judge those, and that it must pay attention to one's own shortcomings, not those of others.

*Fourth.* Ask God's forgiveness for these faults that have been committed. ***The just will open his lips in prayer to ask pardon for his sins*** [Si 39:6].

*Fifth.* Resolve to rectify these failings with the help of God's grace. If God sees that we are directing ourselves to the road of virtue, fighting evil, He will approve and accept our conversion, and He will be most gracious with His gifts. We, ourselves, cannot yearn for the forgiveness of our faults, and for our salvation as much as He, Himself, desires it, as He hastens to help us so that we can achieve freedom<sup>426</sup>.

## **240: Particular examination**

It is important to examine one's conscience every evening, particularly concerning one's predominant fault<sup>427</sup>.

Attention must be paid to distinguish among the most difficult passions one has to conquer, in order to determine which one has to be striven against with particular commitment, using all the weapons in one's spirit. In this way, having overcome these passions which are the most resistant, it will be much easier to conquer the remaining ones. First, because one's soul becomes every stronger as one victory succeeds another. Secondly, because when a person goes from one fierce battle to another which is much easier, victory becomes more possible. So having overcome one's strongest vices, and then confronting those weaker ones, it is easier to approach complete victory a little at a time.

Every vice is opposed by a virtue: as pride is by humility, avarice by almsgiving, lust by continence, and anger by meekness. Therefore, the objective of a particular examination may not only be a struggle against vices and defects, but also a commitment to acquire virtue<sup>428</sup>.

'St. Gaspar told me to begin a particular examination on these words of St. Gregory the Great: 'Whatever you do, look at Him and direct your life according to His example'<sup>429</sup>.' During these prayers that were recommended to begin anew my examination, I experienced much consolation by finding the way to reflect on the redeemer more often, and, in consequence, to unite myself also with Him because it is difficult to apply oneself to think about Him, without feeling drawn to Him. I spent the

<sup>426</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2742-2758**. The five points on the examination of conscience are taken from the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius [n. 43].

<sup>427</sup> Retreat to Acolytes **MssB 4454**.

<sup>428</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2693-2707**.

<sup>429</sup> St. Gregory the Great. *In Primum Regum*. II, 41. PL 79, 107.

entire day by considering all this, and by striving energetically to learn to imitate such a Model.<sup>430</sup>

## SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

### **241: What the Spiritual Exercises are**

The *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius are not merely a simple collection of pious reflections intended to facilitate interior recollection and devout conversation with God. They are, instead, a complete organic method designed to purify, strengthen, and unify a soul, leading it from the phase of its detachment from the world, toward that of the most perfect union with God<sup>431</sup>.

Convinced of the intrinsic efficacy of the *Exercises*, St. Ignatius sought nothing more than a retreat for some days in order to obtain the conversion even of great sinners, as well as progress towards perfection on the part of those who plod along in mediocrity. He reminded preachers that they cannot persuade others if they were not well convinced themselves: actor-preachers bear no fruit.

The results of these *Exercises* depend essentially on two factors: divine grace and our cooperation. Prayer is essential to obtain grace, since only one who prays can merit divine aid. As far as our cooperation is concerned, an abundant 'fullness of heart' toward these *Exercises* is required, above all.

This fullness of heart will come from realizing the magnitude of this undertaking. It deals with laying the foundation of spiritual progress which will serve for one's entire life. It is worth the pain of straining all the powers of one's spirit in order to be disposed to receive the grace by removing all impediments, and be able to cooperate with it. Fullness of heart will increase even more when one realizes how much we can hope in God. Let us put a great hope in the goodness and generosity of the Lord, Who, if He also seeks those in error and pursues fugitives, all the more so will He gather those of a good heart who approach Him, and He will embrace them. So, let us have confidence in divine clemency, which, having inspired this good purpose in us, will also give us the grace and the strength to accomplish this purpose effectively and well, since His will is our sanctification [cf. 1 Th 4:3].<sup>432</sup>

### **242: Dispositions required for the Exercises**

St. Ignatius wanted the *Exercises* to be undertaken with great openness and generosity. He felt that its participants should avidly seek, not so much spiritual comfort, but rather, to follow God's will in our regard, and to detach our personal attractions from terrestrial things, in order to direct these only to Him. It is absolutely

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<sup>430</sup> From the Spiritual Diary of Leopoldina Naudet, cited in **BERTONI** 3, pp. 273, ff.

<sup>431</sup> Danilo Bartoli, *Life of St. Ignatius*. Book 1, c. 16.

<sup>432</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2174-2184**. St. Gaspar freely uses the *Directorium in Exercitia* of the Society of Jesus. cf. CS I, p. 114.



necessary that we develop a total readiness to accept God's will, over and above any desire to profit spiritually, so that we will know how to absolutely determine what we must do to follow every inspiration He will send us. Therefore, we must not hold on to any conviction which we are not disposed to surrender. God is generous to anyone who is generous toward Him then the Devil will not dare to tempt him.

We must not put any limit to God's gifts, by wishing to be enlightened and helped only this much and not more. It would be very inconvenient that the creature behave in such a manner with its Creator.

Besides, it would be very damaging, because it would deprive itself of those greater gifts which God could give. And furthermore such meanness and ingratitude toward God would make it unworthy to receive even that little which it wished. It is rather necessary to expand the spirit in such a manner as to desire with all one's might to unite ourselves with God and to be enriched by Him with heavenly treasures as much as possible.

Among the requirements indicated to derive positive benefits from the *Exercises*, there is also the duty to follow some practical norms. Don't spend time reading if it does not relate to meditation. It should be pursued only when it is oriented to the particular reflection encountered. One should not read hurriedly in order to learn, or find something new. Rather, one should stop and accurately ponder that which has been encountered, in order to stir up appropriate affections. It would be a great mistake to conduct a study during this time!

What has been said in regard to reading, applies also to writing. Notes should not be written unless they have particular reference to the prayer involved. Therefore, meditation must be safe-guarded above all else, and all other things have to be in its service<sup>433</sup>.

### **243: How to follow St. Ignatius**

I hold that the best method to perform the *Spiritual Exercises*, as far as we are concerned, is to faithfully follow the directions found in St. Ignatius' book.

I said, 'as far as we are concerned,' because as far as our Lord, our God is concerned, it is important that we leave Him complete freedom, restricting Him neither to the time, nor to the subject, nor method, nor day. In my view, all this implies that if one is not immediately attracted by the Lord, he must prepare himself according to the directions found in the book of the *Exercises* of St. Ignatius. Consequently, the time, method, subject and order outlined should be followed.

However, when the Lord draws us on to Himself, it is best not to look for anything else, but to follow Him as long as it pleases Him<sup>434</sup>. Let us abandon ourselves to God in these days, as St. Ignatius pointedly asks, by not putting limits in the way,

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<sup>433</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2155-2196.**

<sup>434</sup> Correspondence. Letter to L. Naudet, **June 4, 1813.**

and by not imposing obstacles or time limits on our Lord<sup>435</sup>. Let us follow Him with prudence and discretion. He alone knows how not to be restricted to set ways, and can achieve His goals apart from the usual roads, and the usual times<sup>436</sup>.

## SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

### **244: A guarantee against entrapments**

When human nature's enemy whispers its wily persuasions to a good soul, he desires and prefers that they be kept concealed, and he is very displeased when a soul reveals them to his confessor, or to an excellent spiritual director, who is experienced with his deceptions and his wickedness. The enemy knows very well that he cannot carry out his work from the moment his machinations are discovered<sup>437</sup>.

Nothing is so abominated and detested by the devil as the disclosure of his malice, because this is like removing the ground of trickery from under his feet. If one keeps a watch over himself, and learns how to reveal even the most secret things to whoever is his guide, the devil cannot find a way to hurt him. Having his spiritual director tell him that this is good and that is bad; that this comes from virtue, but that derives from unregulated passion; that this is not the time to do a certain thing, but, later on, it is appropriate, to do some other, the soul becomes well regulated in all things, and knows it can act with assurance. Then it achieves the best way of proceeding as it is written in Proverbs: ***For lack of guidance a people falls; security lies in many counselors*** [Pr 11:14].

It can also happen that a spiritual director may tell us the same things that our thoughts have already suggested to us. This is all very well. But, when things are said to us by the one the Lord has chosen to be our guide, we ought to consider them as coming from the Holy Spirit. Then everything is much better<sup>438</sup>.

### **245: Always confide in God**

When we can clearly see what has to be done, we act freely, confiding in God.

If there are any difficulties that impact our conscience and there is reason to doubt whether a certain action may be displeasing to God in some way, then we should not hesitate to expose our doubts, and clear up things with that minister of God, who, in our opinion appears better endowed with knowledge, probity and prudence.

Meanwhile, we must place our full confidence in God, who, whenever it is necessary, will never deny the light of wisdom to His minister. He it is, Who makes even the 'mouths of babes' eloquent because they know how to speak well of Him.

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<sup>435</sup> o.c., p. 73. **March 6, 1813.**

<sup>436</sup> id. p. 75.

<sup>437</sup> St. Ignatius Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, n. 326.

<sup>438</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3059-3068.**

Doing this, we can be sure we are following the most wise inspirations of the Holy Spirit. ***Son, do nothing without counsel*** [Si 32:19]<sup>439</sup>.

Even when the need arises to find a steady spiritual director, it is necessary to raise one's eyes to the Lord. He knows His own, and assigns His servants in the manner, time, and place He wants. If, at a certain time, it becomes necessary to change and find another, God will let him become known, even if he has to create one for the purpose.

One should omit neither prayers, nor searching, nor evaluation. Resting firmly in the knowledge that whatever is difficult and even impossible for men is possible and most effortless for our God and Omnipotent God; in fact, it is accomplished as soon as He wishes it<sup>440</sup>.

## **246: The Spiritual Director's Responsibility**

A spiritual director must be an excellent teacher, endowed with knowledge and experience. At the same time, he must be humble so as not to attribute anything to himself.

In regard to his penitents, he should endeavor to discern their souls, and to understand what their real interests are. He must know how to revive their fervor constantly with words from sacred scripture, and with the example of the saints. He will instruct them not to rely on themselves, but only on Christ, while, at the same time, he will exact complete cooperation from them. He will also encourage penitents to open their hearts without any reservations, to live in humility, and to cultivate a sincere spirit of conversion and penance.

A prudent director is expected also to keep his eyes wide open to save his penitents from the risk of eventual errors and deceptions. Even when they have attained to a high degree of perfection, souls are not thereby safe, but can run the risk of serious danger if they are not very humble and mortified: ***Whoever thinks he is standing secure should take care not to fall*** [1 Co 10:12]. Moreover, he has to be vigilant about himself so that he will not risk the danger of finding himself lacking in his mission. Among other things, if perchance a soul guided by him has need of another director who is more suited to his needs, he will allow him to choose the other with complete liberty. He must not act like a jealous husband, but like those wise teachers who, after having developed their students to a certain point within their competence, turn them over to their more advanced colleagues.

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<sup>439</sup> Correspondence. Letter to L. Naudet, dated **October 16, 1825**.

<sup>440</sup> Correspondence. Letter to L. Naudet, **August 28, 1828**. In 1811, St. Gaspar assumed the spiritual direction of Leopoldina Naudet and her Sisters of the Holly Family, whose direction he was inspired to terminate in May of 1819. The Servant of God repeatedly asked St. Gaspar to review his decision and to renew his precious service. But, the Saint was unmoved, as is evident also from this section of the letter here quoted. [cf. Correspondence, pp. 143, ff. cf. **BERTONI**, 4, pp. 147, ff.

A good general rule is always to subject one's own judgment to that of the Church and to make its declarations the rule of all evaluations and behavior<sup>441</sup>.

In directing N.N., I should not so much study, but, rather have recourse to the source of light. In this way, I, too, will gain great advantage. I must never lead, but, follow the Lord, who will enlighten her and suggest to me, after having prayed, what will be more useful for her progress and for her correspondence to grace<sup>442</sup>.

#### **247: St. Gaspar, 'The Angel of Counsel'**

The priest, Gaspar Bertoni, a man of great talent, well versed in literary studies and in sacred science, but, above all, outstanding for his sanctity of life and for the virtue of prudence, may be justly called an angel of counsel. Many came to him seeking answers to their most difficult problems. Especially those who were to make a choice in their vocation. They were convinced that in following his advice, they would be making the right and best choice<sup>443</sup>.

The most conspicuous sign of sanctity of that extraordinary man appears to me to be precisely the light of his counsel, whether in respect to himself, or in regard to others. Over and above that natural good sense that God had so generously endowed him with, I sense that his every action was weighed and directed by the light of the Holy Spirit. The clemency, modesty, gravity, gentleness, and courtesy that accompanied all his actions, words and works, were the result of the tenderness and wisdom infused in Fr. Gaspar by the Divine Spirit, in order to make him an apt instrument to guide souls to eternal life.

This is how I always regarded Fr. Gaspar Bertoni. This is why I had recourse to him when I encountered difficulties in answering the call to enter the Society of Jesus. The advice of that man guided me in the face of so much opposition. He encouraged me in the midst of so much discouragement. His advice strengthened me when so much perplexity assailed me. Thus, I have always acknowledged that the greatest reward of having entered the haven of religious life was due to God and Fr. Bertoni<sup>444</sup>.

### **CHRISTIAN PRUDENCE**

#### **248: Charity and prudence**

Let us recall our reflections, beginning from the simplicity, I would say, of charity. This is the first step toward the evangelical precept: ***Be as simple as doves***. Then, we proceed to the most subtle prudence of the serpent, which is proper to the same charity, and which is found in the passage: ***Be prudent as serpents*** [My 10:16].

<sup>441</sup> Meditation on *Primum Regum*, n. 23. MssB 5861-5884.

<sup>442</sup> Spiritual Journal. Note of **January 12, 1811**. 'N.N' is evidently the Servant of God, Leopoldian Naudet. Cf. **BERTONI 4**, pp. 147, ff.

<sup>443</sup> From the *Historia Domus Probationis Veronensis of the Society of Jesus*. SA, pp. 647, ff.

<sup>444</sup> From a letter of Fr. Anthony Bresciani, SJ, to Fr. John M. Mariani, dated January 17, 1855. cf. **BERTONI 4**, p. 409.

But where does one learn this kind of prudence, which is not human, but celestial? And who can give us its rules and training? Here's the school; here's the Teacher. Holy Scripture directs us ***He brought me into the wine cellar, and his emblem over me is love*** [Sgs 2:4]. ***Hear, o daughter, and see, turn your ear, forget your people and your father's house. So shall the king desire your beauty*** [Ps 45:11-12]. Having arrived here, the soul is inebriated with the wine of charity. This precious wine gladdens, fortifies, and transports the soul outside of itself, uniting it with God; disposing it perfectly.

A light of admirable wisdom and divine prudence then glows in the intellect in order to judge its correspondence with God, whether as an effect, or as a means to follow Him in the future and to glorify Him at the present time.

With this help we must strive to enliven our love even more, in order to commit all our strength to prayer. Thus, we can obtain timely enlightenment during difficult circumstances, and when it is necessary to determine which path we must follow<sup>445</sup>.

#### **249: Seeking advice and prayer**

In order to help others on the road to sanctity, it is not enough to be guileless; prudence is also required<sup>446</sup>. Discretion is the queen of all virtues. In order to impart our directives and counsels to others we must be very able to discern one from the other<sup>447</sup>.

Whoever holds the office of Superior is expected to seek counsel and mature reflection of his collaborators each time he has to arrive at any important decision. This obligation derives precisely from that precept which says; ***Do nothing without counsel*** [Si 32:19]. Listening, and also seeking the advice of wise, prudent men, who are zealous in the interests of divine glory, is in conformity with the Lord's pleasure<sup>448</sup>.

After listening to the counsels of honest and solid reason, nothing prevents that this weak torch of human reasoning be subjected to the clearest light of Divine Wisdom. In this way, we will discern the source of every light, from which everything derives either immediately or secondarily, and will take place just as if we had no part in its happening<sup>449</sup>. Let us develop all these things together with God, praying and encouraging others to pray in order neither to delay nor to impede His Providence<sup>450</sup>.

When one can see clearly, one can proceed. But, when things are not very clear, then we must await enlightenment with full confidence. Before asking men's opinion, let us put our problems and even the order and manner of solving them,

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<sup>445</sup> Correspondence. Letter to L. Naudet, **January 26, 1813.**

<sup>446</sup> Spiritual Journal. **September 23, 1809.**

<sup>447</sup> *Original Constitutions*, CF # 299.

<sup>448</sup> Correspondence, p. 100. Undated Letter to L. Naudet

<sup>449</sup> ib.

<sup>450</sup> o.c., p.140. An un-dated letter to L. Naudet.

before the Lord. Moreover, let us not fear, for the Lord says: ***I will instruct you and show you the way you should walk*** [Ps 32:8]<sup>451</sup>.

### **250: Everything is yours: you are Christ's, Christ is God's**

It would be a loss to maintain conditional ties and bond with another person; but, on the other hand, it would be useful to maintain the freedom of availing oneself of the advice, favor, and the help of certain people, at least for some time and for certain circumstances. It is a good thing not to have the kind of attachments that obligate us to the services these people provide, but it is also a good thing to have the freedom of taking advantage of the opportunity when their services are available. In this way, we avoid whatever may be harmful, while we are not deprived of whatever may be useful.

Therefore, in the very act of seeking to avoid an importune attachment, we find that we are leaving another link intact: that of charity, strengthening it to the utmost. This one must never be broken; moreover, it is always perfectly free. ***Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another*** [Rm 13:8]. With these words St. Paul teaches us the most proper way to interact with one another in respect to the manner, criterion, and discretion required.

From this love and charity derive that which the same Apostle writes about: ***Everything belongs to you, Paul, or Apollos, or Kephas, or the world, or life, or death, or the present or the future: all belong to you, and you to Christ and Christ to God*** [1 Co 3:21-23]<sup>452</sup>.

### **251: The secret of the Saints**

May the Lord grant us to acquire again in its entirety that secret of the Saints which enabled St. Gaspar and his companions to cooperate in so many endeavors with each other, which would have been impossible if they had relied only on human criteria. In fact, our first Fathers knew how to combine:

- 1.] an on-going desire to keep a lowly, humble profile as possible, which was characteristic of their life together with an outstanding reputation for sanctity;
- 2.] a most austere life of penance with the most sincere cheerfulness.
- 3.] an heroic detachment and a true spirit of poverty with expenditures for their residence and church, which were completed without incurring debt, while assuring their propriety, and decorum, notwithstanding the expenses required;
- 4.] a most disciplined religious life, together with various and multiple activities.

<sup>451</sup> o.c., p. 105. A Letter to L. Naudet, **January 3, 1814**.

<sup>452</sup> Correspondence, pp. 112, f. Letter to L. Naudet, **June 5, 1814**.

- 5.] complete submission with the full development of each confrere's activities;
- 6.] constant study and work with the most sound piety.

These compatibilities truly represent the secret of the Saints. They are a mystery for the world. For the very reason, they reveal the Divine character of the Lord's work. This secret is the precious legacy which our first Fathers have left us<sup>453</sup>.

## HUMILITY

### **252: Why humility is necessary**

Humility is that virtue which is found between its two opposite vices: pride and disordered subservience. Thanks to true knowledge of oneself, it moderates man's mind to avoid raising itself above its true worth, whereby it would fall into pride; rather, it tends to dispose it to lower itself, but always in the context of right reason in order not to fall into the opposite extreme, that of abjection.

Humility is so necessary that Christ said: ***Unless you become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven*** [Mt 18:3]. St. Bernard observed that Christ, speaking of humility and affirming that without it one cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven, used a different way of speaking here, from the one He used when referring to virginity. He said: ***Let him understand it, who can*** [Mt 19:12]. Virginity is counsel, but humility is a precept.<sup>454</sup> And now, where does this leave you, you who think that humility is only a counsel that is useful only for perfection, and not a command that is necessary for everyone to attain salvation? How can it not be ordained for all of us, when we cannot be saved if we not become like little children?

***Learn from Me,*** the Lord says, ***for I am meek and humble of heart*** [Mt 11:29]. Learn from Me, because even though I am equal to the Father in nature, I lowered Myself and assumed a servant's condition [cf. Ph 2:6, 7]. Not only did I become humble like a child, but I subjected Myself for thirty years to those whom I had created, obedient and submissive to the Father even to death, a death on the Cross. I have given you an example of humility, because as I have done, you must do likewise. [cf. Jn 13:15].

Christ, humble and we Christians proud? No! A proud subject cannot serve a humble leader! The name of Christian is not suited to us if we are not resolved to embrace humility<sup>455</sup>.

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<sup>453</sup> Circular Letter of the Superior General, Fr. John B. Tomasi, to the Confreres, dated October 24, 1916, on the occasion of the Stigmatine Congregation's first centenary.

<sup>454</sup> St. Bernard, *Homiliae super Missus*, I, 5. PL 183, 59.

<sup>455</sup> Early Sermons, n. 1. Humility. **MssB374-376**. Sermon preached June 8, 1800, when St. Gaspar was still a Deacon.

### **253: Intellectual humility**

Sacred Scripture leads us to true humility by its principle: acknowledge the majesty and greatness of God, and submit our will to His in all things with the utmost care. ***Oh, the depths and the riches and wisdom and the knowledge of God! How inscrutable are His judgments and how unsearchable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been His counselor? Or, who has given Him anything that he may be repaid? For from Him and through Him and for Him are all things. To Him be glory forever. Amen*** [Rm 11:33-36].

A soul that recognizes its limits and its dependence, instructed and formed by God, knows that the truth in our intellect is none other than conformity with the order of divine wisdom, which is externalized in His works and in His words. It is important also to achieve a modest attitude of gratitude for accumulating and retaining those truths which are possible to understand, and to guard against the presumption of wanting to comprehend those truths which are above the natural capacity of our minds.

For the rest, let us apply ourselves to contemplate the marvels of creation, so that created things will become a reason for our praise, and a motive for our prayer. Wisdom says: ***For from the greatness and beauty of created things their original author, by analogy, is seen*** [Ws 13:5]. We will be able to see, ascending from created things, how great is the wisdom, power, and love of the Lord. If an attentive and astute mind can apply itself to the consideration of each particular subject, or rather not just things one by one – it is enough to consider oneself – that person would be able to comprehend from those small realities the immense and ineffable power of God<sup>456</sup>.

### **254: Humility and magnanimity**

There are those who think that humility is opposed to that generosity and greatness of soul which tends to grand things and which makes it seem that humility has to shun great works. But, the truth is the very opposite.

In fact, humility represses ambition, not because it should not tend towards those things which are truly great from the standpoint of right reason, but only when it should avoid those things when they appear to be great against the judgment of right reason. In this way, magnanimity drives man to do great things, not against reason, but only in conformity with it. Man, thereby, is effectively called to do great things. ***Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness*** [Gn 1:26], God said in the very act of creation. And St Paul noted: ***...and we boast in hope of the glory of God*** [Rm 5:2].

Human nature is more timid than we think. So, there are two virtues what regulate the same striving towards performing difficult acts and these two help each

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<sup>456</sup> Meditations on Genesis, n. 3. **MssB 4563-4568**,



other like sisters and inseparable companions. One is magnanimity, which strengthens the heart against excessive timidity and the risk of despair, urging it to pursue true greatness in conformity with correct reason. The other is humility, which moderates and restrains the human mind so that it will know how to strive towards greater things, not beyond the just measure of its endeavors, nor with a false presumption, which may cause it to lose true greatness just as Lucifer and Adam lost it.

Humility and magnanimity are not opposed to each other. Attempting to undertake major ventures while relying only on one's own efforts is contrary to greatness, is also contrary to this virtue. About this, Scripture says that ***This is also vanity and a chase after wind*** [Si 6:9]. This is that pride which does not make a man great, but pompous, like a body that swells from infirmity. On the other hand, tending towards ever greater things while confidently putting one's endeavors in God's hands is never contrary to humility.

Finally, humility is truth. Just as it holds one back from going beyond his potential, so it also prevents him from falling below that of which he is capable: and that would be a degrading subservience. Thus, humility places man, and maintains him, in his proper state<sup>457</sup>.

## **255: The foundation of a spiritual edifice**

I see many people who are very intent to lay down solid stone building blocks of unmovable faith, to raise columns and walls of invincible hope, and to extend magnificent walls of charity. To all this, they add embellishments of the most beautiful virtues. They plant gardens where the most pure virginity and the most tender loves invites the celestial Spouse to take delight in the quiet of their pathways.

What a beautiful building, how rich, how pleasant! But has any thought been given to digging a foundation capable of holding up so high an edifice, so that it can handle the strongest winds which may assail it? Were you so busy about eliminating the loose soil of pride from your heart, so that it will remain open to that grace which would hold up a solid edifice on the stones of humility that were placed in the bottom?<sup>458</sup>

Before the Lord raises a soul so high, it is necessary that He lower it as much, because He is an architect Who cannot be less knowledgeable than most ordinary masters of masonry, who know that they must dig deeper when a building is going to be built higher.

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<sup>457</sup> Humility. **MssB 4365-4370**. We are dealing here with a text from the same manuscript which we have consulted treating Patience [It is probable that it, too, was used by St. Gaspar for his Domestic Exhortations which began in September 1840. We are led to believe this was so because both Humility and Patience had a prominent role in the collective spirituality practiced at the Stimate. [cf. BERTONI, 6, p. 69].

<sup>458</sup> Early Sermons, n. 1. Humility. **MssB 377**.

Let us beseech the Lord to increase His light in us, so that being aware of our wretchedness, we will not find ourselves at the bottom, perhaps even in the abyss. Then one abyss will call to another [Ps 42:8], the depth corresponding to the height of the edifice that the Lord has shown us in His plan.

Let us adore so great and sublime Lord, and let us love Him, Who so demeaned Himself, and still demeans Himself in order to love us. To what point, then, should we not lower ourselves, in order to correspond with, and imitate, the abasement to which he descended to unite Himself with us? To Him be eternal glory, Who lives and reigns forever and ever<sup>459</sup>.

### **256: Humility guarantees the authenticity of all virtues**

If a solid foundation of humility is not in place, the other virtues will themselves be the occasion of one's downfall, because it could lead to a haughty despising of others. And so, while one believes he is conversing in heaven, he really needs an extraordinary grace of conversion. It is easier for an obvious sinner to be converted toward goodness, since he humbly realizes his condition because of his very failings, then for a self-deceived person who is clothed with a mantle of virtue which is only apparent<sup>460</sup>.

Virtues can often be an occasion of pride. Pride, such as this, while very hidden and lightly perceived, is revealed by its foundation. It has its primary roots in its incitement to sin, which is concupiscence. It is like an unhappy mother of every vice, which we carry on our backs, but, which can favor the development of every virtue, like a pestilential germ. In the beginning phase of pride, the subject's actions seem to be good on the surface. Moreover, not only are his external actions good, but the example and advice he gives to others can be excellent. So, it may happen that, while he is teaching others humility among other virtues, his own are beginning to be tainted by his pride.

Therefore, the higher the perfection one achieves, the more he must fear, because other vices feed on ugly and sinful actions while pride feeds upon the most alluring pastures provided by the very virtues, and the highest ones at that.

Lord, grant us mistrust of ourselves and confidence in You. Holy and Immaculate Virgin, you were preserved by grace during your conception and were free of concupiscence, free us by your intercession from the root of all vices, especially pride<sup>461</sup>.

### **257: Humility and apostolic productivity**

Christ ***took the form of a slave*** [Ph 2:7]. Through this dumbfounding humiliation, and from this nothingness, God has gained His greatest glory and our

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<sup>459</sup> Correspondence, p. 115. Letter to L. Naudet, undated.

<sup>460</sup> Early Sermons, n. 1. Humility **MssB 378**.

<sup>461</sup> Meditations on ***Primum Regum*** n. 48. **MssB 6710-6739**.

ennoblement. Not only did He free us from sin, but He has made us His children, heirs of His Kingdom.

Whatever be God's designs concerning me, He will never do anything greater with me which does not have as its principle and foundation that nothingness which is my humility. From the moment that I wish to be something, I will be nothing. But, from the moment that I consent to be nothing, I will become capable of anything before God.

All beginnings of great things start with humility. When we fortify ourselves with this virtue, God will make use of us and make us publicly known; He will perform great things through us for His glory.

Humility is the safest way. No one should become a preacher who has not first been mellowed by silence, and has not developed deep roots in humility before appearing in public. Humility is necessary in order to be sure one exercises authority well, as St. Gregory says<sup>462</sup>.

Humility carries out justice, because it frees and overcomes every obligation by which man is a debtor to God, to his neighbor, and to himself. It subjects itself to God by means of religion; to his neighbor, by means of charity; and puts one's body in the hands of one's soul, and the soul in the hands of God. A humble man is at peace with everyone. He loves those who hate him, blesses the one who curses him, honors the one who scorns him. He wins over his enemies with the zeal of charity, and he makes friends of them. He avenges injustices with good works<sup>463</sup>.

**258: Be humble, be humble! Seek out the nooks and crannies**

The truly just understand the distortions caused by pride and vainglory very well, and they feel all its horror. Even a small encounter with this vice makes their generosity of spirit react with as lively a fear as the impression made on them is the stronger, because of the virtues they have acquired and the gratuitous gifts given them. Like the wealthy of this world, they greatly fear the rapacity of thieves: in this case, specifically, pride and vainglory, which would despoil and suddenly leave their home empty.<sup>464</sup>

I am comforted by your refusing the miter, even though we ought to respect the office, and the one who offered you this honor. You have listened to the voice of Don Galvani: 'Be humble, be humble, seek out the nooks and crannies...' <sup>465</sup> **The Lord will save the lowly of spirit [Ps 34:19].**<sup>466</sup>

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<sup>462</sup> St. Gregory the Great, *Moralium Libri in Job*, Book 81, c. 1. PL 76, 571.

<sup>463</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2478-2554.**

<sup>464</sup> Spiritual Journal. **November 17, 1808.**

<sup>465</sup> This phrase in the Veronese dialect refers to a child's game which evoked the story of a cricket in a little hole where it would hide. The phrase was habitually used by St. Gaspar as an invitation to humility.

Because the Lord has given you a grace which is greater than any treasure to live in humility and simplicity, see that you maintain yourself in this blessed state. Finally, even the people of this world like to see their priests humble and meek. With this virtue, you will gain more good than you could ever believe or imagine<sup>467</sup>.

### **259: Humility practiced: experiences and resolutions**

God is found in the depths of one's personal nothingness. Hearing about the greatest things of God, I realized a profound understanding of myself.<sup>468</sup> Humble yourself in all things.<sup>469</sup>

I experienced sentiments of great love toward the Most Holy Trinity in giving us the Son, and great tenderness towards Him, together with a lively faith and a great desire to be united and associated with His sufferings and ignominy. I asked for the grace to suffer and to be despised for Him<sup>470</sup>. Heartfelt affection for Christ, with the desire... and painful humiliation which happened to me<sup>471</sup>.

***Whoever thinks he is standing secure should take care not to fall*** [1 Co 10:12]. Humility, together with great confidence<sup>472</sup>. When we feel called to some degree of perfection, we should guard against having less regard for those who prefer not to follow us. It could be that they have the same, or even more merit before God. Even though we all have the same goal, not all attain it in the same way.<sup>473</sup>

If our failings were to be revealed publicly, like those of others, it would become apparent how our own would be most detestable above all, because of the many graces and inspirations given to us. If these gifts had been given to others, they would be saints<sup>474</sup>.

### **260: The example of St. Veronica Giuliani**

To talk about Veronica Giuliani is to speak about a new St. Francis of Assisi: so much has a daughter retraced the virtues of her father. Now, what was most characteristic of Francis was his humility.

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Don Nicola Galvani [1752-1823], Professor of Moral Theology in the Seminary of Verona, was St. Gaspar's spiritual director. He was intimately linked to Fr. Bertoni and his works, leaving him heir of his estate, among which were the church and house of the Stimate, where the Stigmatine Congregation began.

<sup>466</sup> Correspondence, p. 327. Letter to Fr. Bragato, **April 11, 1848**.

<sup>467</sup> o.c., pp.309, ff. Letter to Fr. Bragato, dated **October 21, '848**.

<sup>468</sup> Spiritual Journal. **August 24, 1808**.

<sup>469</sup> o.c., **September 5, 1808**.

<sup>470</sup> o.c. **September 27, 1808**.

<sup>471</sup> o.c., **June 24, 1813**. The dots are found in the original.

<sup>472</sup> o.c. **September 19, 1809**.

<sup>473</sup> o.c. **December 20, 1808**.

<sup>474</sup> o.c., **August 9, 1808**.

Not an ordinary kind, but, the highest, the most perfect, the humility of Christ which was faithfully copied in himself. This, in fact, was precisely what Veronica's humility was like; a living redrawing of the Crucified One, her Spouse.

Her dying mother commended her five remaining children to the Five Wounds of the Crucified. She assigned Veronica to the wound in the side. From her most tender years, she listened to Jesus' voice: 'My Bride, the cross awaits you. She did not glory in this; father, she used to say that she was very naughty at that age. She used to say the same thing when extraordinary gifts became apparent in her, by signs that confirmed the divine premonitions.

Veronica was profoundly convinced of her nothingness. It was for no other reason that she so frequently prayed to God so that she would come to realize this so well. She considered herself the greatest sinner. Anyone who did not know her, and didn't really know what she was like, would have taken her words at face value and would have considered her one of the world's greatest sinner. This she claimed to be with her Sisters and her novices. She sought every means to ask everyone to pray for her conversion, and did so with so much fervor and conviction that it seemed her heart would break.

As an abbess, she performed all sorts of holy tasks. She served everyone, even lay sisters. She did everything that she could to avoid election to this office. She fell on her knees to beseech the Bishop and Chapter to avoid, as she said, the ruin of the Convent by confiding its care to a superior who was so unworthy, useless to everyone, whether it be in spiritual or temporal matters. The Bishop responded that she was qualified to govern a world, for so many came to her for counsel in the most difficult situations. Nevertheless, because of her humility, she never undertook a task without the advice of others. She never commanded, but used words of prayer, even when dealing with tradesmen and peasants. She hid her supernatural gifts and graces and all else that would do her honor. Since she could not hide her stigmata she claimed that certain gifts were given by God even to sinners in order to convert them.

At the moment of her death, she Asked pardon of all present for the scandal she had given, and begged them that they should pray to the most holy Virgin so that she would obtain for her the salvation of her soul<sup>475</sup>.

### **261: St. Gaspar's humility**

Humility was second nature to him. It was, before all. A humility of the intellect because he held himself to be a great sinner and ignorant. Therefore, he used to say that he was not the type to found religious institutes. If someone consulted him, and there were many, the first thing he would do was to excuse himself and ask: why do

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<sup>475</sup> Sermon on St. Veronica Giuliani, December 29, 1839. **MssB 2163-2172.** Fr. Bertoni composed this sermon on the occasion of the festivities for the Canonization of this Saint, but he was not able to deliver it because of ill health. He entrusted Fr. John M. Marani who with his [Fr. Bertoni's] permission, elaborated the text, which was somewhat sketchy. The first section referred to here is Fr. Marani's [cf. **BERTONI 6**, PP. 14, ff.].

you come to me? For twelve years, he never let slip from his lips a single reference to his studies, writings, or works. He gave credit only to others. Because of this, he was ever prompt to thank his confreres for any and all services. In the same way, he always honored others. But, also because of his convictions, he was reluctant to give his blessing to other priests, except those of his own community. Consequently, clothed in the humility of Christ, he emanated the sweet odor and unction of Christ one felt by being near to Him, and by His words<sup>476</sup>.

It was his usual habit to keep in the background after taking part in various undertakings and in the establishment of institutes for both men and women. He would do so only after the work was safely underway, then he would withdraw and leave the honor and credit to others<sup>477</sup>.

St. Gaspar would often repeat to his sons: 'Be humble, be humble, seek the nooks and crannies... - which he said he had frequently heard from the learned and humble Fr. Nicholas Galvani<sup>478</sup>. The very first thing our Founder wanted was to ground us well in humility, and to maintain its spirit in us constantly<sup>479</sup>.

## POVERTY

### **262 The necessary capital**

To follow Christ is the goal: the means is renouncing everything.

***Every one of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be My disciple [Lk 14:33]. Which of you wishing to construct a tower does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if there is enough for its completion [Lk 14:28].*** The tower which has now to be built is the following of Christ. The cost and the needed materials are renunciation<sup>480</sup>.

To begin an undertaking, one needs to have acquired great and heroic virtue. The capital needed is poverty, then all the other virtues. The smallest thing should not be neglected, nor should one hesitate to gather inspirations<sup>481</sup>. It is necessary to prepare for a great war against hell.

1. Humility is needed to draw help from Heaven.
2. Detachment from all things is also required, so that the devil will not have a means to entrap us<sup>482</sup>.

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<sup>476</sup> *Miscellanea Lenotti*. SA, pp. 124, ff.

<sup>477</sup> o.c., SA, p. 134.

<sup>478</sup> Cajetan Giacobbe, *Life*, SA, pp. 548.

<sup>479</sup> Domestic Exhortations, of Fr. John Bl. Lenotti. CS III, p. 414.

<sup>480</sup> Retreat Meditations, **MssB 2529**.

<sup>481</sup> Spiritual Journal. **July 23, 1809**.

<sup>482</sup> o.c., **July 24, 1809**.

A fortune acquired by hard work is also needed to construct the tower of a consecrated vocation, in order to live in chastity and to be able to bear the weight of the ministry. This fortune must also include difficult renunciations: particularly from relatives and worldly goods, from whatever may constitute great dangers, as well as a renunciation of one's freedom and his very life<sup>483</sup>.

Men seek a certain excellence and abundance in external goods, riches and honors. Now, all these are to be properly sought in the Kingdom of Heaven; gifts which man obtains from the excellence and abundance of God's treasures. This is why the Kingdom of Heaven has been promised to the poor in spirit: ***Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven*** [Mt 5:3]<sup>484</sup>.

### **263: Poverty of a priest**

A minister of the Gospel has an inexhaustible fortune of riches and goods of every sort through his service to God and piety. According to Christ's promise, he will never lack those temporal needs, which are desired by one possessing a spirit of moderation and content with a few things that are necessary to sustain life. ***Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides*** [Mt 6:33].

The condition of man in respect to all the goods of this world is the same at birth as it is at death: he is born without anything, and he dies the same way. He is, therefore, not destined by God to accumulate and to enrich himself with goods which he must leave behind and which will serve no purpose in the future life. An immoderate desire to enrich oneself exposes a person to many temptations. He will find himself entangled in many nets, and to so much disordered greed that will submerge him in an abyss of death and eternal damnation. 'I will make you sink, so that you cannot make me sink': thus said a famous philosopher as he threw his riches into the sea. He should have lavished them on the poor instead!

An excessive love of riches can lead to every kind of evil, even to the loss of faith as the Apostle says: ***The love of money is the root of all evils, and some people in their desire for it have strayed from the faith, and have pierced themselves with many pains*** [1 Tm 6:10]. It is very significant that the Apostle exhorts a man like Timothy so strongly to flee from greed and avarice. But, there has never been a man alive on this earth, even if he were a saint, who was not exposed to the infestation of disease. It often easily affects even those who by a special profession are expected to have complete detachment from earthly things, because the pursuit of private advantage is covered by a pretence of common good, even by what may be imagined as the interests of the Church and the glory of God.

<sup>483</sup> Meditations on *Primum Regum* n.15. MssB 5398.

<sup>484</sup> Early Sermons, n. 57. 'The Beatitudes'. MssB 1285. cf. PVC, pp. 221, f.

***But, you, Man of God, avoid all this*** [1 Tm 6:11]: this is the best panegyric and the most appropriate stimulus for a sacred minister<sup>485</sup>.

## **264: St. Gaspar and poverty**

The love that St. Gaspar had for poverty was considerable, and there was nothing more that he feared, and sought to keep his sons from, than the spirit of magnificence, comfort and opulence. He reminded them by his example and by his words to live the spirit of poverty. He reminded them by his example and by his words to live the spirit of poverty and to practice it effectively. Their food, dress, the furniture in their rooms – in fact, everything, was to reflect poverty. He seemed to be absolutely jealous of poverty, for he was always fearful that at times the love of comfort and luxury would be introduced into his Congregation. These were things that he abhorred and which he immediately and severely discouraged, even if it was only something which could appear as suggesting it<sup>486</sup>. It was commonly said that the life of Bertoni and his companions was too austere<sup>487</sup>.

On the other hand, he never failed to provide and to do whatever was absolutely necessary for the health and welfare of the community. Whenever circumstances required, or justice, prudence, or charity demanded, he was always showed himself to be liberal and magnanimous.

When helping the poor, however, he was so generous that he seemed to be almost sinning by prodigality. Over and above the daily alms that he directed to be distributed to fifty or so poor people at the door of the Stimmate, he frequently opened his hands to needy people who presented themselves to him for help. Many of these received considerable sums.

All the earnings derived from the holdings that were acquired for the Congregation, were used for repairs, plantations, restorations of tenant's dwellings, various other accounts either in the country-side or in the city. This brought about great advantages for workers, who, in every seas, could find work with Fr. Gaspar, and, in effect gave them increased earnings and relief<sup>488</sup>.

## **265: Poverty practiced: concrete experiences and choices**

I felt the desire to imitate Christ in poverty, and in the straightened circumstances of poverty<sup>489</sup>, cheerfulness in adversity, and the consequences of real poverty, with thanksgiving to the Lord, offering to suffer greater burdens and pain, if I

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<sup>485</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3740-3745.**

<sup>486</sup> *Miscellanea Lenotti*. SA pp. 175, f.

<sup>487</sup> *Positio*, p. 200.

<sup>488</sup> *Miscellanea Lenotti*, o.c.

<sup>489</sup> Spiritual Journal. **October 22, 1808.**



am worthy. This attitude is the best gift, of which I know I am unworthy. May God be ever praised<sup>490</sup>.

My unchanging rule prevents me from accepting the gift that your Ladyship has offered me for the second time, and it obliges me to decline your generous offer even after my death. In due time, you will dispose of it according to the prudent advice of the one who will draw up your will. This, however, must not be in my favor, nor in that of the Stimate, because I cannot accept it, and I will see to it that my companions will not accept it either. Above all, it is important to me that they take this maxim to heart, because I know very well that this spirit is to be carried on for God's honor in these circumstances<sup>491</sup>.

The priests of the Stimate, even while they were moved by gratitude toward this pious donor, nevertheless, would not know how to escape from their own ways because they have, for so many years to date, served the church and the country gratuitously, according to their talents. They have always done this without benefices, pensions, or pious legacies. The satisfaction expressed by their bishops and fellow citizens was enough for them<sup>492</sup>.

## PURITY

### **266: The most beautiful virtue**

All the virtues are beautiful, but propriety and beauty are attributed to purity in the most excellent degree, as St. Thomas writes<sup>493</sup>.

Let's consider: Man comprises two principles: one is corporeal; the other is spiritual. He is mid-way, as it were, between the angels with whom he shares intelligence, and the beasts with which he shares animal life. If man elevates himself to act in accordance with the mind, he becomes almost like an angel. But, if he lowers himself in obedience to concupiscence: ***Is it not from your passions that make war within your members?*** [Jas 4:1, he becomes almost like a beast. Therefore, scripture speaks of a man who abandons the sublime place to where he had already been raised, living according to reason and the spirit, in order to lower himself to carnal ways, and says: ***Man did not recognize the honorable status in which he was. He came to resemble the senseless beasts and became like them*** [Ps 49:21].

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<sup>490</sup> ib.

<sup>491</sup> Correspondence, p. 365. Letter to Madame Teresa Gamba, undated.

<sup>492</sup> o.c., p. 366: Letter to the Reverend Ecclesiastic Administrator. An eloquent episode is recalled which caused much surprise in the public opinion of the time: the renouncing of the rich inheritance of Fr. Francis Cartolari, by St. Gaspar and his companions, in favor of the Count Anthony, brother of the deceased. After completing the formal act of renunciation, St. Gaspar gathered everyone in the community chapel, where a *Te Deum* was sung to thank God, 'who had given them the grace to send out of the house the sweepings of Fr. Cartolari, in order to keep the inheritance of his virtues.' [SA, Doc. 27, p. 583. **BERTONI 6**, pp. 339, ff.]

<sup>493</sup> *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q. 152, a. 1.

A dissolute man dislodges his reason from that elevated place where God had placed it to rule and dominate, and tramples it underfoot in order to make it a slave of the passions. Meanwhile, he puts the passions, which were destined by nature to receive laws and restraints, in a position of domination and prevalence. What a monstrosity! If they only knew how to look at themselves in a just and truthful mirror, certain men and women who are so ostentatious in this regard, which is reason for their confusions and brag about their very ignominies, would certainly be astonished if they behold their very own monstrous image. They would end up detesting those things which they rave about, and in which they take pleasure.

On the other hand, how beautiful is the virtue of purity, which preserves the order and dignity of human nature! Thanks to it, it is possible to appreciate man's excellence, who in so exalted terms, the Psalmist speaks, when, turning to God, he says: ***You have made him a little less than the angels*** [Ps 8:6]. It is purity that keeps him in that sublime supremacy which God placed him above all visible creatures. That august splendor, like a glorious diadem is proper to him, and adorns his royal dignity, about which the same Psalmist continues: ***... and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him rule over the works of your hands, putting all things under his feet*** [Ps 8:6-7]<sup>494</sup>.

### **267: An angelic but possible virtue**

Thanks to purity, we can recognize the sublime image of divinity impressed on man, so that it may be said: ***O Lord, let the light of Your countenance shine upon us!*** [Ps 4:7]. The practice of purity builds up in man's heart a living temple of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the very body of man becomes an instrument of God's glory, and what is more, His dwelling place and His footstool, as St. Paul pointed out when he said ***... your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you. Glorify God in your body*** [1 Co 6:19, 20]. It is this virtue which makes a man pleasing in God's sight, a friend of the incorporeal and celestial spirits, dear to mankind and even feared by his adversaries.

But, someone may say: even if it is true that the Saints were able to live pure lives at the level of the most difficult counsels, as for me, it is impossible to observe even the simple precept.

Taken as it is, such an affirmation is unacceptable. It was also disapproved by the Church, which firmly censured it as heresy. But, let us clarify things. If one phrases this better, with Wisdom: ***One cannot be chaste if God does not grant this to us*** [Ws 8:21] – then, very well. But we must keep in mind the authoritative words of the Council of Trent: 'Man must do what he can, and must ask for what he cannot do'<sup>495</sup>

Not even the Saints would have been successful if they relied on their own abilities, without the comfort of grace, which God will never deny to one who properly

<sup>494</sup> Early Sermons, n. 19. 'St. Aloysius Gonzaga's Purity'. **MssB 803-817. PVC**, pp. 162 & 167, f.

<sup>495</sup> Council of Trent, Session, 6, c. 11. Denz. 1536.

asks for it in prayer. Moreover, He is most prompt in granting it, in order to lighten that pleasant weight, that yoke of the divine law, which appears to be above the powers of our infirm nature<sup>496</sup>.

### **268: Blessed are the pure of heart**

Let us go more deeply in order to discover the excellence of this most noble virtue. We will find peace, tranquility and joy which a pure soul intimately enjoys. To actually realize what a taintless joy is really like, even though it may remain hidden, one needs to compare it with what is, regrettably its opposite.

Take the case of a person who is in the throes of a lustful passion, and we see how much trouble, anguish, and agitation to which his heart is subjected. Inwardly, his spirit is like a city in which everything is in disorder, revolution and tumult. The passions, like a seditious and turbulent faction, make an assault on reason, with a blind and furious charge, and press on it from all sides to impose a violent dominion on it. God's temple becomes a throne for sin, which strips the spirit of its weapons, taking away any hope of being able to free itself. Then the will, buffeted by cruel remorse, abandons itself to a desperate desolation.

On the other hand, a chaste and temperate mind confirms that saying of the Psalmist: ***He has granted peace in your borders*** [Ps 147:14]. The will, like a queen, is seated here, commanding and sweet at the same time. The passions, in deference to its reign, well-ordered and directed under the strong guidance of the virtues, increase the glory of the one who, with so much wisdom, controls and guides them. A welcome, pleasant harmony, fills all the faculties of the mind with calm, happiness and joy. No enemy can present itself to disturb this calm, because it will be weakened and repelled at a distance. The assurance and faithful witness of a good conscience fills one with overwhelming joy and prepares him a continuous banquet of true happiness of heart.

Hope, comforted also by the experience of abundant consolations poured out for man by God opens up the blessed portals of heaven for him, because he can already contemplate the crown that has been prepared for him there, drawing out a large lode of unchanging happiness during his journey on this earth: ***Happy are they whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord*** [Ps 119:1].<sup>497</sup>

### **269: A treasure to defend**

Before all else, it is necessary to rein in the body, where the initial root of disorder against purity is found. Wanting to acquire chastity, but not its rigor, is to want fruit-bearing vines without its thorny hedges. The more you remove animalistic tendencies from the body, so much the more will the spirit gain. If you forgo mortification and fasting - there are Christians who do not even observe that which is prescribed - how will it be possible for you to remain pure?

<sup>496</sup> Early Sermons, n. 19. St. Aloysius Gonzaga's Purity. **MssB 803-817. PVC**, pp. 162 & 167.

<sup>497</sup> Early Sermons, n. 19. **MssB 804-811. PVC**, pp. 163-166.

In regard to the soul, one has to develop contemplation of divine things, especially on the good and evil that are reserved according to our merits in the future eternity. The study of the bible and of spiritual books are also necessary. St. Jerome suggests: ‘Love the study of Scripture and you will not love carnal vices’<sup>498</sup>. Humble prayer, not only during temptation, but habitually developed. ‘Since I realized that it is impossible to be continent except through a gift of God. I approached God, and prayed to Him from the bottom of my heart, *thus* St. Augustine attests [cf. Ws 8:21]<sup>499</sup>.

The study of humane letters is also helpful. Men, having once found grain, left the acorns to the swine. Then, too, not only is the mind freed from impure thoughts by study, but the body is mortified by it, too. If nothing else, sloth is overcome, which is so closely entwined with impurity. Without it the water does not get polluted in a marsh, nor can souls in sinful pleasures<sup>500</sup>.

## **270: Purity and personal reflection**

Attention must be paid to personal relations. Man is sociable by nature. But, human nature carries the sign of corruption. And so, it is exposed to harm even from an action, which by itself, is directed to bring needed solace to someone.

Isn't it true that the very first act of deceit came into the world through the eyes? ***The woman saw that the tree was good for good, pleasing to the eyes, and desirable for gaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it. [Gn 3:6].*** Through the eyes, therefore, many deceits continue to enter, like thieves through windows. And if simply indulging in an incautious glance has made so many people sorry, what can we say about an imprudent and prolonged conversation, which is like falling asleep on the edge of a precipice?

This danger is greatest when one thinks that there is less to fear when communicating familiarly with devout persons. How many times have two souls been lost when, under the guise of saving a single soul, both become misguided. The honey of devotion is sticky!

In any case, however, even if caution is not demanded by the obligation of avoiding danger, it may be necessary in order to defend one's good name. St. Paul says: ***We are concerned for what is honorable not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of others [2 Co 8:21].*** A clear conscience is proof sufficient for us, but it is not enough for others. Conscience and a good name are two distinct things. Conscience is necessary for us; our good name is necessary for our neighbor<sup>501</sup>.

<sup>498</sup> St. Jerome, *Epistola*, n. 125 *ad Rusticum*, 11. PL 22, 1078.

<sup>499</sup> St. Augustine, *Epistola*, 157. c. 2, 9. PL 33, 677.

<sup>500</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3596-3605.**

<sup>501</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3606-3615.**

## **271: Various types of Christian purity**

The first kind is conjugal chastity, which is proper to most adult members of the Church, and to which Scripture gives the highest praises: ***Let marriage be honored among all*** - it is holy and worthy of the highest respect [cf. Heb 13:4]. Christian spouses are those who possess goods as if they did not possess them, and use this world as if they did not use it; that is, they do not place their ultimate destiny here [cf. 1 co 7:29, ff.]. Remaining within the limits of what is licit and honest, they abstain even from any desire that is dishonest and illicit, according to the directives of St. Paul: ***your thoughts should be wholly directed to all that is honest, pure, admirable, decent, virtuous, or worthy of praise*** [Ph 4:8].

The widower's continence is another form of purity. Widows deserve particular honor and praise according to St. Paul, provided that they are truly widows, that they are detached in spirit from the pleasures of the sense, not only those of the body, but also from those of the soul [cf. 1 Tm 5:3]. These are those who rule over the peace of families, who night and day persist in prayer; teachers of chastity, full of good and virtuous works [ib.]

The highest and most excellent kind is that of virginity, where the light of purity shines most clearly. Some persons, nevertheless, while meriting praise among men for their virginity, are not so worthy in God's sight. This is because while they have renounced earthly nuptials, they care little or nothing for the heavenly nuptials which unites them to God with incessant prayer and loving contemplation. This, according to St. Paul is the goal of virginity [cf. 1 Co 7:32-35]. Others, even though they have offered the most pleasing fruit and the most beautiful flowers to God, have, nevertheless, retained the plant for themselves, because they have not consecrated their wills to God by means of the vow.

At the summit of purity are found those, who have been bound by the vow of chastity, ***following the Lamb wherever He goes*** [Rv 14:4]. It appears that, thereby, they have touched the ultimate boundary of this virtue. In fact, to what higher goal can men in earthly flesh aspire than to live no longer according to the flesh, but entirely according to the spirit? This surpasses every power of nature, and is only the work of grace: ***not all can accept this word*** [Mt 19:11-12]<sup>502</sup>.

## **272: Modesty: veneration of decorum**

It is necessary to develop attentive care of external behavior regulating it not only on the basis of personal convenience, but also according to the circumstances of place, business and of other people with whom one must deal. This accords with that saying of Scripture which singles out saints, praising them because ***they have venerated decorum*** [Si 44:6]. Possession of this attitude implies treating each other according to what is proper to him. In all our actions there should be nothing that will offend another, but everything we do should be proper to Christian holiness.

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<sup>502</sup> Early Sermons, n. 30. 'Mary's Purity'. **MssB 1104-1108. PVC**, pp. 323-325.

In regard to those things which belong to outward necessities such as clothing, objects of common use, and other such things, simplicity, above all, must be the rule. In this way, extravagance and the inclination to vainglory will be excluded. But at the same time, one should guard against carelessness which avoids diligence and effort, because caring for oneself requires this. That kind of inverted ostentation which can be carried out in the name of God's service. Everything must be simple and decorous, inspired by poverty, but at the same time, suitable to the work performed, and respectfully of the people with whom we have to deal<sup>503</sup>.

Whoever wants to be interiorly recollected must acquire external modesty. He must not let his eyes wander about, nor move one's body unbecomingly<sup>504</sup>. One must carry oneself in a mature way, gravely and not hasten about anxiously<sup>505</sup>.

### **273: Consecrated chastity and charity**

Apostolic Missionaries must strive with all their strength to acquire that perfection of chastity which is befitting those who have embraced an angelic state of life. They are, after all, procurators of Christ's nuptials, and their soul, St. Paul says, espoused to Him alone, must be presented to Him as a chaste virgin, that is, holy in mind and body. [cf. 2 Co 11:2]<sup>506</sup>.

What good is it to restrain the body by continence if the soul does not know how to launch itself into charity toward one's neighbor? The body's chastity is worthless if it is not accompanied by gentleness of mind.<sup>507</sup>

Lust flees from a soul when charity enters<sup>508</sup>. In order to preserve chastity, all should exercise great care to approach the sacraments of the Eucharist and Penance often with proper dispositions. All shall apply themselves constantly to prayer and meditation<sup>509</sup>.

## **AUTHORITY AND OBEDIENCE**

### **274: Authority is service**

***You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you should be your servant [Mt 20:25].*** In the Church there are those constituted in authority to serve the faithful and to be their ministers, according to the will of Christ. Therefore, they must care for the good of the others even at the cost of renouncing their own interests, even to the point

<sup>503</sup> *Original Constitutions, CF ## 128-137.*

<sup>504</sup> *Spiritual Journal. January 4, 1809.*

<sup>505</sup> *ib.*

<sup>506</sup> *Original Constitutions. CF # 109*

<sup>507</sup> *Retreat Meditations. MssB 3106.*

<sup>508</sup> *Spiritual Journal. August 17, 1808*

<sup>509</sup> *Original Constitutions. CF ## 118; 110.*

that they are ready to lay down their life for them. St. Paul could say of himself: ***So I will most gladly spend and be utterly spent for your sakes*** [2 Co 12:15].

St. Peter exhorts the older members to feed the flock of God: ***Not lording it over those entrusted to you, but be examples to the flock*** [1 P 5:3]. Tyrants are those who lord over others and seek to rule them. The minister of Christ must never be commanding and he should be careful not to become a burden to the faithful, who are the people of God. Opposed to the will of commanding is the obligation of example. It will be above all by the example of a holy life that the minister will exercise his office. He should seek to be a teacher and a model of virtue for all, offering in his life a rich image of excellent works, to which anyone wishing to do good can easily conform<sup>510</sup>.

Since all manifestations of domineering and commanding are reprehensible, let everyone abhor every tendency to command, or to assume an air of domineering. If one has to assume the role of leader, let him not be overbearing, but indicate what has to be done and let all serve one another<sup>511</sup>.

### **275: Primary duty of the Superior**

The superior of the community must be a model for one and all. He must realize that he himself must follow the norms of living as perfectly as possible. To be preeminent because of his title and position is not enough. Most of all he must excel all by his virtue and piety<sup>512</sup>.

His first duty is to carry the community on his shoulders, so to speak, by his prayer life, and by his holy desires<sup>513</sup>. He, therefore, should examine himself to see if he truly maintains the house of God that is entrusted to him. Is he negligent, indifferent, or is he yielding? Let him examine his prayer life, and see if he has true fervor and is able to entreat God's goodness to direct him. He must be convinced that one word said to the Lord in prayer has more value than all the shouting with it.

He should examine himself to see if he has nourished holy desires, so pure and so inflamed for the divine glory, that they are able to please God to invoke His omnipotence. Finally, wishing to progress as he should, he must see to it that his prayers and his holy desires imitate the prayers and the holiest desires of the Heart of Christ, Who suffered and died in this world and is glorious and immortal in Heaven and in the most Holy Eucharist, for the benefit and support of His Church.<sup>514</sup>

### **276: Charity and firmness in difficult cases**

Let us not become upset if there is someone in the community who creates difficulties. If the problem can be cured, then the proper medicine should be

<sup>510</sup> Retreat Meditations, **MssB 3564-3568**.

<sup>511</sup> *Original Constitutions*. **CF # 195**.

<sup>512</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3570**.

<sup>513</sup> This is taken from the Rules of the Society of Jesus.

<sup>514</sup> Correspondence, p. 65. Un-dated letter to L. Naudet.

administered with due charity and patience. If he does not accept the cure, then, with diligence and prudence the superior should see that he leaves the community. A few genuine people will do much more than many who are sluggish and imperfect<sup>515</sup>.

If this member does not wish to leave the House peacefully, which would be the better solution, then let him leave even with ill feelings. When a bone is out of place, it always hurts. He will always be a nuisance to himself and to others. Then, by doing this, resentment will cease and peace will return. Since he is a problem, he will be known by all to be one.

When the member is leaving, he should be treated with all kindness. Even if at this moment he seems to be unappreciative, later on when he recalls this, he will speak kindly of the community. Nevertheless, when it is necessary to proceed, the departure should not be held up. The sorrow and the harm caused by leaving are not comparable to what will be caused by his remaining. It is similar to one who has a broken tooth. Out with the tooth, out goes the pain. In the best possible manner, let him go in God's name.

And then let us ask the Lord to console those who remain, whose affliction is understandable. A little up, a little down, one straight, one crooked, we proceed in the footsteps of Him Who leads with the Cross on his shoulders and continues to shut: ***If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me*** [Lk 9:23]<sup>516</sup>.

## **277: He who listens to you listens to me**

Christ made Himself subject for us and humiliated Himself on the Cross. Obedience is the surest way, and it is like a short-cut to perfection. Let us obtain the merit of obeying perfectly<sup>517</sup>. When someone is so docile to his superiors, even contrary to his own judgment, he surely is being led by the Spirit of God. ***Whoever listens to you listens to me*** [Lk 10:16]<sup>518</sup>. For the person who has no superior, because he himself is a superior, the vow of obedience binds his spirit to a total dependence on God in all things<sup>519</sup>.

If an order of the superior is manifestly contrary to the divine or ecclesiastical law, or the rules of the religious institute, everyone should feel obliged to obey God rather than man [cf. Ac 4:9].<sup>520</sup> When fulfilling a legitimate order, and a real impediment occurred, or, at least, if he believed so, or had reliable doubts, he should with all humility make them known to the superior leaving the decision up to him.<sup>521</sup> In

<sup>515</sup> Correspondence, p. 234. Letter to L. Naudet, not dated

<sup>516</sup> o.c., p. 242. Un-dated.

<sup>517</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2188.**

<sup>518</sup> Meditations on ***Primum Regum***, n. 35. **MssB 6309.**

<sup>519</sup> Spiritual Journal. **December 23, 1808.**

<sup>520</sup> *Original Constitutions*, **CF # 141.**

<sup>521</sup> **CF # 144.**



all other cases obedience must be total, prompt, strong and humble, with perfect renunciation of his own will and his own judgment<sup>522</sup>.

One should accustom himself to be guided habitually by the counsel and the judgment of his superior<sup>523</sup>.

### **278: The quality of obedience**

There are those who obey, not out of love of this virtue, but mainly to calm their fears. In such cases when things are contrary to their liking, they strongly oppose their superiors<sup>524</sup>.

All should obey their superiors as obeying Christ<sup>525</sup>. One must obey not only externally in deeds, but also by conforming his will and judgment to the order of the superior<sup>526</sup>.

Regarding the will, the intention of obedience must be pure, that is, solely to fulfill a precept and comply with the superior's will, or better, with God's will, which is executed in and through the superior. Obedience should also be voluntary, that is, one obeys most willingly and diligently. Finally, obedience should be cheerful and spiritually joyful. It should be done with a constant persevering spirit, and with all humility of soul<sup>527</sup>.

Regarding the intellect, everyone should diligently strive to see that obedience be altogether simple, so as not to see the man in the superior, but God, and to regard his precept not as human but as divine<sup>528</sup>.

No one should contrive to be sent to this, or that place, but everyone should allow himself to be moved by obedience, though it is not wrong to show one's preference and inclination. IN fact, Isaiah offered himself, and Jeremiah excused himself. But neither Jeremiah refused God when He sent him, nor did Isaiah presume to go without first being purified with the coals of the altar [cf. Is 6:6-8]<sup>529</sup>.

### **279: The sign of signs**

All of God's works are perfect. God guarantees the authenticity, mainly by three signs. The sign that confirms the others is the fullness of the Holy Spirit by which one receives the grace of the word. The inclination to charity is the same as its effects, that, love of the word. The sign of the fullness of the Spirit is a true humility. The sign of true humility is perfect obedience. This is the sign of signs, the seal of all witnesses.

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<sup>522</sup> CF # 141.

<sup>523</sup> CF # 151.

<sup>524</sup> Spiritual Journal. **July 1, 1809**, which is the beginning of St. Gaspar's diary.

<sup>525</sup> CF # 139.

<sup>526</sup> CF # 140.

<sup>527</sup> CF ## 146-148.

<sup>528</sup> CF # 149.

<sup>529</sup> CF # 186.

One attains perfect obedience when he performs all his external activities, while keeping his eyes on God Who is omnipresent. Thus, through the exercise of obedience one is guaranteed the right way of working and an increase of faith and devotion. One works rightly because the difficulty of obedience is orientated towards God, Who is always present before us. Devotion is increased because we are forced to please Him Who sees our work and prepares to give us our reward in Heaven.

All Scripture teaches us to obey. ***For whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction, so that by endurance and by the encouragement of the Scriptures, we might have hope*** [Rm 15:4].

Perseverance and consolation are the companions of obedience. Hope, so to speak, is like a flower. The fruit is eternal<sup>530</sup>.

### **280: The example of St. Bertoni on authority and obedience**

The superior of the Stimmate, a man of sound judgment and piety, knows how to rule his community, with sweetness and firmness, so that one spirit animated all, one way of living, so to speak, was imbued in all<sup>531</sup>.

In his concerns whether they were relevant or miniscule, Fr. Gaspar never failed to consult his older companions. Even though he was their father and founder, he respected their advice as if he were subordinate and the least among them<sup>532</sup>.

Insofar as his obedience towards his superiors, in particular the Bishops, it is no exaggeration to say that he was always ready and prompt. One word from them was like a command and no matter what contrary reasons he might entertain, he never questioned. There were many burdensome duties assigned to him. He submitted bowing his head and having faith, that in its fulfillment, he would receive help from the grace of God. Even when in ill health, and quite sick, he fulfilled the many demands of his superiors.

Because of his great love for obedience, and the strong motivation of faith that he saw in the voice of God and in the person of his superior, we can understand the zeal that he wanted to instill in those whom he directed and counseled, to the practice of virtue<sup>533</sup>.

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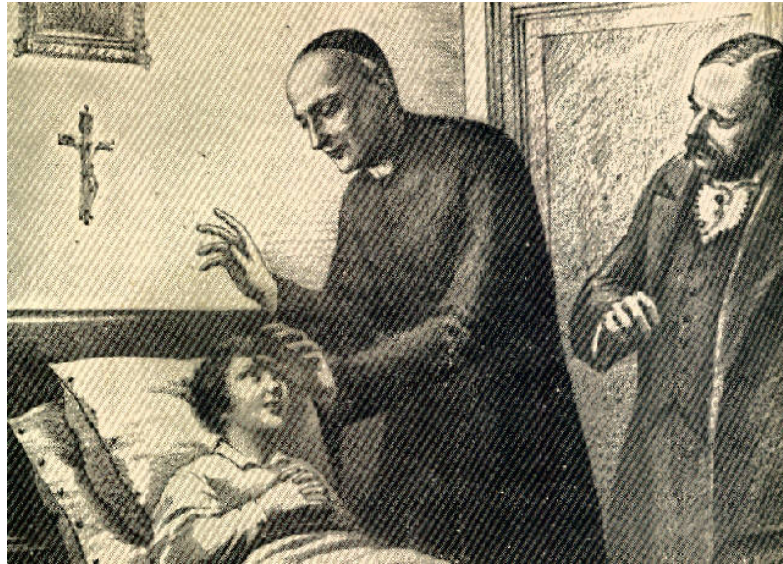
<sup>530</sup> Meditation on *Primum Regum*, nn. 39 & 51. **MssB 6431-6441; 6818.**

<sup>531</sup> Louis Schlor, *Philanthropy of the Faith*. SA, p. 66.

<sup>532</sup> Cajetan Giacobbe, *Life*, SA, p. 495.

<sup>533</sup> o.c., SA, pp. 556, ff.

# **St. GASPAR BERTONI**



**FOUNDER of the CONGREGATION of the  
SACRED STIGMATA of OUR LORD, JESUS CHRIST**

## **SOME RUDIMENTS of his SPIRITUAL WRITINGS**

### **ORDINARY TIME - RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT**

**Part 4 C [## 281 - 343]**

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## ORDINARY TIME OF THE YEAR

### RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT

### MAKING THE BEST USE OF TIME

#### **281: Time never returns**

***Make the most of opportunity*** [Ep 5:16]. Time never returns. Therefore, it should be used with great care<sup>534</sup>. You must give a proper order to your feelings and to your time. It should be used first of all to serve God and praise Him, and then for other things. First the soul, then the body. First the duty of spiritual perfection, then other occupations. ***And over all these virtues, put on love*** [Col 3:14].

Time should be well arranged. One should not act at random. Spiritual writers consider this not a good practice. For example, some do certain things not because it is the time to do so, but more often because they have the desire to do so. If at another time they do not have what they desire, then they neither do it, or, if they do, they ruin it. There are those who begin their day without knowing what they have to do, and end it without knowing what they did. One day they do this, and the next something else. One day they do it this way, and the next another way. One day they do this, and the next day they don't. One day they do less, and another day they do more. One day everything; and the next nothing. They vacillate operating without method or order.

A fundamental rule should be followed. Every Christian and especially every consecrated person must divide the hours of the day in such a way that there is no time which is not well used. Time is a precious gift. God has given it to us to make good use of it for eternal life. One does not make good use of time if he does not have a good method, and if he has not a fixed time for each action. One should not waste the smallest part of this great gift.

To listen is not enough. Good works are useless if they are but desires. Even a written method is not enough. Deeds need substance. Let us not put our trust in good desires. Deeds! Deeds! By means of good works, ***Be all the more eager to make your calling and election firm*** [2 P 1:10].<sup>535</sup>

#### **282: Beware of idleness**

***Let us not be weary of doing good, for in due time we shall reap our harvest if we do not give up. So then while we have the opportunity, let us do good to all*** [Ga 6:9]. If we are able to say that we are already engaged, let us not stop the good we have begun. If we are not seriously engaged, let us not wait until the last moment to begin. When we stop or defer it, it is generally because of laziness. We

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<sup>534</sup> Spiritual Journal. July 24, 1808.

<sup>535</sup> Retreat to Acolytes. MssB 4450-4456.

must always be alert against this. Laziness is a form of sadness, boredom, mental lethargy that renders the spirit heavy, so that the desire to do, or to begin to do good work is lacking. This happens especially in spiritual things that concern the glory of God and the salvation of souls. These things become problems for those who are lazy.

Laziness is opposed to spiritual joy that is born of charity that enjoys God and spiritual things very much. It makes a man bad, and the least useful of all creatures, even inanimate. The reason is that creatures must follow the duties given to them by God, making the best use of time. Above all, laziness puts a man at risk in losing eternal goods, because it takes away the necessary strength to resist the enemy and exposes him to the danger of being deprived of grace and glory.

Let us look at the example of St. Paul. He was very aware of God's will for him to work hard. He not only wore himself out in preaching, writing, consoling the afflicted, comforting the weak, bearing with persecutions and every kind of tribulation, but he applied himself to manual labor to fend for himself. ***You know very well that these very hands have served my needs and my companions*** [Ac 20:34]. Therefore, he could exhort others to labor similarly. ***Bear your share of hardship along with me like a good soldier of Jesus Christ*** [2 Tm 2:3]. ***Fulfill your works as a preacher of the Gospel; carry out your ministry*** [id. 4:5].

Now is the time to wear ourselves, to bear fruits [cf. Ga 6:10]. We shall rest in eternal life.<sup>536</sup>

### **283: Avoid laziness**

Laziness is the first-born child of idleness. Everyone must avoid it, because it is the cause of many evils. It makes a man foolish and dull. What is sillier than one not being daring for his life, not providing it with what is necessary by defending it against enemies? The lazy person not only does not defend himself against his enemies, but he leaves himself wide open and thus directly aids his enemies by giving them power. Through laziness vices are nourished. The devil makes greater headway against those who are lazy.

In every state of life and in every epoch of history the loafers were judged worthy of noting but censure and blame. In our blessed era of the Good News, these are more blameworthy than ever. Mainly because of the example given by Christ, who has shown in the most marvelous manner how to work well. He spent His time consoling the afflicted, healing the sick, freeing the possessed giving sight to the blind, teaching the ignorant, and fulfilling the possessed, giving sight to the blind, teaching the ignorant, and fulfilling every kind of merciful work, and then He would pass the night in prayer. [cf. Lk 6:12].

The Apostles handed down the same example as did their followers. In particular St. Paul, who could say of himself, ***You know well that these hands have served my needs and my companions*** [Ac 20:34].

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<sup>536</sup> Retreat to Acolytes. MssB 4457-4478.

In Christians, it is even more blameworthy, since we have been purchased with the high place of Christ's blood, so that we might do good.

***You have been purchased at a price. Therefore, glorify God in your body.*** [1 Co 6:20]. God is glorified and is present in our bodies when we work well. St Paul again insists. ***Therefore, my beloved brothers, be firm, steadfast, always fully devoted to the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor in the Lord is not in vain*** [1 Co 15:58].<sup>537</sup>

## **284: Manual labor**

All men should work even perform manual labor for at least two reasons. It is a punishment decreed by God for all mankind when our first parents sinned. [cf. Gn 3:19]. It is a fundamental way to avoid laziness and to make good use of time and not freely eat the bread of others, but do something to help the poor so that they can enjoy true peace of heart. St. Benedict advised his disciples that they could claim that they were true monks only when they work with their hands as the Apostles did. He prescribes the specific times in which the monks were to occupy themselves in manual labor, as well as the time for *lectio divina*. With the same spirit he wanted the monks to help one another, so that no one was exempted from duty in the kitchen or working on the farm. They were never to complain about doing this.

It is true that the duties and the exercises of each one are done according to one's assignment, and generally they substitute manual labor. If the rule does not prescribe a particular kind of manual labor, one observes the common law of work by fulfilling exactly what those rules prescribe. But this does not change the fact that it is a very good things, [considering that such exercises belong more or less to the spirit] to add some physical labor according to each one's condition. God is the creator of the soul and body, and from both He demands, and justly so, the tribute of our service.

Furthermore, in order for work to be meritorious, it is to be joined with prayer and the application of the mind of God. ***For while physical training is of limited value, devotion is valuable in every respect*** [1 Tm 4:8]. In this way, while hands produce those things that feed the body, the soul is not separated from God<sup>538</sup>.

## **STUDY & LEARNING**

## **285: Culture and spiritual life**

***God is the Lord of all knowledge*** [cf. 1 S 2:3]. One is unable to reach the summit of spiritual realities without the knowledge of the natural sciences. And I dare to add that this plan of yours is so delicate that it can never be realized as it should be, without the support of a great deal of learning by the various members [of your community]. The first seed of corruption of the great works of God is ignorance. The

<sup>537</sup> Retreat to Acolytes. **MssB 4569-4593.**

<sup>538</sup> DeMabillion, J., *Traité des études monastiques*. **MssB 8892-8900.**

same is true of knowing much, but knowing it in the wrong way. This only leads to losing the good taste of things<sup>539</sup>.

Everyone has to be convinced of the importance of study, as a means to God's glory, and to prepare oneself against the temptations of the devil. This evil one, under the pretext of piety, tries in all ways to have one abandon the study of the humanities. The devil foresees the immense harm that will come to his kingdom through knowledge obtained from these basic studies. On the other hand, one must be on his guard against the other temptation coming from this same enemy, i.e., the use of poorly organized studies that can lead a person into even a greater harm<sup>540</sup>.

Theological studies furnish the weapons for our apostolate. However, as an aid to understand scripture, the humanities are of great value. The study of Scripture is helped immensely by the knowledge of various languages, modern and ancient, by geography, history and literature, and other sciences. The person most interested in having one ignorant of all secular topics is the devil. Basic literary studies are of great advantage to help us when praying and meditating<sup>541</sup>.

### **286: Studying with one's talents**

There are those who possess simple mind, and are capable of learning only a few things. Then there are those who are so smart that they can learn practically everything. When those in the first category forget their condition and try to elevate themselves to the level of those in the second category, they become confused. Because of this vain desire, they put themselves at the risk of failing to understand what they were able to know with dignity, provided they limited themselves to their level with discretion. On the other hand, when great minds are not able to comprehend all that is theoretically possible for them to know, as a result they are tempted to lose courage and to give up, and thus refrain from reaching their proper level. They end up doing minor things and so fail to attain the great results that the Creator has prepared for them.

We are not saying that the intelligent ones should not, from time to time, come down from their high level and study lesser matters. The same can be said of those minds of modest dimension, that they should not fear to raise their minds to a higher level. It is a fact that, while it is true that on one hand one should not neglect anything, on the other hand it is useful to reach for higher things. Everything should be done to avoid contempt for lesser things, and to avoid boredom and discouragement, which may have to be feared<sup>542</sup>.

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<sup>539</sup> Correspondence. Letter to Naudet, **March 6, 1813**.

<sup>540</sup> Correspondence. Letter to Naudet. **July 31, 1813**.

<sup>541</sup> Meditations, *Primum Regum*, n. 52. **Mss B 6848**. who possess simple minds

<sup>542</sup> DeMabillion, J. o.c., **MssB 8959-8960**.



## **287: Study for the glory of God**

One should not be too occupied or fearful of certain difficulties in studying. Studying is done to find the Lord and to seek His glory, since He is the Lord of all knowledge [1 S 2:3]. No one can advance even one step without His light in comprehending natural things. God does not deny this light to many, even if they are pagans, because they too serve to help His creatures, even though they have used their talents badly. How can it be denied to those who wish to serve, to know, and to love Him more, and who propose to communicate this to others?<sup>543</sup>

Since these studies are a means primarily to serve the glory of God in our apostolic work with others, it is obvious that we must first obtain divine mercy for ourselves. This means that we have to win complete victory over ourselves and then join in the battle to win the hearts of others with the weapons of studies. One should keep in mind the suggestions of St. Ignatius given to his students that they maintain the presence of God in themselves. Other points were given to this saint to evaluate better their studies, as a means of glorifying God, and as a defense against the Evil One<sup>544</sup>.

One must always remember that it is better to know a little but well, rather than to know a lot in a confused manner, for then one does not even know what he resumes to know<sup>545</sup>.

## **288: Vain curiosity**

All should moderate their desire of learning of practicing studiousness, a virtue opposed to the vice of vain curiosity. Everyone should refrain from the excessive desire to know all things. This conforms to the view of the Apostle Paul: ***Do not pretend to be wiser than is proper [for you], but see to it that you know in the proper measure*** [cf. Rm 12:3]<sup>546</sup>.

A curious person is always uneasy, because he desires to know and to investigate things that are of no concern of his, and much less is he capable of understanding all things. Furthermore, learning something that he dislikes, he tends to become uneasy. There are those who are interested in knowing the private affairs of others. They wait to learn all sorts of things; they seek every small detail of personal secrets. They tend to talk everywhere, trying to show how well informed they are. They waste time as busy-bodies and force others to do the same. They change the story according to their wild and confused imagination. ***What is committed to you, attend to. DO not be inquisitive about too many things*** [Si 3:21]. As a matter of fact, there are no people who are nosy that are not also disturbed. That is why Holy Scripture condemns vain curiosity.

<sup>543</sup> Correspondence. Letter to Naudet. **August 24, 1813.**

<sup>544</sup> o.c., Letter to Naudet. **July 25, 1813.**

<sup>545</sup> o.c., Letter to Naudet. **July 25, 1813.**

<sup>546</sup> **CF # 122.**

The Apostle calls to Bishop Timothy's attention those young widows, ***Furthermore they learn to be idlers and going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busy-bodies, as well as talking about things that ought not to be mentioned*** [1 Tm 5:13].

Then there are others who are curious roamers, nervous, sowers of bad relations, who take the liberty to visit the rich seeking alms. If [as St. Paul says] this should not be done by widows, neither should anyone else, and much less should I be done by one consecrated to the Lord<sup>547</sup>.

### **289: Human wisdom**

Since God is the Author of both natural and supernatural truths, His truth must always be sought. He must be adored everywhere. We might not always arrive at the truth, but it will always redound to our praise and glory, at the least, in searching for it, and coming close to it. Even if we form a reasonable doubt, and do not rush to a questionable solution, this would be considered as success.

One must investigate the truths in the natural order since they lead to supernatural truths. This is impossible to do if we begin with ignorance, error, or untruth. Once we investigate the hidden truths of nature, our minds will be trained in the contemplation of spiritual reality, and later find a particular joy in searching for the more mysterious and sublime realities.

It is, therefore, necessary to form a group of real learned people, who can reason well, who are able to keep alert against error, but know how to follow the dictates of right reason and virtue<sup>548</sup>.

### **290: Study of the Word of God**

All the knowledge and theology of the first Fathers of the Church came from studying Scripture. This generated ideas and the foundation of solid piety, and made them very pleasing to God, and led them to be guides and teachers of others.

St. Jerome exhorts his friend, Nepotianus: 'Read the Scriptures assiduously, in fact, never lay down this book of the Word of God from your hands.'<sup>549</sup> This saintly Doctor later wrote about Nepotianus that by carefully reading and meditating on Scripture he had made of his heart a library of Christ.

St. Jerome writing about Paulinus asked him to delve into the depth and the marrow of Scripture also, to form his rule for monastic life and to become a good teacher to others. He encourages him to learn from the Scriptures what he must teach, acquiring the proper speech which would conform to the true teaching so that he

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<sup>547</sup> Retreat to Acolytes. **MssB 4560-4568.**

<sup>548</sup> Mabillion, J., o.c., **MssB 9071-9072.**

<sup>549</sup> St. Jerome, Letter 52, 7. PL 22, 533.

would be able to exhort others with holy doctrine and to confound those who would contradict it. The common thought of the Fathers and the Doctors of the Church was that the study of Scripture ought to be had by those who especially lived a consecrated life<sup>550</sup>.

### **291: How to study history**

By knowing history and meditating on past events, one acquires a certain attitude of prudence. Here we see, as if in a mirror, not only human events, but also the great deeds of Divine Providence: on one side, how the world is governed and on the other side, how God governs His Church. It is, therefore, necessary to study history, and in a special way, the history of the Church, but not out of mere curiosity. When it is done in a serious manner, with the intention of benefiting from it, there is no doubt that one can gain an advantage greater than one can imagine. It is not merely a matter of collecting in our mind a series of dates, acts, persons and deeds. This is not yet an historical science, since science is the knowledge of things acquired through reason and cause. To know history means to understand the persons who are the protagonists, and to evaluate, as much as possible, the reasons of their choices, their qualities and defects, their opinions and their passions.

Finally one acquires from this knowledge of others a message we can apply to ourselves, to be edified by virtuous and holy people, to notice what should be avoided in those who do evil and foolish things. Thus, a norm of how to act not only in good circumstances, but also in adverse ones is found. If we do not have this attitude, we will be unable to benefit from history, that is, to acquire an exact rule of conduct which is learned over and above the mere knowledge of dates, by prudent reflection and concentration<sup>551</sup>.

## **THE WISDOM OF THE CROSS**

### **292: Fill me with what is lacking to the sufferings of Christ**

***Be imitators of God, as beloved children*** [Ep 5:1]. God has prepared a ladder for us that we might be capable of reaching such a height. He asks us to imitate His Son, made man, humiliated and afflicted, before He was exalted and glorified.

It is by the Cross that we are conformed to the Son of God, Christ crucified. This is a great dignity and a help. As we are conformed to Christ in His sufferings, so shall we be in His glory. God has ordained that he who does justice is an heir of God. This great happiness and glory will not be ours if we are not joined to Christ through His labors, sorrows and crosses with great patience. ***If only we suffer with Him, so that we may also be glorified with Him*** [Rm 8:17].

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<sup>550</sup> Mabillon, J., o.c., **MssB 8497-8912**.

<sup>551</sup> Mabillon, o.c., **MssB 9026-9057**.

If we really listen to the words of the Apostle, we will find strong reasons to be patient. If Christ Who is our leader goes before us carrying His cross, should not we, His followers, follow Him generously, carrying the same cross? We will, then, participate in His glory, not just any glory, but the same glory of Christ, the Son of God. Really, ***I consider the suffering of the present time as nothing compared with the glory revealed in us*** [Rm 8:18]. That is to say: with a little suffering, we will gain an immense glory; with a temporary suffering we will obtain eternal glory.

We have the certain hope that in a short while we will be freed from all our trials. This hope would stimulate our soul to accept patiently all difficult and bitter trials. Then ***the Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness*** [Rm 8:26]. With such inspirations and with such a helper should we not accept valiantly the cross on our shoulders?<sup>552</sup>

### **293: Patience – a virtue of the strong**

***You need endurance to do the will of God and receive what He has promised*** [Heb 10:36]. Patience is a virtue by which the spiritual good of a person is protected against sadness. It helps him not to be discouraged or defeated.

Patience is necessary for one and all, when we consider the many evils that beset us everywhere and at all times, the result of original sin which brought sickness and death into this world, and all that goes with it. One also needs it when he is tempted by disordered passions which are strong and furiously contrast with our true good. Our enemies, both visible and invisible, try to harm us by sending us temptations, trying to trap and also persecute us. It is difficult to foresee a truce. We must also be aware that this is a way in which the loving designs of our Father are made manifest, and He wishes to use these means so that we can better purify our souls, and urge it on to greater heights.

Therefore, we can see that no one is exempted from the law of suffering, not even those who are saintly and close friends of God. In fact, God seems to send greater trials to His friends and He gives them a bitter chalice to drink from his own hands. Mary, His own Mother, was known as the Queen of martyrs, and the Mother of Sorrows. Was not this the road that the Son of God has to travel? ***Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer and enter His glory?*** [Lk 24:26].

On the other hand, by practicing patience one finds the joy of the most profound peace. Peace is a work of patience both in heaven and on earth. It is enumerated by St. Paul as one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit [Ga 5:22] which ripen and are enjoyed in this life<sup>553</sup>.

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<sup>552</sup> On Patience. Consideration 1. **Mss B 4384-4392.**

<sup>553</sup> Patience. Consideration 2. **MssB 4399-4401.**

## **294: Carrying the Cross with Jesus**

Walking ahead of His apostles, Jesus hastened to His Cross [cf. Mt 10:32] to let us know how willing and ready He was to suffer. He did not fear the sufferings awaiting Him in Jerusalem.

The Gospel clearly points out His attitude as He hastens to accept the humiliating obedience that would lead Him to His passion and death to demonstrate the power of His divine love. This divine love is like a fire and a stimulus that incite us to run with a great spirit toward that obedience which, though quite painful for the body, is very acceptable to God. This is contrary to egotism that walks with leaded feet when a difficult duty has to be done, or when virtue must be practiced, but when it journeys towards honors and worldly pleasures, it runs.

Good Jesus, what a difference between our spirit and the spirit of the world! The world aspires above all things to seek honors and worldly pleasures. You, however, seek to be first in humiliation and suffering. The world seeks greater worldly glory, you, however, seek greater humiliations<sup>554</sup>.

I realize that to suffer some little thing for the love of God is the greatest good. ***Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you [falsely] because of me. Rejoice and be glad because your reward will be great in heaven [Mt 5:1-12]***<sup>555</sup>.

## **295: Accepting the Cross lovingly**

The Lord shows us His Cross so that we may accept it willingly out of love for Him. In the end, it is He Who carries it out of love for us<sup>556</sup>.

Adversities are signs of love, wounds that are medicinal by which God betters us sinners, and spares us for eternity. ***I will punish their crime with a rod and their guilt with stripes. Yet, My kindness I will not take from him, nor will I belie my faithfulness [Ps 89:34]. You chastised me and I am chastened, I was an untamed calf. If you will allow me, I will return, for You are the Lord, my God [Jr 31: 18].*** God is aware of our pains. ***Those whom I love, I rebuke and chastise [Rv 3:19]. My son, do not disdain the discipline of the Lord, nor lose heart when reproved by him, for whom the Lord loves He disciplines; He scourges every son He acknowledges. Endue your trial as 'discipline'; God treats you as son. For what son is there whom the father does not discipline? If you are without discipline, in which all have shared, you are not sons but bastards. Besides this, we have***

<sup>554</sup> Patience. Consideration 2. MssB 4399-4401.

<sup>555</sup> Spiritual Journal. September 29, 1808.

<sup>556</sup> Spiritual Journal. December 3, 1808.

***had our earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them. Should we not [then] submit all the more to the Father of spirits and live?*** [Heb 12:5-9].<sup>557</sup>

It is a great gift to receive punishments from God.<sup>558</sup> Lord, may we carry our cross and not drag it. May we carry it willingly and glory in it. May we also carry it with so much love that we glory in nothing else but that. ***May I never boast except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*** [Ga 6:14].<sup>559</sup>

## **296: Patience and Prudence**

Christ teaches us in what true fortitude and patience consist. These are between rashness which is when one exposes himself to evil when he should not, and cowardice, which is when one holds back when he should face and bear it. There are, therefore, two laws which govern fortitude and patience. One against rashness: ***When they persecute you in one place, flee to another.*** [Mt 10:23], and the other against cowardice: ***Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul*** [Mt 10:28].

On His part, when Jesus was aware that the Jews had decreed to kill Him, ***He no longer walked in public among the Jews. Instead, He withdrew to a region near the desert*** [Jn 11:54]. Thus, removing the danger, since His time had not come to face that for the glory of God and the salvation of the world.

But, when His time came, knowing that His passion was nearing and that the Jews in Jerusalem wanted to put Him to death, He wanted to go, because the time had arrived to do the will of God [cf. Jn 13:1]. He hastened on this journey, walking ahead of His Apostles, so much so that they were amazed and they followed Him with great fear [cf. Mk 10:32].

By the way, to be afraid is not against the virtue, but to hold back from doing one's duty, is. Fear is natural. But man really shows virtue when he is able to stand firm in the face of his own fears. Even the saints feared death, but they did not try to avoid it. If they had not feared it, what good would their patience be?<sup>560</sup>

## **297: Carrying the Cross with joy**

St. John Chrysostom says: 'Give me an innocent man, one who has a clear conscience, one who fervently aspires for the future realities, who awaits that blessed glory, what can sadden him? Death is certainly one of the most unbearable events in his life. The anticipation of death cannot sadden him, but in some way will console him. He knows that this is the end of his labors and it is the only way to attain his crown and the reward for those who strive for virtue. Will the untimely death of his

<sup>557</sup> Catechesis on the *Our Father*. MssB 318, ff.

<sup>558</sup> Correspondence. Letter to Naudet. June 29, 1831.

<sup>559</sup> Meditation n. 5, *Primum Regum* MssB 4693.

<sup>560</sup> Patience. MssB 4396-4399.

sons cause him sorrow? He will be able to bear even this courageously, and he will be able to repeat with Job: ***The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord*** [Jb 1:21].

***If neither death, nor the loss of his children can take away his peace of soul, much less would the loss of riches upset him. If he falls ill and infirm, he would hear the word of God saying to him: in sickness and in poverty, confide in God. For in fire gold is tested, and worthy men in the crucible of humiliation*** [cf. Si 2:5]<sup>561</sup>.

If we want true happiness, let us strive to be holy. Let us arrange our life well, and we shall never lack lasting peace, a peace that the difficulties of this world can never take away or diminish. Let us keep a clear conscience and with this as our testimony, not only will we live peacefully, serenely and happily, but when death comes, terrible as it may be, and the vain joys of the world will give way to frightening mourning, our security will be guaranteed, our joy will be doubled, and we will have nothing to fear. To the few happy years that we have spent here on earth in the fear of the Lord, eternal ages of perfect joy will be added in the joy of God Himself<sup>562</sup>.

## **298: True joy**

***Happy are the people whose God is the Lord*** [Ps 144:15]. We will find true happiness and joy in recognizing that God is our Lord, in serving Him faithfully and in living for Him alone.

This thought is repeated quite often in the scriptures. ***Happy the man who follows not the counsel of the wicked, nor walks in the way of sinners*** [Ps 1:1]. ***Happy the man whom You instruct, O Lord, whom by Your laws y You teach*** [Ps 94:12]. ***Happy are they whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord*** [Ps 119:1]. ***Happy the man who fears the Lord*** [Ps 112:1]. In the Gospels we also read that the humble and meek will be happy, as well as those who mourn and suffer persecution for justice's sake. ***Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are they that mourn. Blessed are those that are persecuted for the sake of righteousness*** [Mt 5:3; Lk 6:21].

Therefore, only those who live a life according to divine law live a happy life. Virtue, no matter how agonizing and deprived of earthly pleasures and honors, and no matter how trying, will find joy, contentment and cheerfulness.

When we notice the fruit of certain trees that possess a specific beautiful color and shape, and are pleasant to taste, we also have to realize that all of this comes from the roots that are buried in the ground, and are repulsive to the eye and repellant to the taste. Likewise, the suffering of one who lives according to god brings forth the fruits of joy and peace.

<sup>561</sup> St. John Chrysostom. Homily 18, 2. PG 49, 183.

<sup>562</sup> Early Sermons, 22. True Joy. MssB 888-895. PVC, pp. 20-23.

If we live a well ordered life, we will also enjoy peaceful and continual joy that not even exterior troubles can take from us, but will always last, even without earthly joys. What is outside us, whether good or bad, cannot cause us harm or sorrow, if our soul is interiorly well disposed.<sup>563</sup>

### **299: The Secret of Joy**

The source of sadness and weariness here on earth even before eternal damnation is vice. Virtue, however, is not slow in rewarding her faithful followers. In this present life virtue is nourished with hope and crowned with pure delights.

He who thinks that a virtuous and mortified life is melancholic and sad is not very much convinced of these things. No wonder. Even a sick man thinks that the wine is bitter and the music dull, while the healthy man enjoys the taste and savors the sweetness.

While Augustine was immersed in the filth of impure pleasures, he felt that he could not live without them. Once he decided to rid himself of these desires, he could say: 'How lovely I found it to be free from the loveliness of these vanities so that now it was a joy to renounce what I had been so afraid to lose. Because it was You, my God, true and utmost kindness, Who chased them from me. You chased them away, and You came to take their place, You Yourself, sweeter than any pleasure.' We must believe this Saint, because after experiencing the bother of his malady, he relished the sweetness of health with much more intensity<sup>564</sup>.

Therefore, if losing such a vile pleasure is compensated not only with an immeasurable gift of happiness in Heaven, but with an overwhelming joy here on earth, it would be quite foolish not to be able to control oneself, with the risk of forever losing perfect and eternal happiness.<sup>565</sup>

### **300: St. Gaspar's patience and joy**

If I tell you that during his illness, Fr. Gaspar had to undergo over two hundred operations on his leg that were quite painful, it would be the plain truth. It is difficult to express adequately the great courage he possessed in suffering these awful pains that continued even after surgery. He was unable to move and had to lie in bed for several months as if he were nailed to it. Despite it all, he suffered patiently, and serenely, and left the impression that he was not only resigned, but happy and content<sup>566</sup>.

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<sup>563</sup> Early Sermons, n. 22. True Happiness. **MssB 880-886; PVC pp., 17-20.**

<sup>564</sup> St. Augustine *Confessions*. Book 9, c. 1. PL 32, 763.

<sup>565</sup> Early Sermons n. 5. Ascension. **MssB 513-515. PVC, pp. 13, ff.**

<sup>566</sup> Cajetan Giacobbe, *Life*. SA, p. 14.



During moments of terrible suffering, he used to say: ‘Strike me, O Lord, for you have reason to do so, and I deserve even more.’<sup>567</sup>

Some twelve, or fifteen days before his death, and feeling somewhat better, when they had to change his position in bed to give him more comfort, he would act the clown by mimicking with his mouth and face those who were assisting him, bringing a little joy and laughter, despite his great pain. One day, near the end of his life, two professors from the seminary had come to visit him. Jokingly, he said, after being asked how he felt: ‘We are here at school.’ This caused them to smile and to be edified<sup>568</sup>.

## THE APOSTOLIC MISSION

### **301: The Mission of Christ**

***The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord [Lk 4:18]. I must proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God because for this reason I was sent [Lk 4:43].***

When God decided to send a Savior to mankind, He made the best possible choice by sending one who was truly human and of the same nature as man. Thus He would be able to set the example and by understanding us would be able to treat us with compassion. He would be truly divine. He would be the only-begotten Son and thus would be able to redeem as by His omnipotent power. If Christ were not truly God, He could not bring the essential remedy. If He were not truly man, He would be unable to give us the example of how to live.

Christ is all wise. He knows what our needs are. He is all merciful and thus able to forgive. He is all powerful, full of goodness and charity to meet us halfway. His providence is limitless in that He is full of care for our own welfare. He is able to treat

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<sup>567</sup> Form the original dialect: *Dei, Signor, dei che gavi rason, dei che mel merito, e merito du peso!*

<sup>568</sup> *Miscellanea Lenotti*. SA, p. 144. Another testimony of how the Founder accepted suffering, typical of Fr. Bertoni. This was handed down to his sons:

... It is a known fact that the priests of the Stimate saw in their superior, Gaspar Bertoni, and in his leadership a great compensation for all their disadvantages, and they truly lived happily in all these circumstances.’ [Bartholomew Sorio].

[*At the School of God with Fr. Gaspar Bertoni – Spiritual Notes*, by Fr. Ignazio Bonetti, CSS. Verona 1989, p. 231: Fr. Charles Zara writes: ‘In all their discomforts and poverty, they were still very happy and content, that it was an exceedingly great joy just to see and hear them.’ Fr. Francis Benciolini, a faithful disciple of Fr. Gaspar’s, said: ‘We imitated our Founder in the art of always being happy, in such a way that his presence always put us in a wonderful state of mind.’

us as brothers because of His meekness and affability. He bestows on us His riches by His benevolence and greatness.

Christ makes us realize that the reign of God is not realized in riches or worldly glory, but in poverty and humiliation. ***For you know the gracious act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that for your sake He became poor although He was rich, so that by His poverty, you might become rich [2 Co 8:9].***

It is through humiliation that we conquer. ***He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even death on the Cross. Because of this God greatly exalted Him [Ph 2:8].***

We are now marked with the seal and the character of Christ. Whoever wishes to be His follower must willingly labor and give his all for Him. ***Whoever serves Me, must follow Me and where I am, there also will My servant be. [Jn 12:26].*** We will be rewarded according to the effort we make<sup>569</sup>.

### **302: As the Father has sent Me, so I send you!**

As Christ went about His mission, he traveled with His disciples throughout the cities and towns of Palestine. Later, He sent His disciples throughout the world to proclaim the Good News to one and all.

He wanted His disciples to watch and perform exactly as He did. They had to be prepared to have the food or clothing or any other thing as He was having. Each one had to be ready to persevere with Him in vigils and privation. Then they would be able to receive the same victory and happiness. He did not limit Himself only to command, but He labored and suffered first. He willingly exposed Himself to persecution and even death. He did not choose victory or take advantages or glory for Himself. He desired to share with His disciples all the honor and glory in proportion to their labors and sufferings. Christ once confided to a saint: If I could find souls truly disposed to give themselves to Me without hesitation, all that you read in the lives of Saints and what I have done for them, I would do the same for them, and would even be prepared to work miracles for them. ***‘Lo, the hand of the lord is not too short’ [Is 59:1]/ I am always the same.***

Those who wish to dedicate themselves totally to the gospel must understand that they are called not only to endure labors, but also to fulfill even greater and harder tasks, once they have overcome the rebellions of the flesh and their own self glory. People should be able to see [in us] some sort of sketch of what Christ and His apostles did together. Today this is more necessary than ever to do the same<sup>570</sup>.

<sup>569</sup> Mission at St. Firmus; Major. **MssB 4194-4200.**

<sup>570</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2448-2466.**

### **303: You are the light of the world**

***You are the light of the world*** [Mt 5:14]. St. John Chrysostom says: ‘ There would never be any more pagans if we Christians were truly what we ought to be, if we obeyed the Commandments of god, if we had no revenge for those who injured us, if we return kindness and blessing to those who insult us, if we would return a blessing when we are maligned. There would be hardly anyone against us, seeing us act in this way, who would not willingly accept the true religion. Look at the many people St. Paul attracted to Christ. If everyone were like Him, we would be able to convert the world.’

The Lord has chosen us to be dots of light, like angels living here among men, like adults living among children, like holy men living among worldly men. The sun remains in the heavens, but is from there that its rays are sent to earth. So it should be for Christians, with our bodies here on earth and our spirit in heaven, we should be a light and ignite a fire around us by the example of our virtue<sup>571</sup>.

### **304: The value of example**

***I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do*** [Jn 13:15]. Jesus says this to His disciples [after washing their feet]. From Him we learn that we must first act and then teach [cf. Ac 1:1].

It is by works that Christ brings followers to believe in His teachings. He exhorts us to meekness, and He does so by His example. ***Learn from Me, for I am meek and humble of heart*** [Mt 11:29]. He teaches poverty, and He Himself lives it by His deeds. ***But the Son of Man has no place to lay His head*** [Mt 8:20]. He prescribes that we must love our enemies and He does so from the Cross, praying for those who crucified Him. ***Father, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing*** [Lk 23:34]. ***If anyone wants to go to the law with you over your tunic, hand him your cloak as well*** [Mt 5:40]. He was not only willing to let them take His clothing, but also His blood. This is what He wanted His disciples to do.

St. Paul did the same as Christ. That is why he was able to say: ***Be imitators of me, brothers, and observe those who thus conduct themselves according to the model you have in me*** [cf. Ph 3:17]. There is no one so cold and inefficient as a teacher who reasons only by words. He is a hypocrite rather than a teacher. That is why the apostles first taught by example and then by preaching. In fact, they did not have to say much, since their deeds were shouting so loudly<sup>572</sup>.

<sup>571</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3556-3557**. this passage is taken from St. John Chrysostom. 1 Tm. Sermon 10, 3. PG 62, 551.

<sup>572</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3741-3743**.

It is also true that one does not need only to aim principally at giving example. This would be a mistake. One must also strive to do good, and do it in a perfect way. The example will follow by itself<sup>573</sup>.

### **305: Watch your life and doctrine**

***Attend to yourself!*** [1 Tm 4:16] – that is, take care to consider often, examine correct, and put in order your actions and behavior. ***Attend to your teaching*** [1 Tm 4:16]<sup>574</sup> so that you are able to teach others as well.

This two-fold duty is necessary for every true apostle, that is, to teach himself first of all, and then others. Live well, take care of yourself, if you wish to help your brothers. Those who neglect to care for themselves while dedicating themselves totally to the care of their neighbor will see their spirit evaporate and will end up by neither helping their neighbors nor themselves.

St. Bernard adds: 'The first consideration should be yourself, so that you will not have to spend time in vain on other things while forgetting yourself. Of what use is it if you gained the whole world and lose yourself? Be as wise as you will; but in every case much will be lacking in your wisdom, if you are not wise for yourself. What will be missing? I don't know. In my opinion, you will be missing everything. Even if you understand the mysteries and the dimensions of the universe, the height of the sky, the depth of the ocean, if you ignore yourself, it would be the same as erecting a building without a foundation. You would not be putting up a building, but a wreck.'<sup>575</sup>

Think often of the way you live, so that you will live better. ***By doing so, you will save both yourself and those who listen to you*** [1 Tm 4:16].<sup>576</sup>

### **306: Spreading the good news**

The grace of the Holy Spirit is intended to enlighten even those people who are estranged from the faith. The darkness of error is clarified by the reaching of the true faith and the works of the devil are destroyed by the proclamation of the Gospel. Sad to say, the spread of the Gospel is made more difficult because of the lack of

<sup>573</sup> Spiritual Journal. July 17, 1809.

<sup>574</sup> **NB: Web-site edition note:** this text is developed by St. Gaspar in Part Four [CF ## 47-68] of his Original Constitutions: *De Progressu: Perfectio sui ipsius – De Profectu in ecclesiasticis doctrina*. Fr. Jerome Nadal, phrased St. Ignatius' ideal in these words:

... God our Lord, through his infinite goodness, impelled Fr. Ignatius of Loyola arousing in his own special grace [cf. our CF # 185] ... his Divine Majesty providing for His Church and the whole world, helping on two major issues: [1] joining learning to spirituality and [2] directing both to the good of our neighbor. *Some people have brains but no heart and others are all heart with no brains; some have both, but very few serve the Lord by directing both to the help of our neighbor* [CommInstr. 38, n. 8] – cited in: Joseph F. Conwell SJ, *Walking in the Spirit*. St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources 2003, p. 35.

<sup>575</sup> St. Bernard, Considerations. Book 2, c. 3.PL 182, 745.

<sup>576</sup> Retreat Meditations. MssB 3805-3807.

preachers. Therefore, it is necessary to promote with all one's power and ardor missionary vocations. In on-Christian countries the spread of the Gospel meets with such obstacles as of being forbidden to preach. To overcome this, one must possess a renewed spirit and have an inexhaustible amount of apostolic patience.

One cannot ignore the danger of a certain inconsistency by which this same missionary can lessen at any given time his zeal to work for the salvation of souls. This ought to become more eager as they become more obstinate. The challenge to promote the glory of God should increase as the difficulties become greater: ***For stern as death is love, relentless as the nether world is devotion*** [Sgs 8:6].

Difficulties do not hinder the missionary journey of the Church until the people have been renewed by the preaching of the Gospel, thanks to the good work of the preachers. The Church knows how to preserve this blessed 'Good News' by fighting against the risk of corruption. At a certain point she also finds a way to have special care for those who are more perfect, by fostering in these new Christian communities vocations to all forms of consecrated life, including the contemplative life. She will not hesitate to engage for this purpose the most tactful services of her ministers who love to serve the best interests of God's glory<sup>577</sup>.

### **307: To struggle as Christ did and to be united with Him**

***If the world hates you, realize that it hated Me first*** [Jn 15:18]. Realizing that many of His disciples would undergo hostility and persecution by the world and that this would be difficult and almost unbearable to a point that even certain high spirits would also be shaken, Christ forewarns the apostles of such an eventuality. Thus, He disposes them to encounter them courageously and generously, scorning hatred and persecution, so as to be able to glory and enjoy them as a distinctive mark of a disciple of Christ.

***If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you*** [Jn 15:20]. Do not be surprised and troubled when the world hates you, says the Lord, be happy that you can imitate Me. besides, be sure that just as their hatred did not harm Me, it will not harm you. If the world persecutes you, it is a sign that you do not belong to the world, that you do not agree with its works, and that you are contrary to them, as I am. By saying this He wants us to understand that He loves us in a special manner, because we are His, chosen by Him to condemn the works of the world, and thus help in saving mankind. We can be sure that His love will give us a greater advantage than the harm that can come to us from the world's hatred.

Oh, my Jesus, you are my model in suffering and the reward of my sufferings, my help in struggles, and my glory in triumph. With the example of your virtue ***train my hands for war*** [Ps 18:35], and after victory, crown my head with the presence of Your

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<sup>577</sup> Meditations nn. 20-23, *Primum Regum*. MssB 5703-5832.

Majesty. May the imitation of Your example of struggling, and the hope of your crown, which are You Yourself, attract and bind me indissolubly to You<sup>578</sup>.

### **308: Communion and Mission**

It is necessary to gather, reunite many workers of the Gospel under the inspiration of the same Spirit. As long as we are alone and each one seeks his own interests [cf. Ph 2:21], we will accomplish nothing, and we will be defeated one by one. When we are united, seeking the interests of Jesus Christ, then we will accomplish everything, and we will overcome all things. That is why our savior prayed: ***I pray, Father, that they may be one as we are one*** [Jn 17:11].

It is not enough to find zealous companions, but to make them, and in a certain sense, to force them to follow us, even if they are timid. Yet one must examine their goal and their vocation. One does not accept anyone, but only the best, those who are noted for their love of God and neighbor. These are chosen as **companions of a mission**. It is opportune to form from this group of good ones a class of perfect workers in confessing the true faith, and in the exercise of all the virtues, imitators of the apostolic life. Thus, this group, well unified, can help their neighbors and assist them in the struggle against the devil.

Both the group and its leader will speak with one voice, have one heart and one spirit, and will be sent to spread the light of the Gospel everywhere. In such a way they are brought together as **companions of the Missions** for two ends: to meet together and assemble the light of many examples; then, to spread everywhere the light of preaching<sup>579</sup>.

### **309: Collaboration leads the individual to multiply**

There is a great advantage in spiritual undertakings when two people share the same mind.<sup>580</sup> Each one seeks to animate the other to practice virtue and acquire perfection<sup>581</sup>.

St. John Chrysostom says very well in commenting on the words of the Fourth Gospel: ***'That all may be one, Father, just as you are in Me and I am in You'*** [Jn 17:21], 'that nothing can compare to the harmony of the reciprocal union of the will. It is through this that the individual multiplies. If indeed two or ten persons find unity, there is no longer one individual, but each will be increased ten-fold. In ten you will find unity, and in each one there will be ten.'

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<sup>578</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3246-3249**. The whole last paragraph is from St. Bernard. Sermon 47, in Cantica 6. PL 183, 1010.

<sup>579</sup> Meditation n. 44. ***Primum Regum*** **MssB 6576-6590**.

<sup>580</sup> Spiritual Journal. **December 20, 1808**

<sup>581</sup> **CF # 265**.

Later on, this same holy Doctor says: ‘behold the greatness of charity: one becomes many and united, so that one can be in many places at the same time; he can be both in Persia and in Rome. What nature cannot do, charity can.’<sup>582</sup>

### **310: Becoming all things to everybody**

Our charity should be the same for one who is educated, or illiterate, one who is noble or lowly, a man or a woman, one from the country-side or from the city. One should work in the same way for all, with the criteria to opt for those who have a greater need. Imitating the example of Christ, Who undertook a long, arduous and hot journey into Samaria to convert a poor woman, who came with a bucket on her head to a well for some water. Even though He was tired and hungry from His journey, forgetting about food. He spent several hours with her. This was the way that Christ so valued the soul of this poor, miserable woman<sup>583</sup>.

St. Gaspar journeyed from the jails to the seminary, as well as from the cloister of pious virgins, to the pious ‘hospice’ of poor worldly women. Thus it was, he went everywhere to bring the gospel of peace. He was everything to everybody, a pastor of souls, in a word, an apostolic and holy missionary<sup>584</sup>. It is well said what everyone used to say about him as a true and constant characteristic. He was for all an imitation of St. Paul [cf. 1 Co 9:22]<sup>585</sup>.

Speaking of St. Gaspar, Bishop Joseph Grassier said: ‘We attest that this priest is exceptionally endowed with sanctity of life, of doctrine and of charity. He is all things to all, so much so, that his zeal shines far above the other members of the clergy.’<sup>586</sup>

### **311: Familiar conversation with our neighbor**

Let each one have before his eyes the example of Christ the Lord, Who, though habitually living with men, even eating and drinking with them, nevertheless, not only observed perfection, but also adhered to a state of life which was most perfect.

We also know that the Apostles, who in their familiar dealing with men, became all things to all so that they might gain all for Christ, and they lived a state of perfection.

Whenever the ancient monks thought it profitable to their neighbors, they abandoned their solitude to mingle with them. So we read in the life of St. Anthony that he left his solitude, traveled over the whole city of Alexandria, hoping to instruct everyone.

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<sup>582</sup> o.c.. From St. John Chrysostom. Homily on St. John 78, 4. PG 59, 425. [**NB: web-site Note: cf. also CF # 266.**]

<sup>583</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3774.**

<sup>584</sup> C. Giacobbe, *Life*. SA, p. 377.

<sup>585</sup> o.c., p. 413.

<sup>586</sup> Testimony given to the Holy See regarding Fr. Bertoni. SA, p.265/

Therefore, to visit and be friendly with people is quite pleasing to God. However, the one who does so should have a great deal of good sense and prudence in his conversation, observing what is enjoined by St. Paul: ***Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each one*** Col 4:6<sup>587</sup>.

### **312: Familiarity**

We have to enter the house of others as they would want, but we must be able to leave the way we want<sup>588</sup>.

Since persons of the world are in most cases rather material than spiritual, it is necessary to descend somewhat to their level and, with polite and familiar conversation, win them over so that they may be disposed, little by little, to listen to spiritual discourses. Although at times we talk of indifferent matters, this is done, or rather tolerated, with the intention of winning them over, such talk cannot be considered a waste of time, but useful and godly<sup>589</sup>.

The ways of God are admirable and deserve to be contemplated upon. Sometimes He uses means that are most imperceptible, like tiny little threads by which he holds back a soul, or calls it back to His service as from the edge of a precipice where it has strayed<sup>590</sup>.

We must never abandon our friends, even when they are far away or gone astray, especially if they have been abandoned by other good people. This will bring them great comfort and help them to change<sup>591</sup>.

### **313: The strategy of a great pastor**

St. Zeno was a protagonist of a renowned battle and of total victory. What was his method and order in battle?

By his manner and cheerfulness he converted the idolaters to Christ. How? In place of courage and by his meekness; in place of war-like terror by his cheerfulness. Let us not be amazed. This is the plan of battle according to the King Himself, and the commander whom He sent. ***As the Father has sent Me, so I send you*** [Jn 20:21]. ***Like sheep among wolves*** [My 10:16]. He sends His servants like little sheep not only to the wolves, but in the midst of wolves. Even if they are bitten, they are not devoured, but they charge their enemies. God desires to glorify Himself in His servants, thus the power of His grace is more clearly manifested, and is strong in overcoming and in winning over, and is gentle by condescending and adapting to

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<sup>587</sup> CF ## 271-276.

<sup>588</sup> Spiritual Journal. August 20, 1808.

<sup>589</sup> CF # 279.

<sup>590</sup> Spiritual Journal. July 13, 1808.

<sup>591</sup> ib.



man's disposition, this man, who must be won over to be saved and then cooperate with God to win over for his Glory.

The leader, who does not allow himself to be drawn in by anger or impatience, or seek glory of his own interests, but is guided by his options calmly and serenely, is deeply appreciated. Neither is he drawn into battle if the end is risky and uncertain. He retreats, even accepting difficulties and hardships. He accepts insults calmly without panicking, while he regroups his forces, and asks for help. When it is the right time and place, he attacks and strikes the final blow. When he is victorious, his manner is good and controlled. He does not brag nor is he insolent or cruel, but gentle and kind. He understands that victory over his conquered enemy is really not complete, until he is able to win over his heart.

It matters little that the meekness of St. Zeno earned a purely human glory. What really matters is what he will receive from the Lord, when he will share in god's own glory<sup>592</sup>.

### **314: The Missionary Spirit of St. Gaspar**

Fr. Bertoni's Mission is found in his Constitutions. To serve God and His Church wholly gratuitously.<sup>593</sup> When someone is sent to any place he should not expect any compensation nor provisions for his journey, or for lodgings, but he shall offer his service absolutely gratuitously<sup>594</sup>.

We shall remain free of dignities, residences, benefices and the perpetual care of souls. We must be willing to go anywhere throughout the Diocese and the world.<sup>595</sup>

The fundamental means to develop the Apostolic Mission are one's own spiritual perfection, a perfect knowledge of the ecclesiastical sciences. Common life, the perpetual and perfect practice of chastity, poverty and obedience.

The rule of life regarding diet, apparel and lodging shall conform to the standards set by the more exemplary clergy among whom they live, and they shall be of edification to the faithful by their Christian simplicity and religious poverty<sup>596</sup>.

### **315: The prayer of the Apostle**

God is our end. It is necessary that our soul and intention remain in Him. Thus we will merit the greatest delight in possessing this absolute good. He, by the infusion of charity and by giving us grace, will fulfill all the desires of our heart. That is what God does on His part.

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<sup>592</sup> Oration in Honor of San Zeno. **Mss 2071-2077.**

<sup>593</sup> **CF # 3.**

<sup>594</sup> **CF # 184.**

<sup>595</sup> **CF ## 4-5.**

<sup>596</sup> **CF # 6.**

This is why we must act with Him. ***But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace to me has not been effective*** [1 Co 15:10]. It is necessary that the Apostle be discreet in elevating himself over his bodily sensations [whenever he finds himself experimenting in mystical prayer]. And let the heart take over for a few moments. The day will come when heart and senses will be intoxicated from this source of blessedness. Meanwhile, to earn this, since this is a gift and a reward, one must strive to serve this God who is so good, and help him in this great work, the very reason why he sent His Son into this world. This is His will, even if He does not need anyone to help Him.

The end, therefore, which is the rule of all means, must be the rule to regulate these affections of holy devotion. St. Ignatius of Loyola gives us a wonderful example. He left the consoling solitude of Manresa where he was intimate with the Lord, and his very delightful contemplation for a more active and productive ministry in the world. God, Who will not be outdone by His Servants in generosity, repaid him abundantly with the same thing that he willingly abandoned for His sake.

Time is short, and later on we will be with God always. Meanwhile we say with St. Paul: ***As far as I am concerned, I would long to depart this life and be with Christ, for that is far better*** [without being diverted by creatures, and to leave this life]; ***yet, that I remain in the flesh is more necessary for your benefit*** [Ph 1:23, f.]. ***For the rest, whether I live, or die, I belong to the Lord*** [cf. Rm 14:8]<sup>597</sup>.

## PREACHING

### **316: The Word of God is living and effective**

God could speak by Himself internally [to the human heart], but He also wants to speak externally through men. St. Paul was sent to Ananias [Ac 9:8]. St. Augustine warns us: 'Do not tempt God by refusing to listen to the preacher'<sup>598</sup>. Through preaching the old man is destroyed, an image of Adam - and a new one is formed in the image of Christ. ***My dear children, for whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you*** [Ga 4:19].

***The word of God is living and effective*** [Heb 4:12]; living because it has the power to work; effective, because it puts that capacity into action, and makes sure that it really works. The vitality and the efficacy of the Divine Word are founded on grace. ***I will put My law within them and write it upon their hearts*** [Jr 31:33]. God can make a soul tender by writing in it sweetly and yet forcefully. ***He sent forth his word and healed them*** [Ps 107:20].

Naturally the faithful must cooperate. Notice what happened to the Samaritan woman. Little was needed to obtain salvation. Little was also needed to lose it. She was saved and became holy because she casually came to the well where a tired

<sup>597</sup> Correspondence. Letter to Naudet. **January 10, 1828. MssB 9500-9503.**

<sup>598</sup> St. Augustine. *Christian Doctrine* Prologue 5. L 34, 17.

Jesus rested. While there, she was questioned by Him. She was willing to postpone for a moment the need to draw water from the well and to listen to Him speak. But upon seeing Him, if she failed to listen, thinking she had other chores to do, or that she was thirsty, or that it was already late, or that she had to hurry home to care for the needs of her household, she probably would have lost this opportunity forever.

Our situation might depend on a small circumstance. The occasion must be seized as if by the hair. The matter of salvation is not to be treated lightly, as a pastime. It is something so grave and fundamental that it should be on the top of our list.<sup>599</sup>

### **317: Preach the Word of God with courage**

The band of preachers of the Gospel must march with readiness and courage as did St. Paul and the other apostles. From the very beginning, they knew what they had to do to the Jews in order to convert them.

A good preacher uses kindness but without weakness. He does not worry about the effect of his message, whether it is accepted or not. He keeps focused on the mission that God gives him, and on the obligations entrusted to him, leaving the results to God. On occasion he is able to speak forcefully and without any human fear to sinners and also to confreres who are imbued with a worldly spirit. He does so that they might be moved. Recalling to mind the words of scripture: ***For stern as death is love, relentless as the nether world is passion*** [cf. Sgs 8:6]. He forces himself even in this to imitate the way of the Divine Providence that threatens Hell fire so that each can avoid it, and scourges harshly those whom He loves.

***Therefore, put on the armor of God that you may be able to resist on the evil day, and, having done everything to hold your ground. So, stand fast with your loins girded in truth, clothed in righteousness as a breastplate, and your feet shod in readiness for the gospel of peace. In all circumstances, hold faith as a shield, to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. With all prayer and supplication, pray at every opportunity in the Spirit. To that end, be watchful with all perseverance and supplication for the holy ones and also for me, that speech may be given me to open my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the Gospel for which I am an ambassador in chains, so that I may have the courage to speak as I must [Ep 6:13-20]***<sup>600</sup>.

### **318: Conditions for fruitful preaching**

If one does not pray well first, he cannot speak well about God<sup>601</sup>. It is in prayer that the preacher finds the manner of preaching. From divine contemplation he obtains

<sup>599</sup> Mission at St. Firmus Major. **MssB 4030-4045.**

<sup>600</sup> Meditations nn. 16 b – 17, ***Primum Regum.*** **MssB 5531-5567.**

<sup>601</sup> Spiritual Journal. **February 4, 1809.**

the light by which, attracting the veneration of the faithful, he is prepared to enlighten the minds of his listeners.

Above all, he follows the example of St. Paul, by raising himself as it were, up to Heaven, and to hear the secrets of Paradise those inexpressible words that no one else is allowed to pronounce. From this he will draw the teachings that are to be given to the world and for the good of mankind [cf. 2 Co 12:1-3].

Thus he will be able to deliver a brilliant sermon that will shed light on the most sublime teachings of scripture, to reveal the secrets of the highest virtues, and to unmask the most hidden vices. All this is done with such conviction and lively spirit that whether one is wise or simple, just or sinner, all will be drawn to follow the instruction and direction for their own life.

One must be careful that his preaching corresponds to his way of life. Thus it will be that what the preacher says about truth and goodness will be more credible because of his way of living. ***Whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do so will be called least in the Kingdom of heaven, but whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven*** [Mt 5:19].

[The preacher] still has a serious obligation to persevere and to increase constantly the gift of **holiness** and **sound doctrine**<sup>602</sup>. This is the only possible way to follow to obtain the fruit of renewal in the spirit and the reformation of the lives of his listeners<sup>603</sup>.

### **319: Testimony of truth**

Truth is in the world like light in the darkness. It appears as light, not like lightening. Lightening passes through obstacles. Light remains outside the window, and does not enter unless the window is open. Let us not be negligent. Let us remove the blindness of ignorance and really wed truth with the ring of faith. He who remains in darkness can make many mistakes. Meanwhile, truth makes one mature, stable and steady.

It is necessary that truth be always proclaimed. It never should be silent because of fear. Thus it is that Providence raises up in the Church renewed and reformed ministers through the action of the Holy Spirit. These are presented with the character of steadfastness and faithfulness. It is necessary to speak clearly and openly, not in a way that pleases the good, and at the same times does not displease the bad. As St. Paul says: ***If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a slave of Christ*** [Ga 1:20].

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<sup>602</sup> **NB:** web-site footnote. This is St. Gaspar's usual insistence on Progress in **Holiness and Learning** [cf. Part IV, *Original Constitutions*, CF ## 47 ff.].

<sup>603</sup> Meditations 16 b – 17, *Primum Regum*. MssB 4960; 5538-5549.

Through these ministries, the Holy Spirit continues to reform the Church. Full of gratitude to God, those who have been enlightened are most ready to serve Him in any and all undertakings. They preach not for money, but for souls, not to the ears, but to the soul, not to be praised but to be followed, not to attract listeners to themselves, but to lead them to Christ. These truly have wed the truth with the ring of faith and nothing can separate them from it, not even death<sup>604</sup>.

### **320: Do not trade the Word of God**

***For we are not like the many who trade on the word of God; but as out of sincerity, indeed as from God, and in the presence of God we speak in Christ*** [2 Co 2:17]. There is a real temptation in preaching, to do so for one's own glory. Christ was also tempted to do this. Christ has taught us, however, how to overcome this temptation: ***Take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no recompense from y9our heavenly Father*** [Mt 6:1].

Those who have the duty to care for their neighbor must diligently be on their guard against this temptation. The more sublime and holy these ministries are, all the more serious is the danger of falling. Woe to those who have the duty to speak well of God if they turn to their own glory what they have received to promote the glory of God. If they seek things too lofty, they fail to reach the humble [cf. Rm 12:16]. Let them recall what God says through the words of the Prophet Hoseah: ***It was I who gave her the grain, the wine, the oil, and her abundance of silver and of gold, which they used for Baal*** [Ho 2:10].

The remedy for this temptation is found in that secret that Christ points out in performing all good deeds. ***But, when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father, Who sees in secret, will repay you*** [Mt 6:6]. ***When you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to be fasting*** [Mt 6:17]. Let us attempt to have the right intention. Then we shall show ourselves as true sons of God if we keep our sights and intentions constantly fixed on Him.<sup>605</sup>

### **321: A good preacher forms others to be teachers of faith**

The best preacher is humble by following the ways of the saints. He is well learned in the Scriptures. He is well disposed to be inspirations of God in prayer. He seeks nothing, hopes for nothing, and fears nothing. This is the effect of the actions of a good preacher. Bolstered by his preaching and instructed by his doctrine, real heroes are born and grow in the Church, because he has nourished them with the word of God and by example like cedar trees in a garden. Furthermore, his best disciples soon emerge as true teachers.

<sup>604</sup> Meditations n. 19, *Primum Regum*. MssB 5649-5672.

<sup>605</sup> Rodriguez, o.c., MssB 8840-8844.

The preacher is like an architect. He makes a design, and later, with many helpers, builds the house. In such a way, the architect, without using his hands, does more than any other worker. On the other hand, even listeners can become real teachers in the perfection of the active and contemplative life.

It can also happen through an inadvertent mistake that preaching proves unsuccessful to the point that the bad ones take this as an occasion to distort doctrine and blaspheme God. The good preacher, however, does not become depressed over this. He is not worried about his personal insult, but the harm done to God. He calmly thinks about what has occurred, and with humility, and without presumption, he turns to God for inspiration.

The Lord will always show His wonderful ways; the way of Divine Providence, even though hidden, of making use of evil for His own ends.<sup>606</sup>

### **322: The preaching of the Apostolic Missionary**

The Ministry of the Word should be carried out in all its forms: preaching publicly, or instructing the people by public and private Catechism lessons; by pious talks and holy conversations; at times, fraternally correcting vices; at times, exhorting to the practice of virtue and frequent reception of the sacraments; at times guiding and encouraging people to acquire perfection' preaching the Spiritual exercises; promoting pious societies or associations; attending devotedly to the spiritual care of the sick, especially the dying<sup>607</sup>.

In giving missions, they shall depend strictly on the Bishop of the place, always observing their wishes regarding the place and time of exercising ministry<sup>608</sup>.

It is the duty of the confreres not only to teach the truths necessary or useful to reach eternal life. This should be done by preaching, teaching, but also by explaining the primary elements of faith and morals, especially to children and those who are uneducated. This should be done in the Oratories or in Catechism classes, whether public or private. This also is quite useful to the church, and because of this, it should be very dear to them<sup>609</sup>.

The Christian education of children and youth, and also the uneducated, should be promoted with great fervor: with Oratories, catechesis and also with private instructions<sup>610</sup>.

Whenever possible, it is also fitting to instruct young people in their scholastic courses. Although these young people are accepted in our schools for instruction in

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<sup>606</sup> Meditation nn. 25-27. *Primum Regum*. MssB 5900-6034.

<sup>607</sup> CF # 163

<sup>608</sup> CF # 2.

<sup>609</sup> CF # 182.

<sup>610</sup> CF # 165.

scholastic matters, nevertheless the chief aim of this education is the quest and formation of their moral life<sup>611</sup>.

Concern above all must be had so that they will be well instructed in Christian Doctrine. They shall be taught it once a week. Each week they shall be given a conference to encourage them in the progress of virtue. When the occasion arises in the course of the lectures, the teachers shall strive to instill in their pupils religious respect and love toward God and love of virtue<sup>612</sup>.

### **323: St. Gaspar and the Catechism for adults**

One of the activities to which St. Gaspar dedicated himself in a special way for the good of souls was Catechesis, or Christian Doctrine, especially in the form of the so called Fourth Class. This instruction was held in each parish of the city on the Sunday afternoons during the summer time. Due to the fact that it was an inconvenient hour, and also because of the heat of the day, the catechist had to be particularly adept and capable, and had to have a wonderful spirit of self-sacrifice.

This ministry was always very close to the heart of St. Gaspar. If he was unable, because of sickness or some other duty, to conduct this class personally a few times, he made quite sure that it was handled by one of his own group. At certain times there were at least seven priests from the Stimmate Community assigned to different parishes to teach this Fourth Class. St. Gaspar wanted all his sons to be well prepared with great diligence to teach these classes, and he wanted them to be down to earth, pleasant and practical.

It appeared that the Lord wished to show him how pleased He was with this ministry, arranging that his short agony and death would occur on a Sunday afternoon, at the time that all of his priests had to leave to attend to the classes of the Fourth Class. As his disciples left to preach the reign of God, St. Gaspar departed for Paradise<sup>613</sup>.

## **APOSTOLIC UNDERTAKINGS**

### **324: Preparing for the work of God**

The time of God's calling ordinarily happens with a great outpouring of charity and love. ***Stay in the city until you are clothed with the power from on high*** [Lk 24:49]. This charity that comes from heaven is well distinguished from the false and imprudent zeal that comes from this earth<sup>614</sup>. The abundance and increase of charity: this is the definite and decisive sign and the moment in which one must begin to act. For a long time they were but hidden inspirations of the Holy Spirit and grew by prayer

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<sup>611</sup> CF ## 166-167.

<sup>612</sup> CF ## 170-172.

<sup>613</sup> Miscellanea Lenotti. SA, p. 156

<sup>614</sup> Meditation n. 16 b, *Primum Regum* MssB 5526.

and meditation. The language of the Lord is peace. This is how He answers us and assures us that what we are doing is pleasing to Him. ***I will hear what God proclaims: The Lord – for He proclaims peace to His people and to His faithful ones*** [Ps 85:9].

Everything seems to invite and encourage us to hasten to do what the Lord has inspired us to do for His glory. Certainly, for us, it is convenient to wait, not to be waited for. I believe that we should not wait one moment, once we are ready, because the Lord is closer than we think; rather, He is so close that He stands at the door and waits until we are ready. He is really at the door [cf. Mt 24:33]<sup>615</sup>.

The inspirations of God must be received with great feelings of charity and purity of intentions, and should be guarded with great care. Therefore, we should also care for little things as well as great things, because in the eyes of God everything is great, as the Lord makes clear the extent of His designs<sup>616</sup>.

### **325: Courage and trust in God**

The Lord Who has given the outline of the whole building, will also give the design for each section, for the grandeur and beauty of the whole construction. If at the present time, we do not see clearly the total picture, we can rest assured that when He desires it, we will see it then, which will be the best time. The Lord will enlighten us to complete is us, with us and through us, what he has already begun. ***The One Who began this good work in you will bring it to fulfillment.*** [Ph 1:6]<sup>617</sup>.

We should have high spirits because the Lord does not desire plans of paper, or canvas, but of spirit. If the spirit is not wide and high, it cannot contain the design of a building that is high and wide and developed to its least detail, and therefore, risks receiving only what it can hold, and that is a lesser plan. As we widen our soul for the charity of Christ, so will He widen and develop the magnificent design of His glory.

Praise to God for what He desires to fulfill. Blessed are those who give themselves to this most loving and powerful god. Nothing more is needed. As He has given us the desire, so, too, God ***will give the power and the strength*** [Ps 67:6]. This is beautiful because the desire is not far from the deed. ***Whatever He willed*** - and because of this, He has us longing for it, ***He did*** [cf. Ps 115:3]. He has already accomplished it, because there is nothing that can resist His will, even before we are able to carry it out, poor creatures that we are.

<sup>615</sup> Correspondence. Letter to Naudet. **January 16, 1814.**

<sup>616</sup> o.c., to Naudet. **March 6, 1813.**

<sup>617</sup> **NB:** Website note: Fr. Bertoni quotes this passage in his key Constitution: CF # 185.



Nothing is lacking as long as trust is not lacking. Talents, knowledge, and energy – we will find all this superabundantly in Him. ***Happy is the man who trust in Him [Ps 34:9]***<sup>618</sup>.

### **326: Decision making**

Every good undertaking calls for much prayer and great care. It must have the greatest confidence in god, and the utmost care, true humility, and heroic virtue on the part of man.

If we do all we can on our part, God on His part will do everything and do it well<sup>619</sup>. The meek and humble of heart will be embraced by God as a mother, and He will lift them up out of the mire<sup>620</sup>.

Let us see to it that there is also community prayer. He who is fervent will inspire those who are not, and he who tramples all things under his feet and keep his eyes on God alone, will keep the chariot of God's glory moving and will bring with himself those souls still encumbered with petty things of this present life, and who are perhaps not the most agile on the way<sup>621</sup>.

Whenever we have to make a choice, we should freely determine [trusting completely that God will be there at the opportune time] the most prudent option and the most convenient one in the Lord. Let us not waste time. With the help of God, let us do whatever we can, and the Lord will do His part as He knows best<sup>622</sup>.

### **327: Do not worry about tomorrow**

There is no reason why we should be full of fear or lack confidence. Listen to what Scripture says so strongly: ***Seek first the reign of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides. Do not worry about tomorrow [Mt 6:33-34]. Whoever for love of Christ's cause gives up brother or sister, or father, or mother, or sons or property will receive a hundred-fold in this life and inherit life everlasting.*** [cf. Mt 19:29].

As for our defects, we must remember God knew of them even before we were called. If they appear now more evident to us we need to be more conscious of His goodness and omnipotence. It is, therefore, both necessary and our duty to let confidence grow with humility. No one who has trusted in Him has ever been left confused. He, whose function is based on the word of God, even if he be frail and very weak, will become steadfast and very strong. If the Lord has made clear the object of His glory, He will gradually show the way, and how to realize it.

<sup>618</sup> Correspondence. Letter to Naudet.- **no date., p. 177.**

<sup>619</sup> Correspondence, p. 177. to Naudet – no date.

<sup>620</sup> *ib.*, p. 179.

<sup>621</sup> *ib.*, p. 247 – no date.

<sup>622</sup> *Ib.*, p. 243. Letter to Mother Naudet. **August 28, 1828.**

We should be happy if there are other groups of souls who are united to the glorious banner of Christ, coming from other places and under the guide of other persons. For, indeed, the more we are, the better it will be for the glory of God, and for each and every one of us, for the fact that our charity increases and expands in the mutual communication and sharing<sup>623</sup>.

### **328: One step at a time**

We often wonder what we should do [*quid faciendum*], but this is not enough. We should also know how to do it [*quomodo faciendum*].<sup>624</sup> Yet even this is not enough. We should know exactly when we should do it [*quando faciendum*]. The Lord, Who has taken the first step, will also take the second and the third, communicating that light, which enlightens everyone, who comes into this world [cf. Jn 1:9]<sup>625</sup>.

Once everything is clear, we should move ahead. If there is a doubt on some issue, let us wait with faith for God to enlighten us. Let us resolve not only the issue at hand, but also the way it is to be accomplished, first of all in front of God, before we discuss it with people. Let us not fear, since the Lord tells us: ***I will instruct you and show you the way you should walk. I will counsel you, keeping my eye on you*** [Ps 32:8]<sup>626</sup>.

Many rush into action, in order to get successful before time. Many deceive themselves in such a way that, in order not to ruin their own plans and projects, they disregard some obligation. Yet, in doing this they damage them, all the more. Never neglect one point, even if it should seem a perfectionism, with the pretext of not ruining some undertakings.<sup>627</sup>

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<sup>623</sup> To fully understand the spirituality of this letter written to L. Naudet on **June 28, 1813**, which Fr. Stofella calls ‘an admirable document’, one must understand the reason for it. St. Gaspar and L. Naudet wanted the former monastery, so called Teresa, as the place for her to establish her new Institute of the Sisters of the Holy Family. The owner, who had recently purchased it, deeded it to another charitable school administered by some ex-nuns.

‘This disappointment’, notes Fr. Stofella, ‘produced an increase of joy and zeal for the greater glory of God and a more responsible abandonment to the Divine Providence.’ Three years later, after the death of Joseph Bellotti, who deeded this property to Fr. N. Galvani, L. Naudet with her Sisters, entered this Convent of Teresa shortly after Fr. Gaspar had entered the Stimmat with his companions. [cf. **BERTONI 3**, pp. 594, ff.]. Correspondence, p. 86. Letter to Naudet. **June 28, 1813**.

<sup>624</sup> **NB: web-site Note.** For some, these formulations would be the way to interpret St. Gaspar’s CF # 1, the ‘end’ – and CF # 2, the manner of proceeding under missionary obedience

<sup>625</sup> Correspondence, p. 106. Letter to Naudet, **January 16, 1814**.

<sup>626</sup> Correspondence, p. 104. Letter to Naudet. **January 3, 1814**.

<sup>627</sup> Meditation 16 B. **Primum Regum** MssB 5521-5533.

**329: If God is with us, who can be against us?**

The Lord is the God of Peace, harmony, charity and nothing can resist His will. It is necessary that all fulfill it, and more than anyone else, those who seem more inclined to their own will instead of God's will. ***All things serve You*** [Ps 119:91]. ***Our God is in heaven; whatever He wills, He does*** [Ps 115:3]<sup>628</sup>.

Since the Lord is above all our contradictions, it follows that we must put our faith firmly in Him, and never lose sight of this. This is the surest way. ***So surpassing is His mercy toward those who fear Him*** [Ps 103:11].

What can we do to show our thanks for so much mercy? What a baby must give to its mother, who holds the baby in her arms, and does not want even to put it down<sup>629</sup>. At times the mother will show her child an apple. Immediately the child is pleased to see the beauty of the fruit, and to imagine its sweetness, but when the mother, playfully, raises it out of reach, the child becomes sad and the joy now turns to tears, since she is unable to grasp it with her hands, all the while the mother is teasing the child. What does the child do to obtain it? She hugs her mother and never stops begging. This is how she obtains it<sup>630</sup>.

Therefore, we should always keep our eyes on God. In doing His will, everything will turn out for the best. ***My eyes are ever toward the Lord, for He will free my feet from the snare*** [Ps 25:15]. ***Happy the man who follows not the counsel of the wicked, but delights in the law of the Lord, whatever He does prospers*** [Ps 1:1-3].

To conclude, all true apostolic undertakings are mostly the result of prayer<sup>631</sup>.

**330: God can bring good out of evil**

When an undertaking is pleasing to God, it must be seen to be really contradicted from the beginning to the end. If perchance God desires something other than what we think should be pleasing to Him, we must submit to the Divine will, which is the wisest, the most just, the most perfect, instead of following our own will, which is ignorant, mixed up, and evil. If it is the work of God, nothing can destroy it. ***This is the hope I firmly hold in my heart*** [Jb 19:27 – Vg].<sup>632</sup> In the beginning there are always difficulties, but no one can stop the work that the Lord clearly designs with His hand. God can change even badly made things into good ones<sup>633</sup>.

On our part, we must purify our mind, comfort our heart, and recall what the Lord told us when He said to the two brothers, the sons of Zebedee: ***Can you drink***

<sup>628</sup> Correspondence, p. 111. Letter to Naudet. **June 4, 1814.**

<sup>629</sup> Correspondence, p. 108. Letter to Naudet. **June 1, 1814.**

<sup>630</sup> Correspondence, p. 31. Letter to Naudet. **December 1, 1812.**

<sup>631</sup> Correspondence, p. 11. Letter to Naudet. **June 4, 1814**

<sup>632</sup> Correspondence, p. 122. Letter to Naudet. **December 21, 1814.**

<sup>633</sup> Correspondence, p. 122. Letter to Naudet. **No date.**

***the cup that I am going to drink?*** [Mt 20:22]/ We know their quick response: ***We can***, they said. And Jesus replied: ***My cup you will indeed drink*** [in fact, they drank of it, supported by divine grace], ***but at my right to sit and at my left, is not mine to give, but for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father.*** [ib., v. 23].

Blessed for all ages be our Heavenly Father. May He give us the grace to fulfill His will, not only in part, but all of it. This is what our sanctification consists in: to help our brothers and to glorify Him<sup>634</sup>.

### **331: Birth of the Marian Oratories: as at Bethlehem**

When St. Gaspar decided to begin this work, the first group of children was taken to the first floor of the rectory. This was the pastor's library. There was no other place available. Later on, due to the renovations of the rectory, they had to move out. It seemed as though there was no room for them in the inn. [cf. Lk 2:7]. So, they went into a shed. Fixing it up as best he could, he brought his youth there. Here was the beginning of the Marian Oratory. This soon became the standard ad model of other Oratories founded in all parishes to the great advantage of the ministry to the youth in the parishes which welcomed them and cherished them.

Needless to say, this humble beginning and its development from this humble shelter was heartening to St. Gaspar and gave him great hope. He, who have lived solely on faith and followed the example of his Divine Master in all his doings, was very happy. The birth of this little ministry resembled the birth in the stable of Him who was to bring light and salvation into the world. In all this he could recognize Divine Providence.

Therefore, he began to comfort and encourage these young people to practice humility, self-abnegation, love poetry and mortification; in a word, the same virtues that Jesus so eloquently taught from the lowly stable of Bethlehem. He was too strong and too faithful to let these difficulties overwhelm Him, and even bigger ones. He felt that this ministry was pleasing to God, since it came from Him<sup>635</sup>.

## **PERSEVERANCE**

### **332: Walking toward sanctity – from difficulty to joy**

The deception of a diabolical temptation consists I magnifying the difficulty and weariness, which is experienced at the beginning of our spiritual journey, as if these are going to last a life time, and perhaps increase daily, making it more difficult to give up worldly pleasures.

However, this is completely false. Weariness will last for a time, but habit will make relatively easy that which at first was difficult, and will even become pleasing

<sup>634</sup> Correspondence, p. 122. Letter to Naudet. **December 21, 1814.**

<sup>635</sup> C. Giacobbe, *Life*, SA p. 340.

and joyful. In Scripture we read: ***A patient man needs to withstand for a time, and then contentment comes back to him*** [Si 1:20]. We also read: ***On the way of wisdom I direct you, I lead you on straightforward paths*** [Pr 4:11]. Behold, from the beginning the narrow paths of virtue have a difficult entrance. But then: ***When you walk, your step will not be impeded, and should you run, you will not stumble*** [Pr 4:12].

Notice how the Holy Spirit says that the journey is slow and easy, not when these paths are ended, but from the very beginning. The Lord, from the very beginning, gives much pleasure to those souls that are dear to Him and remain faithful in His service fighting evil. If they do not stop and become discouraged, He continues to favor them, until He gathers them ***to sit with His people, in the beauty of peace*** [cf. Is 32:18] in which they gently labor, their spirit resting in God. Sirach also states: ***For in cultivating her*** [that is, in acquiring wisdom] ***you will labor but little, and soon you will eat of her fruits*** [Si 6:20].

If we continue undaunted, and do not worry over these first small difficulties, we will soon notice how quickly our hearts will turn with consolation and joy to bless the Lord Who has shown us how to attain so much peace<sup>636</sup>.

### **333: Remain steadfast on the way to conversion**

The devil would like us to think that it is difficult to persevere in works of penance, just as it was when one decided on conversion. Difficulties occur only at the beginning, and when we first overcome the devil, who opposes us with all his strength, then he himself weakens. First, because he was defeated, and second, he was defeated when he thought that he was more powerful. Let us be courageous and bold and hasten on the glorious way with all our strength.

Onward, therefore, let us not fear our enemies, and let us not worry over our weaknesses. God will fight for us. He will defend us because of the love He has for us. He comes, moved by honest and valuable causes of virtue, of our salvation, and of His glory. He comes, driven by the aversion he has instinctively to sin, to destroy it.

God is obliged by His word, for He promised to protect man who has faith in Him with the power of His grace. ***But kindness surrounds him who trust in the Lord*** [Ps 32:10]. If God is fighting with us and for us, what have we to fear? He easily conquers His enemies, whether they are few, or many, learned or unskilled, strong or weak. Let us go forward with courage, fight with all our strength and become victorious<sup>637</sup>.

<sup>636</sup> Earl Sermons, n. 18. Perseverance. **MssB 780-784. PVC, pp. 114-116.**

<sup>637</sup> Early Sermons, n. 27: 'Discouragement of Conversion' **MssB 1013-1015. PVC, pp. 45, ff.**

### **334: Our spiritual journey starts at the beginning of each day**

***My son, when you come to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for trials*** [Si 2:1]. We find these words of the Holy Spirit in Scripture. No sooner does he see a person on the right way and beginning to seek what is right with a strong resolution, the devil begins with all kinds of wiles to have him turn back to hindering his journey. He makes him consider the difficulties and the boredom of a long strenuous journey, in order to weaken and discourage him. He seems to say: 'How can you resist your passions for so many years, never give in to any whims, always mortifying your senses?' In this way he suggests strong temptations that are very difficult to overcome, and at times, even difficult to detect.

Let us examine with care this subtle trick of his. He lengthens out of proportion the time that lies ahead of us, making it uncertain even to a point that we are not even sure of another day. In the Gospel we are warned; ***Do not worry about tomorrow*** [Mt 6:34]. This is what we have to do to avoid the snares of the devil: to live each day as if it were the last. Who cannot bear the burden of a single day? How much more should we remember the reward that God has prepared for those who valiantly fight His enemies, and the promise of salvation given to those who persevere to the end [cf. Mt 10:22].

Even if we were granted another day, tomorrow we would begin to make our resolutions, and to work as if this were to be the last day to gain heaven. What will happen to us, if after having done our best to start our journey, we stop running because we judge that the finish line is too far away, when perhaps it is really close? ***Woe to you who have lost hope***, says the Holy Spirit, ***who have left the good road, seeking evil ways*** [Si 2:14-16]<sup>638</sup>.

### **335: If God is with us, what do we have to fear?**

God is not only happy to show us the way, but He Himself offers to lead us. ***On the way of wisdom I direct you*** [Pr 4:11]. Let us deeply reflect on this point. Thus we will be able to calm the fears that still trouble our hearts, and those that the enemy does not cease to provoke in us in order to thwart our resolutions.

No matter how long the road is to travel, no matter how difficult it is to walk steadily, no matter how many dangers we encounter, or strong enemies who block our journey, or the endless snares put in our way, if the Lord walks with us, ***Why should we fear?*** [Ps 26:1].

***I set the Lord ever before me; with Him at my right hand, I shall not be disturbed*** [Ps 16:8]. Why should we fear to fall. ***If He is with us and takes up arms to fight our adversaries*** [Dt 7:21] ***why should we be frightened? If He is always ready to watch over our steps and to free our feet from snares***, [Ps 91:3, 12], ***how can we be bound? May Your good spirit guide me on level ground*** [Ps 143:10]. Is there any grater safety?

<sup>638</sup> Early Sermons. N. 18. 'Perseverance' MssB 775-779. PVC, pp. 112-114.

We noticed very well when one is guided by the Spirit of God, his way is secure. He has promised this Spirit to anyone who asks: ***If you, who are wicked, know how to give your children good gifts, how much more will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him*** [Lk 11:13].

What else remains to be done? Nothing else, except that we place that condition to which He has bound His infallible word, namely that we pray. Because He who has begun the good work of our sanctification [cf. Ph 1:6], giving us the grace to be converted, He Himself will bring it to fulfillment, strongly assisting us until the end<sup>639</sup>.

### **336: Only the brave conquer**

Courage. If the time is short, the labor is shorter, and if God Himself comes to our aid, let us make up our minds, reconfirm our good resolutions, and run without stopping until we capture Him to whom all our thoughts and desires should be directed.

If we are resolved from the start, every suffering and difficulty will cease, because nothing frightens our enemies more than bold courage. Even if we are losers in the first phase to our adversaries, we should not fear. Even if in the battle we are wounded, let us not lose heart. Knowing that medicine is available and effective, we will renew ourselves immediately with greater courage, and with more faith in God, we will carry on our race.

When we least expect it, we will see every difficulty overcome, every enemy defeated, and we will be assured of that crown promised to those who persevere to the end [cf. 2 Tm 2:5]<sup>640</sup>.

### **337: Never stop**

We should imagine heaven at the end of an avenue strewn and obstructed with thorns, stumps and thickets. We should focus our attention on the end and not on the thorns, walking and brushing off now and then the thorny spines. We should never rest until we reach the end<sup>641</sup>.

We must rivet our attention on our end, God. We should never lose sight of Him. We must always work without ceasing, praying without interruption, struggling valiantly without being disheartened, and never stopping until we possess it. If we have put our hand to the plow, we must never turn back, because: ***No one sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the reign of God*** [Lk

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<sup>639</sup> Early Sermons, n. 18. 'Perseverance'. MssB 785-788. PVC, pp. 116-118.

<sup>640</sup> Early Sermons, n. 18. MssB 790-793. PVC, pp. 118-120.

<sup>641</sup> Spiritual Journal. July 30, 1808.

9:62]. We push on, forgetting completely all past hardships, but desiring greater things<sup>642</sup>.

When the road becomes much longer than we thought, this can cool us off, unless we resume immediately and walk along the road.<sup>643</sup> Let us make use of the present time [cf. Ep 5:16]. Time will never return. Therefore we must use it with great diligence<sup>644</sup>.

## THE LAST THINGS

### **338: Reflection on death and eternity**

Precious is the death of the just. Stephen, the first martyr, filled with the Holy Spirit, dying, sees the heavens open up, and Jesus sitting at the right hand of the father. He dies cheerfully and serenely, with peace in his soul and the taste of honey on his lips. He dies, rather, he sleeps in the arms of the Lord. ***He slept in the Lord*** [Ac 7:60]. ***Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of His faithful ones*** [Ps 116:15].

Who is it that does not desire to die the death of the just? ***May I die the death of the just*** [Nb 23:10]. This was said even by Balaam who later died the death of the impious. Those who still live in sin also may say this and they desire intensely to die like the just, yet they still want to live in sin. This is nothing but a vain desire. One dies as a just man, if he lives like one. One does not die as a saint, if he does not live a saintly life.<sup>645</sup>

We are invited by the Gospel to think of the end of the world [cf. Lk 21:5-36]. This is a thought that should impress all our feelings, and make us reconsider seriously looking into ourselves. Let us reflect now a bit deeper. Is it not the death of every man in particular that which for every man will become the universal end? The day I die is for me the end of the world. Can we perhaps escape this day and avoid death? Or should this day be less feared?<sup>646</sup>

Let us earnestly apply ourselves to prayer, keep watch on ourselves, and perform the practice of Christian virtue. Let us do penance generously and also mortification. We are called to reform ourselves radically, and begin a new life, putting on the wedding garment which makes one a number of the elect. It is a matter of our soul! It is a matter of eternity!<sup>647</sup>

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<sup>642</sup> Early Sermons, n. 18. **MssB 791. PVC, p. 119.**

<sup>643</sup> Spiritual Journal. **July 13, 1808.**

<sup>644</sup> o.c. **July 24, 1808.**

<sup>645</sup> Early Sermons, n. 26. 'Death.' **MssB 970-971. PVC, pp. 47, f.**

<sup>646</sup> Early Sermons, n. 32. 'The terrible death for each man'. **MssB 115401156. PVC, pp. 74, f.**

<sup>647</sup> Early Sermons. N. 24. 'Imminent Death'. **MssB 944. PVC, p. 73.**



### **339: A good death**

To die well, one must avoid idleness, sin and the occasions of sin. Those who did well will rise to eternal life. Those who lived badly will rise to condemnation [cf. Jn 5:29]. It is not enough to be converted only in the intellect; one must be converted with his will, and this is not easy.<sup>648</sup>

We must take steps to make a real, serious conversion of our life. If we are still under the yoke of sin, we must learn to detest it, and confess it to a priest, and promise to avoid sin, and the occasions of sin; then, we must take all the means needed to keep our resolutions.<sup>649</sup>

Remember: the past is no more, the future has not yet arrived; only the present exists and it is in my power. Let us live day by day, or rather from morning to mid-day, from mid-day to evening, and perform every act with the greatest perfection possible. Perhaps I will have no more time to glorify God.<sup>650</sup>

Also, reflect well on this: when a person in danger of death is well disposed, it is not discernible that the Lord prolongs his life. Death is a bridge between two eternities, between what is before and what comes afterwards. It is a step. When a man is sure that this is the right time, he should be encouraged to take that step<sup>651</sup>.

### **340: Judgment**

***Fear God and give Him glory, for His time has come to sit in judgment*** [Rv 14:7]. The light from the east flashes to the west. The Cross already appears high in the heavens [cf. Mt 24:30]. Sinners behold the law-giver, behold the judge; he alone can condemn and save [cf. Jas 4:8]. ***Behold He is coming amid the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him*** [many times with their sins]. ***All the people of the earth will beat their breast in front of Him*** [cf. Rv 1:7].

The angels will come forth to separate the good from the bad, the goats from the sheep [cf. Mt 25:31]. What a bitter separation. The father from the son; a daughter from the mother; a friend from a friend – all will be separated for all eternity. Two will live together in the same family, or who work together in the same office: one will be taken up among the elect, and the other sent with the reprobates.

Those who were not able to overcome human respect, or to change their way of living, or those who were unable to endure a little blushing when confessing their sins before the minister of God, must now suffer shame, which is now useless, as they see even their most hidden sins bared before the whole world. Meanwhile the elect will be saying; 'We too were sinners, but by the grace of god we were able to overcome the

<sup>648</sup> Spiritual Journal. February 15, 1809.

<sup>649</sup> Early Sermons. N. 24. 'Imminent Death'. MssB 944; PVC, p. 73.

<sup>650</sup> Spiritual Journal. September 17, 1808.

<sup>651</sup> o.c. December 23, 1808.

occasions and the habits of sin, human respect and convert to God with our whole heart.'

How blessed are those just ones who will now remain with God for all eternity. How sorrowful those sinners, who now must suffer by not ever seeing God. O Lord! You, who are so merciful and loving, grant that we may not hear on that day those bitter words: ***Out of My sight*** [Mt 25:41], and may we not be deaf t that loving word: ***Come***<sup>652</sup>

### **341: In the light of judgment**

Let us not be content with the thought that judgment day is near, rather we should think of it as present. Let us always be alert, and never dull our senses to this event. Let us make a real and sincere resolution to better ourselves always and, if necessary, to change our way of living.

Why do we hesitate to throw ourselves into the arms of divine mercy, while we still have time, before mercy yields to justice? Now is the time to do penance, and thus assure ourselves of salvation. To neglect such an important matter is flirting with failure and playing with fire. Remember you are dealing with your soul. Once it is lost, it is lost forever. You are dealing with a final and unchangeable state of life. You are dealing with an eternity of joy, or of suffering. Why should we hold off our decision?

This God-man, our judge, who loves us as tenderly as a father, and who has no desire to condemn us for all eternity, threatens and warns us. He shed His blood to wash away our sins. By His merits, we have been given once again a right to enter His Kingdom. He makes us participants in His work of redemption, by lessening the weight of our penance. ***Come***, he shouts, ***come to Me all you who labor and are burdened***, oppressed by the weight of your sins, ***and I will give you rest*** [Mt 11:28].<sup>653</sup>

### **342: Should one live as though hell did not exist?**

We cannot live as if Hell did not exist, and also as though I could deserve it. Hell does exist, and with it are cruel torments, pain of the senses, expressed in the biblical image of fire, and torments of the soul. The intellect will be darkened and will be focused only on its own evil, in contrast to the good that was lost. The will remains obdurate and obstinate in hating god. The heart of the damned is like a turbulent sea, in which all the rivers of torment enter through the faculties of the soul. The memory is tortured, because it recalls the joy of the past, the occasions it had to be saved, and the evil that was done. Above all the greatest pain is the loss of not seeing God, our infinite Good<sup>654</sup>.

<sup>652</sup> Early Sermons. N. 14. 'Universal Judgment'. **MssB 695-713. PVC, pp. 86-93.**

<sup>653</sup> Early Sermons, n. 14. **MssB 698-712. PVC, pp. 89-93.**

<sup>654</sup> Retreats 1806. **MssB 3946-3952.**

There are many Christians who believe that Hell exists, and know that one mortal sin can condemn one; nevertheless, they live peacefully with mortal sin on their soul, and if they do not confess, shame shuts up their mouth, and neither do they have great fear of the fact that they are living in sin. They are however, expert in conducting their business, draw up contracts, caring for their families and knowing how to avoid dangers. But they do not know how to care for their soul. This is really crazy.

Where does all this ruin come from even among Christians? From ignorance. Where does this ignorance come from? From not listening to the Word of God. The Word of God sweeps away the darkness of ignorance, and also conquers human perversity. The Word of God and sin cannot exist side by side. The first Christians were converted by preaching. Naturally, it is not the voice of man that converts, but the Voice of God. ***Indeed God's word is living and effective*** [Heb 4:12]<sup>655</sup>.

### **343: Heavens – a perpetual day**

Let us think of the blessed happiness that the Lord has prepared for us, and like a beloved Lord He anxiously waits to give it to us for all eternity. There will be no longer any sorrow, wailing, sadness, poverty, or sickness. All will be peace, happiness and joy. Everything will be tranquil and serene. A perpetual day. A life without end. Loving conversion with the angels, a blessed concord with the choirs of saints, a joyful banquet with Christ. A blessed vision and enjoyment with our first beginning and our last end, who is God.

If St. Paul considered all his burdens light in comparison to the enormous weight of glory [cf. 2 Co 4:17], why shouldn't our struggle against sin be lighter, so as to live the life of grace? Those merchants who seek their riches beyond the seas, at times, suffer ship-wreck, and yet they start out anew on another dangerous journey with lively hearts. And we, who are sure of a happy ending, why do we not have the courage and the faith of starting anew our journey towards our homeland? Some of the great saints, like Peter, Paul and Magdalene, had fallen into grave sin, but they knew how to turn to good use the enthusiasm that they had formerly when committing sin.

Let us lift our eyes and see how beautiful Heaven is. Let us set our eyes on Christ, Who shed all His Blood that we might merit victory, and now He shows us the crown that He wishes to place on our heads<sup>656</sup>.

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<sup>655</sup> Mission at St. Firmus Major. **MssB 4035-4041.**

<sup>656</sup> Early Sermons, n. 27. 'Desperation of Conversion.' **MssB 1008-1018; PVC, pp. 43-47.**

# **St. GASPAR BERTONI**



**FOUNDER of the CONGREGATION of the  
SACRED STIGMATA of OUR LORD, JESUS CHRIST**

**SOME RUDIMENTS of his  
SPIRITUAL WRITINGS**

**SPECIAL THEMES – Fr. BERTONI'S DEVOTIONS**

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## SPECIAL THEMES

### Fr. BERTONI's DEVOTIONS

#### THE SACRED HEART

#### **344: The most appropriate symbol of love**

The Church is the prudent and most wise Spouse of Christ. By her love relationship with Him, she has developed a great desire to see that her spouse Jesus is adored and loved. To reach this purpose she derives the most convincing means to reach everybody, and the easiest and most effective motives. Could she have found a more appropriate symbol of love than the Heart of Jesus?

The many connections between heart and love have already developed among all people a commonly accepted bond. The heart is recognized as the seat of love and the heart is almost a synonym of love. We even give the same meaning to both terms.

All the more so Jesus' love is symbolized by His divine Heart. His Heart is the source of that blood which was shed for our sake. It is enlivened by a most pure soul. It is identified by the hypostatic union with the Word. The very characteristic of this Heart is the fact that it has always been the most perfect means through which Jesus' invisible and inexpressible sentiments of love have been and are manifested for us to see and feel.

The side of Christ was torn open after His death just to show His heart, the very Heart wounded by the lance, the scar which He preserved in His glorious body. All these things make the Heart of Jesus such a tender, distinct and divine symbol that it is impossible to venerate the wounded Heart without remembering and venerating His love.

The Church is happy to see that her intentions are being met. She has seen that through this sensible object, people receive the Eucharist every first Friday of the month. Here is a renewed fervor of devotion towards the Blessed Sacrament. The feast of the Sacred Heart is celebrated with solemnity and with joy not so much because of the pomp and the noisy crowd associated with it, but rather because of the piety, affection and love of devoted people. All this generally causes people to recall more often the love of Jesus and encourages them to reciprocate His love with more fervor.<sup>657</sup>

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<sup>657</sup> Sacred Heart Notes. **MssB 1768-1772**. These are notes of a sermon which Fr. Bertoni gave on June 5, 1812, Feast of the Sacred Heart, in the Church of St. Fermo Major. What is noteworthy here is the rich theological content together with the apologetic zeal in defense of the devotion to the sacred Heart against Janenism. [**BERTONI** 3, pp. 383, ff.].

### **345: Why do You show us Your Heart?**

Lord, you created man in your own image and likeness [Gn 1:26] and established him as the aim for all creatures. As your image he is able to know you and to love you. In his ingratitude man quickly ruined himself and all his posterity. You promised that from his seed a Liberator would come, namely, your only Son, given up to death for man's sake! ***What a love!*** [1 Jn 3:1]. This man takes the life of His own Redeemer. On that very night in which he betrays Him, You instituted a Sacrament of love with the aim of communicating yourself to him and of remaining with him until the end of the world. Still man grows lukewarm, forgets this benefit, too, and tramples on it. Yet, you put before his very eyes Your Heart wounded for him. Why do you show him Your heart? [Jb 7:17]. SO much ingenuity of love is in view of inspiring man to love you. I understand, Lord, You are an abyss of goodness and love. Man is an abyss of ingratitude and malice. ***Deep is calling on deep!*** [Ps 42:8]<sup>658</sup>.

Our poor human heart is also able to wish our friends success ad ever good thing. If this is what we frail human beings can do when we love our friends in Christ, how much more should we trust the Heart of Christ, our Lord, Who loves us more than any mother. Oh, what a Good Shepherd! Let us surrender completely in all circumstances, as wise, docile, and humble sheep, to be supported, led and fed by him<sup>659</sup>.

Oh, lovable Heart of my Jesus, Who has ever found you to be slow in feeling pity for his miseries, or indifferent in paying heed to his requests, or difficult in granting him pardon for his faults<sup>660</sup>.

### **346: Lived experience of the devotion to the Sacred Heart**

Feast of the sacred Heart. During Mass During Mass, at the Consecration, Communion and throughout the whole thanksgiving time, many tears of compunction and affection. In particular, during Communion I felt for a moment as if my spirit was snatched away from all creatures, at the service of its Creator<sup>661</sup>.

While praying before Mass, I felt a little sleepy. Then I heard a voice speak to me from the Crucifix: 'Look at My Heart.' These words brought a marvelous light to my mind, and a great rush of fervor to my heart. I felt as if my spirit rose to get a closer look at that beloved object. I felt a shiver run through my whole body. My eyes were closed and so was my mouth, but my soul was wide awake and full of joy.

It seemed that my soul wished to separate itself from my body. It seemed to be dying, and yet enjoying this. When it turned back again with desire towards the One Who was talking to it, I had another shivering and feeling of a sweet painful death. My soul was then confused about what to do. If the experience had continued it was going

<sup>658</sup> Sacred Heart [Notes]. **MssB 1775-1777.**

<sup>659</sup> **Correspondence**, p. 391. Letter to Fr. Louis Bragato. May 29, 1840.

<sup>660</sup> Early Sermons, n. 3. The Name of Jesus. **I. MssB 412. PVC p. 237.**

<sup>661</sup> **Spiritual Journey**, July 2, 1808.

to die, or at least to be separated from the body. In such inability to act, it rested with delight in the hands of the Lord and finding great peace. It was ready to die at that very moment. Then, in an instant, it regained contact with the senses.

The effect of this was a very tender devotion to the Sacred Heart. During Mass, I was full of sentiment. My soul was moved to tears at Holy Communion. After Mass, I experienced great recollection and peace for the whole day with an increase of faith, hope and charity.<sup>662</sup>

## THE STIGMATA OF THE PASSION

### **347: To contemplate the Wounds of the Crucified and the scars of the Risen One.**

Christ rises on the third day from death to life, freed from all sorrow and pain, as splendid as the sun. He still bears the scars of the Five Wounds impressed in His Body. They are victorious emblems of His Mercy. They are glorious emblems of His Justice. With these He won a victory over death and hell. With these, He made satisfaction before the Divine Father on our behalf. These Wounds He ceaselessly shows to the Father, pleading with Him for mercy for us sinners. These Wounds are perennial springs of grace and heavenly assistance.

He shows them also to us, to invite us to love Him and to suffer for Him. What longing do they instill into us, to suffer for Christ! Do they not? They Wounds of the Redeemer are like many mouths which teach us how we have to suffer for His sake.

Let us then keep our eyes always fixed on those sacred Wounds. We shall be encouraged to bear patiently the trials and labors of the earthly pilgrimage. We too shall bear our Cross with the hope of obtaining victory. Otherwise we shall have to look at them, on the Judgment Day, with confusion and shame: ***They will look on Him Whom they have pierced.*** [Jn 19:37].

Take courage! Take courage! Let us gaze with eyes of faith at the Wounds of that God of Mercy who hangs from the Cross. From this contemplation will our heart not acquire much strength to combat bravely in temptations, to bear with tribulations, poverty and sickness! Let us dwell upon the Wounds of the Crucified first, and then we shall contemplate the scars of the Risen One.<sup>663</sup> In that way we shall see how true it is – as the Psalmist also says – many are the trials of the just man, but from

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<sup>662</sup> **Spiritual Journal.** May 30, 1812. It is noteworthy the coincidence of this mystical experience felt by Fr. Gaspar and the time in which he was preparing Notes for the sermon of the Sacred Heart.[cf. **n. 344**, just above].

<sup>663</sup> St. Augustine. *De S. Virginitate*. 54, 55. PL 40, 428



them all the Lord will rescue him [cf. Ps 34:20], and He will give us an eternal crown in heaven.<sup>664</sup>

### **348: The Stigmata of Christ impressed on the heart**

If you do not have eagle's wings to fly toward the stars, take the wings of the humble dove which nests in the cliffs and, there, you will meditate on the Wounds of Jesus Christ. Holiness was found more by St. Francis in meditating on the Passion of Christ than by all the wise men in contemplating the heavens<sup>665</sup>.

Remind yourself constantly that the greater you are the more you have to humiliate yourself in everything [Si 3:20], and if you cannot live in our little house of the Stimate with your body, you should stay in spirit in ***the clefts of the rock*** [Sgs 2:14], in the wounds of our most beloved and most humble savior, where I leave you embracing you with all my heart.<sup>666</sup>

Picture to yourself the Risen Lord as He appeared to the disciples very much alive and shining, with the scars of His Wounds. At the same time he invites you to heaven, where He is preparing to return: ***I go to prepare a place for you.*** [Jn 14:2]. Consider the conditions and the way necessary to reach heaven. Christ entered it with the scars of His Wounds. This is the price with which I purchased this kingdom. It cannot be had at a lesser price.<sup>667</sup>

...For the rest, cheer up! And when you need more cheerfulness, fly on the wings of thought to the little room of Fr. Michael, if your wings are not always ready to

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<sup>664</sup> From the Sermons of Fr. John Baptist Lenotti [**Bertoni 6**, pp. 394, ff.]. The piercing, produced by the nails and by the lance in the members of the Crucified and retained in the body of the Risen Lord, and the object of one of the great devotions of Christian piety, is expressed in theological-spiritual terms with various names: sores, wounds, scars, stigmata and have practically become synonymous throughout the centuries. The distinction between Wounds of the Crucified Christ and the scars of the Risen Lord had been over-stressed by St. Augustine for polemical reasons. He wanted to oppose the pagan philosopher Porphyrius who claimed that by the fact that the Wounds had remained in the body of Christ after His Resurrection, there was no true death and resurrection. Subsequently, however, the controversy lost both interest and relevance. By calling scars and marks of the Risen Lord, in fact, we do not intend to deny that we deal with true wounds. We want just to specify that they are not bloody nor sorrowful [cf. Ignazio BONETTI, *Le Stimate della Passione*. 1952. pp. 70-75; and by the same author, *Le Fonti della Salvezza*. 1984, p. 8.

<sup>665</sup> Meditations from **Spiritual Exercises. Mss B 3419**. The thought is taken from the *Imitation of Christ*. Book 2, c. 1.

<sup>666</sup> **Correspondence**, pp. 311, ff. Letter to Fr. Bragato, November 18, 1835.

<sup>667</sup> Meditations from the Spiritual Exercises. **MssB 2682; 2687**. cf. above, marginal number 97.

fly over the clouds to the bosom of your God and in the Glorious Wounds of your Savior. Take your seat as one of His People, in the beauty of that peace...<sup>668</sup>

### **349: The Stigmata of Christ and our hope**

Is it not true that when we are grieved by faults, by temptations or by any adversities, as soon as we fell on our knees in front of the Crucifix, we felt consoled in looking at His Wounds? What a consolation to see Him clasping us all to His Heart. to see His Heart open as if to show that He wants to hide all of us inside there. To see His head bent as if to look for us to lead us to Paradise!<sup>669</sup>

Jesus is a true Friend Who never forgets us. He has painted His faithful ones on His hands with the scars of His Wounds which He will bear always. He painted them there with His Blood so deeply that neither time nor eternity can ever wipe them away. As far as we are concerned, we should always try to keep our Friend Jesus in our hearts and to act always for His sake. He surely deserves this!<sup>670</sup>

Let us always keep our eyes fixed on Christ, the author and the perfecter of our faith [Heb 12:2]. Let His Wounds, His Blood be our hope. A God Who died for us, Who died torn apart by so many tortures and humiliations. Is this not a sweet hope for us? He ascended to heaven where He shows to the eternal Father the scars of His Wounds to move Him to pity our wretchedness and save us. Let us therefore cling to Jesus and His Cross. Either death nor life nor all the powers of the world or of hell will be able to separate us from Him.<sup>671</sup>

### **350: Christ on Judgment Day with His Stigmata**

Christ will sit on His throne and then all shall look on Him Whom they have pierced [Jn 19:37]. There will also be a throne for Mary and for the Apostles. Jesus will say: Do you see these Wounds? They have been opened for you. This Blood? I have shed it for you. In it I have washed you in Baptism.

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<sup>668</sup> **Correspondence**, p. 318. Letter to Fr. Bragato of January 29, 1840. Fr. Michael is Fr. Michael-Angelo Gramego, who, because of his cheerfulness, was called 'the delight of the new-born Congregation' [cf. *Memoirs of the Fathers and Brothers*. Verona 1886, p. 51].

<sup>669</sup> Fr. Carlo Fedelini, Friday Sermons, manuscripts, quoted by Fr. Nello Dalle Vedove, 'Conformation to Christ Crucified'. Rome 1989, p. 52. Every Friday evening in the Church of the Stimate, there was a celebration in honor of the Passion and of the Five Wounds of the Lord. Fr. Gaspar himself was keen on giving a meditation for about half an hour, for as long as he could. Subsequently, he was sustained by his confreres. While we do not have any written notes of Fr. Gaspar's sermons, the manuscripts of Frs. C. Fedelini and J. B. Lenotti have been preserved [cf. **BERTONI** 4, pp. 272-274. Ignazio BONETTI, 'At the School of God with St. Gaspar Bertoni'. Verona 1989, p. 125, n. 156].

<sup>670</sup> **BERTONI** 5, p. 643.

<sup>671</sup> J. Baptist Lenotti, Friday Sermons. **BERTONI** 6, p. 584.

On that day we shall be saved by our good works only. Let us therefore give ourselves over to the continuous exercise of good works. And then let us throw ourselves at the feet of Jesus and say: 'Ah, Lord, on that day, there will be no place to hide myself, but today I have found it. It is in the Wounds which I have opened by my sins. Hide me in Your Wounds!'

Then we rely on Mary. On that day we shall approach her and greet her as Mother, Advocate and Queen. Then she will turn to Jesus and say: 'Here is my son and yours. He came to be in Paradise with us. He has been devoted to me. He not only paid homage to me himself, but has promoted devotion to me among his friends and relatives and children. Here he is now, looking for his reward.'

Then Jesus will turn His face benevolently towards us. He will throw His arms around us: He will thank us. Yes, He will thank us for our devotion which we have shown towards His Mother, and as a reward He will present His Wounds for us to kiss. The very thought of this gives us an immeasurable amount of consolation now. What an experience will it be then?<sup>672</sup>

## **ESPOUSALS OF THE VIRGIN MARY AND St. JOSEPH**

### **351: The Espousals of Mary and Joseph and intimacy with Christ**

Our soul must have with Christ its Spouse, to whom it is married in grace, the same relationship that Mary had with her Spouse, Joseph.

Mary never let him down in the least, but always heeded his wishes. Similarly our soul must never let God down by disobeying His commandments. Furthermore, Mary always honored her Spouse as the head of the family, perfectly fulfilling all the obligations of her state and depending entirely on him. We, too, have to honor our heavenly Spouse by fulfilling exactly whatever our condition, as workers, students, heads of families, employers and especially Christians! Mary enjoyed the company of her spouse. Let us imitate her by visiting our heavenly Spouse in the Eucharist and by keeping Him company with joy.

Finally, Mary gave him every possible assistance and comfort in all his sufferings and pains, especially in his last illness. It is true, we cannot assist directly Christ our Spouse with similar services; however, we can do it to those who represent Him, namely the poor. We can assist them when they are in need. We can instruct them when they are ignorant. We can visit them when they are sick. We can pray for them when they are dead.

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<sup>672</sup> C. Fedelini, Friday Sermons. **Bertoni** 5. []. 588; 640, f.

Thus we shall profit greatly from the spiritual espousals of our soul with is Spouse Christ, and we shall imitate the most blessed Mary in what she did for St. Joseph.<sup>673</sup>

### **352: The Holy Spouses and religious life**

Whoever enters this Religious Congregation must always have his eyes on the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph. From them he will learn the love of poverty, dedication to prayer and meditation, promptness in obedience, even I things difficult and contrary to nature, love toward God at Whose glory he should always aim, love towards neighbor whose spiritual good he is ready to serve with zeal, even at the cost of his life.<sup>674</sup>

All possible effort must be exercised so that our young candidates may be enamored with spiritual things and devotion to Our Lady and St. Joseph, by encouraging them to imitate their examples as the opportunities arise. Above all they are to be exhorted to fulfill all tasks, even small ones, with great diligence, especially when they are not seen by anybody. As a consequence, this diligent way of acting in view of pleasing God and of imitating Our Lady and St. Joseph who reached great perfection in their most hidden life, will become almost as second nature to them.<sup>675</sup>

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<sup>673</sup> Innocent Venturini, Second Little Sermon in honor of the espousals, in **Bertonian Historic Archive**, Series 2, **Sermons**. On the espousals, Verona 1992, pp. 231-234.

Fr. Gaspar had a particular devotion to the Mystery of the espousals of Mary and Joseph. He chose the Holy Spouses as Patrons and Models of the Stigmatine Congregation. He dedicated to the Holy Spouses the main altar of the Church of the Stimate and introduced as the Patronal Feast the celebration of the Holy Espousals on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of January [which date was however traditionally established by the Liturgy]. This choice, which seems surprising, has to be seen against the background of a soul considered as the Spouse of Christ, an image very dear to Fr. Gaspar [see the Marginal Numbers above, nn. **38-43; 147, 273**]. It is in this context that the above quoted meditation of Fr. I. Venturini has to be seen. This Priest was famous for his deep adherence<sup>3</sup> to the thought of Fr. Gaspar [cf. ***Summarium Additionale***. Doc. 29, pp. 600, f.]. In promoting this devotion, Fr. Gaspar had also the pastoral concern of meeting the spiritual needs of Christian couples and families.

His interest in the family apostolate is expressly testified by Fr. Camillo Bresciani, who wrote: 'He supported the holiness of marriage, prevented divorce, reunited separated couples. How many were the illegitimate and scandalous marital relationship which he did manage to solve!' For more on this subject, see J. Stofella. 'The Cult and the Devotion of the Holy Espousals, in: CS I, pp. 245-402. I. Bonetti, 'At the School of God with St. Gaspar Bertoni. Notes of Spirituality.' Verona 1989, pp. 106-111.

<sup>674</sup> J. M. Marani, 'Compendium of the Constitutions, in: CS II, p. 165.

<sup>675</sup> J. M. Marani. 'Rules', CS II, p. 256.

Oh most holy Virgin, through those virginal nuptials which you celebrated with your most chaste spouse, St. Joseph, may my soul enter into spiritual nuptials with your Son, and my Lord, Jesus.<sup>676</sup>

### **353: The Holy Spouses and the Christian family**

St. Gaspar promoted the veneration to the most holy of weddings, with the intention that his sons should find in the Holy Spouses their most powerful protectors. His second and holy aim was that good Christian couples should see in the example of the most chaste Spouses the rule and inspiration for all virtues at the same time obtaining through their powerful protection the graces which are so necessary for themselves and their children<sup>677</sup>. Marriage should be held in honor by all people, especially by those whom Divine Providence has called to live in it. To honor marriage properly, it is not sufficient for the couples to feel affection with the heart and to express it with words. Works are expected, especially those derived from their most basic duties. Among these, the pride of place is given to conjugal chastity, which is also the most beautiful mark and dignity of such a state. It is therefore purity, I mean the most special and outstanding, which characterizes and honors the marriage of the Holy Spouses, Mary and Joseph, in a manner utterly new and wondrous.

Oh most holy Virgin, in your nuptials with St. Joseph you are an excellent model of chastity to all Christian couples. We pray that you bestow on them an abundant gift of that chastity which is proper to their state and honors it so much<sup>678</sup>.

### **354: The Holy Spouses, Models of conjugal love**

Married people, would you like to have a norm for your state, which could teach you to live happily all the days of your life? Take the Holy Spouses. What was the knot which bound so tightly the heart of Mary with St. Joseph's, the heart of Joseph to Mary's, and the heart of Joseph and Mary to Jesus? It was Love!

Love caused Joseph to spare no effort to assist his wife and to keep her comfortable. Love made him tirelessly dedicated to his work in order to support the family with his earnings. Love made him to have reverence towards his Spouse, to be solicitous in serving her to watch over her and protect her with great responsibility.

Love made Mary honor Joseph as her head, even though she was infinitely superior to him in dignity. The one who was 'Queen of Heaven and Earth' made herself subject and obedient to her Spouse, so that she surpassed all other married women in reverence and respect, always attentive in fulfilling her obligation as Spouse and Mother. She was most diligent in her daily tasks, without neglecting anything

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<sup>676</sup> Traditional Prayer during the Stigmatine Novena to the Holy Spouses.

<sup>677</sup> G. Giacobbe, *Summarium Additionale*, p. 513.

<sup>678</sup> J. M. Marani, 'Panegyric of the Holy Spouses, in: **Bertonian Historic Archives**. Series II. Sermons. 'On the espousals'. Verona 1992, p. 151.

which made her progress in the spiritual life. On the contrary, she grew in virtue while living at home with her husband, even more than when praying in the Temple.

This very love drew the thoughts, joys and the entire heart of Joseph and Mary towards their beloved son, Jesus.

Here is, dear married people, a very effective example to keep you completely happy: the love of charity. A love which does not give occasion to suspicion, is an enemy of jealousy, flees from quarrels, takes away resentments, is not deceived by appearances, nor tired by waiting. On the contrary, this love maintains inseparably united faithfulness, prudence, kindness, patience, generosity, dignity and honesty.<sup>679</sup>

## OUR LADY

### **355: Mary, the Mother of God**

We can easily refer to Mary, the Mother of God what the Holy Spirit has said in the Book of Proverbs **8:29**: ***When He set for the sea its limit.*** Mary, in fact, had to conceive and enclose within her womb the Word of God, which is the sea, and the abyss of wisdom, of power, of virtue, and of all existence and goodness.

Should we not, therefore, call Mary the mistress of that sea which as measureless as it is, she was able to contain in her immaculate womb? The Virgin Mother of God had the right to have a maternal authority over Christ, as other mothers have, because one can say that she was more a Mother to Christ than other mothers are with respect to their children. As a mater of fact, Christ is born only of His Mother. That is why the Blessed Virgin had more authority over Christ than other mothers have over their children. Christ Himself did not disdain to recognize Himself as her subject: ***He was obedient to them [Lk 2:51].***

‘The God to whom Angels are subjected was subjected to Mary. We have to admire both things, then,’ this is an exhortation of St. Bernard, ‘and choose which one of the two should be admired more, either the most gracious condescension of the son, or the more excellent dignity of the Mother. Both are marvelous and miraculous things: obedience of God to a woman is unheard of humility; a woman commanding God is unparalleled loftiness’<sup>680</sup>.

If therefore Mary had such commanding authority over the Person of her Son, if she has such an easy and determining influence over the Heart of the King, Who is certainly her Sovereign and her son as well, how could she not have clear control over all His treasures, namely over that immense sea of grace and mercy?<sup>681</sup>

<sup>679</sup> I Venturini, Sermon in Honor of the Espousals of Mary and Joseph, in: **Bertonian Historic Archives**. Series II, Sermons, ‘On the Espousals’. Verona 1992, p. 151.

<sup>680</sup> St. Bernard, Homilies. I, 9. PL 183, 60, ff.

<sup>681</sup> Early Sermons, 29. ‘The Name of Mary’. **MssB 1075-1080. PVC pp. 312-314.**

### **356: Mary, Queen of Heaven and Earth**

Mary is Mother of the King whom God has established over all the works of His hands. Consequently, she is also established as Queen and as such she possesses by right, all the kingdoms of the Son. How could she in fact not possess her Son's Kingdom, she who possesses entirely the Son Himself?<sup>682</sup>

Mary is first of all Queen of Angels, as the Church says in her hymns, because of her excellence and dignity. Secondly, she is such because of her eminent grace and virtue. But, at the same time she is such on account of her own true authority. One sees this from the respect angels have towards her. Such reverence is clearly demonstrated by the fact that the archangel Gabriel greeted her with such veneration and respect.

The Queenship of Mary is also extended to the world, namely, over all people. One cannot possibly separate the royal power of the son from that of His Mother. One is the flesh of Mary and Christ, one in spirit, one in love. From the moment it was said: **The Lord is with you** [Lk 1:28], the promise and the gift grew inseparably together. Therefore one has to believe that the glory of the Son is not only similar to that of the Mother, but that it is the same.

What a beautiful field is opening up for us to consider the love of Mary towards us and her desire to save our souls! We do not need to waste our time with much reasoning. It is a field which is open to everybody and which is easy to walk through. Let us enter into it through our personal considerations. We shall discover how vast it is, we shall enjoy its beauty, we shall enjoy its priceless and wholesome fruit<sup>683</sup>.

Is it difficult for Mary to intercede? Is it difficult for Jesus to grant a grace?<sup>684</sup>

### **357: The Immaculate One**

The holiness of Mary was like a most clear sky which was never clouded even by the shadow of sin. Her spirit, always enraptured in God, was never hindered nor held back by any earthly thing. Mary is surely the only one who can be called wholly beautiful and spotless before God: **You are all beautiful, no blemish in you!** [Sgs 4:7]. She did not experience the actual disorderly suggestions of a fallen nature, but this very disorder of nature was removed completely from her. Rather it is even truer to say that it was not removed. In fact, through her immaculate conception God's grace prevented the action of our flawed human nature, so that sin never reigned in her body. Who can therefore understand with human judgments, which are normally very limited, the excellent purity of the Mother of God?

O God! What superhuman purity did the divine motherhood of Mary demand of her! A purity superior to that of angels. In fact as much as she was exalted over all the

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<sup>682</sup> Rupert of Deutz, Commentary on the Song of Songs. Book 3. PL 168, 877.

<sup>683</sup> Early Sermons, n. 29. **MssB 1081-1090; PVC pp. 315-319.**

<sup>684</sup> **Spiritual Journal.** May 18, 1810.

choirs of angels because of her dignity as Mother of God, so much did she have to surpass in an unimaginable measure the purity of those most pure beings, as lofty as they are.

Let then all those of us who are devoted to Mary and imitators of her purity, approach her and sit, as it were, under the shade of this most pleasant tree of paradise. Its fruit will be sweet to our taste. She kindly stretches the branches of her protection over all her servants, even to the lowest ones. Those of us who, in the scorching desert of this world, feel they are walking tormented by the fierce burning of passions, look for shelter confidently under the shade of this healing tree. They will find refreshment, rest and health for their tired and confused hearts.<sup>685</sup>

### **358: Christ is waiting for us. Mary is calling us.**

The Feast of the Holy House of Mary, which came to rest among us permanently at Loreto, is like a gentle invitation to our heart that it may fly quickly to visit in spirit those sacred walls. Blessed walls, more splendid than royal palaces, you have welcomed the Queen of Heaven, the Spouse of the Holy Spirit. You are the witnesses of the errand of the angel and, what matters more, you are witnesses of the great mystery of the Incarnation!

It seems to me that on such an occasion God has a request to make of us. He asks for our heart. Like the House of Loreto, He wants to consecrate our heart and make of it a temple where He can dwell. ***Do you not know, my brothers,*** exclaims St. Paul, ***that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?*** [1 Co 3:16].

How consoling to see our soul similar to a temple, to dialogue with God in the peace of a good conscience, to find within ourselves all consolation and a sweet joy for our present life, together with hope for the future! Shall we hesitate for a moment to grasp such happiness! Christ is waiting for us! Mary is calling us! Yes, it is she who wants to open our heart to her Son.

Holy Virgin, here we are at your feet. Our eyes are fixed on you, and so are all our trust and all our supplications. You have made our heart a temple for your Son. Therefore, we hope that, having welcomed our King as a guest into our heart, He will give us a place in His Kingdom.<sup>686</sup>

### **359: The Virgin of the Annunciation**

Let us contemplate the Blessed Virgin and the Angel who greets her. What an honor that God chose to be born of a woman and assume our flesh! How much should we congratulate Mary on this. She is the source of all goodness for us. She is the only one God is looking for with satisfaction. What a great reverence we should have for Mary!

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<sup>685</sup> Early Sermons, n. 30. 'The Purity of Mary'. **MssB 1115-1120; PVC pp. 327-329.**

<sup>686</sup> Early Sermons, n. 8. 'The Holy House transported to our Heart.' **MssB 573-592.**



The Virgin and the Angel, in the little House of Nazareth, talk about the Mystery of the Incarnation: ***Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord*** [Lk 1:38]. Humility. This is the condition which God demands of those, in whom He intends to perform great things, for their own good and the good of others.

Let us consider how the Virgin, after the Angel had completed his errand, gave thanks to God with a great spirit of faith and humility. In the same way the faithful, and all the more so the priest, must relate to God after the reception of the Holy Eucharist. It must be with that same spirit of faith and humility, with a very personal recollection. We are honored by God as the Virgin was.<sup>687</sup>

### **360: A concrete program of Marian devotion**

After God, it is Mary who should have pride of place in your heart. You should not lose sight of her at any cost. You should, rather, see that your devotion to her be enlivened more and more, day in and day out.

You will recite every day the third part of the Rosary of Mary. In any trouble, small or great, you will invoke her most powerful name. You will prepare the celebration of her liturgical feasts with novenas, during which you will make your meditation around the respective mysteries, employing loving conversation and simple vocal prayers.<sup>688</sup>

St. Ignatius of Loyola never began any task whatsoever without first entrusting it to Our Lady. Nor did he make any petition to God except through her. He used to carry a picture of her around his neck. In his bed he always kept the Rosary of Our Lady with the intention of falling asleep while thinking of her and of turning again to her when waking up.<sup>689</sup>

### **361: Spirit of total entrustment to Mary**

I greet you, my Mother. Give me your blessing. Bless me and all who are dear to me. Vouchsafe to offer to God today, all I have to do and suffer, in union with your merits and those of your Divine son. I offer you and consecrate to your service all my being and whatever belongs to me, placing everything under your protection. Obtain for me, dear Lady, purity of soul and body and grant that I may not do anything today

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<sup>687</sup> **Spiritual Exercises.** Meditations. **MssB 2472-2479.**

<sup>688</sup> From a Rule for the day suggested to the young Gaspar by his Spiritual Director, Fr. Nicholas Galvani. It is preserved in the archives of the Stimmate [cf. **BERTONI 2**, pp. 19-24].

<sup>689</sup> Notes on St. Ignatius, taken from the Life written by G. Peter Maffei. **MssB 8722.**  
**BERTONI 2**, p. 692.

displeasing to God. I ask this through your Immaculate Conception and your perfect Virginity.<sup>690</sup>

Most holy Virgin Mary, Mother of God, though unworthy to be your servant, moved however by your wonderful mercy and by the desire of serving you, I choose you this day as my personal Queen, Advocate and Mother. I resolve firmly to serve you always and do what I can to see that others may serve you, too. I entreat you, therefore, most compassionate Mother, to accept me in your service for ever. I pray, be always favorable to me, and obtain for me the grace to act in thought, word and deed in such a way that I may not give any offense to you and your divine Son. Remember me and do not abandon me at the hour of my death.<sup>691</sup>

### **362: A secret for efficiency in pastoral activity**

One day a young parish priest paid Fr. Gaspar a visit. He was discouraged by the fact that [as happened to his predecessor] his parishioners showed complete indifference and even hostility toward him, and were deserting the church in great numbers. So much so that he had lost hope and intended to resign. 'But, there is also hope in the mother of Holy Hope!' explained forcefully Fr. Gaspar. 'Start the Marian Oratory! Call and attract the youth. Welcome them and embrace them as a loving father does. At the beginning you will deal with only a few. Then Our Lady's solicitude and untiring zeal will increase the number day by day. Talk often to them about = the devotion to Mary. Put them under her patronage. Trust, yes, firmly trust, that by beginning to be a shepherd to the children, the parents themselves will come in time to listen to you, and to recognize you as their shepherd and father, too.' As a matter of fact, things went as Fr. Gaspar had foreseen. After having dedicated himself to the care of the youth in the Marian Oratory, according to the suggestion of Fr. Gaspar, that parish priest saw the parents get rid of their hostility and indifference towards him. They realized that he could not be shepherd only to their children, but had to be also, and in the first place, to their parents. Then it was that the relationship between parishioners and parish priest became a very happy one.

When that parish priest returned to Fr. Gaspar to report about the good result of his suggestion, the saint gave the merit all to God, expressing to Him all his gratitude. He said it was thanks to Mary's protection that such a benefit was conferred on that parish and its shepherd.<sup>692</sup>

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<sup>690</sup> **Spiritual Journal**. May 24, 1808. This is a prayer which St. Gaspar copied and made his own. He used to recite it daily. He gave it to his sons as the greeting to our Lady at the beginning of the day. [cf. *SpEx* n. 234].

<sup>691</sup> This is the traditional formula for the reception into the Marian Congregation. Bertoni offered this prayer at the age of 12 in 1789 [cf. **BERTONI** 1, p. 208]. And renewed it together with his Community of the Stimate in 1824 [**BERTONI** 4. 390].

<sup>692</sup> G. Giaccobe, Life. **SA** p. 403.

### **363: The excellence of the Rosary**

I do not know any other exercise of piety that can claim to have more excellent characteristics [of helpfulness] since its very beginning. The Queen of Heaven herself suggests it and recommends it. It has been promoted and spread as one of the most valuable resources for the life of the Church. It is a weapon of defense against heresy and vice. It is a refuge in most pressing needs. It is a support in terrible times of trouble.

The high quality of this prayer itself appears both from the perfection of the arts which constitute it and from the consistent structure of its practical use.

The Rosary consists in fifteen decades of Hail Mary's, separated by the Our Father, which is said in between and of the Mysteries of our Redemption which are recalled through pious meditation. Now, what prayer is ore excellent than the Our Father, and, after that, what is more noble than the Hail Mary? As regards the mysteries of the life, death and resurrection of Christ, they certainly constitute the highest subject for meditation. The essential purpose of the Rosary is to imitate what the mysteries promise. Is there a holier and more sublime purpose than that? And all this through the meditation of Mary, which, after that of Christ is certainly the most advantageous and effective.

When one considers the practical structure of this prayer, how far-reaching and how involving it is. Many things are involved: the tongue to praise, the mind to meditate, the heart to love, all of these with extreme ease.<sup>693</sup>

### **364: The power of the Rosary**

The Rosary devotion has helped the Church enormously. Thanks to it the Christian people have been given steadfast protection and kept in safety for many ages against the formidable attacks of their most powerful enemies.

In the 12<sup>th</sup> century the Albigenses had been spreading an anti-Catholic movement which was a summary of all heresies. It refused infant baptism, it denied the Eucharist, it derided penitence, it removed the hope of future resurrection, it destroyed faith in the one Creator of the universe. Churches were knocked down, altars were demolished, priests were tortured and put to death.

In such difficult situations, to whom should one have recourse? To Mary. To the one who is the strongest support of the Christian people against their adversaries. To her about whom the liturgy sings with special praise: Mary, you alone have defeated the heresies of the whole world!<sup>694</sup> And help did not delay in coming. The Queen of Heaven herself brought it. She appeared to St. Dominic Guzman and gave him this errand: 'Go preach the Rosary. Know that this form of prayer is the most pleasing to

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<sup>693</sup> Early Sermons, n. 39. 'The Rosary'. **MssB 1367-1375**. This sermon was delivered October 4, 1807.

<sup>694</sup> Roman Missal of St. Pius V. Common of the BVM.

me and my Son. It will be of very special advantage to the Church.' The result was miraculous, and it confirmed that such devotion remains most excellent and efficacious for salvation.

In the year 1571, the Turks called for an expedition with the aim of destroying the armies of the Christian countries and so to insure for themselves control over the sea. The warring fleets faced each other near the port of Lepanto on Sunday, October 7<sup>th</sup>. That was the day when all Christianity was praying the Rosary with great devotion and supplication to invoke the help of Mary.

And help came swift and plenty for all to see. In living memory, there has been no victory in which the hand of God was experienced with such evidence. S. Pius V decreed that each year on the first Sunday of October, there should be a celebration commemorating Our Lady of Victory. Gregory XIII testified that that victory was won by the prayer of the Rosary, and asked that, on that day of remembrance, Mary should be honored with the title Queen of the Rosary.<sup>695</sup>

### **365: The fruitfulness of the Rosary**

You can see in the Rosary an exercise of prayer which is the most noble in its origin, the most perfect in its structure, the most widely recognized by the authority of witnesses and confirmed by miracles. Here are the excellent mystical roses with which a splendid crown is intertwined for the Virgin. They are like roses transplanted from the heavenly gardens into the fertile garden of the Church.

Mary herself is called Mystical Rose. She is that Mystical Rose which makes the just happy, sinners healed, beginners attracted, those who are professing to shine brighter and the perfect ones crowned. She calls under her mantle those who are troubled. She becomes a protecting fence for those who are tempted. She enters both the well cultivated garden of great people as well as the simple little employs the unemployed. She does not hamper the worker. She renews the fervent. She does not discourage the lukewarm.

Let us all plant the flowers of the Rosary, water them, nourish them, and make them known. Let our sins and daughters adorn themselves with them as a protection for piety and as a defense of virtue. Let their fragrance perfume our homes. Let these flowers adorn the churches, the altars of the saints, the tombs of the faithful. Let us make a garland, woven with these flowers around the high throne of the Mother of God.<sup>696</sup>

### **366: The Rosary: a lesson of life**

The Rosary is a prayer adapted for all Christians. In it sinners get a sure means for their conversion, and the just a savory food for their life of prayer. In the meditation

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<sup>695</sup> Early Sermons, n. 39. **MssB 1368-1395.**

<sup>696</sup> Early Sermons, n. 39. **MssB 1377-1397**

on the life and death of Christ, the former find a powerful remedy against the poison of the flesh and the senses. In the contemplation of the glory of Christ the latter find a gentle invitation to long for eternal life.<sup>697</sup>

Fr. Gaspar confided to Fr. Lenotti the thought he used to have while meditating on the second Joyful Mystery of the Rosary. He said: 'I am always impressed by what Mary did for Elizabeth. As soon as she was told of Elizabeth's pregnancy she left immediately. She intended to go and assist her in the difficulties of her condition. She left immediately and in haste, as the evangelist says [cf. Lk 1:39], though the road was long and difficult. So great was her solicitude in helping that sick person and her charity towards her. And once she arrived, she stayed with her not one or two days, for three full months, giving help in her need.'<sup>698</sup>

One day [Fr. Benciolini relates the incident], Fr. Gaspar went to pay a visit to a sick brother and suggested to him to say the Hail Mary in order to overcome weariness. 'But', he said, 'meditate on it, as I do myself when I have sleepless nights. I recite the Rosary, but I meditate on the words of the Hail Mary, spending even one hour and more on each one. I do the same with the Our Father. In this way I go through the night'.<sup>699</sup>

### **367: Fr. Gaspar's devotion to Mary**

After the suppression of the Order of the Servants of Mary in Verona, our beloved Virgin inspired [Fr. Bertoni as] another 'Philip Benizi', to keep alive devotion towards her as his Lady and Mother.<sup>700</sup>

From his youth, Fr. Bertoni cultivated a very special filial devotion to Mary. He used to invoke her often and entreat her to be always a merciful mother and a powerful advocate for him. Every single day he used to offer himself to her anew. During the month of May one can say he used to offer himself entirely to her, making, together with traditional sacrifices, a more intense effort to practice virtue. He did not let any Marian festivity pass by without special preparation in prayer and some particular spiritual resolution.<sup>701</sup>

To describe how much devotion he had towards Mary, and how much he did for her, and how much he tried to move the hearts of all to love and respect Our Lady, one would have to write a book.<sup>702</sup>

He used to preach very often about Our Lady. From those sermons we can understand that his soul was filled with love of Mary.<sup>703</sup>

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<sup>697</sup> Early Sermons, n. 39. See above, **MssB 1376**.

<sup>698</sup> Miscellanea Lenotti, **SA** p. 313.

<sup>699</sup> Miscellanea Lenotti, **SA**, p. 188.

<sup>700</sup> From the Funeral Commemoration of Fr. Camillo Bresciani. **SA**, p. 207.

<sup>701</sup> Fr. G. Giacobbe, Life, **SA**, p. 313.

<sup>702</sup> *ib.*, p. 509.

## St. JOSEPH

### **368: The Greatness of St. Joseph**

Jesus was conceived and born of the Blessed Virgin Mary through the Holy Spirit, without any human intercourse. However, by the fact that Mary belonged completely to Joseph, who had power and authority over her as his property, the fruit of this field is rightly attributed also to him who owns it. As a consequence, therefore, to be very explicit, we must say that the beloved Jesus, Who came to fill the world with all blessings, is the fruit of the Espousals of Mary and Joseph. He is the offspring of this holy marriage. Jesus wanted to be known and recognized as son of the holy couple, Mary and Joseph. As He called Mary by the sweet name of Mother, in the same way, He called Joseph Father while putting His arms around him.

Noble by birth, Joseph descended from Patriarchs and Kings. He excelled in all gifts of nature and was perfect in all virtues. He is called by scripture a 'just man' [Mt 1:9], which is to indicate that he possessed perfectly all virtues.

Now I understand why the Evangelists, who are so generous in praising some individuals, were so restrained in paying tribute to Joseph. They knew that he, who had been chosen by the Holy Spirit to become the husband of Mary, must have been filled with very many outstanding qualities. Therefore, they were just as concerned to make him known for what he was: the husband of Mary. Husband of Mary! This means to have the same heart, the same soul with that heart, and that soul which carried the Heart and Soul of the Son of God. Husband of Mary! It is the same as saying that he is completely similar to his Spouse in heart, talents, behavior, holiness and virtue<sup>704</sup>.

### **369: St. Joseph, teacher of the interior life**

In our devotion and love let us never separate what God has joined together with an indissoluble bond namely Mary and Joseph. If we are really willing to pursue our progress in the way of perfection, we should have a special devotion to St. Joseph. To him God seems to have entrusted all people who are consecrated to interior life.

It is not sufficient to have recourse to St. Joseph in prayer. We have to beg him to get involved with us by imitating him, taking him as a model, especially with regard to obedience and recollection. St. Joseph is the saint of silence. We shall then invoke him frequently. We shall endeavor to make our meditation with diligence. For his sake we shall take special care to obey faithfully and to control our tongue. If we do this we shall allow St. Joseph to take up the direction of our soul and he will obtain many graces for us.

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<sup>703</sup> *Positio*, p. 134.

<sup>704</sup> I. Venturini, 'Semron in Honor of the espousals of Mary and Joseph', in: **Bertonian Historic Archives**. See above, p. 149.

Finally, let us dedicate our heart to St. Joseph. Let him see that it should be preserved, purified, and used as he wishes. He will adorn it with virtues and fill it with love for Jesus and Mary. He is the master of the interior life. Let us become his disciples! We shall be sure to make progress in the way of perfection under his direction<sup>705</sup>.

### **370: St. Joseph does not ask, but commands**

Jesus is the tree of life. Mary is the Paradise in which that tree was planted. Joseph is the angel who defends it [cf. Gn 3:24]. Jesus is the living bread which came from heaven. Mary is the ship which brings it from afar. Joseph is the helmsman who steers and directs them. After Mary, Joseph is the holiest, the most privileged, and most powerful in heaven. He is not asking, he is commanding. Let us then turn to him with great confidence.

Priests, who are called by God to the great task of leading souls to salvation, should ask of Joseph some of his charity and zeal. Fathers of families should ask for the grace of fulfilling their duties of mutual love and faithfulness, and seeing that their children are educated in the Fear of God. Youth should pray to him to be granted to keep the lily of purity unblemished. Those who are rich and noble should ask St. Joseph to make them richer and nobler by the practice of Christian virtues. Those who are poor and of low condition should ask St. Joseph for the strength to bear with serenity and cheerfulness the labors and trials of life and to love poverty in the spirit of the Gospel. Those who are crushed under the weight of the Cross should ask St. Joseph to be able to carry it with patience, knowing that it is the surest way to Heaven.

Also the sinner, who has offended the Lord and has nailed Him to the Cross, can put his trust in St. Joseph. The good father will pray for him. There he is, stretching his hand to help the repentant sinner to return to Jesus. Will Jesus reject him? No, He will welcome him with loving kindness, because of the prayer of such a good father<sup>706</sup>.

## **SOME LITURGICAL FEASTS**

### **371: New Year's Day**

In your letter, you wish me a thousand blessings for this New Year, not excluding crosses. I thank you for such great kindness, which is exquisitely spiritual. As a matter of fact, what could we wish our own friends better than crosses? Certainly to me you could not have wished a more pleasant thing. Not that I have the strength to bear them, but it is the Lord who gives me the grace of appreciating them. Through your prayers and God's mercy I expect to obtain, together with suffering, patience, too. So, as I see the coming to me quickly and from the very first days of the year, I

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<sup>705</sup> Fr. J. B. Lenotti, Community exhortations. **CS III, pp. 284-301.**

<sup>706</sup> From the Sermons of C. Fedelini. **CS I, pp. 316-319.**

welcome them cheerfully, and say: 'Here are the crosses which my dear Fr. Louis foretold, praise the Lord!' <sup>707</sup>

I thank you for the New Year's wishes. I pray that the Lord will give you in return all the blessings which you need most. In the meantime, I rejoice in the greatest gift the Lord granted you, to give thanks amidst tribulations, because patience makes perfect things [Jas 1:4], and a person, who is grateful also in troubles, draws many blessings upon himself. There is nothing that can give greater honor to God than this. <sup>708</sup>

### **372: All Saints' Day**

All Saints' Day stirs up in our hearts the most intense desires of the blessedness of heaven. Today's Gospel indicates to us the shortest way to get there: ***Blessed are the pure in spirit, because theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, because they shall be comforted. Blessed are the gentle, because they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who are thirsty and hunger for justice, because they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, because they shall find mercy. Blessed are the pure of heart, because they will see God. Blessed are the peace-makers, because they shall be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of justice, because theirs is the Kingdom of heaven*** [Mk 5:3-10].

It is not sufficient to love blessedness in order to possess it. One has to comb that path which Christ has indicated, which the saints have trodden. Take courage. Keep looking up! We see those triumphant hosts of saints on the walls of blessed Jerusalem. They are our friends, our brothers. They are ready to help us on our journey towards that Kingdom by the encouragement of their example and the assistance of their prayer. They long to see us with them, they wait for us, they call us.

We see Jesus, our Leader, anxious to share with us the glory of His kingdom and the full possession of His heritage. It is He Himself who set the ladder in front of us and exhorts us to climb it. He promises His grace to comfort us all through our climbing. He stretches His right hand to us.

The first decisive step one takes at the beginning of any task determines all that follows. Let us rid our hearts of any attachment to the world. Let us make at least an act of renunciation in spirit. Let us keep our anger in check. Let us learn from Him to be kind and meek of heart. Let us give up the empty joys of the world. As far as we are concerned we should be sorry for our faults, with the assurance that our mourning will be changed into joy, which in turn, nobody will be able to snatch away from us. In the meantime we do not thirst except for justice, nor are we intent except to be merciful. Thus our spirit will be purified in such a way that it will begin to see the first rays of its

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<sup>707</sup> **Correspondence**, pp. 317, f. Letter to Fr. L. Bragato. January 29, 1840.

<sup>708</sup> **Correspondence**, p. 284. Letter to L. Naudet of December 30, 1831.



future happiness, and will bring peace in our hearts. Then while our eyes will say: Paradise is beautiful, our hearts will boldly say: Paradise is mine.<sup>709</sup>

### **373: All Souls' Day**

Scripture narrates that Judas the Maccabee sent 10,000 silver drachmas to Jerusalem with the intention of offering sacrifices for the soldiers fallen in battle. The same Scripture praises this initiative with the famous expression: ***It is a salutary and holy thought to pray for the dead, that they may be absolved from their sins*** [2 M 12:46].

In his book of ***Dialogues***, St. Gregory the Great tells us that he ordered that Mass should be celebrated for thirty consecutive days to pray for Justus, a monk of his monastery of St. Andrew's. He then heard that the monk's brother had a revelation that after the Last Mass was celebrated, the soul of that monk flew to heaven free from all pain of sin.<sup>710</sup>

St. Augustine affirms also that one of the holiest exercises and most pious activities in which people can get involved during this life is to offer sacrifices, alms and prayers for the dead who are in Purgatory, for we are their family.<sup>711</sup>

Above all, prayer is the key to open the blessed door of Paradise, not only for ourselves, but also for our neighbor. Let us then offer prayers and petitions for the souls in Purgatory. It does not require much effort to pay. We can do it everywhere, at any time, in any circumstance. How much spiritual advantage shall we have just for ourselves! This is in fact an act of charity and of mercy, the most exquisite! We shall also derive an outstanding temporal advantage.

What we can be sure of is that we shall never be abandoned in our needs, nor ignored in our supplications and desires, provided, that through the charity we exercised with regard to our deceased brothers and sisters, we have been fortunate to make God our debtor. Because He said: ***What you did to one of the least Brothers of Mine, you did it to Me*** [Mt 25:40]<sup>712</sup>.



<sup>709</sup> Early Sermons, n. 37. The Beatitudes. **MssB 1267-1296 PVC pp. 216-224.**

<sup>710</sup> St. Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*. Book 4, c. 55. PL 77, 420, ff.

<sup>711</sup> St. Augustine, Sermon 172, 2. PL 38,936.

<sup>712</sup> Early Sermons, n. 31. 'The Souls in Purgatory'. **MssB 1139-1149. PVC pp. 196-199.**