

# Three “Franciscan” Panegyrics



**Honoring St. Francis of Assisi and St. Veronica Giuliani**



**by St. Gaspar Bertoni**

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**[Honoring the anniversary of Founder’s Ordination to the Holy Priesthood, in 1800]**

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## Three “Franciscan” Panegyrics by St. Gaspar Bertoni<sup>1</sup>

{I} Panegyric in Honor of St. Francis of Assisi, preached in St. Firmus’ Major Church, Verona , Italy - October 4, 1808 [evening before?].

[Franciscan Three Ages of the Interior Life]  
[Introduction: Definitions and Texts]

**1795:**<sup>2</sup> Perfection consists in conformity with Christ: ... *everyone shall be perfect, if he be as his master.* [cf. Lk 6:40]<sup>3</sup>.

Since it is our intention now to expose with simple words, which are the only ones at our disposal, the sublime life of the humble St. Francis, to his great praise and honor and for our instruction, we need to fix our attention on the character of his perfection, and to distinguish its grades.

The perfection of every Servant of God consists in imitating the Divine Master. It was a singular imitation of Christ that forms the character of St. Francis.

**1796:** Wishing, then, to expose with simple words, which are all that we can muster, the sublime life of the humble St. Francis, for his just praise, and no less for our own useful instruction, it is not difficult to fix our attention on the character of his perfection and to be able to distinguish its levels.

The perfection of every great Saint consists in conformity with Jesus Christ: the perfect conformity with Jesus Christ is the character of the sublime holiness of Francis.

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<sup>1</sup> St. Gaspar Bertoni: born, October 8, 1777 in Verona, Italy; founded Congregation of the Sacred Stigmata of Our Lord Jesus on Nov. 4, 1816; died, June 12th, 1853; Beatified on Nov. 1, 1975; canonized on Nov. 1, 1989. [NB: In the Franciscan tradition, there are two special homilies - morning and evening - attributed to St. Bonaventure [cf. *Francis of Assisi. The Early Documents*. A Three Volume Series. New York City Press 2000, pp. 508-524; Vol. II, *Saint Francis of Assisi. The Founder*]. Here are two panegyrics in honor of St. Francis, preached by the Stigmatine Founder on October 4th, 1808, perhaps following the same custom of a morning and evening intervention. **Much of the text is in Latin, perhaps copied. [The texts abound in “pious exaggerations”, more in accord with the spirituality earlier times].**

<sup>2</sup> These marginal numbers were affixed to the copies made of the Stigmatine Founder’s original documents by the Stigmatine scholar of these writings, Fr. Louis Benaglia, CSS [+ Dec. 3, 1988]. These are collected in a typewritten five volume set, *Manoscritti di Don Gaspar Bertoni*. Series III. Fonti Bertoniane. Archivio Storico Bertoniano. Roma 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Since Fr. Bertoni’s text was the Latin Vulgate, the English translation used in these sermons will be: *The Holy Bible translated from the Latin Vulgate*. Douay Version.

Perfection, which springs forth from charity and which finds its perfection in charity, consists in the imitation of Christ: the life of Christ is expressed His teachings.

**1797:** *Be followers of me as I also am of Christ* [cf. 1 Co 4:16].

*Charity is the bond of perfection.* [Col 3:14].

*Everyone shall be perfect, if he be as his master* [Lk 6:40]

*Charity is the bond of perfection* [Col 3:14].

*Everyone shall be perfect if he be as his master* [Lk 6:40].

Perfection, which from charity has its root as well as its accomplishment, consists in the conformity of our life with that of Jesus, our Lord. And since this divine Master *began to do and to teach* [Ac 1:1], His actions are individual to Him and of incomparable excellence, but they are expressed under the heading of His teachings for imitation.

### [1] Variations on the Three Ages of the Interior Life

**1798:** *The charity... is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us* [Rm 5:5]. When this charity is newly born, and still a baby, it still is similar to Christ according to all His precepts through the work of every virtue. This is the common evangelical perfection, necessary for all the sons and daughters of His Church, regenerated in the light of His Gospel. This charity, when it is nourished, and has grown and become adult, conforms one to Christ according to His counsels, through the work of supererogation, and of every heroic virtue. This is the perfection proper to the Saints, the heroes, of apostolic men and women. A seraphic charity in a wayfarer, which transforms one into Christ through the most strict and literal fulfillment of His every word, and by the most vivid copy of his every individual action, this is the perfection that is characteristic of the humble Patriarch of the poor Franciscans, the most perfect lover and imitator of Christ, who cries out to us: *be followers of me as I am of Christ.* [1 Co 4:16].

**1799:** For this purpose, as St. Bernardine observes, God places him to shine out in His Church in the dangerous darkness of the final times, so that he might point out in the way of perfection the manifest sign of every virtue, example, and scope, by which we are led back to Christ, as St. Bernardine writes: ‘so that against the dangerous darkness, he might show to us a manifest sign in the way of perfection, by which we would be led back to Christ, the exemplar and end of perfect virtue.’

**1800:** So, as I am proposing this evening his transforming charity, not only as to admire this most perfect life in the fitting tribute, but further that we might be led to imitate even more for the usefulness of your souls, it is fitting for me to do so.

Since we are in agreement that we are not only to admire him, but also to imitate him, it is fitting that we become instructed in his perfection and in his charity ... it is fitting that we go from the most common levels, to the more special parts of his life. So, I am proposing Francis to you, not only for your admiration. We are not only to admire him, but also to imitate him. Thus, it is fitting that in a way that is proper for our smallness, then passing over from the better known realities to those more concealed, and finally to those that are the most mysterious - from the lowest to the very heights, even to the most sublime levels. We need to ascend by steps to the knowledge of his charity, to distinguish by parts the most sublime path of his perfection.

**1801:** These levels of perfection are explained by Christ in His eight Beatitudes, where the first three are meant for the believer to decline from evil; and the four following are geared toward exercising good; and the final one, is aimed at helping each to sustain adversities. The levels of charity responding to these are explained by St Paul:

- charity from a pure heart [in so far as it declines from evil];
- and a good conscience [in so far as it follows after good];
- and an unfeigned faith [in so far as it holds strong against adversities] [1 Tm 1:5].

*Everyone shall be perfect if he be as his master* [Lk 6:40].

Evangelical perfection which the Blessed Francis observed, and in the witness of which Jesus Christ Himself sealed him with His Stigmata.

**1802:** The state of charity is three-fold:

- the Lowest: which consists in the observation of the legal mandates;
- the Median: which consists in the carrying out of the spiritual counsels;
- Supreme: which is in the realization of the eternal joys and consolations.

Thus, a three-fold perfection is had; which distinction is found in the Scriptures: that of Necessity, that of Supererogation; and that of Ultimate Fullness.

**1803:** The Perfection of Necessity: *You shall be perfect, and without spot before the Lord your God* [Dt 18:13] [cf. St. Thomas for whom perfection is that from which nothing is lacking].

The Gloss adds here: 'without criminal stain'. - Prosper writes in his "Concerning the Contemplative Life": the perfect are those who, willing what God wills, do not acquiesce in any sins by which He is offended.

**The Perfection of Supererogation:** **Mt 19:21:** *If you will be perfect, go sell what you have and give to the poor...* Jerome wrote to Heliodorus: The perfect servant of Christ has nothing other than Christ: and if he/she have something other than Christ, such a person is not perfect.

**The Perfection of Ultimate Fullness:** **Pr 4:18:** *But the path of the just, as a shining light, goes forward and increases even to perfect day.* [this means: the resplendent clarity of the divine vision]. St. Augustine in his Soliloquy, 1: The truly perfect virtue is that reason which comes all the way to the end, where the blessed life is achieved.

**1804:** The first and the second perfection differ from the third much like merit differs from reward. The Median perfection differs from the Lowest level much like a counsel is distinguished from a precept. All of these were in Blessed Francis, as appears from the reading of his *Legend*; all precepts as well as counsels refer to the fulfillment and the observance of that charity.

**1 Tm 1:5:** *Now the end of the commandment is charity, from a pure heart, and a good conscience, and an unfeigned faith.*

Decline from evil - accomplish good - and patiently endure adversities.

In these words the three-fold act of charity is insinuated: on account of the declining from evil, there is the 'pure heart'; on account of the following of good, there is the 'good conscience'; on account of the tolerance of adversities, there is the 'unfeigned faith'. I.e., a faith that is not fragile and weak, but one that is strong against adversities.

**1805:** This three-fold act of charity proceeds in two ways from the habit of the virtue: either according to the law of precept and of necessary, or universal obligation; or, according to the law of counsel and that of spontaneous and spiritual obligation: the second includes the first, and adds to it in so far as the possibility of the wayfarer would admit. So it is that the second level is said to be 'perfect' with regard to the first: however, with respect to the second, more advanced level, the first is said to be imperfect.

**1806:** Ambrose writes in his *Concerning the Offices*: every office is either median or perfect; which can be proven from the authority of the Scriptures. Mt 19:7: *If you will enter life, keep the commandments.* **V. 18:** *You shall do no murder, you shall not commit adultery.* These are the duties of the Median level, to which something is still lacking. **V. 21:** *If you will to be perfect, go sell what you have, and give to the poor, ... and come, follow me*. This is the Perfect duty, which the Greeks call catorthoma, by which all are corrected which might leave some still lapsed. [The saint treats these in *De Off.* 1, 35, f. - t. 2. 11 B].

**1807:** Therefore, we are treating of evangelical perfection according to the common acceptance, and we intend to speak of this Median Perfection.

From what has been said it might be gathered that evangelical perfection is the conformity of the way-farer to Christ, through that habit of virtue by which evils are declined from in a supererogatory manner, goods are accomplished, and adversities are suffered. In these three, three levels of evangelical consist, which the Blessed Francis perfectly achieved. In the mystery of this Christ consigned him with His own Sacred Stigmata as a testimony of his consummate imitation and evangelical perfection.

*And patience has a perfect work [Jas 1:4], in fortitude and perseverance unto the very end of the cross and of life: And you are they who have continued with me, Lk 22:28: to the very end: for the faith, justice and virtue of Christ; in the assembly of innocence and of the rest of the virtues.*

Bede commented: The one whose patience cannot be conquered, such a one is proven to be perfect.

St. Cyprian stated: Take away patience from charity, and one does not endure desolations [cf. *Regarding the Good of Patience*, 497 A].

Tertullian so depicts the portrait of patience: The countenance of the patient person is tranquil and placid, pure brow, not drawn in the wrinkles of wrath, or the furrows of anger; the untoward events this person sees as insignificant, expressing humility in one's eyes, not unhappiness, and this individual's mouth is sealed with the honor of taciturnity. His color remains the same before what is secure as well as what is harmful; he disdains the advances of the devil, and threatening laughter. His clothing lies in cleanliness next to his breast, and suited to his body, as one who is neither angered or inflated. Such a one sits on the throne of his most meek Spirit and most gentle, Who is not disturbed by upsetment, nor by the overshadowed moon. But is always open and simple in tender simplicity. Elias is thus described in the third level [1 K 19:12]. For wherever God is, there is also His student in patience. When, therefore, the Spirit of God has descended, He is accompanied by individual patience. [cf. *Concerning Patience*, c. 15, p. 70].

**1809:** There are three levels of patience: to endure patiently - freely - joyfully. [These are described by three military ranks:]

The One standing before the Standard [*Antesignanus*]: this is Christ: Lk 12:50: And I have a baptism wherewith I am to be baptized: and how I am straitened until it be accomplished?

The Captain of the Centurion [*Primipilus*]: this is Peter: 1 P 4:13: *But if you partake of the sufferings of Christ, rejoice that when His glory is revealed...* etc.

The Standard Bearer, [the Ensign] [Signifer]: this is Paul: Rm 5:3: *but we glory also in tribulations.* - 2 Co 12:10: *For which cause I please myself in my infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ.* - Ga 6:14: *But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ...* By this love and joy in the Cross, Paul was seen to be transformed into the crucified Christ.

**1810:** This is the way that it was with St. Francis, and thus he was impressed with the Stigmata by Him. St. John Chrysostom [in his *Hom. 1, 4., in 2 Co*] wrote that when temptations that besiege one daily are comparable to a cumulus cloud, the Apostle to the Gentiles did not act in any other manner than as though he were already living in the midst of paradise, this is how he rejoiced and conducted himself [cf. t. 10, 253/2 A].

The Centurion here is St. James: *Count it all joy...* etc. Jas 1:2 as applied to supreme good. Love, desire, joy refer to the good; hatred, fear, sadness refer to the evil. The remaining Apostles, Ac 5:41: *And indeed they went rejoicing...* - St. Bernard comments: Concerning the three-fold kind of goods: No only patiently, but also willingly, and indeed even ardently, as torments are comparable to ornaments, sufferings to delights, as the Blessed Andrew made clear.

## **[2. An Application of the Three Ages]**

**1811:** The first level of perfection is: to decline from evils.

The scope of the precept is charity from a pure heart. Rather, since from disordered conversion to a three-fold commutable good, one might note that all sin draws its origin either exteriorly, inferiorly or interiorly. This order is in accord with the concupiscence of the eyes, the concupiscence of the flesh, and the pride of life. These three are to be avoided not only regarding consent to their acts, as this is done by the exercise of their opposite virtues. But further, these must be avoided even as far as the occasion is concerned. And this promotes merit, as something expedient for salvation.

**1812:** Jesus is the Master of Perfection, and so to perfectly decline from the concupiscence of the eyes, He counsels that all these temporal goods be left behind: *If you wish to be perfect.* Mt 19:21: to perfectly decline from the concupiscence of the flesh, He teaches that every experience, or concupiscence of the generative faulty, be totally avoided, Mt 19:12: *... For there are eunuchs,, who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven. He that can take, let him take it...* To perfectly decline from the pride of life, He suggests that the will be denied, Mt 16:24: *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself...*



In this three-fold, supererogatory declination of the three-fold origin of all evil, consists the first part of evangelical perfection. This is what Sacred Scripture insinuates, and the authentic Doctors teach, and the Holy Fathers, the instructors of religion affirm.

**[a.     The First Part of Perfection]<sup>4</sup>**

**1813:** The first part of perfection, then, is to decline from evil: charity is to be of a pure heart.

Every sin draws its origin from the disordered conversion to a three-fold commutable good, i.e., external, inferior and interior, according to the concupiscence of the eyes, of the flesh, and the pride of life. And these three realities must be rejected totally, and not only as regards their act or consent to them, as this can be done by the exercise of the opposite virtues. Further, these must all be avoided even as far as their occasion is concerned, and this further promotes the merit and becomes an expedient to salvation.

**Dt 18:13:** *You shall be perfect, and without spot before the Lord your God...* Prosper, in his *Concerning the Contemplative Life*, noted: that the perfect are those who will what God wills, and they acquiesce in no sins by which He is offended.

**1814:** St. Francis was perfect in this manner, also while still living in this world, even before he knew of his own vocation. It happened that while he was wasting time with vane friends, immersed in vanities, and in his youth, he would never give in to the vices, and he would not even desire those delights that were any less than innocent. He fled the companionship of the lascivious, those wanton sinners, and the vain. He was born rich, and situated by his father in the business world, he began to appreciate wealth. However, he did not place his hope in money, nor in the treasure of this world. Humility and meekness were the adornment of his beautiful customs. This is perfection, but only according to the precepts. *You will be perfect...*, etc. Dt 18; 13.

**1815:** But Jesus is the Master of Perfection, and in order to decline perfectly from the concupiscence of the eyes, which is avarice, He counsels that all these temporal goods be left behind. Mt 19:21: *If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have*.

And of that other young man he never paid much attention to the fact that he had been born rich, as he was, and he was committed by his father into buying

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<sup>4</sup> **NB:** With this paragraph, Fr. Bertoni's basic text shifts from Latin to antiquated Italian.

and selling, and understood what was needed to make a profit. Did he ever, though, place any hope ever in gold, which is so highly thought of on the part of other men?

**1816:** Rather, Francis was also quite liberal in his use of money, and very generous toward all. He also became a very merciful benefactor with the poor, even to the point of thinking that he had done very little penance as at the request of one, and came to tears over having given but little, once being distracted as he was by so many business matters. Then, he actually ran after that beggar, and fell at his feet, and warmly asked him to kindly pardon him. Then, beyond what the poor man had hoped, and beyond what was his need, the saint made very liberal provision for him. And he was not even content with all this and so, from that time on, he obliged himself perpetually by vow that he did not wish ever again to deny anything that was asked of him for God.

**1817:** And it became his custom that when he would even hear mentioned the love of God, or heard about the deeds and the sufferings of Jesus Christ, he would first feel himself shaken to the core, and this would move him to wish for the most ardent imitation of Him.

And how great was his temperance, his modesty, his innocence, that he sought no pleasures, or comforts, in conversations, and took part in no abuses? Even his innermost desires, were they ever anything but the most innocent? As a young man, did he not remain gentle, loving, and even among his rather vain companions, and those immersed in vanities, in such a licentious age? Did he not consider every type of vice to be the most despicable and abominable?

And was not his humility great, his meekness, and were these not the adornment of his most beautiful conduct? And was not his detachment most generous in the face of riches?

**1818:** He managed all this while he was still being occupied in worldly affairs, and had not yet understood well the secret of his vocation. What would he do then, once he would come to understand it? What did he do? Hardly had he heard the voice of the Master of Perfection, Jesus, Who led him to know that to perfectly decline from the concupiscence of the eyes, or avarice, He counsels all to the renunciation of temporal goods [ *If you wish to be perfect, go, sell,...* and so on - Mt 19:21 - *Blessed are the poor in spirit* Mt 5:3]. This moved the saint to sell what was his, since he was quite wealthy, and to cast it all away from himself, if not always through generosity, but with disdain, with a feeling of its abomination, to seek Christ alone. *I count all these things to be but loss...that I may gain Christ* [Ph3:8].

**1819:** What would he do? He would despoil himself even of his clothing, as well as the right of being the heir to his own father. He even took off the clothing that

covered him in the presence of the Bishop in order to follow the nude Christ, stripped on His Cross. Then there was seen the very harsh hair-shirt on the flesh of Francis.

What would he do once he would hear Christ Who taught that in order to decline perfectly from the concupiscence of the flesh, not only to remove every such experience, but even to extinguish any desire of pleasure, even those licit ones, with a voluntary grief and mortification? It was enough for him to hear the message of Christ: *He that can take, let him take it* Mt 19:12. *Blessed are they who mourn* Mt 5:5. Thus one would see Francis with such scarce meals, so much so that it seemed impossible that he could hold his life together with so little. This was furthermore sprinkled with ashes to remove taste from it, and he would pour icy water over the heated vegetables. During his illness, however, he would consume the cooked food, but only in the more acute phases of his sickness. Yet, his fasts were perpetual, that were even more intense in the six Lents, but were never interrupted.

**1820:** He traveled and did not bring food for the journey; when he would lodge somewhere, he did not accept any human care whatsoever. He slept very little: his bed was the naked earth, his pillow a stone, or a piece of wood: and this was his situation after having worked hard in preaching. Otherwise, he took his rest almost in haste, either standing up or while seated. His dwelling places were either the horrible caves, or poor stables.

He wore rough clothing, even intentionally made more uncomfortable. These allowed his flesh to experience everything from the heat, as well as from the cold, and the greater discomforts of the seasons. His flesh was tormented by coarse hair-shirts, by harsh flagellation, that much blood flowed out from his veins. Under this punishment a number of times, he fell to the ground, conquered as it were by the excessive suffering of his body. And not content with the arms used to combat this, nor even being satisfied with some victories, he continued to have thorns, ice, flames, fire, to serve as his instruments for his final victory. Not even after his victories would he let up from crucifying in every manner his flesh with its desires, so that he would be all the more similar to his Crucified Lord out of love for Him.

**1821:** What would he do? After listening to Christ Who would offer the persuasion that to decline from the pride of life, he would need the abnegation of his own will, by submitting it docilely to others, in order to humiliate himself: *Whoever would come after me, let him deny himself.* Mt 16:24. *Blessed are the meek.* Mt 5:4. And immediately, Francis would be subservient to all, would serve all others, subject himself to many. He placed himself among the leprous as his duty in order to medicate them, to kiss them, and to suck their wounds. He would refer to himself as the General Minister of his Religious Community, even though he was its illustrious

Founder. He renounced the Generalate, in order to depend in all things on a Guardian who was assigned to him at his own request. He promised obedience to his companion on the journey, considering it to be the greatest grace among all those he received from God, if he could obey a novice, even for a single hour.

**1822:** And so, to confess his wretchedness, his defects in the presence of his own subjects; and he would command them under obedience to repeat the words of supreme humiliation for him and embarrassment, which he would bring up about himself.

Therefore, the making known his own defects, his imperfections, he would note these also in public, along the streets, in the squares, gathering the people round to listen to him.

In a few words, there was nothing which could contribute to his greater humiliation and most profound confusion, that he would not immediately embrace. He was disposed in everything to contradict, to bring displeasure to himself. He was so capable in drawing upon himself in the most vivid manner, the obedience of Jesus Christ, and the love for His ignominies. *He was made obedient Ph 2:8. He shall be filled with reproaches Lm 3:30.*

### **[b. The Second Part of Perfection:] <sup>5</sup>**

**1823:** The second part of evangelical perfection consists in two aspects:

The second part of perfection consists in the supererogatory pursuit of goods, which, according to a two-fold manner of live, namely, active and contemplative, consists in two possibilities: the first in a condescendence toward one's neighbor, and the other in raising up toward God by the activity of the mind.

The first: in a condescendence toward one's neighbor. This supererogatory condescendence of charity toward one's neighbor consists in this, that according to the laws of justice and mercy, signs of love and benefits are extended, not only toward one's friends, but even toward one's enemies, by means of a very broad benignity. Mt 5:44, ff.: *Love your enemies: do good to them that hurt you: and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you. ...be you, therefore, perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. [v. 48].*

**1824:** Secondly, through this manner of directing the supererogatory action of the mind upward toward God, there is awaited in this, that according to the law of mental cleanliness and peace, through ecstatic love for the divine splendor and ardor, the devout mind experiences the sacred and suffers the excess. 2 Co 5:13, f.:

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<sup>5</sup> NB: Here Fr. Bertoni's text returns to Latin.

*For whether we be transported in mind, it is God; or whether we be sober, it is for you. - Heb 5:14: But strong meat is for the perfect; for them who by custom have their senses exercised to the discerning of good and evil.*

**1825:** In witness to this matter, the Blessed Patriarch of the Poor, Francis, in the beginning of his Rule, proposes three values to be vowed as fundamental: the Rule and the Life of the Minor Friars is this, i.e., to observe the Holy Gospel of our Lord, Jesus Christ, by living in obedience, without having anything of their own, and in chastity.

He then commends another three values as to be desired, as complementary to the above three: Let the Friars that above all, that they ought to desire to have the Spirit of the Lord and His holy activity; that they pray always to God out of a pure heart; and to have humility, and patience under persecution and in sickness, and to love those who persecute, reprehend or argue with you.

**1826:** And surely, wherever these three are lived, there is first of all the direction of one's activity in God - there is added to this then the condescension toward one's neighbor, and there is placed in the center, the tolerance for adversaries. Therefore, in the first three the perfect man is crucified to the world: in the following three, one is rendered conform to God, and as though on the six seraphic wings one is elevated from worldly concerns and borne toward the heavenly rewards.

As a result, on this poor man, St. Francis, who perfectly observed and taught the perfection of the Gospel, in a seraphic apparition, Jesus impressed His own Stigmata as a sign of His greatest approval. He did this that He might show to us that on this way of perfection by which we would be led back to Christ, the exemplar and end of perfect virtue, against the very dangerous darkness of the final times.

### [c. The Third Gospel Perfection:]

**1827:** The third evangelical perfection consists in the supererogatory acceptance of all that is adverse. This is attended not only in this sense, that one might patiently endure adversities that might come upon one, which according to the Law of God cannot be declined, since each is held to this. But, further, that each one should out of the fervor of the divine love yearn for adversities with a great desire, and with a great desire sustain these. Jas 1:2, ff.: Count it all joy, my brethren, when you shall fall into divers temptations...And patience has a perfect work that you may be perfect and entire, falling in nothing [v.4].

For this is indeed the consummation of perfection and charity Jn 1 [1 Jn 4:18]: *Fear is not in charity- but perfect charity casts out fear* from the ark of spiritual perfection.

According to this, therefore, the ark of spiritual perfection since it is within triple arched and double vaulted, is consumed on two elbows

**1828:** To sustain patiently - freely - joyfully.

All joy: i.e., all good.

- The honest, because the adversities make us to become conform to the image of Jesus Christ, Rm 8:29. They raise us up from the 'common': *for I bear the stigmata of the Lord Jesus in my body Ga 6:17*; we are raised up over the Angels, who cannot suffer for God. *Strength and beauty are her clothing. Pr 31:25*.

**1829:** From adversities there comes to us a real good, utility, because they take evil away, that is, they remove imperfections: *I will purge away your dross. [Is 1:25]*; they do these because they eradicate their very roots, which is self-love. Stupidity assembles in the heart of youth, and the rod of discipline will put it to flight.

Adversities bring good to us: they expel us from this world and urge us onward toward God. *And the Egyptians pressed the people to go forth out of the land speedily. Ex 12:33*. - Adversities perfect the spirit in us: the intellect. *So it was always: by day, the cloud covered it, and by night as it were, the appearance of fire. Nb 9:16*. Adversities also perfect the will.

There is brought to us a delightful good, because adversities are the sign of predestination of the love of God and of love for God; the reason is that God sweetens these.

#### [d. The Progressive Beatitudes: Mt 5:1, ff.]

**1830:** As on a sublime mountain, the Savior and our Master has shown by the example in His own life, this mystery of perfection, He Who is the total splendor of perfection, the mirror and exemplar. Lk 6:40: *But everyone shall be perfect, if he be as his master*. Since He would teach His Apostles this perfection in accord with this significance, as in Mt 5:1, ff. He went up into the mountain, not addressing the imperfect crowds, but His own disciples, whom He had decreed to raise up to the height of perfection. And therefore, in a most ordered manner, He teaches them the eight Beatitudes:

**1831:** 1. *Blessed are the poor in spirit:* He invites them to the perfect abdication of temporal possessions.

2. *Blessed are the meek:* He induces them to the denial of their own wills and senses, by which one becomes rude and impudent.

3. *Blessed are they that mourn:* He encourages them to the perfect detestation of the carnal desires.

4. & 5. *Blessed are they that hunger and thirst...the merciful:* He attracts them toward the just and pious condescension and support toward one's neighbors.

6&7: *Blessed are the clean of heart...the peace-makers:* He draws them to action that tends on high, to be limpid in intellect, tranquil and peaceful in affection, by which the soul of the perfect man, is rendered in accord with Jerusalem, which is interpreted as the vision of peace.

8. Concluding with: *Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice's sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* By so doing, He has made a complete circle, and returns to the first beatitude, for in this one last one, the summary of all of them is completed.

**1832:** And through this, His seminal perfection of this small, representative world in the way of reparation and grace, directly corresponds to the healthy production of the world machine in the way of nature. Hence, since those first three Beatitudes pertain to distinction, the following three are embellishment. And so in this, as by almost distinguishing the first three, the powers of the soul are separated from the totality of evils, that there might be a pure and distinct being; the three following are presented almost as ornamentation, and they lead souls toward God, that there might be had a decorous and embellished being. However, should one descend to each one of these Beatitudes, in which there is clearly manifested such marvelous correspondence, and the symbol of such similitude, that there could be said the same as is noted after the works of the six days of creation: Gn 2:1: in the soul of the perfect man it would seem that all is completed.

On account of this, as in the place of the first three works, which are the foundations of the universe, and then their completion in the three following days, the first three Beatitudes fall under vow: and the three following, pertain to desire.

#### **[4. The Example of Francis and His First Companions:]**

**1833:** The second part of perfection, therefore, consists in following by the way of supererogatory works that good which, as far as the two-fold life, the active and contemplative, are concerned, and so is distinguished in two: The first in condescending toward one's neighbor; and the second in elevating the mind toward God. *Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice.* Mt 5:6.

He preached with great fervor, and drew souls with the most gentle of manners. He began to conform himself to the apostolic life, rather to the life of our Lord, calling all to penance.

**1834:** With his first companion, he opened the Gospel three times. The first time they read: *If you wish to be perfect* [Mt 19:21]. The second time: you will bring nothing with you, only one tunic. Mt 10:9, ff. The third time: *Whoever wishes to*

*come after me* Mt 16:24. Francis then comments: ‘This is our rule. The Rule and Life of the Friars Minor is to observe the holy Gospel of our Lord, Jesus Christ, in obedience, without having anything of our own, and with chastity.

**1835:** *Blessed are the merciful.* Mt 5:7. He saw the world of his time so declined from rectitude, through the heresy of the Albigensians and the Waldesians; also because of the interior wars, bad customs of life, exchanging gentleness with licentiousness, values for vengeance, the abundance of fraud, a real industry of deception, and presumption over magnanimity. The Saint proposed the remedy with prayer, good example, and preaching.

**1836:** The difficulties of travelling did not hold him back, nor the contrarieties of the seasons, or his diminishing strength. Very few were the cities that did not hear him; and extremely few were those who did not find profit in him and wanting to follow him. At more than 30 candidates at a time were those that followed him. In but a few years he had more than 5,000 sons. The villages and entire cities would see him and follow after him, resolved to live obedient to his laws, and in his cloisters: thus, he instituted his Third Order. Simply at the sight of him, some heretics converted, as did convicts and thieves. *He was directed by God unto the repentance of a nation, and he took away the abominations of wickedness.* Si 49:3.

Italy discovered that she had been changed. She came to disdain vice, and sought virtue as its reward. Once more worship was rendered on the altars, respect for priests, and honor to God.

**1837:** However, Italy did not suffice for him: he wanted the whole world. As soon as he had seven sons, that he sat down with them one day to divide up the world. Let’s go, he said to them, wherever God and the need of souls cry aloud for us. And while at that time all this was merely the beseeching of the heavens, a little later their number had increased, and he sent them throughout the world. He did not close his eyes before he had abundantly provided for the four parts of the world with such valid workers.

**1838:** He manifested love and rejoicing in suffering. There is no need for me to tell you again what his meals were like, or his sleep: and indeed, I feel no need to repeat the story of his perpetual fasts, distinguished in six very long Lents, but never interrupted. He would submit to the whip for any infraction: just listen to an eyewitness, Brother Giles.

If only he had had a healthy body... But, he, too, had to suffer physically: in foods, sleep, his flesh, with perseverance and voluntarily. Three times he went looking for martyrdom.



He suffered spiritually through compassion; through his Sacred Stigmata, he found his every joy.

**1839:** At the point of his death, he lay despoiled, naked: this was his living of Poverty: *Blessed are the poor...* Mt 5:3. He had himself stretched out on the ground: mortification: *Blessed are they who mourn* Mt 5:5. - covering with his left hand the wound in his side: he lived humility, and soon received a cloth for this as a loan, and lived his obedience: *Blessed are the meek.* Mt 5:4.

He admonished all to live patience and poverty, and the faith of the Holy Roman Church. Beginning to pray Ps 141:2: *I cried to the Lord with my voice* [and he expired at these words: *the just wait for me, until You reward me!* V. 8.

### **[Summary]**

**1840:** This, then, is the path along which Francis walked and reached heaven: let us follow him, then, courageously, living in evangelical perfection according to the precepts - or, if God should call us to them, according to the counsels, and we, too, will arrive at the same end of imitating Christ on earth, and of possessing Him for all eternity. And let us set underway immediately, as the journey is long, and maybe the time allotted for us is rather short: eternity awaits us, without end.

**1841:** The second element of the second part of perfection<sup>6</sup>.

There is need to move upward in limpid union in the intellect: having become as a mirror of the Divinity, a most lucid temple, with an understanding of the sacred Scriptures.

Prayer - prophecies - ecstasies.

Memory: from the thought of creatures, he passed over to the continuous recollection of Christ.

**1842:** The will freed from any affection whatsoever, he cultivated only love for Christ the Lord.

*Since they shall see God.* Mt 5:8.

He realized a tranquil and peaceful union in his affections.

Order: *He set in order charity in me.* Ct 2:4. His mind was subjected to God, his passions subjected to reason. He hardly experienced them any more, after having overcome them. His body was subject to his soul as ill as it was; it was most

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. # 9953 of MssB

disposed toward the soul. For him creatures were subjected to humanity, almost as though in the state of original justice.

Will sit: *And my people shall sit in the beauty of peace.* Is 32:18. Tribulations were not able to separate him, and were not even to upset him. These actually formed the complement of his blessed state.

*Since they will be called the children of God.* Mt 5:9, because they submitted all to God with loving reverence. - Those who act in the Spirit of God, they are called the children of God, because they deal confidently with God. *And His turning is toward me.* Ct 7:10.

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**{II} Second Panegyric in Honor of St. Francis of Assisi -  
preached in St. Firmus' Major - Verona, Italy  
October 4, 1808 [morning of the Feast?] <sup>7</sup>**

[The Sorrowful Stigmata:  
The Joy of the Con-Crucified Spouse of Christ]

**[Introduction: The Saint's Life]**

**1844:** *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me. Mt 16:24.*

Since it my task on this day, sacred to the every glorious memory of the Seraphic Patriarch, provide some spiritual nourishment for your devotion, most beloved, I would not know how I could better satisfy this duty other than by guiding your pious and very docile attention along the most illustrious foot-prints of his life.

To speak of the heroic actions of Francis of Assisi means to speak about every virtue, of every manner of perfection, of every level, even the most elevated, of holiness.

**1845:** To speak of this most holy hero means to speak of the most perfect spirit of penance, of the most sublime spirit of the Cross, of the most enflamed spirit of love towards the Crucified Christ. Hence, how well to him might those words of Christ in the Gospel be applied: Mt 16:24: If any man will come after me, let him deny himself: this is the spirit of penance. *Take up his Cross:* this is the spirit of the Cross; *And follow Me:* this is the spirit of love. These are the principles, the progress, the consummation of holiness The way is clearly marked for anyone who would want to follow it: *If any man will...* This is for anyone who would choose to follow this way, not trusting in his own strength, but in the divine mercies: *to come after Me.* All of this is to speak of Francis. To attend to this message, as I am not sure on your part whether there is fear of my insufficiency, but this is an enkindling to the imitation of one who indeed imitated Christ so well.

**[1. If any man will come after me, let him deny himself...]**

**1846:** *If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself.* Let him deny himself: this is the spirit of penance. The effect of this spirit is to put to death all of man that is exterior, by denying himself what is his: denying those things that pertain to us. In the interior it means, denying oneself: denying ourselves. One denies those things that belong to him by renouncing them. It is relatively easy to deny one's things.

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<sup>7</sup> NB: in the MssB ## 1783-1794, there are some notes that seem to have been the rough draft of this fuller discourse - which run here from # 1844-# 1874.

However, to deny oneself, means to leave self behind. It is quite laborious to give up oneself. That person leaves behind himself who sets aside that living the old life of Adam according to the flesh, in order to live according to the spiritual new life of grace. This is how St. Gregory explained it [Hom 32 in Ev. T. 2, 325/2 A]. This occurs because the man who lives of this spirit of penance is led to abhor that which he previously loved, and to love that which... and so on. This is the thought of St. Ambrose [Serm 26, 6. App. t. 2, 427 C spurious]. Hence, in practice that person is a good penitent and a perfect denier of himself who previously was intemperate and has become very abstinent: previously he was impure, and then totally chaste: once he had been avaricious, and now he is supremely generous. This is St. Jerome's description.

**1847:** Observe then the change: here is a man who was but a little while earlier rather wealthy, and was much respected in the public squares because of his fine business sense. He was all eyes, and all hands in order to accumulate riches that were not sinful, but they were indeed earthly. This same man comes rather suddenly to the door of a church among the crowd of poor people, dressed as a poor person just like they, in exchange for his new and lordly garments. Now he is seen to be all committed, totally fervent, and full zealous in quest for poverty. And who is this man? It is Francis. But, how can such an unusual change of his actions be explained? And there was an even more stupendous change of affections. Let us ask him himself: *But the things that were gain for me, the same I have counted for loss for Christ.* Ph 3:7.

**1848:** What merchant [Fr. Segneri so nobly and on his own comments this passage of St. Paul] - what merchant who buys pearls in the dark, replaces with them all his other gains, i.e., meaning his delights, his wealth, his reputation: then in the light of day it is seen that rather than pearls, he has bought mere glass. Such a man would not think of this quite valueless merchandise as a profit, but rather as a real loss - this was Francis. In the very profitable speculations of his merchant's profession he once contemplated his pleasures, he tasted the fruits of a smiling good fortune, he took his ease in the shade and in the breeze, happy in the vast credit and enjoying a good name, that the more this all spread, it produced for him many friends, and matured for him abundant means of every greater usefulness.

**1849:** All this took place while he was still in the darkness, as unfortunately so many of us are right now, who might nonetheless speak to their own confusion of their laziness and sleepiness: *The light of justice has not shined unto us...* Ws 5:6: We do not know virtue under its genuine light. However, since God would draw the light from that same darkness in which His servant was. This servant, then, cooperated in a powerful manner in the spirit of penance and when he had removed from himself those impediments, he was brought to a more vivid light by means of the gospel

teaching that soon was suggested to him. He then clearly discovered that his apparent gains were in truth, losses, i.e., they were clearly misunderstood: *on account of Christ*. His wealth was misunderstood, first because of the lessening profit, because they can promise to no one that they will acquire Christ's love; and then secondly, because of the emerging harm that accrued, taking from him the love for Christ to anyone who might have acquired it. And this is why it is said: *But the things that were gain for me... Ph 3:7*.

**1850:** Nor is this all: having been assisted by this light, the Saint moved on to consider as loss not only the things that previously he had that of as gain: his delights, his wealth, his reputation. But, he also came to see all else under this light, that was not Christ: the convenience of his high birth, his quickness of mind, his abundance of talents, and other such gifts and all for the same reason: *on account of Christ*. That is, it is because anyone who wishes these things, it would only follow, either that he would not aspire to follow Christ, or that he would abandon Him. *Furthermore, I count all these things to be but loss. Ph 3:8*.

**1851:** But, how did Francis pass over to form so resolute a judgment, which went against the torrent, so to speak, of the entire human race, which held all the more earthly goods in such high esteem? *He was one against the many*, something like a second Noah in his times, as St. John Chrysostom would say. How did he do it, and what path did he follow? *All was for the excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ: Ph 3:8*: he achieved it not through any knowledge acquired in the school of philosophers, but in that of Christ, and through an eminent knowledge of Christ, and this is one that surpasses by far all the other knowledge that is not of Him. And also, as part of His knowledge there is that lesson of renouncing everything [ *So likewise every one of you who does not renounce all that he possesses, cannot be my disciple. Lk 14:33*]. This is not ordinary knowledge, but eminent, precisely because no knowledge is less practiced. To render oneself 'nude', so that one would wish nothing other on this earth than the nude Christ: ... for the excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ. Ph 3:8.

**1852:** So, this excellent knowledge led Francis to give up everything. To each his own, he set about selling all that he had, even from the clothing he wore, to the horse that he rode, and placed it all among the workers at San Damiano. To all persons should be given that which is theirs: to fellow-citizens, correspondents, and friends, and his relatives, from all, he departed without so much as a farewell. He renounced everything within himself, even to the approaching of a leper, in order to overcome the strongest repulsion with him, he even kissed that leper on the mouth. He did this so that he might the better put away the horrible attachments in his own life, so that he received as a reward that ability of recognizing his most beloved Savior. To give up not only what he had, and all that he was, but he also handed

over whatever he could have hoped to achieve, or to be one day. From the prosperous course of his profession, and from the most abundant means of his own talents that he had at his disposal: *he surrendered all*. He persuaded himself not only speculatively, but on the very practical level, that Christ alone could supply for all these realities. Even more, he was convinced that Christ could satisfy the more for all the goods that he was leaving behind, in order to have only the naked Christ on a Cross: *all things are loss for Christ*.

**1853:** His was a most universal refusal. This was because it even included other goods which he did not actually have to give up, only because he did not possess them at the time, nor had any reasonable hope of ever acquiring them [such as these would be positions of authority, tributes, thrones, courtesans]. However, even at the hint of ever coming into the possession of such earthly goods, realities only as a mere possibility, all were in like manner rejected: he counted *all things, all things to be loss for the excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ*.

His was a most generous refusal: this is because he not only renounced them, but he rejected them outright: *I count all things to be loss for the excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ*. Ph 3:8. Furthermore, it was because he rejected them all with disdain, much as would be done with things that are truly harmful to one, he would castaway: *I count all things to be loss*. And this is what he did with a briefcase that contained the price of all the goods that he had sold, and he offered it all to the priest at San Damiano for its restoration. And since this gesture was not accepted by the priest out of fear of Francis' father, these were all thrown out of a window by Francis, with such a noble and generous gesture of disdain.

**1854:** And it was not only done out of disdain either, but even with a sense of abomination, and one of the most high level: *I count all things to be but loss*: Ph 3:8. He considered all earthly goods as 'loss': *I count all things to be loss*. 'Loss' would now be all lascivious conduct, also because of the ill repute that these would render even among those far away, with such damage to one's reputation - and to those close at hand, who would note such bad example: *The beasts have rotted in their waste*. Jl 1:17. 'Loss' would be all the profits from avarice, because of the filth that is so difficult to avoid for all those who would strive to manage these: *The sluggard is pelted with the waste of oxen: and every one that touches him will shake his hands*. Si 22:2.

**1855:** He would consider as 'loss' the glory of ambition, which so soon and suddenly goes bad, becomes worm infested, putrefied: *Fear not the words of a sinful man,. For his glory is waste and worms. Today he is lifted up, and tomorrow he shall not be found*. 1 M 2:62, f. *The name of the wicked shall rot*. Pr 3:7. In this way, Francis gave up everything and with generosity and with disdain. He presented himself naked before the Bishop, in order to more expeditiously hasten along and

even fly to embrace no longer the consolations and the delights, but the Cross, and the Cross of Jesus Christ.

**[2. Let him take up his Cross...]**

**1856:** *Let him take up his Cross: Mt 16:24. This is the spirit of the Cross.* Not that he took it of necessity on his own shoulders, as was forced on the Cyrenean, but by his own choice, totally free, fully spontaneous. He did not pick up the lightest one: he elected the heaviest. Nor did he drag it behind himself out of duty, with protestations, nor with a sense of imposition. Nor did he bear under it only with peace and resignation, or out of a sense of commitment: he carried the heaviest Cross with thanksgiving, with supreme, heart-felt joy, with indescribable rejoicing and happiness and exultation of spirit, and solely out of his grand love for suffering. This, then, describes his tender devotion even at the exterior sign and figure of the Cross of his Savior. He never bent over under its weight, nor for the long period of time that he bore it, or because of its overwhelming burden: he was always looking ahead toward his goals, always constant in his yearnings, he carried it, rather he raised it up like the glorious flag of his triumph. This is the way Assisi saw him entering as in triumph in the midst of his detractors.

**1857:** His own fellow citizens thought he was crazy, and so they not only shouted out against him and derided him, but they even threw mud and stones at his head and person. In fact, the persecution of enemies, St. Jerome notes [*cf. Letter to Heliodorus, 14, 4, f. t. 5, 30 C*], is the first type of the Cross, and he endured this to supreme degree from his fellow citizens and friends, even from his own father - and what was most painful, from his own Friars, as indeed from some of his first companions, he endured bitter persecution beyond all belief.

This tribulation permitted by God, allowed that His own Vicar [of Christ] at first would not recognize him and rejected him. Later, however, having been better informed in a vision, had him called into his presence, and pleased the saint in everything by granting the requested approval of his Order. A greater tribulation, however, was in God's permitting his own Friars to rebel against his spirit. This was for him the greatest tribulation, especially when God expressly imposed on the Saint that of authorizing as head of his new Community, one of the most seditious and turbulent rebels against him. These are indications of the secret, adorable dispositions of God, employed to try His servants.

**1858:** The temptation of the devil is the second type of Cross, and this was quite fierce and long-lasting. This came to him under every guise, both from within, and from the outside.

The Cross in third place, and the heaviest of Crosses, was the most severe mortification that he personally imposed on himself: very meager meals, from which he was scarcely able to conduct his life, and these were rendered tasteless by the sprinkling of ashes, or cold water on the cooked vegetables. He only made use of these cooked vegetables in times of illness, and solely in its most acute phases. His sleep was very short, and always on the floor, with a stone, or block of wood under his cheek, even after having been worn out in preaching. Otherwise, he would take his rest as though in passing, even standing up, or seated. His flesh was afflicted with rough clothing, that was purposefully rendered so. Such clothing allowed him to suffer from the heat, and also the cold, undergoing the greatest discomfort from the seasons as they passed. He tormented his own flesh with hair-shirts, caused it great discomfort by prolonged fasts, lacerated it with assiduous flagellation, even though he was almost habitually infirm, and languishing in his illness

**1859:** Still not satisfied in carrying such a cross, and one that was so heavy, he took it along with him to live among barbarians, in order to seek there something even more harsh and contrary to his nature, if something could be found to assist him to rise up. However, not finding even this, he did find another commitment to raise up there on his own, in his very love towards Christ. Since his love gave him great desires to be with Christ [*Having a desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ*, Ph1:23], he discovered a great cross in the sheer living in the world and that life itself was a very harsh martyrdom. *The world is crucified to me, and I to the world* Ga 6:14. Here he is on his Cross: but love knows no limits.

**1860:** It was not enough for Francis to be patient on his Cross, while he was still alive: he indeed wished to be crucified, and even further, to be dead. *For I ...am dead* Ga 2:19. Love assisted him even in this: *For love is strong as death* Ct 8:6. In the end, he was indeed totally dead: dead to the life of sensation, dead to the world. A dead person does not see, not hear, nor taste, nor does he have feeling, or movement, he does not speak: he does not change, nor experience resentment, nor is such a one moved. This describes Francis with regard to this world from which he was totally outside it. His world was entirely interior to himself: the three-fold concupiscence, explained by St. John, 1 Jn 2:16, and to all else, he wished to be dead.

**1861:** Regarding the concupiscence of the flesh: so that it would die, he would role about in the ice and the snowy bushes. For the concupiscence of the eyes, which is avarice: never dwelling in the ins, and not the proper clothing to remove the cold, or his nudity, hardly a piece of bread to satiate his hunger: in summary, he had nothing of his own, but the yearning for death. For the pride of life: whether he joined the people gathered in the square of Assisi, or entered into the major church of the



town, he would be almost nude, other than his leggings, and a cord around his neck, he would let himself be drawn before the people in the public square as in accord with the customs of the time, malefactors would be conducted. Standing up on a stone, even when suffering fever and the very great cold, and seemingly close to death, he would nonetheless, preach to that people with great fervor and vigor of soul and would say to be heard by all: 'I am not worthy to be honored as a spiritual man; rather I should be considered as one who is carnal and gluttonous and should be rejected by all the people, in that in the most acute phases of my struggles, I did make use of some meat. In his preaching, he would shout so that he would be heard by all: may it die, may all my pride be put to death: *For I... am dead Ga 2:19.*

**1862:** I am crucified, I am dead: but not even with all this has my life known sufficiency, if I am not fixed together with Christ on His Cross, and on the very Cross of Christ Himself: *With Christ I am nailed to the Cross Ga 2:19.* And how much clearer the Greek is here: *Christo synestauromai.* With Christ I am nailed to the Cross. This means that his desire was to be crucified together with Christ - as though in-grafted, and co-planted into the tree of the Cross of Christ, as though to have in common with Him on the tree the sap and the life, i.e., the grace and the charity.

**1863:** Of this co-suffering and transforming love, the first effect is union, a cording to the Author of the Book, *Concerning the Divine Names*. And this is what St. Francis did, that he be united, and became as though one with Christ Crucified: *That they may all be as one...with Me. Jn 17:21.*

The second effect is mutual inherence. And this is what St. Francis achieved, so that he was able to say: *A bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me... and I to him. Ct 1:12; 2:16.*

The third effect is an assiduous thought. And this is what St Francis realized toward his beloved Jesus, almost being as *a bundle of myrrh...he shall abide between my breasts. Cf. Ct 1:12*, of the intellect and will, through a loving contemplation, Thus he languished and his love liquefied in the simple memory of his Crucified Lord.

**1864:** The fourth effect is ecstasy: and Francis truly experienced this in that night in which from that Seraphin which appeared to him, as St. Bonaventure narrates, he would receive in his spirit an admirable ardor, and in his flesh the no less marvelous image, from which he seemed to be no longer just an earthly man, but a Seraphin of heaven. He became a living image of the Crucified Lord, with the five wounds of the Savior, as though totally transformed into Christ. And just notice that already, without almost even realizing it, I have introduced, as I now can see, what is far beyond, and almost as though led to the heights, of that perfection which totally

consists in following behind after Christ, and which I have reserved for the third point.

### [3. **And follow Me... - “the Espousals Principle”**]

**1865:** And follow Me Mt 16:24].

This is the spirit of love in following Christ: And follow Me. Also because this which we have described here is rather a flight than a following, if it pleases you, we might continue now step by step, retracing the way, adapting our expression to all, so that they, too, might arrive according to their capacity to this height, or at least to measure it with their eye, in order to reach it in their own time.

There are very many who follow Christ as out of fear slaves: these do follow, but from afar, and since they are indeed at a distance, they have no share in the secrets of their master. *The servant does not know what his lord does.* Jn 15:15.

Some follow Christ as children, out of a love that is somewhat self-centered in the inheritance. However, children are often more loved than loving: hence, they may even come to the point of disdain for their father, if he commands them to do some things contrary to their taste, even though these may be reasonable and for their own good, but they are difficult and arduous. *I have brought up children and exalted them: but they have despised me.* Is 1:2.

**1867:** A few follow Christ as friends, who base their love in the mutual communication of goods; but should there cease the sweet flow of these goods, due to a disposition at present still hidden, but which would always be in accord with a just Providence, and should there be substituted for these the bitter participation of evils endured by the friend: *The disciples all leaving him, fled.* Mt 26:56: these were the very ones who once declared themselves to be the friends of Christ: *For all seek the things that are there own; few, the things that are Jesus Christ's* Ph 2:21.

**1868:** Very few are those who follow Christ as lovers, who in the early flame of their youthful tender love, they follow Christ everywhere He goes, whether to Tabor, or even to Calvary, and in the odor of His perfumes, of the internal consolations and inspirations, they even run behind Him; however, they are not able to keep up with Him, nor can they come even with His speed which presents itself as giant steps forward, in running along in His way. *He has rejoiced as a giant to run the way* Ps 18:6.

But the spouse, and adult in the school of love, is not attracted by the odor, but finds support on the right hand of her Husband: Draw me. Ct 1:3: on him, she clings, finding support in His strength, and keeps up with His pace, and with Him she not only runs, but flies. Leaning on her beloved Ct 8:5.

**1869:** And this is how Francis followed Christ: *And let him follow Me.* Mt 16:24. This does not mean just near by, but side by side; this does not mean just closely, but in united manner, but transformed. Francis did not search for consolations, delights, the gifts of Christ: rather he sought Christ Himself: *that I may gain Christ* Ph 3:8. The 'nude' Christ on the Cross, in His shame, poverty: and this was the ideal from the first motions of grace, he began thus where others hardly even manage to arrive. *But the things that were gain to me, that same I have counted as loss for Christ. Furthermore, I count all things to be but loss for the excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as dung, that I may gain Christ* Ph 3:7, f. For Him Francis left behind, refused, rejected everything: not merely to gain love, service, the following of Christ, but Christ Himself: *that I may gain Christ* ib. The reason is that from the outset he did not want anything less than the whole Christ.

**1870:** And oh! How he achieved Him, while he succeeded in becoming with Christ as though one and the same spirit, in such a manner that he could finally exclaim: *And I live, now not I; but Christ lives in me,* Ga 2:20, and this by an entire and perfect transformation of love: that I may gain Christ, and that I might know Him, Ph 3:8, ff.: he achieved this by losing all of himself, in order to find his all in Christ. So it was that one could no longer find Francis unless with Christ, rather in Christ. Nor could one discern, I would almost say, even Francis as comparable with Christ: disdained as Christ, poor as Christ, wounded as Christ.

### **[Summary]**

**1871** A Saint so sublimely transformed by love - a Saint who suffered such great and frequent languor, ecstasies, refinements of love - a Saint, I would say with that expression of St. Francis de Sales, whom God exposed to the world through a miracle of love, could only avoid death by strength of love, it was love that kept him from dying. Just observe him at the point of his death: he had himself placed nude on the earth, and received a habit as alms, and spoke to his Friars gathered around him, and he spoke to them of love. He urged them to love and fear God, that they love and fear also His Church. Then, he had the Passion read, and finally he began with supreme ardor, Psalm 141: *I cried to the Lord with my voice: with my voice I made supplication to the Lord.* And then he pronounced those words, v. 8: *Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Your name: the just wait for me, until You reward me.* Then, he breathed forth his soul in the flower of his virile age, the 45th year of his life.

**1872:** Much like a little bird, I would say, that had been enclosed in a prison by his master so that he might love it. This creature comes to be exposed one day to the flowering spring-time and in the orchard that will bear fruit in the autumn. The bird

feels the open air of the country-side, and looks toward the green branches of the near-by trees, in the shade and in the gentle breeze, leaping happily as on a feast, and sees its winged companions, and hears their harmonious singing with which they invite it to compete with them. At a certain point, moved by a stronger love of freedom, the small bird strikes against his gates with his head, and with his breast, in order to break out of his prison.

Such is the spirit of this Seraphim of Love, hearing, I believe, the canticles of love which in heaven the Angels and the Blessed offer their tribute to God. The Saint was moved by a very strong desire to be with them, rather with God Himself, and so he struck, shook, flew up against his confinement with such vehemence, and with such impetus against his bars and the confining chains of his prison, that his beloved and loving Master was deeply moved, and finally made the move to release him and set him free from his prison.

Say with Francis: *Draw me*. Ct 1:3. He did this in singular fashion, because the level of his love with which he followed Christ is indeed quite singular...

**1873:** Therefore, he could indeed say with the Spouse in singular manner: *Draw me*, and could say with her in common: *Draw me: we will run after you to the odor of your ointments*. Ct 1:3. He could say, as I pointed out, in common with so many of his sons, who in number and in splendor equal the stars. They shine out gloriously in perpetual eternity. Dn 12:3. They have made for him a triumphal crown up there in heaven, or enlighten the living with the most pure light of virtue, the dense darkness of this world in which we are: he could say this to the many of his devout admirers, faithful followers, powerful imitators of his spirit in every state, In every condition, in every place, in all ages, in all centuries, in all times, and in the past, in the present and in the future, and thus, everywhere and always where this Gospel of Christ will be preached [and this will go on until the end of the world, in accord with the ineffable promise of Christ]: *If any man will come after me...* Mt 16:24.

**1874:** Yes indeed, Francis could say, and could say, in common with the Spouse: *We will run after You* Ct 1:3: It is as though he were saying: I will run in the odor of Christ's examples by which I am drawn. And they will run in the odor of my examples, which are not mine, but are those of Christ. *To the odor of Your ointments*. Ct 1:3. I could also add these words of the Apostle: *Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ* 1 Co 4:16, in the spirit of penance, in the spirit of the Cross, in the spirit of love. *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself*, etc. Mt 16:24.

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### III. Reflections on the Canonization of St. Veronica Giuliani, Capuchin Mystic in Verona, on December 29, 1839<sup>8</sup>.

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[The Stigmata of Easter and the Eucharistic Espousals]

#### [Introduction]

**2127:** Much less does the Apostle forbid glorying in supernatural goods, provided that they give glory to God. 2 Co 10:17. Veronica had all these supernatural gifts, common to the saints and spread among them: ...*but everyone has his proper gift from God. 1 Co 7:7; ...dividing to everyone according as he will. 1 Co 12:11*. And in addition to all this, she was endowed with her own most singular gifts, unique and prestigious. And yet, she never gloried in any of it.

She did not boast of her prestigious blessings of holiness and gifts:

Those of her infancy: she was a blessed pregnancy on the part of her mother, after experiencing many previous difficulties; she was born on the feast of St. John the Evangelist, the beloved disciple of Christ; she was baptized on the Feast of the Holy Innocents, as she was to be innocent in her own life: she received the name of Ursula, the virgin and guide of virgins; ...

**2128:** In her childhood: at the age of three, she already enjoyed familiarity with Jesus and Mary; her sense of enjoyment was totally immersed in her decorating a statue of Mary with the Child. That this was done out of instinct, not so much of nature, but of grace This came to be understood because all the delicacies bestowed on her she would use to decorate that image. She would engage in colloquies and simple conversations with the images, as her models. She would easily make believe these images were truly the persons represented: *[Wisdom] was playing in the world, her delights with the children of men [Pr 8:31]*. She was like Job in the time of childhood innocence. ... This information was had on the testimony of her sisters, of her Confessor, and from herself in her adult years. ...

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<sup>8</sup> This would have been St. Gaspar Bertoni's final public address - he took ill at this time and remained so until his death - June 12, 1853 - an invalid and for the most part confined to his room. [NB: cf. recent studies on this Capuchin Mystic: Aa. Vv. *Testimonia e messaggio di Santa Veronica Giuliani. Atti del Congresso Internazionale di studi su santa Veronica Giuliani*. Roma, Pontificio Ateneo Antonianum, 27-31 Ottobre, 1982. Roma: Ed. Laurentianum - G.R.A. Km 68.800. 1983. 2 Volumes]. [The level of self-inflicted mortification as described would be considered excessive, in the minds of many, due to the advances made in the Church in the modern theology of saints and the body].

Jesus. At four years of age, when Viaticum was being brought to her Mother, she expressed the desire to receive Holy Communion. [p. 10]<sup>9</sup>.

**2129:** The dying Mother recommended her five surviving daughters to the Five Wounds of the Crucified: to Veronica, she assigned the Wound of the Sacred Side. She was motivated by charity toward the poor, and miraculous gifts: ... She came to understand these much better in hearing her Mother read the lives of the Martyrs.  
...

She never gloried in the marvelous experiences she knew, but rather would always speak of her wrongful state for her age. *What a one do you think this child will be? For the hand of God was with him.* Lk 1:66. If you would ask the whole world, they might respond that she would be a great saint. But if you ask Veronica, she would say that she was not good, that she was an ingrate. But what can be said when to these special graces there would then follow unique gifts, and one would notice signs accomplished in her as indications of divine predilection in her regard?

**2130:** These signs are the supernatural gifts, gratuitously bestowed, which however often accompany the most outstanding holiness. Whenever a country bumpkin, or a poor shepherd girl would see themselves suddenly so loved and caressed by a great monarch: to the former such a personage would make the promise to make him important in his royal court, and to the latter was given the pledge of future nuptials. However, since both of them are still in their lowly work and garments, how could this be done if they were not first glorified? Would they still not be considered as nothings by their peers, simple and poor brothers and sisters and neighbors? How would they consider them suddenly raised up, and exalted even beyond the more noble and the well of in the realm? However, even being raised up to such greatness the miracle would be their own not taking advantage of their sudden promotion, but rather never to forget their lowly origins. This is precisely a good comparison of the prodigy of Veronica's humility.

**2131:** She never gloried in the wonderful supernatural gifts bestowed on her totally gratuitously, as well as her common endowments, the customary testimonies regarding her holiness: prophecies, miracles, healing from illness. All these were ordained to her holiness, as were her visions, revelations, ecstasies, raptures, throughout her entire life. Hers were such singular gifts: ... the wound in her heart with flowing blood, the stigmata, formal espousals with Jesus Christ, communion from the hand of Angels, of Mary the Virgin, of Jesus Christ [192], visible sufferings of the entire passion, an experience of Purgatory [203], a vision of the judgment [69], a vision of Hell [195]. She hid all these things to the best of her ability, in order

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<sup>9</sup> These page numbers are found in the original manuscript - referring to the Franciscan/Capuchin source from which Saint Gaspar Bertoni derived much of his material.

to flee from the danger of being admired by her peers. And she was also very much afraid of deceptions, even to the very end. *But be zealous for the better gifts: And I show unto you yet a more excellent way. 1 Co 12:31.*

### [1. Her Special Graces]

#### **2132: Common Gifts:**

- **Prophecies:** there were often testimonies regarding her holiness. This gift was so frequent in her that it was said commonly in her Monastery that her words were almost all directly prophecies: in that they always seemed to correspond to the effects. She predicted her death in various ways. She once advised two postulants, with so much opposition, and facing near impossibilities, that they should enter the Convent. For two others, her advice was the opposite, even though they had already been assured of acceptance, and one was also already vested. She predicted the names of three Bishops, one of whom became a Bishop six years after her death. This prophecy concerned the young Fr. Guelfi, who was an Oratorian of St. Philip. She also advised him that he should go to his father far away, because she could see that he was already close to his death, and that the old man would be assisted by his priest son as he approached death.

**2133:** She predicted that health would be restored to others among the Fathers of St. Philip whose health was in a desperate condition. She predicted the birth of a son to Charles VI, although he would then die. She stated that the plague that had brought near extermination to Marseilles had ended. She predicted the healing of the priest, Fr. Lomellini, and then also his death.

- **Her reading of hearts:** [cf. c. 10 of Bk 1]: She did this for Bishop Codebo', who had consulted with Fr. Guelfi what should be done regarding the body of the Saint after her death. In seeing him, as though she had heard everything, the Saint said to him: Your Excellency, regarding my body after my death, do whatever you wish, and do not be so worried. She could recognize many times certain mental reservations, and secrets kept in people's hearts. She treated Fr. Crivelli, her Confessor, with reverential fear and great subjection, persuaded that he knew all that passed in her heart.

#### **2134: - Infused Knowledge:**

- **Discretion of spirits:**

- **Miracles:**

- **Cures:** she was once instrumental in the cure of cancer in the leg suffered by a religious Sister, who was enduring spasms of pain. She healed her with the simple washing of the ailing member one time. She also healed migraine

headaches and other such evils simply by touching the afflicted person's head, and it would disappear. Another time, she encountered a person who felt that he was going out of his mind with pain, and she healed him with a blessing. A religious once suffered a sliver in her eye, which soon inflamed and created much discomfort. It was decided that she would have to undergo a very dangerous operation, but with a simple embrace the saint cured her. Another time a religious sister had received multiple and serious wounds in both hands: by simply reaching out to the scapular of the Saint, her difficulties were healed. And still another time, a young boy suffered a cataract in one eye, and he was healed simply by bathing it in water that the saint had used to wash her own hands.

- All such gifts ordered to her holiness:
- Visions, revelations, ecstasies, raptures that she experienced all her life.

**2135:** - Better gifts:

- The impression of the Cross in her heart.
- The Chalice of Jesus Christ. When Veronica was 33 years old, the same age as the Divine Redeemer. Before He began His passion, He was comforted by the Angel, so Veronica was by Christ Himself.
- A Crown of Thorns: Christ Himself placed this on her head. This Crown served as a clear sign that she was to be espoused with the Lord. The thorns made it clear that she was being called to be the Spouse of *The Crucified God*<sup>10</sup>.

**[2. The Divine Espousals of the Eucharist and the Stigmata of Easter]**

**2136:** - **The Divine Espousals:** which is a certain, most intimate union between the soul and God, by the most perfect charity. It has been pleasing to the Lord to initiate this with certain great souls and to manifest it with sensible signs, and with certain formalities which are customary in human marriages, as with St. Catherine of Siena and with some other Saints of the highest level. To dispose her the better for such an honor, God generously bestowed on her many graces and visions: those of Jesus Christ Who comforted her and stipulated the Marriage Pact: visions of the Virgin Mary. Who appeared to her on a magnificent throne, with St. Catherine and St. Rose, assuring her of her approaching nuptials, and showing her the wedding ring, and teaching her about the most sublime virtues. On Holy Saturday Jesus Christ also appeared to her, telling her of her Nuptials on the following day [Easter], and showing her also the precious ring. He gave her a new rule of life, worthy of His

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<sup>10</sup> This is the unusual title of a very insightful modern theologian's book - cf. Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*. NY; Harper & Row 1973



Spouse. She spent the intervening night in prayer, and Jesus Christ appeared to her many times, in order to purify her spirit, and to endow her with rich endowments of His merits, given to her as a kind of dowry.

**2137:** When the moment came for Holy Communion, in which the Espousals were to be celebrated, she was given the grace of hearing the Angels singing a very sweet melody: 'Come, o Spouse of Christ! In her rapture, she saw two magnificent thrones, one for Jesus, and one for Mary. She saw the immense Heavenly Court: the two Saints were standing at the fore, as maids of honor. St. Catherine and taught her the ritual of that august function. These two saints led her to the throne and vested her in precious garments over her religious habit: the final outer garment was a white dress richly embroidered. Jesus Christ then began: Come, o Spouse of Christ! The Blessed Virgin then picked up with the following: 'Accept the crown...,' etc...

### **[3. The Wedding Ring from the Glorious Sacred Side]**

**2138:** Then He indicated to His Mother that she should be vested in the wedding garment: and this was a most rich mantle covered with gems. Mary handed this to St. Catherine, and she vested Veronica in it. Jesus Christ then drew the Wedding Ring from His Side: the ring, with a gem on which was the Name of Jesus: Jesus Christ with His Mother then slipped it on her finger: then He blessed it. There ensued the celestial harmony. There was imposed the new rules of a more perfect life. Among its stipulations was that from now on her life would be totally crucified. He made her the mistress of all His treasures, the merits of His actions and sufferings.

#### **2139:**

- Wounded in her heart, on Christmas, by the Baby Jesus, with a kind of arrow, the blood issued forth, and this was noted various times by the other nuns.
- The Stigmata, and the renovation of these at different times, and a prodigious odor which permeated throughout the entire monastery. The Sisters would know from this when the Stigmata were being renewed, and the bandages which covered these, gave this sweet odor to the garments in the laundry.
- A Participation in the other sufferings of the Passion.
- The multiplicity of the signs impressed on her heart: in all, there were 24.

### **[a. Sublime Gifts lived in Charity]**

**2140:** *But be zealous for the better gifts. And I will show you yet a more excellent way. 1 Co 12:31.*

Veronica came to know well that one way can be excellent, because it exceeds others [and thus one arrives in the heights], because of its sublimity, rarity, singularity. This, however, is admired the more, but in it there is also the greater danger for the person who traverses it, either of taking vain glory in the praise that accrues from it, or of falling down because of its height. And greater, too, is the envy of one's enemies, as they strive either to incite one to slip, or by trying to deceive the individual by suggesting other false ways in preference to the true path. Therefore, all the less is the number of those who can be helped, or directed along such a journey, since there are so few who walk along such a way and come to know these extraordinary ways.

**2141:** Now, the most excellent path is that which is the most direct, smooth, secure, and masterful, along which all follow, and in which, in the final analysis, every path must be inserted, even that which is the most singular, if it is authentic. This is the way of charity, to which are subordinated all the visions, the ecstasies, and the like, almost like the sacraments in the Church, which signify and produce and increase, charity. Therefore, the Holy Church, in order to prove the authenticity of singular spirits, tries each one and observes with various trials, in order to ascertain their charity. Charity consists more in what is done than in the affections: If anyone will love me, he will keep My word... Jn 14:23. This is the path that Veronica trod. This is the pathway of charity, which *is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who is given to us...Rm 5:5.* And this is why He is most excellently called *the Gift of God. - Being justified freely by his grace, etc., let us glory in the hope of the glory of the sons of God Rm 3:24; 5:2.*

**2142:** And Veronica certainly had every human reason to glory for these reasons. She was endowed with such grace.

And she did not glory in those gifts that render one graces: sanctifying grace, holiness: she was endowed with grace from the time of her swaddling clothes. She maintained innocence of life until her death. She was educated by the Virgin Mary and by Jesus Christ, and she was always instructed and moved by them right up until her very last day.

Her infused, theological virtues: in her faith, she yearned for Martyrdom; hope in which she desired death for the assurance of being united with Christ: *I am having a desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ Ph 1:23.* This was so needed in order to overcome the most horrible temptations. She would intercede with God in order to provide miraculously for the monastery. His charity was so ardent that it extended even to the conversion of her enemies, sinners and the common folk.

**[b. Her Moral Virtues]**

**2143:** Her moral virtues [chap. 10], justice, and cf. there, also for her fortitude, temperance.

Her counsels of religious perfection: poverty, chastity [Book 3, Chapter4], obedience [chapter 7].

Prudence: this is for guiding not only one's own reason, but also that of others. Thus, she was mistress of Novices all her life, and Abbess for the last eleven years, and with apostolic confirmation, while still serving in the office as Mistress. She maintained a gentle but strong government, in such a way that those who were her enemies became her friends. She was one who would have been capable of governing the world! This was the testimony of Bishop Eustachius. She exercised great providence in temporal matters, and great discretion in the spiritual.

**2144:** She was endowed with exceeding justice toward God, as in religion, promoting His glory, not only by making of herself a holocaust in religious observance, but even by converting sinners to God by the force of her tears and the blood that spurted from her flagellation. She exercised toward her family that piety, by carrying out that last wish of her pious mother, who consigned her to the side of Christ, even to the forming of her own heart with that of Christ, one heart alone. She was a source of comfort to her grieving father after the death of his beloved partner. She freed her from the horrible pains of Purgatory with the fervor of her acts of penance. She maintained justice toward her superiors, by her observance, obedience, placing herself always submissive to their orders and indications.

Hers was a rigorous justice: toward both equals and inferiors. She fulfilled all the offices of religion, from the least to the most sublime with singular exactitude, fidelity and diligence.

**2145: Fortitude:** Her heart remained always strong and constant even in the most bitter agonies, or in her battling with both visible and invisible enemies, or in the most harsh trials that came to her from human beings or which were permitted by God. By means of these, she used them as cement for her virtue and constancy. She used to say: my suffering is not suffering to me: my suffering is always compassion [218].

Temperance: She not only restrained her passions and appetites, but she had them so under control, and her spirit was so free, ordered and peaceful, that of her it could rightly be said: *...but the lust of sin shall be under you, and you shall have dominion over it.* Gn 4:7.

**[c. Evangelical Counsels and her Espousals].**

**2146: The Counsels of Evangelical and Religious Perfection:**

**Poverty:** From her childhood and as a young girl living in the world, she rejected all the pomp and fine clothing, of which so many of that sex and of that age are much carried away [206]. Out of love for the most rigid poverty, she chose the Capuchin Nuns: her tunic abounded in 96 patches, even when she was Abbess. She introduced the most demanding poverty into the Convent, and the perfect common life.

**Chastity:** she flourished in that hedge of penance: this was cultivated in her by heaven from her earliest years. With her espousals, there was the pleasing odor of paradise that came from her body, filled her cell, and everywhere she went. In her battles and beatings on the part of devils, and in her participation in the flagellation of the Cross, she was never seen with any part of her body uncovered. She possessed chastity in such an eminent level that she seemed to be the portrait of this great virtue. It seemed that she was a pure spirit, without the weight of humanity. And with her example, she manifested the will to have and to maintain this virtue.

**2147: Obedience:** and not only of execution and of deed, but also that of will and judgment. If it had been possible for her, she would not have wanted to take a step, nor draw a breath, without the merit of obedience. Invited by the Most Holy Virgin to the eternal banquet, she excused herself in that she did not feel she had this under obedience. And when commanded by Christ, and reproved because of her fasting, she never wanted to do any of this unless under obedience. Even in the harshest of her trials that came to her from other human beings and from the devil, she begged her Superiors never to use terms of what would be better, but only those of commanding and ordering.

**[d] In Fear and Hope in the Cross]**

**2148:** In such sublime virtue, she never fell prey to pride: rather, she always considered herself to be the greatest sinner, and not only in her opinions and words, but in deed.

I know that *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of, and is wisdom itself* Si 1:16. This must be maintained in charity which is perfect, which is also the sign of its authenticity: *Fear the Lord, all you his saints.* Ps 33:10.

However, since charity is known by deeds: *If anyone love me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him. And we will come to him, and will make our abode with him*, etc. Jn 14:23 - then all the more is it manifested in suffering. The

reason is that the *proof of love is the manifestation of the work*, and sufferings show charity rooted and solid in the heart: *But that on the good ground are they who are in a good and perfect heart, hearing the word of God they keep it and bring forth fruit in patience.* [Lk 8:15].

**2149:** However, the Apostle Paul does not simply concede, but praises taking glory in *the hope of glory for the sons of God: Being justified therefore by faith, let us have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we also have access through faith into this grace wherein we stand, and glory in the hope of the glory of the sons of God.* Rm 5:1, ff. He then adds, almost this new grade of perfection to this good glory: *And not only so: but we glory also in tribulations.* Rm 5:3.

Now Veronica did not end by glorying in *the hope of the glory of the children of God*, with the ordinary level of being just: justified, yes, but with the grade of the more perfect just and with the greatest saints she came to glory in suffering: *but I will glory in tribulations,* Rm 5:1, ff. She indeed glory in suffering: in the Cross, as can be gleaned from her love of penance, mortification, fasting, all of which were her Cross [cf. Book 3, chapters 4 & 5].

#### [e. Penance Lived]

**2150: Mortification:** she practiced heroic acts to overcome her repugnance of her very delicate nature: she had putrid fish brought into her room, [etc. 60]; she kept a cotton pad used to bandage an external ulcer from the infirmity mistress, which she chewed over in her room. As these acts displeased the devil, she noted that the kitchen utensils she was using were all mysteriously over-turned. Yet, her efforts were pleasing to God, and that it was seen that the food she was preparing was more mysteriously multiplied. The challenges in the novices' training she took on herself [62, etc.], even taking care of their corporal needs in sickness [63]. Her room seemed to harbor all the insects of the entire monastery, [ibi]. She would eat for herself even the longest kept left-overs. [212].

**Fasting:** the life of the Capuchin Nuns in that Convent was a perpetual abstinence from meat, and the fast was maintained every day, except for Sundays. With what she ordinarily ate she could not naturally keep alive, in the judgment of her doctor. The devil rendered this all the more bothersome with all kinds of creatures, such as insects, mice, bed-bugs, blood-suckers; the Lord provided her with a liquid of an unsupportable taste. [cf. *Resitretto*, Book 2, chapter 5; and her *Life* 104 & 212].

**2151: Penance regarding her sleep:** her rest lasted usually about an hour, often interrupted by affections and disturbed by battles with the devil. Who tempted her especially in the night. She slept on the bare ground, or on a very low bed. On her bed, she often put thorns, or hard objects. She would sleep on a kind of container holding stones, and this for the whole night, and often on the hard bin containing the fire wood...

... **2153:** However, at the slightest hint of obedience, she would set aside all her penance, which still did not suffice for her ardent yearnings. ... Could anything greater than all this be read in the biographies of the greatest penitents? What was lacking in her that she could merit the title 'a martyr of penance'? She had gifts beyond all others, and yet held herself to be less than all others, this is the summary of her humility. She merited supreme honors, and always loved the lowest place, and even to be disregarded. This is the most perfect level of humility. She would glory only in the cross Ga 6:14. However, this is already something common to the most illustrious saints. For this most singular Saint, like Francis himself, it did not suffice to glory only in her own cross, but she wished to glory also in the very Cross of Jesus Himself: *But God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*; because while it is said of all the just and the saints who will ever follow Christ: *Take up his Cross*, Mt 16:24, and to each one his or her own. To singular saints there is granted this addition: *save in the Cross of our Lord*. Veronica loved sheer suffering, and not the glory that might accrue from that. However, she likewise loved the disdain of sharing in suffering for Christ. She loved all this through the inclination of her own will, disdaining her own humanity, but always in obedience to god and to her superiors, and for her love for her neighbor, the Church and sinners. [Book 3, chapter 3].

**2154: Her suffering [Book 2].** God began this, when Veronica reached the age of thirty-three, being an express image of His Son [76]. Jesus Christ predicted the chalice for her and its torments: ... She had a natural repugnance for the chalice, which was overcome by the strength of her penance. Her thirst was not so much for consolations, but rather of bitterness and sufferings. The vision of Jesus being scourged, and He showed her the chalice while comforting her.

The effects of the chalice [79], these were increased by her doctors and also by the devil [80], as well as by God Himself [87]. Her goal was to have Him always before her mind, restraining her own humanity. Each day she was afflicted by a powerful fever, that kept her for eight days without eating or drinking [79]. ... The remedies offered by medicine increased her torments.

#### [4] The Experience of the Stigmata and the Divine Espousals

**2155: The crown of thorns: [chapter 2, 82].** The vision of Christ crowned with thorns, and the affections of the Saint herself: overwhelmed by suffering, she fell to the ground [84]. ... She spent entire Lents in continuous suffering. These afflictions were suffered by her for 34 or 35 years [85]. Exterior signs were evident in her body [86], The remedies brought by doctors and surgeons increased her torments and heroic acts.

**2156:** The question almost naturally arises: but did she not also some experience heavenly consolations to comfort her? Yes, and these were extraordinary: one of these was the Divine Espousals, which, however, was the result of her pure suffering. ] [90] The preparation for this grace were visions and greater sufferings, and the supreme pain in this line, were the aridity and most refined sense of being abandoned. Her proofs of fidelity cost her agony. She gave no indication of paying much heed to anything else, she did not desire anything different, than pure sufferings, without any mixture of sweetness and all was accepted out of love for her Beloved.

**2157:** ... This wound in her heart was renewed by a flame, leaping forth from the feet of Jesus Christ ... [129]. She experienced great suffering in her reception of the Sacred Stigmata [136 and 229]. She experienced most difficult trials by order of the Bishop aimed at the humility of the Saint, due to the presence of signs [139]. On July 12th, there were revealed to her the trials coming from the Holy Office, and she was enjoined to remove as far as would be possible all visible signs. She responded that she would do this once her gifts had been authenticated. However, she was prepared with further greater sufferings. [140]. On July 20, 1699, the suffering of her Five Wounds was renewed. This indicated to her that the signs would not be taken away until three years had passed from their first impression. These were renewed many times with great suffering. [ibi]. The night before the signs would be taken away, she experienced great pain.

**2158:** It seemed to her that her flesh had become detached from her bones [142]. There remained after the impression of the Stigmata that her hands and her feet remained so numb, that she could hardly move them, not even to perform any act. [143]. The nerves in her hands had so withdrawn that this produced in her such pain that she thought she would die. [ibi]. The wound in her heart gave her such suffering that she thought she would expire at any moment [ibi]. And not because the signs were taken away did her suffering from the stigmata and their renewal cease, for they were renewed until her death, with great pain, many times, and every Friday at 9:00 p.m. , in the greater solemnities, as on September 17th and October 4th, and always in that obedience had commanded this [144].

**2159:** Her participation in the other pains of the passion [148]: One sign of this was the enormous curvature of her spine and her bones from the right shoulder under the weight of the Cross: she experienced shocks, contortions , a pulling, and frequent agony from her endurance of all the Passion of Jesus Christ, which would sometimes last 24 hours: agony, being captured, bound, fatigue - the experience of being led to the tribunals of Herod and Pilate with the slaps and blows [153]. In all this, she was reduced to such an authentic agony that her confessor was called a number of times. This was all witnessed by him and his companion, as well as by the nuns. They noted the most profound piercing of the ropes on both of her wrists, with the experience of both terror and compassion. [153]. She endured then the flagellation; and felt its torment [154]. Her being crowned with thorns, the carrying of the Cross, the ascent to Calvary. She endured the sensation of being crucified with a fierce agony and cold sweat [155, ff.]. She suffered then the pains of the Virgin Mary [156]. She experienced the crucifixion in her feet and in being raised up, before the Bishop and her confessor [157-8].

**2160: Disdain:** She offered prayers so that the thorns would not impede her labors in the Monastery, and that they be hidden [83]. She begged the Lord many times that all the sensible signs be taken away. [cf. the heading “Suffering”]. The scars of the signs once the wounds were closed, she hid with a bandage. [144]. Many times she asked the Lord to take these signs away also. He said to her however, that He would only do this when she would be closer to her death [144]. She experienced the vision in which Jesus Christ revealed to her the false accusations leveled against Him, the criticisms, and the rejection, that He had to suffer from human beings.

Once her Stigmata had been manifested in the Convent, some of the nuns began to contradict her and speak against her, saying that this was all for show and that she had clearly arranged for all this to happen. They made it known that in their opinion that if she made a show of such appearances, and did not cease and desist from her hypocrisy, she would be damned. The Bishop was informed, and he manifested a sublime disdain [224].

**2161:** Once the Holy Office in Rome was advised, and the order was received to make the required proofs in order to discover whether this was indeed a case of hypocrisy and delusion, he began by removing her from her task of Novice Mistress. She lost both active and passive voice in community Chapters. This seemed to be in accord with the wishes of the stronger members in the community, and their whisperings could be heard along the corridors of the nuns, who called her a witch, and excommunicated. They threatened to burn her alive in the middle of the cloister. They confined her to a room in the infirmary, as in a prison. They prohibited her from writing to anyone, other than to her fellow nuns in Mercatello, and once



her letters were first reviewed by her Abbess. She was never allowed to go down into the 'speak room'. Then, she was forbidden even to come into the choir for the Divine Office and the Mass, other than on feast days, and even then, she could only come to the threshold, as though she were indeed excommunicated. She always had to be accompanied with a Lay Sister who was charged with leading her down and then back to her prison, with the prohibition of speaking to the other nuns. This Sister was commanded to treat Veronica with such rigor, as if she were indeed a hypocrite and a deceiver.

**2162:** She was even deprived for some time from Holy Communion, and she was only allowed to go to the confessional for a time prescribed by the Abbess. She did all she could to have these wounds healed, and almost feared for herself that all of this was a posture. She had her gloves sealed with the episcopal seal. However, her wounds then began to fester within, and so it became necessary to go to bathe them with rose water, as the Bishop reported to the Holy Office. While she was in this state of total abandonment by everyone in the monastery and outside, and even being totally rejected, she remained in complete humility, resignation, quiet, tranquility, fully at peace in the arms of Christ, for Whom alone she wished glory. In all of this, she thought nothing of herself, nor did she take any steps that the disdain in which she was held by others would be lessened. Rather, she rejoiced in all this, and eventually came to be much admired by the Bishop, and the monastery. The Holy Office was indeed satisfied that all doubt had been set aside regarding Veronica's virtues, but many cautions were imposed in order to impede the curiosity and frivolous conversations in the city.

**2163:** She endured very harsh trials in the person of the Abbess, by order of the Bishop and from Father Crivelli, whom God had made known to her was a man of great merit [228]. She was also tried by words: when he first saw her, he called her a witch and a hypocrite, and more than once. Once preaching to the community, he singled her out in the choir, and called her out of her stall, saying: Where are you? Come here and sit on the ground. Veronica did this without showing the least sign of disturbance, and then she thanked him profusely. He told her that he had lost all confidence in her and that she should be burned alive as a witch and a hypocrite. And yet she was found by him even in this so resigned and humble in these ordeals, that he came to admire her the more. And the more he tried to humiliate her by speaking brusquely to her, the more she humbled herself, saying: 'I really do not want to be a witch, and if your reverence should know that I am under the sway of the devil, please free me from him for the love of Jesus Christ' [229].

**2164:** Trials by deeds: she was prohibited to speak or to write to those outside. A Lay Sister was assigned to her as her superior. This Sister was always accustomed due to her nature and by a precise order she had received, always to speak down to her in a rude manner. The Sister commanded her first to do one thing and then another. She made her change her cell into a very poor room, that was quite dark... The priest, simulating his admiration, bawled her out as acting stupidly, that she had really not understood her orders. This went on for about two months, and this so displeased the devil that each night he appeared to her under horrible forms, hoping that she would run away out of fright. ... She remained through all this always at peace, and even showed great unhappiness when these ordeals ceased.

**2165: Obedience:** By nature, the drinking of the chalice was repugnant to her, and yet her spirit was always anxious with the great desire to taste it, to carry out the will of God [77]. 82]. In the midst of these sufferings from the Crown, she exclaimed: 'Long live the Cross, may my suffering go on! I want nothing other than the will of God; I am happy in what pleases Him: here I am, ready for all.' [85]. In her sufferings in preparation for her Espousals, she protested that she did not want anything other than his will and good pleasure, [90] and the Lord showed His pleasure in her through a vision. She wanted to be a Victim to be sacrificed on the altar of Christ's Cross, and to suffer all His pains, but all submitted to His will [91]. Jesus Christ showed Himself content with these acts.

**[a. The Wound in her Side]**

**2166:** Having been asked by Jesus Christ whether she wanted that the wound in her heart be renewed, she responded: Lord, 'You know that I do not want anything other than Your Will' [129]. Before receiving the Stigmata promised her by Christ, she was interrogated by Him to see if she yearned for these, she responded: 'Just the fulfillment of Your will' [135]. At the hint of obedience the Stigmata were renewed. [144]. She accepted Fr. Crivelli's mental precept, directed to her by God to suffer the torments of the Passion in His presence and of the One Who willed this. And it was carried out in the presence of Fr. Crivelli and of the Bishop [15 c and 151]. During her suffering of the flagellation, while she was destitute of all her strength, and the confessor said: That is enough! And immediately it stopped and quiet returned. And receiving the order to get up, she came alone into choir to hear his Mass kneeling. She simply obeyed [154, 155]. Being totally out of breath and under the fierce agony of the Cross, with cold sweat and tears, at the command of obedience, she ceased everything [156].

**2167:** Charity toward her neighbor: In the midst of the sufferings of the crown she also experienced a profound compassion for sinners. She asked to be a mediatrix between God and sinners, and that He would send her more sufferings [85]. In this circumstance the sufferings of the crown were renewed, also throughout her entire head, and for many hours she enjoyed similar suffering [85]. She protested her principles and asked through the wound that was given to her heart by the Infant Jesus on behalf of sinners [123]. She offered the wound in her heart, saying: ‘For this wound I ask of you for the conversion of sinners [133]. Jesus Christ, in conferring on her the most sensible signs of the Stigmata, confirmed her as the mediatrix between sinners and Himself, and willed that quite often she would ask Him to suffer for the salvation of many souls [143].

**2168:** And really, she did not glory in this cross, shared and copied over in herself, but rather in the Cross of her lord Jesus Christ: *But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified to me, and I to the world. Ga 6:14:* She always feared and trembled even to her death that she was indeed a great sinner.

**Humility of concept:** this was notably in the consideration of her own nothingness. She considered this in a unique manner, as appears from her writings [234]. For nothing other did she pray so frequently to God, than for her to understand this from him. She feared that she was indeed the greatest of sinners.

### **[Conclusion: Humility in Word and Deed]**

**2169: Humility in speech:** Whoever did not know her, or did not understand who she was, if this person had only come to understand her words and expressions, such an individual would have taken her as the greatest of sinners. She was most desirous of confessing to the whole world, and would have tried to have herself considered to be the most ungrateful woman before God, and the greatest sinner of the world. And she did whatever she could in this regard. She referred to herself in such tones before her companion nuns and with her novices. She often made before the novices a kind of general confession, narrating the little defects of her childhood as enormous sins, with such contrition that her listeners often broke into tears for her, repeating many times: ‘In hell, there is place for all; there it will be for me, if I do not change my life!’ [235]. She continually recommended herself to all to pray for her conversion, with such efficacy and fervor that it seemed that her heart would break.

**2170: Humility of Deeds:** She did not risk that others would accompany her, for the fear of infecting them and yet she remained so abject and mortified with the nuns, as though she was not of the stature to appear among them. If she could have been hidden in the deepest center of the earth, so that she would not have to see any more by creatures, and that these creatures would not be able to see her any more, this was so that she would not infect and poison them with her exchanges with them. She deeply wished that all would cast her away from them, and disdain her, as she so well merited. She never resented the disdain that more than one person directed in her regard, for different reasons [236]. [cf. also Book 3, chapter 5]. Whoever might disdain her would please her very much, and she repeatedly obliged her novices to give her means of mortification and humility. [236. And Book 1, chapter 10].

**2171:** As Abbess, she practiced some very lowly duties. She served all, even the extern lay Sisters. She did all she could to resign from her position as Abbess. Fr. Crivelli, her confessor, implored her to ponder the thought that had not been communicated to her, that of making her Abbess, from not giving her the Cross about which she was thinking. And in wishing to convince her of this, she was surprised by such a terror that she fell to her knees, to beg of the Bishop and the Chapter not to let her be the cause of the final ruin of the Monastery, with giving it a superior who was so evil and useless for anything worthwhile, both in the spiritual as well as in the temporal realms [238]. Meanwhile, according to Bishop Eustachi, she was capable of governing an entire world: and all had recourse to her for counsel in the most complicated matters. And yet out of humility, she never undertook anything herself without taking counsel from others. As Superior she never used terms of command, but rather of prayer, with artists and workers, hiding everything that might cause them to honor her, concealing the extraordinary penance she performed and the gifts and supernatural graces she received. Only obedience could induce her to manifest these to confessors.

**2172: She was afraid even of her own visions as though they were her own imaginings, and she said she did this in fact, in fear and trembling.** She would will relate those visions where she would be corrected by God for some of her defects or imperfections. Since she could not hide the Stigmata, she would simply state that certain benefits were bestowed by God even to sinners in order to convert them. She would quickly point out, however, that these benefits in her had not yet been followed by any good fruit of her conversion. When the Bishop came to visit her on the day she fell ill she began with the most humble acts to protest to him that she was the most unworthy in the Monastery, while in 50 years of religious life she had so poorly corresponded to God that so far she had not yet acquired even a single virtue. She asked for his pardon and also of the listening nuns for all the

scandals she had committed, begging them to not imitate her, as she was a great sinner. In a letter to the Bishop of 1625, she once wrote: May the most Holy Virgin obtain for me the salvation of my soul: I always fear and tremble. [187. Cf. observations, here]<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> NB: It goes without saying, some of these accounts of frequent diabolical interventions in the saint's life, and the extraordinary suffering inflicted on her own body, may be more in accord with the 'hagiography' of former times. For the frequent mention of the Devil, and for the descriptions of the saint's horrific self-imposed mortification, as well as the imposed monastic disciplines, the student would do well to ponder the following recent bibliographical reflections:

The Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, ***Christian Faith and Demonology [Les formes multiplies de la superstition]***. June 26, 1975, in: *Vatican Council II. Vatican Collection*, Vol. 2 *More Post-Conciliar Documents*. Gen. Ed., Austin Flannery, OP. Collegeville MN: The Liturgical Press 1982, Doc. # 108, pp. 456- 485.

John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body. Human Love in the Divine Plan*. Boston: Pauline Media 1997.

Benedict Ashley, OP, *Theologies of the Body. Humanist and Christian*. Pope John Center 1985.