
Treatise on Prayer and Meditation



Saint Peter of Alcantara

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PROLOGUE

Composed by Father Peter of Alcantara Friar Minor of the Order of the Blessed Saint Francis directed to the Most Magnificent and Very Devout Mr. Rodrigo de Chaves resident of Ciudad Rodrigo

Most Magnificent and Devout Sir,

Never would I have been moved to compile this brief Treatise, nor consent to its publication, were it not for the many times that Your Lordship commanded me to write something brief and compendious and clear on prayer, the profit of which would be common to all; since being but of a small volume and price, it would benefit the poor, who do not have much opportunity for very costly books, and being written with great clarity, it would be of benefit to the simple, who do not have much breadth of understanding. And since I perceived that it is of no little merit in this case to obey him who asks such a pious and holy thing, for the fruit that can be drawn from it, I sought to put this holy and well-certified commandment into effect, for in my opinion, this little work cannot fail to be of profit, if the great affection and will that I have for the service of Your Lordship and Her Ladyship, Dona Francisca, your Companion, who is no less bound to Your Lordship by the chains of Charity and Love in Jesus Christ our Good, than by that of Matrimony, would not bring me some measure of merit.

Although indeed it is true (as it is) that all the good that our brothers do, and which we Christians enjoy, results in a merit particular to him who delights in it, well might I be able to say *Quod particeps sum devotionis vestrae* (That I am a participant in your devotion), and in all your good works, since as children much beloved by the Lord (for thus I wish to call Your Lordship), since you regard me as your Priest, never has the poverty of my doctrine and industry failed to assist the richness of our holy intentions and lofty thoughts. And having read many books about this matter, I have extracted and compiled the essence of those that seemed to me to be the best and most profitable. May it please the Lord that it may thus profit all those who seek Him, since it is not for the rest, and may Your Lordship obtain the spiritual interest of your good desire, and I that of your good will; all to the honour and glory of Jesus Christ our Good, who is all that is good.

Fr. Peter of Alcantara.

Part One

Chapter 1.

Of the Fruit that may be drawn from Prayer and Meditation.

Because this brief Treatise speaks of prayer and meditation, it would be a good thing to say in a few words what the fruit are that may be drawn from this holy exercise, so that you may offer yourself to it with a most happy heart.

It is a well-known thing that one of the major impediments you may have to obtaining your ultimate happiness and well-being is the bad inclination of your heart, and the difficulty and affliction that you have in doing good; because if it was not by means of this difficulty and affliction, then it would be

a most easy thing to run along in the path of the virtues and attain the end for which you were created. For this reason the Apostle says: “For I am delighted with the law of God, according to the inward man: But I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind, and captivating me in the law of sin, that is in my members.” (Rom. 7:22-23). This, then, is the most universal cause that there is of all our evil. And so, to leave this affliction and difficulty behind us, and make this whole business easier, one of the things which is most profitable is devotion. Because (as St. Thomas says) devotion is nothing other than “a promptness and keenness to do good works”, which dismisses from our souls all this difficulty and affliction and makes us ready and keen for every good thing. Because it is a spiritual refection, a refreshment and a dew from heaven, a puff and breath of the Holy Spirit and a supernatural affection; and this Spirit, in this manner, rules, compels and transforms your heart, for it places within you a new taste and breath for spiritual things, and a new disgust and abhorrence for the sensual. And so the Spirit highlights our everyday experience, because at whatever time spiritual persons come out of some profound and devout prayer, it is then that all their good intentions are renewed in them; it is then that they feel the desire and determination to do good works; it is then that they have the urge to love and please the Lord, who is just as good and sweet as was shown to them then, and to suffer new trials and hardships, and even to shed their blood for Him; and finally, all the freshness of our souls comes back and is renewed.

And if you ask me by what means we may attain that powerful and so very noteworthy affection for devotion, the same holy Doctor replies to you, saying: “through meditation and contemplation on divine things”; because, from profound meditation and consideration of these things, there results this affection and sentiment in the will, that we call devotion, which then excites us and moves us to all good. And because of this, we learn why this holy and religious exercise is so highly praised and commended by all the Saints; because it is the means by which we attain devotion, which, although it is no more than a single virtue, it nonetheless prepares us and moves us to all the other virtues, and acts like a general stimulus to all of them. And if you wish to see how true this is, then here is how Saint Bonaventure puts it, in these plain words:

“If you wish to suffer the adversities and miseries of life with patience, then be people of prayer. If you wish to attain virtue and fortitude so as to conquer the temptations of the enemy, then be people of prayer. If you wish to mortify your own will with all its likings and appetites, then be people of prayer. If you wish to be wise to the deceits of Satan, and defend yourself from all his deceptions, then be people of action. If you wish to live happily and journey smoothly along the way of penance and work, then be people of prayer. If you wish to brush away from your soul all the troublesome flies of vain thoughts and cares, then be people of prayer. If you wish to be sustained with the strength of devotion and be always full of good thoughts and desires, then be people of prayer. If you wish to fortify and confirm your heart in the way of God, then be people of prayer. Finally, if you wish to root all the vices out of your soul and plant the virtues there instead of them, then be people of prayer; for in it you will receive the unction and grace of the Holy Spirit, which

teaches us all things. And above and beyond all this, if you wish to rise to the heights of contemplation and enjoy the sweet embraces of the Spouse, then exercise yourself in prayer, because this is the way by which the soul rises to contemplation and the enjoyment of heavenly things. Do you not see, then, how much virtue and power there is in prayer? And as proof of everything I have said (leaving aside the testimony of the Divine Scriptures), this is enough now to provide sufficient proof that we have heard and seen, and that every day we see many simple people, who have attained all the above-mentioned things and other things greater than this by means of the exercise of prayer.” Thus far we have the words of Saint Bonaventure. And what treasure, what store, can we find that is even richer and fuller than him? I now present what another very religious and holy Doctor has to say about this proposition, when he speaks of the same virtue: “In prayer,” he says, “the soul is cleansed of its sins, it pastures on charity, and is made certain in faith, it is fortified in hope, made happy in spirit, its bowels are purged, its heart purified, truth is revealed, temptation overcome, sadness flees, the senses are renewed, weakened virtues are repaired, tepidity removed, the rust of vices cleared away, and in it there is no lack of the living sparks of the desires of heaven, among which there burns the flame of divine love. Much and great is the excellence of prayer! Great are its privileges! The heavens are open to it. Secrets are discovered by it, and the ears of God are always attentive to it.” This is enough now, because the fruit of this holy exercise may now be seen to some degree.

Chapter 2.

Of the Subject Matter of Meditation.

Having seen what the fruits of prayer and meditation are, let us now see what are the things on which we must meditate. To which we reply, that since this holy exercise is so ordered as to create a love and fear of God in our hearts, so that we keep His Commandments, then this is what would be the most appropriate subject for this exercise that we could ever hope to do in reply to this proposition. And although it is true that all created things, and all the spiritual Sacraments, move us to this; yet, generally speaking, the mysteries of our faith, which are contained in the Symbol, that is the Creed, are the most efficacious and profitable subjects for it. Because in this we are reminded of the Divine Blessings, the Last Judgement, the pains of Hell, and the glory of Paradise, which are very great stimuli to moving our hearts to the love and fear of God, and we ought also to remind ourselves of the Life and Passion of Christ Our Saviour, in whom all our good consists. These two things are met with most importantly in the Symbol, as these are the things that we ponder upon most ordinarily in meditation, so that with good reason it is said that the Symbol is the most proper subject of this holy exercise, although it will also be for each one of us the thing that most moves our hearts to the love and fear of God.

So, in view of all this, in order to introduce novices and beginners to this Way (to whom it is appropriate to give food already chewed and digested), we shall briefly sketch out here the two kinds of Meditations for all the days of the week, one kind for the night, and the other kind for the morning, drawn for the greater part from the mysteries of our Faith, for since we give our body two reflections every day, so also must we give them to our soul, whose repast is meditation on, and consideration of, Divine things. Of these Meditations, one kind are on the Mysteries of the Sacred Passion and Resurrection of Christ, and the other on the other Mysteries that we have already spoken of. And whoever has no time to be in recollection twice a day, at least will be able to meditate one week on one kind of Mysteries, and the other week on the other kind, or just stay with only those of the Passion and Life of Jesus Christ (which are the principal Mysteries), although it is not appropriate for the others to be omitted at the beginning of our conversion, because they are even more appropriate at this time, when the most important thing required of us is the fear of God and sorrow and detestation of our sins. Now follows the first seven Meditations for all the days of the week.

Monday

Today you will be deal with the remembrance of your sins, and gain an understanding of your own self, because in the one you will see how many evils you have, and in the other, how you have no good in you at all, unless it be from God, who is the means by which we attain humility, which is the mother of all the virtues.

For this reason, you must first think about all the multitude of the sins of your past life, especially those which you committed at a time when you knew less about God than now. Because if you know how to squarely face up to them, you will find that they have multiplied more than the hairs on your head, and that you lived at that time like a Gentile, who has no idea of Who or what God is. So ponder, then, briefly on all the Ten Commandments, and on the seven mortal sins, and you will see that there is none of them which you have not broken many, many times, in thought, word, or deed.

Secondly, ponder upon all the Divine blessings, and recall how you have spent your past life, and look at what you have filled it with; since you will have to give an account for all of this to God. Then tell me now: how did you waste your childhood years? And when you were a teenager? And what happened when you became an adult? And finally, how did you spend every single day of your past life? With what did you occupy your bodily feelings and the powers of the soul that God gave you, in order that you would know Him and serve Him? How did you make use of your eyes, except to look upon vanity? And how did you use your ears, except to hear lies? And how did you use your tongue, except in a thousand kind of oaths and murmurings? And how did you use your sense of taste, your sense of smell, and your sense of touch, except in sensual gifts and blandishments?

How did you profit from the Holy Sacraments, which God ordained for your remedy? How did you give Him thanks for His blessings? How did you respond to His inspirations? How did you employ your health and strength, and your natural abilities, and all the blessings that are called good luck, and

the means and opportunities He gave you to live a good life? What care did you have for your neighbour, whom God entrusted to you, and for those works of mercy that He pointed out to you as coming from Him? So think what you will reply on that Day of Reckoning, when God will say to you: "Give me an account of your stewardship, and the account I entrusted to you, because I no longer wish you to have charge of it." Oh tree, dry and blasted by eternal torments! What will you say to Him on that Day when you are asked for an account of all the time of your life and every second of every single day? Thirdly, think about all the sins that you have committed and are still going on committing every day, even after your eyes have been opened a little to the knowledge of God, and you will find that Adam is still living within you with many of his former habits and customs unchanged. Look how disobedient you were towards God, how ungrateful you were for His blessings, how you rebelled against His inspirations, how lazy you were when it came to matters of His service, which you never did, either with that promptness and diligence, or purity of intention, which you ought to have had, but instead, you acted out of other worldly considerations and interests.

Consider how hard you were on your neighbour, and how concerned you were about your own self, what a friend you were to your own will, your own flesh, your own honour, and all your own interests. Look how you were always proud, ambitious, angry, arrogant, vainglorious, envious, malicious, free-and-easy, moody, superficial, sensual - the friend of your recreations and conversations, and full of laughter and idle chit-chat. Look how inconstant you were in your good intentions, how inconsiderate you were in your words, how deficient you were in your deeds, and how cowardly and pusillanimous you were when it came to any serious business.

Fourthly, consider the multitude of your sins against what has been said so far, and then consider their gravity, so that you may see how your misery has grown on every side. To this end, you ought to consider first and foremost the following three circumstances in the sins of your past life, in other words: "Against whom you sinned, why you sinned, and in what manner you sinned." If you start by looking at whom you sinned against, you will find that you sinned against God, whose Goodness and Majesty is infinite, and whose blessings and mercies towards mankind exceed the grains of sand in the sea; and so, for what reason did you sin? For a point of honour, for an animal pleasure, for a trivial interest, and many times for no real cause; just out of habit and contempt for God. And then, in what manner did you sin? With such facility, with such audacity, with such a lack of scruples, with so little fear, and at times with such ease and contentment, as if you were sinning against a God of wood, who neither knows nor sees what goes on in the world. Was this, then, the kind of esteem that is due to so great a Majesty? Is this the gratitude owed for so many blessings? Is this how you repay that precious Blood spilled out for you on the Cross, and those lashes and blows that were received for you? Oh what a miserable sinner you are, for all that you have lost, and so much more for all that you have done, and even more still if, with all this, you do not behold your perdition! In view of all this, it is a thing of great profit for you to detain your eyes for a moment to consider the possibility of yourself as nothing at all; for the truth is, that in your past, you

have nothing at all to call upon except nothingness and sin, and anything else is from God; because it is clear that both the gifts of nature, and the gifts which come from grace (which are so much greater), all come from Him; because His is the grace of predestination (which is the source of all the other graces), and His is the gift of a vocation, and concomitant grace is also His, and His is the grace of perseverance, and His is the grace of eternal life. So what, then, is your own, and where is your own glory, except in nothingness and sin? Pause, then, a while to consider that nothingness, and place this nothingness into your own account, and all rest into God's account, so that you may see clearly, and beyond all doubt, just how little you are and how great He is; how poor you are and how rich He is, and, in consequence, how little you ought to adore and esteem yourself, and how much you should adore Him, love Him, and be glorified in Him.

So consider all these things we have talked about, and think of yourself as the lowest of the low. Think that you are nothing more than a weathercock, which changes with every wind that blows, lacking every value, lacking every virtue, having no firmness, no stability and no real kind of existence. Think of yourself as a Lazarus, four days dead, a putrid and abominable corpse, full of worms, to whom all those who pass by stop up their noses and eyes so as not to see you. Think that it is just like this that you stink before God and His angels, so you can consider yourself unworthy even to lift your eyes to heaven, and think of how the earth has to put up with you, and how you make use of God's creation to serve you, in order to enjoy the very bread you eat and the air that you receive.

Cast yourself down together with that publicly sinful woman at the feet of the Saviour, and cover your face with confusion and with that very same shame suffered by that woman in front of her husband when she was taken in adultery, and, with every possible sorrow and contrition of your heart, ask Him to pardon you all your errors, so that through His infinite compassion and mercy, He will be willing to turn to you and receive you back into His House.

Tuesday

On this day you will consider the miseries of our human lives, because through them you will be able to see how vain the glory of the world is, and how much it deserves to be little-valued, for it is founded upon the same weak foundations as this miserable life; and since the defects and miseries of this life are almost beyond number, you ought now to pay particular attention to the following seven points:

Firstly, consider how brief this life is, since "the days of our years in them are threescore and ten years. But if in the strong they be fourscore years: and what is more of them (if anything remains, as the Prophet say) is labour and sorrow." And if from this we subtract the time of childhood, which is more the life of animals than men, and the time we spend sleeping, when we do not use either our senses or our reason (which makes us human), we shall find it to be even briefer than it seems. And if in addition to all this we compare it to the eternity of the life to come, then it will scarcely seem like a moment. And that is why you will see how ludicrous are those who, for the sake of enjoying this

tiny little puff of life, cheerfully set about losing their repose in the life which is to last for ever.

Secondly, consider how uncertain this life is (which is another misery on top of the previous one), because you cannot rely on the little that you have, since this little bit that you have of life is not secure, but uncertain. Because how many actually arrive at the seventy or eighty years that the Psalmist mentioned? For how many is the cloth cut when the weaving begins? How many go in their prime (as they say), or before their time? “Watch ye therefore,” our Saviour says “for you know not when the lord of the house cometh: at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning.” To understand this better, and to make good use of it, you should remember the deaths of the many people that you have known in this world, especially your friends and relatives, and certain illustrious and famous people, to whom death came at different ages, and left their intentions and hopes unfulfilled. Thirdly, think how fragile and brittle this life is, and you will find that there is no glass jar as breakable as life is, since a cold wind, or sunstroke, or a jug of cold water, or the cough of a sick person, is enough to deprive us of it, as is clear from the daily experiences of many people, who at the very peak of their years fall prey to some occasion of this sort.

Fourthly, consider how mutable life is, and how it never stays in one and the same state. Because of this, you must consider how much our bodies change, since they never stay in the same health and disposition, and how much greater is that of our souls, which are always changing like the sea, with the various winds and waves of the passions and appetites and cares that disturb us at every hour, and, finally, how many are the changes which are ascribed to chance, which never consents to remain one and the same, since neither the same state, nor the same prosperity and joy, never remains constant in the course of our human lives, but they always change in one way or another. And in addition to all this, consider how continuous is the movement of our lives, since life never stops either by day or by night, but always goes first in one direction and then in another. In view of all this, what is our life but a candle, that is always becoming spent, and the more it burns and radiates, the faster it spends itself. “What is our life but a flower, which cometh forth in the morning, and in the middle of the day it wilts, and in the evening it falls away.”

So by reason of this continual change, God says through Isaiah: “All flesh is grass, and all the glory thereof as the flower of the field.” About which verse St. Jerome says: “Truly, whoever considers the fragility of our flesh, and how in every second and moment of time we grow and decline, without ever staying in the same state, and how what we are talking about and planning and evaluating today is even now passing out of our lives, so that same person cannot fail to call our flesh grass, and all its glory like the flowers of the field.” He who now is a child at the breast, suddenly has become a boy, and the boy a young man, and the young man soon arrives at old age, and as soon as he finds himself old, he marvels at seeing that he is no longer young. And the beautiful woman, who brought in her train the crowds of enamoured young men, very soon discovers a forehead lined with wrinkles, and she who before was adorable, bit by bit soon comes to be abhorrent.

Fifthly, consider how deceitful life is (for perhaps this is the worst thing about her is that she deceives so many, and brings along such a crowd of blind lovers in her train), since being ugly, she seems beautiful to us, being bitter, she seems sweet to us, being brief, to each one of us separately, she seems long, and being so miserable, she seems so adorable, for there is no danger or labour which people will not endure for her sake, even though it might be to the detriment of their own eternal life, for they cheerfully do things through which they come to lose that same eternal life.

Sixthly, consider how, besides being so brief (according to what we said), the little bit that we have of life is subject to such miseries, both of the soul and of the body, that all of it is nothing else than a valley of tears, and an archipelago of infinite miseries. St. Jerome writes that Xerxes, that very powerful king who demolished mountains and subdued the seas, after going up into a high mountain to look back down on an army which had been gathered together from an infinite number of people, stared at it thoroughly, and then started to weep. And when he was asked why he was weeping, he replied: "I am weeping because in a hundred years time there will be nobody left alive out of all the people that I now see before me." "Oh, if only we (says St. Jerome), could go up into some high watchtower, so that from there we could see the whole earth below our feet! From there you will see the falls and miseries of the whole world, and people destroyed by people, and kingdoms by kingdoms. You will see how some are tortured and others killed; some are drowned in the sea, and others are taken prisoner. Here you will see weddings, and there, funerals; here some people are killing people, and there others are dying; some abound in wealth, and others go begging. And finally you will see not just the army of Xerxes, but all the people of the world alive today, and who in a few days from now will have disappeared." Think of all the infirmities and labours of our human bodies, and of all the afflictions and cares of our hearts, and all the dangers that there are, in both all the conditions and ages of mankind, and you will then see even more clearly how many miseries there are in this life, since when you see with such clarity how little it is that the world can give you, then all the more easily will you be able to despise whatever there is in it.

To all these miseries succeeds the last, which is death, which, both for the body and for the soul, is the last of all these terrible things; since the body in a moment will be deprived of everything, and the soul will then discover its fate for ever. All this will let you know how brief and miserable is the glory of the world (since such is the life of the world on which it is founded), and, in consequence, how worthy it is of being trampled on and little-valued.

Wednesday

Today you will think about the approach of death, which is one of the most profitable considerations that there is, both for attaining true wisdom and in fleeing from sin, and also in beginning in good time to prepare yourself for the hour of reckoning.

Think, therefore, first and foremost, of how unknown that hour is in which you have to face death, because you do not know on what day, nor in what place, nor in what state it will befall you. You simply know that one day you

will die, and all the rest is uncertain; but ordinarily this hour strikes at a time when you are most neglectful and oblivious of it.

Secondly, think about the separation that there will be then, not simply from all the things that you love in this life, but also between the soul and the body, your long-time companion whom you have loved so much. If right now you think it is a great evil to be exiled from your home country and the native air in which you were created, when even an exile is able to bring with him everything he really loves, how much greater will be your universal exile from everything in your house, your property, your children, the common air and light, and finally, from everything? If an ox bellows when it is separated from another ox with which it ploughs, what bellowing will there be in your heart when you are separated from all those people in whose company you took on the yoke of the burdens of this life?

Consider also the pain that you will receive when you are shown in what state your body and soul is to be found after death, because, as we know, the body can have no better fate than a hole six feet deep in company with other dead bodies; but regarding the soul, we do not know for sure where it will go, nor what fate will befall it. This is one of the greatest griefs that it will suffer then; knowing that there is either glory or pain for ever, and to be so near either one or the other, and not know which of these two unequal fates is to befall us.

After this grief there follows another no less great, which is the account which we will then have to give, and which is such as to make even the bravest tremble. De Arsenio writes that when he was on the point of death he began to be afraid. 10. And when his followers said to him: "Father, and you too are afraid now?" he replied, "My sons, this fear is no new thing for me, because I have always lived with it." At that time, then, you will be shown all the sins of your past life, like a squadron of enemies who have come to attack you, and the greatest sins, and those in which you took the most delight, these are the ones which will attack you most fiercely, and which will be the cause of your greatest fear. Oh, how bitter then is the remembrance of past delights, which at another time appeared more sweet! And this is why, with much good reason, the Sacred Author said: "Look not upon the wine when it is yellow, when the colour thereof shineth in the glass: it goeth in pleasantly. But in the end, it will bite like a snake, and will spread abroad poison like a basilisk." These are the dregs of that poisonous brew of the enemy; this is the residue that remains in that Babylonian chalice, with its gilded exterior. For then, you miserable sinner, you will see yourself surrounded by so many accusers, and you will begin to fear even the image of this Judgement, and say to yourself: "Oh miserable me, how deceived I have been, and what ways have I walked in, and what will become of my deeds in this Judgement?" So St. Paul says: "For what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap. For he that soweth in his flesh, of the flesh also shall he reap corruption." And St. John says: "that in that sovereign city, which is all pure gold, nothing foul shall enter, so what hope can he have who has lived so foully and so basely?"

To help us with all this we have the Sacraments of Confession and Communion and Extreme Unction, which is the last help which the Church can give us in these troubles, and both in this and the other sacraments we ought to consider the anxieties and griefs that we shall suffer there for having

lived evilly, and how much we should have sought to follow a different path, and what life we should have had then, had the time been granted to us for this, and how then we would have endeavoured to call upon God, and the sorrows and the attack of illness scarcely would have taken place.

Look also at those last throes of illness, which are like the harbingers of death: how terrible they are, and how much to be feared. Your chest heaves, your voice fades away, your feet grow dead, your knees chill, your nose grows sharp, your eyes grow hollow, your face takes on the pallor of death, and then your tongue can no longer be relied upon to perform its function; finally, with a great shudder of the soul as she departs, your senses are disturbed and lose their value and virtue. But, more than all this, it is your soul which then suffers the greater troubles, because then she is struggling and agonising, partly because she is departing, and partly through fear of the time of reckoning that is overtaking her; because she, naturally, refuses to depart and longs to stay behind and avoid that time of reckoning.

And when your soul has finally departed from the flesh, there still remain two ways for you to go: the one accompanying your corpse to its burial, and the other following your soul until the determination of her case, so let us then consider what will happen to each one of these parts. Look, then, what that body is after its soul abandons it, and with what noble vestments it is clad for burial, and how they manage to cast it out of the house. Consider its burial with everything that happens to it, the tolling of bells, all the requests for the dead, the offices and solemn chants of the Church, the deepest sympathies of your friends, and finally, all the multitude of details that normally happen before the body is abandoned to its grave, where it remains entombed in that earth in perpetual oblivion.

And when your body has been abandoned to its grave, then turn your attention afterwards to your soul and look at the road she must take for that new region in which, finally, she must appear, and how she will be judged. Imagine that you are already present at this Judgement, and that the whole Court of Heaven is awaiting the pronouncement of this sentence, in which all the receipts will be weighed in the balance right down to the last detail. There you will be asked to give an account of your life, your property, your family, the inspirations you had from God, the equipment you had for a good life, and above all the Blood of Christ, and then a judgement will be handed down according to the account owed against the receipts.

Thursday

Today you will think about the Last Judgement, because this consideration will wake up in your soul those two principal affections which must be the aim of every Christian, namely: fear of God and a horror of sin.

Think, then, first and foremost, how terrible will be that day on which the cases of all the sons of Adam will be investigated, and our lives will be finally brought to trial, and a definitive sentence will be passed that will be for ever. That day will include all the days of every century - present, past, and still to come, because in it the world will give an account of all those times, and into it will be poured forth the anger and fury that has been pent up in every century. For that enormous flood of the Divine indignation will be discharged at full

volume, with great torrents of anger and fury, for so many sins have been committed since the beginning of the world.

Secondly, consider the dreadful signs that will precede that day, because (as the Saviour says) before this day comes there will be signs in the sun and the moon and the stars, and finally among all the creatures of heaven and earth. Because they will all lament their end before they pass away, and they will tremble and try to escape their fall. But men, he says, shall be withering away for fear, and scorched by death, hearing the dreadful roaring of the sea, and seeing the great waves and storms that will arise, sensing with this the great calamities and miseries that will threaten the world with frightful signs. And so they will be astonished and terrified, their faces pale and distorted, dead before their actual death, and sentenced before their judgement, fearing danger with its own terrors, and each one of them so occupied with himself that he will not stop to think about other people, even if it is his own father or son. No one will care about anyone, because everyone will be concerned only for himself.

Thirdly, consider that universal flood of fire that will come before the Judge, and that frightful blast of the trumpet that the Archangel will sound to call all the generations of the world to assemble together in one place and make themselves present for the Judgement; and, in addition to all this, the dreadful Majesty with which the Judge is to come.

After this, consider how strict will be the account that will be asked of everyone there. "Indeed," says Job, "can man be justified compared with God?" And if he seeks to contend with Him in judgement, about the thousand charges that will be laid, he will not be able to defend himself against a single one of them. So how will each one of those evil-doers feel then, when in the examination of himself before God, he hears Him speak thus deep inside his conscience: "Come here, evil man, what do you see in Me, why did you so despise Me and pass over to the band of My enemy? I created you in My image and likeness. I gave you the light of faith, and I made you a Christian, and I redeemed you with My own blood. For you I fasted, for you I was a wayfarer, kept watch, toiled and sweated drops of blood. For you I suffered persecution, the scourge, blasphemies, mockings, beatings, dishonours, torments and the Cross. My witnesses are the Cross and the nails that appear here; My witnesses are these wounds in My feet and hands, which remain in My body; My witnesses are heaven and earth, before whom I suffered. For what did you do to that soul of yours, which I made Mine with My blood; in whose service did you employ what I bought so dearly? Oh, insane generation, adulterers! Why did you prefer to serve that enemy of yours with your labours, rather than Me, your Redeemer and Creator, with joy? I called you so many times, and you did not respond to Me; I knocked at your doors, and you did not wake up; I stretched out My arms on the Cross, and you did not even look; you despised My teaching and all My promises and warnings; then decide now, angels; judge now, judges, between Me and My vineyard - what more must I do for it than what I have done?" For what will the evil-doers now reply, those who despise divine things, those who make a mockery of virtue, who have little esteem for simplicity, who place more account on the laws of the world than on the laws of God, those who are deaf to everything He says, insensitive

to all His inspirations, rebellious against all His commandments, and ungrateful and hard-hearted before all His chastisements and blessings? How will they reply - all those who lived as if they believed there was no God, and those who take no account of any Law, except when it suits their own purpose? "What will you do," says Isaiah "in the day of visitation and of the calamity which cometh from afar?" From whom will you seek rescue, and what will the abundance of your wealth profit you then?

Fifthly, consider, after all this, the terrible sentence that the Judge will pronounce against the evil-doers, and that dreadful word that will resound in the ears of him who hears it: "His lips," says Isaiah "are filled with indignation, and his tongue as a devouring fire." What fire could scorch as much as those words: "Depart from me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels." In each one of these words there is much to ponder and think about, in the separation, the damnation, the fire, the company, and above all, in the eternity of it all.

Friday

Today you will meditate on the pains of hell, because through this meditation your soul will then be more confirmed in the fear of God and detestation of sin.

These pains, says Saint Bonaventure must be visualised under the various images and similitudes that the Saints teach us. For which reason, it will be most appropriate to imagine that the location of hell (as St. Bonaventure himself says) is like a dark and gloomy lake, situated beneath the earth, or like a bottomless pit full of fire, or like a dreadful and gloomy city, which burns everywhere with living flames, in which nothing else can be heard but the voices and screaming of the tormentors and the tormented, with a perpetual weeping and gnashing of teeth.

For in this accursed place, two principal pains are suffered: those we call the pains of the senses, and those we call the pains of loss. And regarding the former, think how there is no human sense either inside or outside the soul which does not suffer its own torment, because, just as evil-doers offended God with all their members and senses, and all of them took up arms in the service of sin, so will He order that each one of them will suffer their own torments and pay as they have merited. There those adulterous and indecent eyes will suffer from the horrible vision of the demons. There those ears that gave themselves over to listening to lies and foul language, will now hear perpetual blasphemies and screaming. There those noses that loved erotic perfumes and odours will now be filled with an intolerable stench. There the gluttony that pampered itself with a variety of foods and sweet-meats will now be tormented by a rabid hunger and thirst. There the spiteful and blasphemous tongue will be made bitter with the bile of dragons. There the cosseted lover of gifts and blandishments will now struggle to swim in the freezing waters of the river Cocytus, (as Job says) and between the heat and flames of fire. There the imagination will suffer with the apprehension of present sorrows; the memory, with the remembrance of the pleasures of the past; the intellect, with the representation of the evils to come, and the will, with the uncontrolled furies and rages that evil-doers have towards God.

Finally, all the evils and torments that can be thought of will be found there together, because, as St. Gregory says: “there they will find a coldness beyond all endurance, a fire that cannot be extinguished, worms that cannot be killed, an intolerable stench, a palpable darkness, the scourges of tormentors, the vision of demons, the shame of sin, and the despair of anything good.” So tell me now: if the least of all these evils that are found there were to be suffered for a very small space of time, how hard would it be to bear it? So what then would you have to suffer there, all at one and the same time, of all this multitude of evils, in all your interior members and feelings, and this not just for the space of but one night, nor a thousand, but for an infinite eternity! What feelings? What words? What judgement is there in the world that can make us feel and pay the price of this as it is suffered there?

Yet all this is not the greatest of the pains that can happen there: there is still another, far beyond comparison, which is what theologians call the pain of loss, which is to have to lose the sight of God, and His glorious company, for ever, and because this pain is so great as to deprive you of your greatest good, and since God is the greatest good of all goods, so then the loss of Him is the greatest evil of all evils, and this is no more than the truth.

These are the pains that are generally inflicted on all the condemned. But besides these general pains, there are other special pains that are suffered there, each in conformity to the quality of the offence. Because one will suffer the pain for pride there, another that for jealousy, another that for avarice, another that for luxury, and so on and so forth. There the sorrow will be weighed out in conformity with the delight previously received, and the shame in conformity with the presumption and pride, and the nakedness in conformity with the excess and abundance, and the hunger and thirst in conformity with the pampering and satisfaction of the past.

To all of these pains is attached the eternity of suffering, which is like the seal or key to all of them, because all this might even be tolerable if it was finite, because nothing seems great if it comes to an end. But a pain that has no end, nor alleviation, nor decrease, nor diminution, nor any hope that it will ever end, neither the pain, nor he that inflicts it, nor he that suffers it, but that it is like a cruel exile and an irredeemable curse, that will never come to an end; this is something to be taken into account by whoever considers it attentively. This is, then, the greater of the pains that are suffered in that unfortunate place; because if these pains were to last for a limited time, even if it was a thousand years, or a hundred thousand years, or as a Doctor says: “if they were to hope that they had to go on until they drained out all the water of the Oceans, drawing out only one drop of the sea every thousand years, even this would be like a ray of hope to them.” But this is not so, since their pains compare with the eternity of God, and the duration of its misery with the duration of His divine glory; to the extent that God lives, to that extent they die, and were God ever to cease to be who He is, they would then cease to be who they are; for in this duration, in this eternity, I would seek, my brother, to fasten my eyes on consideration of all this, and (like even a mere fool) I would now think long and hard about this step before you, for He proclaims that eternal truth in His Gospels, saying: “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.”

Saturday

Today you will think about the glory of the blessed, because in this way your heart will be moved to despise the world and the desire for its company. For in order to understand something of this good, you must consider the following five things, amongst others, in other words: the excellence of the place, the pleasure of the company, the vision of God, the glory of the body, and finally, the fullness of all the good things that are there.

In the first place, consider the excellence of the place, and above all, the greatness of what is to be admired, because when you read in certain serious authors that any one of the stars of heaven is greater than all the earth, and that there are even some of them of such a notable size, that they are ninety times greater than the whole earth; and knowing this, you lift your eyes to heaven, and observe such a multitude of stars there, and so much empty space that could be filled by many times their number, so how could you not feel a sense of awe? How could you not be astonished and in ecstasy, considering the immensity of that place, and even more at the sovereign Lord who created it?

For the beauty of it cannot be explained in words, because if in this valley of tears and this place of exile, God has created such admirable things, so full of beauty, what then must He have created in that place which is the dwelling-place of His glory, the throne of His greatness, the palace of His Majesty, the home of His elect and the Paradise of all delights?

After the excellence of the place, consider the nobility of those who dwell in it, whose number, whose sanctity, whose wealth and beauty exceed everything that can be thought of. Saint John says that: "After this I saw a great multitude, which no man could number." Saint Dionysius says that: "so great is the number of the angels, that it exceeds without comparison all the material things that there are on earth." Saint Thomas, confirming this opinion, says: "that just as the greatness of the heavens exceeds the earth without proportion, so the multitude of those glorious spirits exceeds that of all the material things that there are in this world, in the same proportion."

For what thing could be more admirable? For sure, this is the thing that, if it were well considered, would be enough to make all mankind astonished. And if each one of those blessed spirits (even if it were the least of them) is more beautiful to look at than all this visible world, how wonderful then would be the sight of such a number of so many beautiful spirits, and the sight of the perfection and offices of each one of them? There the angels dwell, the archangels minister, the principalities triumph and the powers rejoice, the dominations reign, the virtues shine out, the thrones radiate their light, the cherubims glow and the seraphims blaze, and they all sing praises to God. For if the company and communication of the good is so sweet and friendly, what will it be to live there with so many good spirits, speak with the Apostles, converse with the Prophets, communicate with the martyrs, and with all the elect?

And if it is such a great glory to enjoy the company of the good, what then will it be to enjoy the company and presence of Him whom the morning stars praise, whose beauty the sun and moon marvel at, before whose merits the

angels kneel, and all those sovereign spirits? What will it be to see that universal good in which there is every good, and that greater world in which there is every world, and Him who being One is everything, and being the most simple, embraces the perfection of all things? If it was such a great thing to hear and see King Solomon, as the Queen of Sheba said: “Blessed are thy men, and blessed are thy servants, who stand before thee always, and hear thy wisdom.” Then what will it be to see that supreme Solomon, that eternal wisdom, that infinite greatness, that inestimable beauty, that immense goodness, and enjoy Him for ever? This is the essential glory of the Saints, and this is the ultimate end and haven of all our desires.

Consider, after all this, the glory of the bodies, which enjoy those four singular gifts, which are: subtlety, lightness, impassability, and clarity, which will be so great, that each one of them will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. For if no more than one sun, which is in the midst of the sky, is enough to give light and joy to this world, what then of all those suns and luminaries who shine there? For what will I say of all those other good beings who are there? There they will have health without infirmity, liberty without servitude, beauty without foulness, immortality without corruption, abundance without necessitude, tranquillity without disturbance, security without fear, knowledge without error, satisfaction without weariness, joy without sadness, and honour without contradiction. Saint Augustine says: “There will be true glory, where no one will be praised in error or in flattery; there will be true honour, where it is denied to none who is worthy, and bestowed on none who is unworthy. There will be true peace, where none will suffer attack from within himself nor from any foe outside. The reward of virtue will be God Himself, who gave the virtue, together with the promise of Himself, the best and greatest of all possible promises... we shall see Him for ever; we shall love Him without satiety; we shall praise Him without wearying” There the place is wide, beautiful, resplendent and secure, the company very good and agreeable, the time of one kind: there is no distinction between evening and morning, but it continues with a simple eternity. There you will find a perpetual spring, which, with the freshness and breath of the Holy Spirit, will always be in flower. There all will rejoice, all will sing and praise that supreme Giver of everything, through whose largesse they live and reign forever. Oh, Heavenly City, secure dwelling-place, land where every delight is found! Nation without spite, quiet neighbours and people with no necessities! Oh, if only this struggle had already ended! Oh, if only the days of my exile had already concluded! When will this day arrive? When will I come and appear before the face of my God?

Sunday

Today you will think about the Divine Blessings, so as to give thanks to the Lord for them, and to inflame yourself more with the Love of Him who has done you so much good. And although these blessings are without number, you can at least consider these five most principal ones, namely: of Creation, Conservation, Redemption, Vocation, together with other blessings that are special and hidden.

Firstly, regarding the blessing of Creation, consider most carefully what you were before you were created, and what God did with you, and gave you, before anything you merited, namely: your body with all its members and feelings, and your excellent soul, with its three very noteworthy powers, which are, intellect, memory and will. And realise that in giving you a soul of this kind, He in fact gave you everything, for there is no perfection in any creature that you do not have within your own self, since it is evident that giving us these gifts in part is to give us everything together at one and the same time. Regarding the blessing of Conservation, look how closely tied your whole being is to divine Providence; how you could not live even for a second, nor take a single step, if it was not for Him; how He created all the things of the world for your service: the sea, the land, the birds, the fishes, the animals, the plants, and even the very angels of heaven. Also consider the health that He gives you, your powers, your life, your sustenance, with all the other temporal helps. And above and beyond all this, ponder much on the miseries and disasters into which you see other people fall every day, and which you would also have fallen into were it not that God, in His compassion and mercy, had not preserved you.

Regarding the blessing of Redemption, you may consider two things: firstly, how many and how great were all those good things that He gave us by means of the blessing of Redemption; and secondly, how many and how great were the evils that He suffered in His body and His most holy soul, so as to earn these good things for us; and so that you may feel more keenly what you owe this Lord for all that He has suffered for you, consider now these four principal circumstances in the Mystery of His Sacred Passion, namely: Who suffered, what did He suffer, for whom did He suffer, and for what reason did He suffer? Who suffered? God. What did He suffer? The greatest torments and dishonours that were ever suffered. For whom did He suffer? For infernal and abominable creatures, like the demons themselves in their works. For what reason did He suffer? Not for His own profit, nor for our deserts, but out of the promptings of His infinite charity and mercy.

Regarding the blessing of Vocation, consider first and foremost how great a mercy of God it was to make you a Christian, and to call you to the faith by means of your baptism, and also to make you a participant in the other Sacraments. And if after this vocation, you had already lost your innocence, He drew you out of sin, and returned you to His grace, and placed you in a state of health, so how could you fail to praise Him for this blessing? How great a mercy was it for Him to wait for you so long, and put up with so many of your sins, and send you so many inspirations, and not cut the thread of your life in the way that the thread of the lives of others was cut in the same state; and, finally, to call you with such a powerful grace as to resuscitate you from death to life, and open your eyes to the light! How great a mercy was it, after you had already been converted, to give you the same grace not to return to sin, and to conquer the enemy and persevere in good!

These are the public and well-known blessings: there are other secret blessings, that no-one knows except those who have received them, and there are others even more secret, that even those who have received them do not know, but only He who has given them. How many times in this world have

you merited for your pride, or negligence, or lack of gratitude, your abandonment by God, just as He could have abandoned many, many others for any one of these causes? And yet He has not done so! How many evils, and occasions for evils, has the Lord preserved you from in His Providence, undoing the snares of the enemy, and stopping him in his tracks, and not giving way to his insinuations and blandishments? How many times could He have done with each one of us what He said to St. Peter: "Behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not!" For who could know these secrets except God? The positive blessings - well, you may even come to know them at times, but the private blessings, which do not consist in making us good, but in liberating us from evil - who else could know them? For both these as for the others, this is the reason why we always ought to give our thanks to the Lord, so that we may understand how obligated we are when we go to account, and how what we owe Him is so very much more than what we can ever repay, for even in this our understanding fails us.

Chapter 3

Of the Time and Fruit of the above-mentioned Meditations.

Dear Christian reader, these are the first seven Meditations where you can philosophise and occupy your thoughts during all the days of the week, not because you cannot think about other things on other days besides these, but because, as we have already said, anything that induces our hearts to love and fear God and keep His Commandments is a matter for meditation. Yet the points I have already mentioned stand out: firstly, because they are the principal Mysteries of our Faith, and the ones which, through their own inherent value, most move us to that Faith; and secondly, because beginners (who have need of milk) have here the things on which they ought to meditate almost fully masticated and digested for them, because they walk but as pilgrims in a foreign land, wandering through unfamiliar regions, taking some things here and leaving others there, without having a solid foundation in anything.

It should also be noted that the Meditations of this week are very appropriate, as we have already said, when conversion begins (which is when you turn once again to God), because this is when it is fitting for you to begin with all those things that can move you to sorrow, and the detestation of your sins, and the fear of God, and contempt for the world, which are the first steps along this way. And so those who are beginners ought to persevere for some space of time in the consideration of these things, because in this way they will be founded much more firmly in all these virtues and affections.

Chapter 4

Of the other Seven Meditations on the Sacred Passion and the manner in which we should meditate on them.

After these Meditations there follow another seven Meditations on the Sacred Passion, Resurrection and Ascension of Christ, to which can be added the other principal steps in His most holy life.

Here it should be noted that there are six things which must be meditated on the Passion of Christ: The greatness of His sufferings, for us to suffer together with them. The gravity of our sinfulness, which is the cause, so as to detest it. The greatness of the benefit, so as to give thanks for it. The excellence of the Divine goodness and charity, that is revealed there, so as to love it. The appropriateness of the mystery, so as to marvel at it. And the multitude of the virtues of Christ, that shine out there, so as to imitate them. So, in accordance with this, when we are meditating, we ought to do it, inclining our hearts, both to have compassion on the sufferings of Christ, for they were the greatest in the world, and also for the sensitivity of His body, and for the greatness of His love, and also for His suffering, which had no consolation of any kind, as was declared previously in this book. At other times, we must have the respect necessary to learn the reasons for sorrow for our sins, considering that these sins were the cause as to why He suffered as many and as grave sorrows as He did. And again, we must draw from all this the motives of love and gratitude, when we start to realise the greatness the love that He revealed for us, and the greatness of the blessings that He gave us, redeeming us so copiously, at such a cost to Himself, and at such profit to ourselves.

At other times we must lift up our eyes to think of the appropriateness of the means which God takes to cure our misery, that is, to give satisfaction for our debts, to minister to our necessities, to merit us His grace and humble our pride, and to induce in us contempt for the world, a love of the Cross, of poverty, of simplicity, of insults, and all the other virtues and honest labours. At other times we must set our eyes upon the examples of virtue that shine out in His most sacred life and death, in His meekness, patience, obedience, mercy, poverty, simplicity, charity, humility, benignity, modesty, and upon all the other virtues, that in all His deeds and words, shine out brighter than all the stars in the sky, in order to imitate something of what we see in Him, because we do not consider the spirit and grace that we receive from Him as useless on this account, and in this way we shall journey to Him for Him. This is the loftiest and the most profitable method that there is for meditating on the Passion of Christ, for it is by way of imitation, since through imitation we shall arrive at transformation, and at that point we shall be able to say with the Apostle: "And I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me."

Besides all this, in all these steps it is important to keep Christ present before our eyes and make sure that that we hold Him before us whenever we suffer, and take into account, not just the story of His Passion, but also all the circumstances of it, especially these four things: Who suffers? For whom does He suffer? How does He suffer? For what cause does He suffer?

Who suffers? Omnipotent God, who is infinite, immense, etc. For whom does He suffer? For the most ungrateful and inconsiderate creatures in the world.

How does He suffer? With the greatest humility, charity, benignity, meekness, mercy, patience, modesty, etc. For what cause does He suffer? Not for any interest of His own, nor merit of ours, but for the sole reason of His infinite compassion and mercy. In view of all this, we must not be content to just look at what He suffered externally, but rather, we must contemplate the soul of Christ even more than the body of Christ, both in sharing His sorrows, and in all the other affections and considerations that there are in this.

Now that we have considered this little Preamble, let us begin to think about the Mysteries of His Sacred Passion in their proper order.

There now follow the other Seven Meditations on the Sacred Passion.

Monday

Today, once you have made the sign of the cross in preparation for what lies ahead, we shall think about the Washing of the Feet of the Disciples, and the Institution of the Most Holy Sacrament.

Think, then, oh my soul, about this Last Supper, and about You, sweet and benign Jesus, and look at the priceless example of humility that He gives you here, when He rises from the table to wash the feet of His disciples. Oh good Jesus! What is this that You are doing? Oh sweet Jesus! Why do you so humble Your own Majesty? What must you feel, oh my soul, when you see God Himself on His knees before the feet of men, and even before the feet of Judas. Oh cruel man! How is it that His great humility does not soften your heart? How is it that this great meekness does not move you to tears? Is it really possible that you have agreed to sell this meekest of Lambs? Is it really possible that, even now, you have not the least compunction when faced with this example? Oh clean and beautiful Hands! How can You bear to touch feet so dirty and abominable? Oh purest of Hands! How is it that You feel no disgust, washing feet made dirty on the roads, and stained with Your blood? Oh fortunate Apostles! How do you not tremble, seeing that great humility? Peter, what are you doing; perchance you will consent to let the Lord of Majesty wash your feet? Marvelling and astonished St. Peter, when you saw your Lord on His knees before you, did you not begin to say: "Lord, dost thou wash my feet?" Are You not the Son of the Living God? Are You not the Creator of the world, the Beauty of Heaven, the Paradise of the Angels, the Remedy of mankind, the Brilliance of the Glory of the Father, the Fount of God's Wisdom in the highest heavens? And do You ask me to let You wash my feet? When You are the Lord of such Majesty and Glory, why do You seek to take on an office of such great lowliness?

Consider also how, when He had finished washing their feet, He wiped them with that Sacred Cloth that was wrapped around Him, and turn your gaze up higher with the eyes of your soul, and there you will see before you the Mystery of our Redemption. Look how that linen Cloth gathered to itself all the filth of the dirty feet, so that they became clean, and the Cloth became all stained and dirty after having performed this office. What more dirty thing can there be than someone conceived in sin, and what is there that is cleaner and more beautiful than Christ conceived in the Holy Spirit. "My beloved is white and ruddy," says the Bride, "and chosen out of thousands." For this very beautiful and clean Being sought to receive into Himself all the stains and

foulnesses of our souls, and leaving these souls clean and free of them, He ended up (as you know) on the Cross, weighed down and befouled by them. After all this, consider the words with which Our Saviour ended this story, when He said: “For I have given you an example, that as I have done to you, so you do also.” And these words are not merely meant to refer to this instance and example of humility, but also to all the works and life of Christ, because it is a most perfect demonstration of all the virtues, especially of what is represented to us in this place.

Of the Institution of the Most Holy Sacrament.

In order to understand something of this Mystery, we need to presuppose that no created language can declare the greatness of the love that Christ has for His Bride, the Church; and, in consequence, for each one of the souls that are in grace, because every one of them is also His bride. For this most sweet Spouse, in seeking to depart this life and to absent Himself from His Bride, the Church (because this absence was not a cause for Him to forget her), He left us as His memorial, this Most Holy Sacrament (in which he Himself remains), seeking no other token between Himself and her than this memorial of Himself, and Himself alone. This Spouse, in view of His prolonged absence, sought to leave a companion for His Bride, so that she would not be left alone; and so He left her the company of Himself. Sacramentally, where He Himself remains, who is the very best companion that He could ever leave her. He also sought to go on and suffer death for His Bride and redeem her, and enrich her with the price of His Blood. And so that she might taste of this treasure (whenever she so wanted), He left her the keys to Himself in this Sacrament; because, as St. Chrysostom says: “all the times that we go to Him, we must think that we go to put our lips up against the wound in the side of Christ, and drink of that precious Blood, and make ourselves participants in Him.” In other words, this heavenly Spouse desires to be beloved by His Bride with a great love, and therefore He ordained this mysterious particle with such consecrated words that whoever worthily receives it, is touched and wounded by His love.

He also sought to assure her, and give her tokens of that most blessed and happy inheritance of glory, so that in the hope of this great blessing, she would be able to pass in joy through all the trials and hardships of this life. For in order to ensure that His Spouse would have a certain and sure hope of this great blessing, He left her here, in the form of hosts, that ineffable treasure that is worth every bit of what she hopes for there, so that she would not lose her faith that God would give Himself to her in glory, where she will live for ever in the spirit, since He did not deny Himself to her in this valley of tears, where she lives in the flesh.

At the hour of His death, He sought also to make a will and leave His Bride something intended for her remedy, and He left her this, which is the most precious and profitable thing that He could ever have left her, for in it He left God.

He sought, finally, to leave our souls sufficient provision and maintenance for them to live on, because the soul has no less need of proper maintenance in order to live its spiritual life, than the body has need of its own sustenance for

bodily life. So therefore this wisest of Physicians (who has taken the pulse of our weakness) ordained this Sacrament, and so He ordained it as a species of maintenance, so that the same species in which it was instituted would declare to us the effect that it worked, and the necessity that our souls have of it, no less than that which our bodies have of their proper nourishment.

Tuesday

Today you will think about the Agony in the Garden, and the Passion of Our Saviour, and how He was taken to the house of Annas and insulted. Consider, then, first and foremost, how that mysterious Supper finished, and the Lord with His disciples went out to Mount Olivet to pray before He entered into the battle of His Passion, so as to teach us how, in all the trials and temptations of this life, we need always to have recourse to prayer as our holy anchor, through which virtue we shall either be relieved of the burden of our tribulation, or we shall be given the strength to overcome it, which is another major grace. As His companions on this journey, He took with Him those three beloved disciples, St. Peter, St. James and St. John, who had been the witnesses of His glorious Transfiguration, so that these same Apostles could see how differently he showed Himself now for love of mankind, and which He had displayed so gloriously to them in that vision. And so that they could understand that the internal troubles of His soul were no less than those that were beginning to appear exteriorly, He spoke these sorrowful words to them: "My soul is sorrowful even unto death: stay you here, and watch with me." When He had said these words, He was withdrawn away from them a stone's cast, and, prostrating Himself on the ground with the greatest reverence, He began His prayer, saying: "My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me. Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." And when He had said this prayer three times, at the third He was seized with a great agony, and His sweat became as drops of blood, that ran down all over His sacred body drop by drop until they fell to the ground. Consider, then, the Lord in such a sorrowful state, and look how He had a vision there of all the torments that He was to suffer, learning most perfectly how many cruel sorrows were to be laid upon His most sensitive of bodies, and how there were to be placed before Him all the sins of the world (for which He was to suffer), and the lack of gratitude of so many souls, who would not acknowledge this blessing, nor profit from so great and costly a remedy, then was His soul so greatly anguished in so great a manner, and His feelings and His most delicate flesh so disturbed, that all the powers and elements of His body were frozen with horror, and His blessed flesh opened up everywhere and let out His blood, so that it flowed everywhere in such abundance that it ran down onto the ground. And if His flesh instinctively recoiled in horror in this way, what then of His soul which suffered these pains directly? Look, then, how, after He had finished praying, that false friend arrived with all that infernal company, having already renounced the office of Apostle, and made himself the ally and captain of the army of Satan. Look how he stepped forward in front of all without the least shame, and approaching the good Master, he sold Him with a kiss of false peace. At that hour, the Lord said to those who had come to seize Him: "You are to come out as it were to a robber with swords and clubs

to apprehend Me. I sat daily with you, teaching in the temple, and you laid not hands on me.” And also: “but this is your hour, and the power of darkness.” What more horrible thing could there be than to see the Son of God take on the image, not just of a sinner, but of even a condemned man? “This is,” He says, your hour, and the power of darkness.” From these words we realise that this was the hour when that most innocent of Lambs was handed over into the power of the princes of darkness, which are the demons, so that by means of their ministers, they would be able to execute in Him all the torments and cruelties they desired. Think, then, to what depths now that divine Highness has descended for you, for he arrived at the last of all evils, which is to be handed over into the power of the demons. And because the pain that your sins merit is exactly this, then He sought to submit Himself to this pain so that you might be freed from it.

So when these words were said, all that pack of hungry wolves attacked that meek little Lamb, some seizing Him on one part, and another on another, each one as they could. Oh how inhumanely they treated Him, how greatly they abused Him, how much violence they used against Him, how they cursed and swore at Him and insulted Him, as conquerors usually do when they are seen with their prey! They seized hold of those holy hands, that shortly before had worked such miracles, and tied them up very tightly with slipknots, to the point of scraping the skin off His arms and making the blood burst out, and thus they dragged him in bondage through the public streets, to His great ignominy. Look closely how He went on this journey deserted by His disciples, but accompanied by His enemies, unable to stop, with hurried steps, covered with dirt and His face already red and out-of-breath with the way He was rushed along. And think about the evil treatment of His person, as reflected in His face, with such gravity in His eyes and that Divine bearing that, in the midst of all these abuses by the world, could never be obscured.

Then you can go with Our Lord to the house of Annas, and look how it happened there, as Our Lord replied courteously to the question that the High Priest put to Him about His disciples and doctrine, that one of those villains who stood beside Him gave Him a great punch in the face, saying: “Answerest thou the high priest so?” To which Our Saviour benignly replied: “If I have spoken evil, give testimony of the evil; but if well, why strikest thou me?” And look, then, oh my soul, not simply at the meekness of this reply, but also at that Divine face, all bruised and discoloured with the force of the blow, and then look at His eyes, so serene and undisturbed by that affront, and that most holy soul, so humble in its interior, and so ready to turn the other cheek, if the tyrant asks for it.

Wednesday

Today you will think about the presentation of Our Lord to the High Priest, Caiaphas, and the troubles of that night, and St. Peter’s denial of Him, and His scourging at the pillar.

Firstly, consider how they brought Our Lord, first from the house of Annas, and then to the house of the High priest Caiaphas, where it will be right for you to accompany Him, and there you will see the Sun of justice eclipsed, and that divine face, upon which angels desire to look, now spat upon. Because

Our Saviour, sworn under oath to the Father, had to say who He was, and He replied to their questions what He must, and those villains who were so unworthy of so lofty a response, and blinded by the brilliance of such a great light, now turned against Him like rabid dogs and discharged upon Him all their rage and fury. So they vented all their anger in beating Him severely about His head, and they spat upon that divine face with their infernal mouths; then they covered His eyes with a cloth, and beat Him about the face and amused themselves with Him, saying: "Prophecy unto us, O Christ, who is he that struck thee?" Oh, the marvellous humility and patience of the Son of God! Oh, the beauty of the angels! What was His face that it should be spat upon? When men wish to spit, they turn their faces towards the most despised corner they can find, and in that whole palace, could they could find nowhere more despised than Your face, to spit upon it? Oh earth and ashes, how were you not humbled by this example?

After this, consider the troubles in which Our Saviour passed all that sorrowful night, because the soldiers that guarded Him mocked Him (as St. Luke says) and could find no better way to conquer the sleep of the night than in jeering and tormenting the Lord of Majesty. Look, then, O my soul, at how your most sweet Spouse was made a target for the stings of so many dreadful blows that they gave Him there! Oh cruel night! Oh night without rest, in which You, Oh my good Jesus, did not sleep a wink, and neither did they who took their rest in tormenting You! Night was ordained so that all creatures might take their rest in it, and so that the feelings and members worn out with the troubles of the day might rest, and now the evil-doers used it to torment all Your members and feelings, wounding Your body, afflicting Your soul, tying up Your hands, punching You in the face, spitting on Your face, tormenting Your ears, because, during the time when all the bodily members are accustomed to rest, all of Yours were in pain and trouble. What Matins were these, so different from those that the heavenly choirs of angels would normally sing to You at this hour? There they would be saying: "Holy, Holy, Holy!" but here they say: "Death, Death, Death! Crucify Him, crucify Him!" Oh angels of Paradise, whose different voices You hear: what do you feel, seeing Him so mistreated here on earth, whom you reverence so much in heaven? What do you feel, seeing God suffering such things for the very same people who have done such things? Whoever heard of such a degree of charity, that even suffers death to free from death those very people that inflict it? The troubles of that sorrowful night increased even more with the denial of St. Peter, that so familiar friend, the one chosen to see the glory of the Transfiguration, him who was honoured above all the others with the founding of the Church; that first among all his brothers, who, not once, not twice, but three times, in the presence of his self-same Lord, swore and lied that he did not know Him, nor knew who He was. Oh Peter, how evil a man is he who now, to his very great shame, denies ever having met Him See how that means that you were the first to condemn Him before the High Priest, since you let it be known that He was such a person that you yourself were dishonoured by knowing Him. And what greater injury could there be than that? "And the Lord turning looked on Peter." His eyes went straight after that sheep that had been lost. What a look of marvellous virtue! What a silent look,

but so full of meaning! Peter well understood that language, and the words behind that look, for the cries of the cockerel are not enough to wake him up, and you are the same. But the eyes of Christ do not simply speak, but also open, and the tears of Peter declare it, which do not flow so much from the eyes of Peter, as from the eyes of Christ!

After all these injuries, consider the scourging that Our Saviour suffered at the pillar; because the judge, seeing that he could not satisfy the fury of those infernal beasts, determined to inflict on Him one of his famous punishments that would be enough to satisfy the fury of those cruel hearts, so that then, content with this, they would cease to call for His death. Enter now, O my soul, in spirit, into Pilate's Praetorium, and bring with you the tears that have appeared, for they will be very necessary for what you will see and hear there. See how those cruel and vile butchers strip Our Saviour of His clothing, with so much inhumanity, and how He allows them to strip him with such humility, neither opening His mouth, nor replying a word to such abuses as they wounded Him with there. See how they then tied that holy body to a column, so that they might thus wound Him at their pleasure where and how they pleased. See how alone the Lord of the Angels was among such cruel executioners, having on His part neither sponsors, nor validators who would act for Him, nor even as much as eyes that would have compassion on Him. See, then, how they began, with the utmost cruelty to discharge their whips and scourges upon that most delicate flesh, and how they added scourgings upon scourgings, wounds upon wounds, and stripes upon stripes. And then you will see there how that Most Holy Body breaks out in great welts, His skin tears open, and the blood wells up and pours out in threads everywhere. But, more than all this, what does it mean to see that great open wound that was lashed open between His shoulders, where the cuts of the whips principally fell.

Consider, then, when the scourging was finished, how the Lord covered His nakedness, and had to go throughout the whole Praetorium looking for His clothes, in the presence of those cruel butchers, without anyone ministering to Him, nor helping Him, nor providing Him anything to wash Himself with, nor refreshment of the kind that was usually given to those who had just been flogged. All these are things that are worthy of great sentiment, gratitude and consideration.

Thursday

Today you must think about the Crowning with Thorns and the Ecce Homo, and how Our Saviour carried the Cross on His shoulders.

The Bride invites us to the consideration of those sorrowful events in the Book of Canticles, in these words: "Go forth ye daughters of Sion and see King Solomon in the diadem, wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the joy of his heart." Oh my soul, what are you doing? Oh my heart, what are you thinking? Oh my tongue, how quiet you have become! Oh my very sweet Saviour, when I open my eyes and look at this sorrowful altarpiece, which I have set before myself here, my heart breaks with sadness. For how is it, Oh Lord, that the past scourgings were not enough, and the death to come, and so much blood already shed, but of

necessity the thorns had to draw forth the blood from your head, which the scourges had spared? And so that you, my soul, might yet feel something of this sorrowful happening, firstly set before your eyes the portrait of the Lord as He was before, and the great excellence of His virtues, and then look closely at the manner of Him shown therein. Look at the greatness of His beauty, the measure of His eyes, the sweetness of His words, His authority, His meekness, His serenity, and that appearance of His that commands such veneration. And after you have looked upon Him in this way, and delighted at seeing such perfection, turn your eyes to look at Him as you can see Him now, draped in that purple robe of mockery, the reed as the royal sceptre in His hand, and that horrible diadem on His head, those mortal eyes, that deceased face, and that body so totally drained of blood and made ugly by the spittle that was splattered all over His face. Look at Him both within and without, his heart pierced with sorrows, His body full of wounds, abandoned by His disciples, persecuted by the Jews, mocked by the soldiers, despised by the High Priest, discarded as a false King, accused unjustly and deprived of all human favour. And do not think of this as something already past, but as present; not as a foreign sorrow, but as your very own. Put your own self in the place of what He is suffering, and look at what you would feel if, in a part that is so sensitive like your head, someone were to drive in so many very sharp thorns that would penetrate as far as the bones. And what do I call thorns? A single sharp pain from a pin would be all that you could scarcely suffer. So what would that most delicate of heads have been feeling with this crown of torments? And when the crowning and mockery of the Lord had run its course, the judge seized hold of Him and treated Him as badly as he could, dragging Him into the sight of a furious people, and said to them: "Ecce Homo." (Behold the man.) It was as if he was saying: "If you hate Him so much that you want to bring about His death, now look at him here in such a state that you can no longer hate Him, but pity Him. You were afraid that he would make Himself a King, now see Him here so disfigured that He scarcely looks like a man. From these bound hands, what do you have to fear? From this scourged man, what more can you ask of Him?"

This way, my soul, you can understand just how things had turned out for Our Saviour, for the judge believed that the figure he presented then would be enough to break the hearts of His enemies. And so you can well understand what an evil case it would be if you did not have a Christian compassion for the sorrows of Christ, for they were such that they were enough (so the judge believed) to soften all those fiery hearts.

Yet as Pilate saw that the punishments he had inflicted on that most holy Lamb were not sufficient to calm down the fury of His enemies, he went in to the Praetorium, and sat down on the judgement seat to pronounce a final sentence in this case. The Cross had already appeared at the gates, and that frightful signboard had already appeared on the hill, ready to be nailed above the head of Our Saviour. For once the cruel sentence was given and promulgated, His enemies added one cruelty to another, that was to load upon those shoulders, now so bruised and lacerated by the past scourgings, the heavy timber of the Cross. With all this, Our pious Saviour did not refuse this

burden, which contained all of our sins, but eagerly embraced it with the greatest charity and obedience for love of us.

That innocent Isaac now journeys to the place of sacrifice with that heavy burden bearing down on His exhausted shoulders, followed by many people and many pious women, who accompanied Him with their tears. Who would not shed tears, seeing the King of the Angels journeying step by step with this onerous burden, His knees trembling, His body bowed forward, His eyes cast down, His face bloody with that garland on His head, and with those shameful jeers and imprecations shouted out against Him?

Meanwhile, my soul, turn your eyes away a little from this cruel spectacle, and with hurried steps, with cries of suffering, with weeping eyes, journey now towards the house of the Virgin, and when you arrive there, fall down at her feet, and begin by saying to her in a sorrowful voice: “Oh Mistress of the Angels, Queen of Heaven, Gate of Paradise, Advocate of the World, Refuge of Sinners, Health of the Just, Joy of the Saints, Mistress of the Virtues, Mirror of Purity, title of chastity, soul of patience, and sum of all perfections! Woe is me, my Lady, why has my eyesight been kept for this hour? How can I live, having seen with my own eyes what I have seen? What good can any more words do? I leave your Only-begotten Son and my Lord in the hands of my friends, with a Cross on His shoulders for His execution on it.”

What feeling can equal here the sorrow felt by the Virgin? Her soul failed her here, and her face, and all her virginal members were covered by a deathly sweat, which would have been enough to put an end to her life, if the Divine dispensation had not preserved her for a greater trial, and also for a greater crown.

So the Virgin then went in search of her Son, her desire to see Him giving her the powers that sorrow had taken from her. Hear from afar the clash of weapons, the mob of people, and the clamour of jeers which they continually hurled at Him. Then see the glinting of the metal lances and halberds that were lifted up on high; see the drops and trail of blood on the way, which were already enough to show her the footsteps of her Son, and guide her without any other guide. She comes closer and closer to her beloved Son, and looks at Him with eyes obscured with sorrow and the shadow of death, in order to see (if she could) Him whom her soul so greatly loved. Oh love and fear in the heart of Mary! On the one hand she desired to see Him, and on the other she refused to see such a pitiful figure. Finally, she arrived where she could see Him, and those two luminaries of heaven beheld one another, and they pierced each other's hearts with their eyes, and wounded their injured hearts with the sight of each other. Their tongues were silent, but the heart of the Mother spoke, and her most sweet Son said to her: “Why did you come here, my dove, my beloved, and my Mother? Your sorrow increases My own, and your torments torment Me. Go home, my Mother, go home to where you are staying, for shame does not belong to you, nor the company of murderers and thieves to your virginal purity.”

These and other more pitiful words were spoken in those pious hearts, and in this manner He departed along that wearisome way to the place of the Cross.

Friday

Today you will contemplate the Mystery of the Cross, and the Seven Last Words that Our Lord spoke.

So wake up, then, today, my soul, and begin to think about the Mystery of the Holy Cross, whose fruit repaired the damage caused by that poisonous fruit of the forbidden tree. Look first and foremost how, when Our Saviour arrived at this place, those wicked enemies (to make His death all the more shameful) stripped Him of all His clothes, even His under-tunic, that was all woven from top to bottom, without any seam. So behold how that innocent Lamb allowed Himself to be stripped naked with such meekness and without opening His mouth, nor saying a word against those who so mistreated Him. Rather, with very good will He consented to be stripped of His clothes, and remain shamefully naked, so that the nakedness into which we fall through sin would be covered better with them than with fig-leaves.

Some Doctors say that, in order to strip this tunic from off the Lord, they wrenched off with great cruelty the crown of thorns which He had on his head, and after He was stripped, they put it back on and rammed the thorns into His brains once again, which was a thing of great sorrow. And it is certainly to be believed that they used this cruelty when they did those many other extremely cruel things to Him during the whole process of His Passion, and the Evangelist has much to say that they did with Him what they wanted. And as the tunic was stuck to the wounds of His scourging, and His blood had already congealed and clotted to this same clothing, when they stripped Him (as those villains were so foreign to pity), they tore off His clothing with many blows and with such force, that they ripped open His skin again and re-opened all the wounds of His scourging, to such a degree that His holy Body was opened up everywhere as if it had been flayed, and everything was made a great wound, so that His blood flowed everywhere.

Consider, now, my soul, the loftiness of the Divine goodness and the mercy that shines out so clearly; look how He who clothed the skies with clouds and the fields with flowers and beauty, is now stripped of all His clothes. Consider the cold that His holy Body suffered, seeing how it was all torn and naked, not only of its clothing, but also of its layers of skin, and with so many deep wounds opened up within it everywhere. And if St. Peter suffered from the cold the night before, even though he still had his clothes and shoes, how much more did that delicate Body suffer in being so much wounded and naked?

After this consider how Our Lord was nailed onto the Cross, and the sorrow that He suffered at the time when those thick and square nails went through the most sensitive and the most delicate parts of the most delicate of all bodies. And think also what the Virgin felt when she saw with her own eyes and heard with her own ears how those cruel and heavy blows fell so often over those divine members, because truly indeed those hammerings and nails not only went through the hands of the Son, but they also wounded the heart of the Mother.

See how they then lifted the Cross right up and let it drop down in a hole that had been dug for this purpose, and how (this is how cruel those ministers were), at the time of lowering it down, they let it fall with a thud, and so they

made the whole of that holy Body shake in the air, and they made the wounds of the nails open even more, which was a thing of intolerable sorrow. Then, O my Saviour and Redeemer, who could have had such a heart of stone that did not break with sorrow (for on that day the stones broke open), considering what You suffered on this Cross. O Lord, the sorrows of death have surrounded You, and all the winds and waves of the sea have beaten against You. You have been plunged into the depths of the abyss, and You have found no support. The Father has abandoned You, and what hope do You have, Lord, from mankind? Your enemies are howling at You, Your friends are breaking Your heart, Your soul is afflicted, and You accept no consolation for love of me! For sure, my sins are very serious, and Your penance declares it. I see You fastened to a tree, my King; there is nothing else to hold up Your body but three big iron nails; from them Your sacred blood drips down, and You have no other repose. When Your Body weighs down on Your feet, the wounds in Your feet open up with the nail that pierces them; when Your weight shifts to Your hands, the wounds in Your hands tear open with the weight of Your body. Then Your holy head, tormented and weakened by the crown of thorns - what pillow supports it? O most serene Virgin, how well-employed your arms were before by this office, but now it is not your arms that are used, but those of the Cross! Upon them the sacred head will have to recline when it wishes to rest, and the refreshment that it will receive from it will make the thorns press deeper into the brain.

The sorrows of the Son grew with the presence of the Mother, and her heart was no less sacrificed with these same sorrows within, than the Sacred Body was without.

There are two crosses for Thee, O good Jesus, on this day: one for the body and the other for the soul; the one is the cross of the Passion, the other is the cross of compassion; the one transfixes the Body with nails of iron, the other Your most holy soul with nails of sorrow. O good Jesus, who could declare what You were feeling when you declared the anguish of that most holy soul, which You certainly knew was being crucified with You upon the Cross? When You saw that pious heart transfixed and pierced with the sword of sorrow, when You extended your blood-filled eyes and saw that divine face covered with the bitterness of death? And all that anguish of her spirit without death, yet already more than dead? And those rivers of tears that poured from her most pure eyes, and You heard the weeping that was torn out of that sacred breast, expressed with all the weight of such a great sorrow?

And after all this, consider those seven words that the Lord spoke on the Cross. Of which the first was: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." The second was to the Thief: "This day thou shalt be with me in Paradise." The third to His most holy Mother: "Woman, behold thy son." The fourth: "I thirst." The fifth: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The sixth: "It is consummated." The seventh: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

Look, then, oh my soul and see what charity there is in these words by which He entrusted His enemies to the Father; with what mercy He received the Thief who confessed to Him, with what concern He commended His pious Mother to His beloved disciple; with what thirst and ardour He showed that

He desired the salvation of mankind; with what a sorrowful voice He uttered His prayer, and pronounced His tribulation before the Divine observance; how He carried obedience to the Father so perfectly, right to the end, and how, finally, He commended to Him His spirit and resigned Himself completely into His most blessed hands. From all this, it is clear that in every one of these words there is contained a document of virtue. In the first, he commends us to charity towards our enemies. In the second, mercy towards sinners. In the third, piety towards our fathers. In the fourth, the desire for the salvation of our neighbours. In the fifth, prayer in the face of the tribulations and abandonment of God. In the sixth, the virtue of obedience and perseverance. And in the seventh, perfect resignation into the hands of God, who is the sum of all our perfection.

Saturday

Today you are to contemplate the lance-wound inflicted on Our Saviour, and His Descent from the Cross, together with the weeping of Our Lady and the office of burial.

Consider, then, those cruel enemies, who, having accomplished their desire of bringing about the death of Our Saviour on the Cross, because they wanted so much to see Him dead, even then, after this, did not let the flames of their fury abate, but now sought even further vengeance and blood by attacking such Holy Relics as remained, rending and casting lots over His clothing and piercing His sacred side with a cruel lance. O cruel ministers! O hearts of iron, so little value do you place on what the living body has already suffered that you do not even wish to spare it after death! What fury of enmity is there so great that it is not appeased when it sees its enemy dead before it? Lift up those cruel eyes a little, and look at that poor mortal face, those eyes now dead, at that fallen head, and that pallor and shadow of death, for even though you might be harder than iron and the diamond, when you yourselves can bring yourselves to look at what you have done, can you not now be pacified? Yet now that minister arrives, bearing his lance in his hand, and pierces the naked breast of Our Saviour through with great force. The Cross vibrated in the air with the force of the blow, and there now came forth out of Him both water and blood, with which were healed all the sins of the world. Oh river that comes forth from Paradise, and waters with its torrents all the surface of the earth! Oh precious wound in the side of Christ, made more through the love of mankind than through the iron of the cruel lance! Oh gate of heaven, window of Paradise, house of refuge, tower of strength, sanctuary of the just, sepulchre of pilgrims, nest of simple doves, and flowery bed of the bride of Solomon! May God save you, precious wound in the side of Christ, that wounds devout hearts; the hurt that hurts the souls of the just; the rose of ineffable beauty; the ruby of inestimable price; the entrance into the heart of Christ, the testimony of His love and the token of everlasting life!

After this, consider how, that same day in the evening, those two holy men Joseph and Nicodemus arrived, and, setting their ladders against the Cross, they took down the Body of Our Saviour in their arms. When the Virgin saw that, now that the torment of His Passion had ended, His sacred Body had now arrived onto the ground, she disposed herself to give Him a secure

harbour on her breasts, and receive Him from the arms of the Cross into her own. Speak, then, with great humility, to those noble people, and ask them, that since she had not been able to say farewell to her Son, nor receive from Him His last farewell on the Cross at the time of His decease, to let her go up to Him now and not seek to make her disconsolation grow everywhere, for since His enemies had farewelled Him so terribly when He was alive, now let His friends say at least say goodbye to Him when He was dead.

For when the Virgin held Him in her arms, what tongue could express what she felt? Oh angels of peace, weep together with this holy Virgin; weep, heavens; weep, stars of the sky, and all the creatures of the world, and share the tears of Mary! The Mother embraced the torn and lacerated Body, pressed Him tightly against her heart (her powers remained for only this), put her face against the thorns on His sacred head, cheek next to cheek, and the face of the most sacred mother was stained with the blood of her Son, and the face of her Son was watered with the tears of the Mother! Oh sweet Mother! Is this, perchance, your most sweet Son? Is this Him whom you conceived with such glory and gave birth to with such joy? What has happened to your past happiness? Where have your former joys gone? Where is that mirror of beauty in which you looked at each other? All those who were present were lamenting; those holy women, and those holy men were all lamenting; heaven was lamenting, and the earth and all its creatures were accompanying the tears of the Virgin. The Holy Evangelist wept as well, and embracing the Body of His Master, he said: "Oh good Master, and my Lord, who will be my teacher from henceforth? Who will I go to with my doubts? On whom will I lean? Who will share the secrets of heaven with me? Why have things changed so terribly? The night before I leaned against Your sacred breast where You gave me the joy of life, and now I am to repay You for that great blessing by holding Your dead body in my arms! Is this the countenance I saw transformed on Mount Tabor? Is this the figure brighter than the sun at midday?

Also present lamenting was that holy woman once taken in sin, and embracing the feet of her Saviour, she said: "Oh light of my eyes and remedy of my soul, if I was to be fatigued with sins again, who will receive me? Who will cure my wounds? Who will vouch for me? Who will defend me from the Pharisees? Oh think of the other manner in which I had these feet and washed them when You received me among them! Oh beloved of my heart, who will let me die with You now? Oh life of my soul, how can I say that I love You, for now I am still alive, holding You who are dead before my eyes?

In this manner all that holy company wept and lamented, watering and washing that sacred Body with their tears. For now the hour of burial had arrived, and they wrapped the holy Body in a clean sheet, tied His head up with a cloth and placed Him on a stretcher: they journeyed with Him to the place of the sepulchre and deposited their precious treasure there. Then the sepulchre was covered with a stone, and the heart of the Mother with a dark fog of sadness. There she said goodbye again to her Son; there she began once more to feel her loneliness; there she saw herself already dispossessed of all the good in her life; and there she left her heart buried where her treasure lay.

Sunday

Today you will think about the Descent of Our Lord into Limbo and His apparition to Our Lady, the holy Mary Magdalene and the disciples. And then the Mystery of His glorious Ascension.

Regarding the first, consider how great the joy of those Fathers in Limbo would have been when they received the visitation and presence of their Liberator this day, and what thanks and praises they would have given Him for this Salvation that they had so long desired and hoped for. Those who return from the East Indies to Spain tell us that they consider all the tribulations of their voyage well worthwhile for the joy they receive on the day when they return to their homeland. For if this is the effect of the voyage and their exile for only one or two years, how much more would be the effect of the exile of three or four thousand years be, on the day that they received such a great Salvation and came to have access to the Land of the Living?

Consider also the joy that the Most Holy Virgin would have received this day through the visit of her resurrected Son, for it is certain, that just as it was she who was the one who most felt the sorrows of His Passion, so then she was the one who most tasted the joy of His Resurrection. For what would she have felt when she saw her Son before her, all alive and glorious, accompanied by all those Holy Fathers who were resurrected with Him? What would she have done? What would she have said? What would have been her embraces and kisses and the tears of her pious eyes? And the desire to depart with Him, if this had been conceded to her?

Consider the joy of those other holy Marys, and especially the one who had continued to weep before the sepulchre when she saw the Beloved of her soul, and cast herself down at His feet, and found Him resurrected and alive, who she had sought and desired to see even if dead; and take careful note that, after His Mother, he appeared first to her who most loved Him, most persevered, most wept and most solicitously sought after Him, so that you may hold it as certain that you will find God, if you seek Him with the same tears and diligence.

Consider the manner in which He appeared to His disciples when they were going to Emmaus in the habit of a pilgrim, and look how affably He showed Himself to them, how familiarly He accompanied them, how gently He concealed Himself from them, and finally, how lovingly He revealed Himself to them and left them all with honey and sweetness on their lips; so let your conversations be such, as were theirs, and feel the sorrows and emotions that they felt (for they were the sorrows and troubles of Christ), and hold it as certain that you will not lack His presence and company, if you always keep this in mind.

Regarding the Mystery of the Ascension, consider first and foremost how the Lord delayed His ascension into heaven for a space of forty days, during which He appeared many times to His disciples, and taught them, and expounded to them about the Kingdom of God. In such a way that he did not seek to ascend to heaven, nor depart from them, until He had left them in such a way that they could rise to heaven in the spirit with Him. Whence you will see, that the bodily presence of Christ abandoned them many times (that is, the physical consolation of devotion), so that they could now fly aloft in the spirit and be more secure from danger. In which we can see the marvellous radiance of the

Providence of God and the manner that He has in dealing with His own at different times: how He encourages the weak and exercises the strong; gives milk to the babes and weans the infants; counsels some and tests others, and thus treats everyone according to the level of their achievements. And so neither those who have been encouraged have the grounds to be presumptuous, for encouragement is a proof of weakness; nor do the disconsolate have grounds to be dismayed, for this is oftentimes an indication of strength.

In the presence of His disciples, and appearing to them, He rose to heaven, so that they would all now be witnesses to these Mysteries, and no-one is a better witness of the works of God than those who know them by experience. If you wish to know for sure how good God is, how sweet and how gentle He is towards His own, how great the virtue and efficacy of His grace is, His love, His providence and His consolations, ask those who have experienced them; for they will give you the most sufficient testimony of them. He also wanted them to see Him rise to heaven, so that they would follow Him with their eyes and their spirit, so that they might feel His loss, and so that His absence would make them feel lonely, because this was the most suitable means for them to receive His grace. Elishah asked Elijah for his spirit, and the good Master replied to him: "if thou see me when I am taken from thee, thou shalt have what thou hast asked." For they were forerunners of the Spirit of Christ, whose love made them feel the loss of Christ, and those who felt His absence and remained in this exile always sighed for His presence. The same was felt by that saintly man who said: "You were my consoler, and you did not depart from me; going on your way you blessed your own, and I did not see it. The angels promised you would return, and I did not hear it," etc.

For what would have been the loneliness, the feelings, the words and tears of the Most Holy Virgin, the beloved disciple and the holy Mary Magdalen and all the Apostles when they saw Him depart and disappear from their eyes - Him who had so captured their hearts? And in spite of this, it is recorded that they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, because they loved Him so much. Because the very same love that His loss had made them feel so greatly, now made them taste of His glory, because true love does not seek for itself, but only for those whom it loves.

It now remains for us to consider with what glory, with what joy and with what words and praises that noble Victor would have been received in the sovereign City, what would have been the festivities and reception that they gave Him, what would it have been to see men and angels and everyone in unison journeying to that noble City, and to fill those seats left empty for so many years, and to raise up high above everyone that most sacred humanity, and to seat Him at the right hand of the Father.

There is much to be considered in order to understand how well employed are His travails for the love of God, and how He who was so humbled and suffered here more than all creation, is now magnified and lifted up above all else, so that in this way the lovers of true glory might understand the journey that they have to follow in order to attain here, that is, to descend into submission and place themselves below everyone in order to be raised above everyone.

Chapter 5

Of the six things that can intervene in the Exercise of Prayer.

And so, dear Christian reader, these are the Meditations which you can practise during the days of the week, so that you will not thereby lack material on which to ponder. But here it is to be noted that before this meditation certain things ought to proceed, and other things follow afterwards, that are related and as if an appendix to it.

Because, first and foremost, even before we enter upon our meditation, it is necessary to prepare our hearts for this holy exercise, and this is like someone tuning a guitar before playing it.

Preparation should be followed by a reading on the subject for meditation on that day, according to the sequence of the days of the week (as we have dealt with above). And without a doubt this is most necessary at the beginning, until you know on what you must meditate.

After the meditation there should follow a devout outpouring of thanks for all the benefits received, and an offering of all our lives and that of Christ Our Saviour, in recompense for them.

The last part is the petition that is properly called the oration, in which we ask for all that is required, both for our own salvation, and for that of our neighbour and all the Church.

These six things can intervene in the oration, and among other benefits, they have also this quality, that they give us more copious material for meditation, since they place before us a wider range of foods, so that if we cannot eat one, then we may eat another, and so that if one thing in our rosary of meditation is finished, we may enter into another, where we are offered something else on which to meditate.

I am well aware that neither all these parts, nor this exact order is always necessary, but nonetheless, this will serve for those who are beginners, so that they may have some order and thread by which they may be guided at the start. 10. And of course, out of all the things I have said her, I do not want a perpetual law or a general rule to be made; because my intention is not to make a law, but to give an introduction to help beginners on this journey, on which, after they have commenced it, age and experience, and much more so the Holy Spirit, will teach them the rest.

Chapter 6

Of the Preparation that is required before Prayer.

Here it will be good for us to treat in particular of each one of the parts we mentioned above, and first of all we will deal with the subject of Preparation.

Place yourself first in a place of prayer on your knees, or on foot, or in the form of a cross, or prostrate, or sitting down if you cannot do otherwise, and first of all, make the sign of the cross. Then you will recollect your mind and withdraw it from all the things of this life, so that you may lift your intellect up, considering that it is to look at Our Lord. And you are to be there with all that attention and reverence as if you had really found Him present, and be ready with a general repentance of your sins (if it is the prayer for the morning) so that you can make your general confession, and if it is the prayer for the night, you are to examine your conscience in regard to everything you have thought, spoken, done and heard during that day, and the way you have forgotten Our Lord, and when you are sorry for all the defects of that day, and all those of your past life, humble yourself before the Divine Majesty, before whom you are now present, and then say those words of the holy Patriarch: "I will speak to my Lord, whereas I am dust and ashes" and then you will repeat those words of the Psalm: "To thee have I lifted up my eyes, who dwellest in heaven. Behold, as the eyes of servants are on the hands of their masters, as the eyes of the handmaiden are on the hands of her mistress: so are our eyes unto the Lord our God, until he have mercy on us."

"Have mercy on us, O lord, have mercy on us; for we are greatly filled with contempt. For our soul is greatly filled: we are a reproach to the rich, and contempt to the proud. Glory be... etc. And because we are not capable, Lord, of thinking any good thing on our own part, since all our sufficiency is of God, nor can we worthily invoke the name of Jesus, except by the favour of the Holy Spirit. Therefore: Come, O Holy Spirit, come, and emit, O Holy One, rays of Thy eternal Light! Come, O Father of the poor; come, O Giver of Thy gifts; come, O Light of human hearts! Consolation best and true, sweetest guest of human souls, cool refreshment of life's heat, in our labours, give us rest: In our torments, heal our souls, in our tears, console our hearts. O most blessed heavenly Light, fill our inmost emptiness: We who call in faith to Thee!"

V. Emit thy spirit, and they shall be created. R. And thou shalt renew the face of the earth. Oration: O God who fills the hearts of the faithful, etc.

Having said this, you will then supplicate Our Lord to give you the grace, so that you may continue on with that attention and devotion, and that internal recollection, and with that fear and reverence which is fitting when you are before such a sovereign majesty, and so you will spend this time of prayer, so that you may go forth from it filled with a new strength and spirit for all things in His service, because prayer that does not bring forth this fruit is very imperfect and of very little value.

Chapter 7 Of Reading.

When this Preparation is concluded, then you should follow with the Reading of what is to be meditated upon in prayer. This ought not to be hurried or rushed, but should be done attentively and calmly; applying to it not merely

the intellect in order to understand what you are reading, but much more the will to savour what you have understood. And when you find some devout passage, detain yourself a little more in it in order to experience it better; and let the lesson not be very long, so that you may give more time to the meditation, which is of so much more profit, when you may ruminate and penetrate things more slowly and with more affections; but when your heart is so distracted that it cannot enter into prayer, then you may detain yourself a little more in reading, or add the reading together with the meditation, first reading a passage and meditating upon it, and then another in the same manner; because by proceeding in this manner and tying the mind closely to the words of the reading, there is less opportunity to be distracted into different things as when you are free and unconfined. Nonetheless, it would be better to struggle to discard your thoughts and persevere and fight (like another Jacob all night) in the labour of prayer. Because finally, when the battle has finished, the victory is attained, and Our Lord gives you devotion or another major grace, which is never denied to those who struggle faithfully.

Chapter 8 Of Meditation.

After the Reading there follows the Meditation on the passage that we have read. And this sometimes is on things that are truly memorable, as are all the passages on the Life and Passion of Christ, the Last Judgement, Hell and Paradise. There are other things that pertain more to the intellect than the imagination, like consideration of the blessings of God, His goodness and mercy, or some other aspect of His perfections. This type of meditation is called intellectual, and the other kind, imaginary. And we are accustomed to use either one or the other in these exercises, according to what the subject-matter of the meditation requires.

And when the meditation is imaginary, we ought to try and visualise each thing in the manner in which it is, or in the manner in which it happened, and imagine that everything happens in our presence right in the very place where we are, so that by representing these things to ourselves in this way, consideration and sympathy for them become more alive for us, and even imagining these things happening inside our hearts is better, since cities and kingdoms fit into it, all the more will the representation of those Mysteries fit, and this will help greatly in making the soul recollected, by being occupied within itself (like a bee within its hive) making its honeycomb; however, going in the imagination to Jerusalem to meditate on the things that happened there in every single separate place is something which is wont to overload and damage your head; and for this same reason, you ought not to fasten your imagination too much on the things that you think, so as not to fatigue your nature with this vehement apprehension.

Chapter 9

Of Giving Thanks.

After the Meditation you must then give thanks; for which you must use the occasion of the Meditation we have just finished to give thanks to Our Lord for the blessings you had in it; for if your Meditation was on the Passion, you must give thanks to Our Lord, because He redeemed you with so much trouble; and if it was on your sins, because he gave you so much time for penance; and if it was on the mysteries of this life, for the many things he freed you from; and if on the approach of death, because He liberated you from its dangers and gave you time for penance. And if on the glory of Paradise, because He created you for so much good, and the same with the rest.

To these blessings He will add all the others which we have spoken of above, which are the blessings of creation, conservation, redemption, vocation, etc. And so you will give thanks to Our Lord, because He made you in His image and likeness, and He gave you a memory so that you might remember Him; and intellect, so that you might know Him; and a will, so that you might love Him. And because He gave you an Angel to guard you from all troubles and dangers, and all mortal sins, and from death when you were in it, which was nothing less than to free you from eternal death; and all because He found it good to assume our human nature, and die for us. And because He caused you to be born of Christian parents, and gave you holy baptism, in which He gave you His grace, and promised you His glory, and to receive you as His adopted child. And because He gave you weapons to fight against the demon with, and the world, and the flesh, in the Sacrament of Confirmation. And because He gave Himself in the Sacrament of the Altar. And because He gave you the Sacrament of penance, so that you would turn back and recover the grace lost by mortal sin, and for the many good inspirations that He has always sent you and is still sending you, and for the help that He gave you to pray and do good works and persevere with the good that you have begun. And to all these blessings He adds the other general and particular blessings that you know that you have received from Our Lord. And through all these blessings, and many others, both public and private, He gave you as many graces as he could, and He invites all creatures, both in heaven and on earth, to come and help Him in this office. 11. And in this spirit, if you so wish, you will be able to say this canticle: “Benedicite omnia opera Domini, Domino, laudate et superexaltate eum in saecula!” (All ye works of the Lord, bless the Lord: praise and exalt him above all for ever!) or the Psalm: “Benedic anima mea, Domino: et omnia, quae intra me sunt, nomini sancto ejus. Benedic anima mea, Domino: et noli oblivisci omnes retributiones ejus. Qui propitiatur omnibus iniquitatibus tuis: qui sanat omnes infirmitates tuas. Qui redimit de interitu vitam tuam: qui coronat te in misericordia et miserationibus, etc.” (Bless the Lord, O my soul: and let all that is within me bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and never forget all that he hath done for thee. Who

forgiveth all thy iniquities: Who healeth all thy diseases. Who redeemeth thy life from destruction: who crowneth thee with mercy and compassion, etc.)

Chapter 10 Of Offering.

After we have given thanks with all our hearts to the Lord for all these blessings, then, naturally, our hearts will burst forth into the same affection as the prophet David, who says: “What shall I render to the Lord: for all the things that he had rendered to me?” For our part, we satisfy this desire to some extent by giving and offering to our God everything we have and that we can offer Him.

And therefore, first and foremost, you must make an offering to Him of your own self as His perpetual slave, resigning yourself to Him, and placing yourself in His hands so that He may do with you whatever He wants in time and eternity, and you must also offer Him as well all your words, deeds, thoughts and labours, which is all that you might be called upon to do and suffer, so that everything may be to the glory and honour of His Holy Name. Secondly, offer the Father the merits and services of His Son, and all the troubles that He suffered in this world through His obedience, from the manger up to the Cross, since all of these are our own property and an inheritance that He left us in the New Testament, through which He made us heirs to all this great treasure: And just as the gift of grace is no less mine than that acquired through my lance, so the merits and the right that He gave me are no less mine than if I had sweated and laboured for them myself. And therefore, you can offer this second offering equally with the first, listing in order all these services and labours and all the virtues of His most holy Life, His obedience, His patience, His humility, His fidelity, His charity, His mercy, and all the rest, because this is the richest and most precious offering that we could ever offer Him.

Chapter 11 Of Petition.

After making such a rich offering, surely we may then beseech mercy through it. And first and foremost, let us, with a great affection of charity and with zeal for the honour of Our Lord, beseech Him that all the peoples and nations of the world should come to know Him, praise Him and adore Him as their only true God and Lord, and in the depths of our hearts, let us repeat these words of the Prophet: “Let the peoples glorify thee, O God, let the peoples glorify thee.” Let us petition also for the heads of the Church, who are: the Pope, the Cardinals and Bishops, with all the other lesser Ministers and Prelates, that

the Lord may govern them and illumine them in such a manner, that they may bring to all mankind knowledge of, and obedience to, their Creator. And in the same way, let us petition (as St. Paul counsels us) for the kings, and for all those who are constituted in dignity, so that by means of His Providence we may live a quiet and peaceful life, because this is acceptable before God Our Saviour, who wants all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. Let us petition also for all the members of His mystical Body, for the just, that the Lord may preserve them, and also for sinners, that they may be converted, and for the deceased, that in His mercy He may release them from their torments and bring them to their rest in the life everlasting.

Let us petition also for the poor, the sick, the imprisoned, for captives, etc. May God, through the merits of His Son, help them and free them from all evil.

And when we have prayed for our neighbours, let us then pray for ourselves, and whatever it is that we might ask Him for, He will give each one of us what we really need, as is well known. But for greater ease in understanding this doctrine, here are the following mercies that we can ask for:

First and foremost, let us ask, through the merits and sufferings of Our Lord, for pardon for all our sins, and amendment of them, and let us specially pray for God's favour in fighting all those passions and vices to which we are most inclined and by which we are most tempted, uncovering all our wounds to our Heavenly Physician, so that He may heal them and cure them with the unction of His grace.

Secondly, let us pray for those most lofty and noble virtues in which the sum of all Christian perfection consists, and which are: faith, hope, love, fear, humility, patience, obedience, fortitude against all troubles, poverty of spirit, contempt for the world, discretion, purity of intention, and other similar virtues which are the summit of this spiritual edifice; because faith is the basis of all Christianity; hope is the staff and remedy against all the temptations of this life; charity is the aim of all Christian perfection; fear of God is the beginning of true wisdom; humility is the foundation of all the virtues; patience is the armour against the attacks and blows of the enemy; obedience is a very pleasing offering, where we offer ourselves to God as a sacrifice; discretion is the eyes which the soul uses to see and go on all its journeys; fortitude is the weapons with which it does all its works, and purity of intention is what refers and endears all our works to God.

Thirdly, let us then pray for other virtues, which, besides being virtues of major importance in themselves, serve also as a guard for the major virtues, and these are: temperance in eating and drinking, moderation of the tongue, guarding our appetites, the measure and composition of our exterior selves, our sweetness and good example towards our neighbour, rigour and severity against ourselves, and other similar virtues. After this, let us finish our petition with the love of God, and let this detain us and occupy the major part of our time, and may we beseech the Lord for this virtue with all the affections and desires it brings with it (for in it consists all our good), and let us be able to pray in this way:

Special Petition for the Love of God.

Above all these virtues, give me Your grace, O Lord, so that I may love You with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my powers, and with all my feelings, just as you have commanded me. For You are all my hope, all my glory, and all my refuge and joy! For You are the most Beloved of all the beloved! Oh wonderful, sweet and charming Spouse! Oh sweetness of my heart! Oh Life of my soul, and happy repose of my spirit! Oh beautiful clear day of Eternity, and serene Light of my desires, and wonderful Paradise of my heart! Oh my adorable Beginning and perfect sufficiency! Make me, my God, make me, my Lord, a pleasant dwelling-place for Yourself, so that, according to the promise of Your holy Word, You will come to me and take Your rest in me. Mortify in me everything that displeases Your eyes, and remake me according to Your heart! Wound the deepest depths of my soul, O Lord, with the arrows of your love, and inebriate me with the wine of Your perfect charity! Oh, how soon will this be? How soon will I please You in everything? How soon will I cease to be my own? When will nothing other than You live in me? When will I love You with the utmost ardour? When will I be totally consumed in the flames of your love? When will I be totally melted and transpierced with Your most efficacious sweetness? When will you reveal Yourself to this poor vagrant and reveal to me Your most beautiful Kingdom which is within me, which is You with all your riches? When will You captivate me and flood me and transport me and hide me in Yourself, where I shall never reappear? How soon after leaving behind all the impediments and obstructions, will I be found in the Spirit with You, so that never again will I be found apart from You?

Oh, Beloved, Beloved, Beloved of my soul! Oh, Sweetness, Sweetness of my heart! Hear me, Oh Lord, not because of my merits, but because of Your infinite goodness! Teach me, enlighten me, direct me and come to my aid in everything, so that I shall do nothing and say nothing, except what is pleasing before You. Oh my God, Oh my beloved, Oh my desire, Oh the Good of my soul! Oh my sweet Love! Oh my delight! Oh my fortitude, watch over me; You are my Light - guide me!

Oh God of my desires! Why do you not give Yourself to the poor? You fill the heavens and the earth, and You leave my heart empty! For you see the lilies of the field, and you give food to the little birds to eat, and You even sustain the worms - so why do You forget about me, for I have forgotten everything for You? I was slow to get to know You, Oh infinite goodness! I was slow to love You, Oh Beauty so ancient and so new. How sad I am for the time I did not love You! How sad I am, that I did not know You! How blind I was, that I did not see You! You were within me, and I sought to find You outside me! For even though I was slow finding You, Oh Lord, through Your divine clemency, do not let me ever leave You!

And because one of the things that most pleases You and most wounds Your heart is to have eyes that know how to look at You, give me those eyes, O Lord, with which I may look at You; that is, humble and loving eyes; devout and imploring eyes; attentive and discreet eyes, so that I may understand your will and accomplish it, so that, looking at You with these eyes, You will then look at me with those same eyes with which You looked at St. Peter, when You made him weep for his sins; and You will look at me with those self-same eyes

with which You looked at the prodigal Son, when You went forth to receive him and gave him the kiss of peace; with those eyes with which You looked at the Publican, when he did not dare raise his eyes to heaven; with those eyes with which You looked at Mary Magdalen, when she washed Your feet with her own tears; and finally, with those eyes with which You looked at Your Bride in the Canticles, when You said to her: "Behold thou art fair, O my love, behold thou art fair, thy eyes are as those of doves" so that if the eyes and beauty of my soul are pleasing to You, You will give my soul those adornments of virtues and graces with which she always seems beautiful to You.

Oh, most Lofty, most Clement, most Benign Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one sole true God, teach me, direct me and come to my aid in everything, Oh Lord! Oh, omnipotent Father, through the greatness of your infinite power, make me a living memorial of Yourself, and fill me with Your holy and devout thoughts! Oh Most holy Son, through Your eternal wisdom, clarify my intellect and adorn it with the knowledge of the supreme truth and my extreme vileness! Oh Holy Spirit, the love of the Father and the Son, through Your incomprehensible goodness, may Your will take hold of me, and may it burn in me with such a great fire of love, that no amount of water may extinguish it! Oh Holy Trinity, my One God, and all my Good! Oh, if only I could praise You and love You just as all the Angels praise You and love You! Oh, if only I had as much love as all the creatures combined, how willingly I would give it all to You and offer it up to You, although not even this is not enough to love You with as you deserve! You alone are worthy to love Yourself and praise Yourself, because You alone understand Your incomprehensible goodness, and so You alone are able to love Yourself as You deserve, in such a manner that only in this divine breast can the justice of Your love dwell!

Oh Mary, Mary, Mary, Most Holy Virgin, Mother of God, Queen of heaven, Mistress of the world, Tabernacle of the Holy Spirit, Lily of Purity, Rose of Patience, Paradise of all Delights, Mirror of Chastity, Repository of Innocence! Beseech for this poor exile and pilgrim, and share with him the leftovers of your most abundant charity. Oh most fortunate of Saints, and most fortunate of spirits, who burn so much with the love of your Creator, and most particularly you Seraphims, who burn the heavens and the earth with your love, do not abandon this poor miserable heart, but cleanse it, like the lips of Isaiah, of all its sins, and burn it with the flames of your most ardent love, so that I may love this Lord alone, and seek Him alone, and repose and dwell in Him for ever. Amen.

Chapter 12

Of some Warnings that must be had in this holy exercise.

Everything that has been said up till now serves to provide material for consideration, and it is one of the principal reasons for this book, because only a few people have sufficient material for consideration, and so, for lack of it, many people fail in this exercise. Today we give a brief account of the manner

and form that you must have in this. And although in this matter our principal Teacher is the Holy Spirit, yet nonetheless experience has shown us that certain warnings are necessary in this regard, because the way leading to God is arduous and you have need of a guide, without whom many people spend much of their time lost and on the wrong track.

First Warning

Let the first warning, then, be this: that when you set yourself to consider something of what has already been mentioned in fixed times and exercises, we must not be so attached to it, that we think it an evil deed to pass from one thing to another, when we find in it more devotion, more joy or more profit, because, as the purpose of all this is devotion, what serves best to this end, has to be for the best. However, this should not be done for trivial causes, but for some known advantage. In the same way, if in some passage of your prayer or meditation you feel more joy and devotion than in another, detain yourself in it the whole time while this affection lasts, even though you end up spending all the time of your recollection in it. Because, as the purpose of all this is devotion (as we have said), it would be an error to look elsewhere, with doubtful hope, for what sure thing we already have before us.

Second Warning

Let the second warning be when, in this exercise, you work to excuse too much speculation of the intellect, so you must try to make this business more with the affections and sentiments of the will, than with discourses and speculations of the intellect. Because, without any doubt, you will not finish this journey if you go to your prayers like this and try to meditate on the Divine Mysteries as if you were studying them in order to preach, which serves more to dissipate the Spirit than to recollect it, and takes you more outside yourself than within yourself. From whence it comes that, after your prayers are finished, you remain dry and without the juice of devotion, and as ready and quick for whatever triviality as you were before. Because, if the truth be known, such people have not prayed, but have spoken and studied, which is a very different business from prayer. Such people ought to consider that, in this exercise, it is more important for us to listen than to talk. For in order to get this business right, it would be better for you to have the heart of an ignorant but humble old woman, with a will well disposed and ready to notice and love the things of God, than to have a lively intellect which is ready to analyse everything, because this is only proper to those who study in order to become experts, and is not fitting for those who pray and think about God in order to shed their tears.

Third Warning

The last warning taught us how we must calm down the intellect and entrust this whole business to the will; but the present warning also imposes its own tax and limitation on this same will, so that it will not be excessive or vehement in its exercise, and this means that you are to know that the devotion that we seek to attain is not a thing which can be reached by force of arms (as some think), which, by too much forced zeal and sadness and false

hype, manage to produce tears and compassion when you think about the Passion of the Lord, but usually ends up mostly by hardening the heart and making it quite incapable of being visited by the lord, as Cassian teaches. And in addition to this, these things usually cause damage to your bodily health and at times leave the soul so terrified by the suffering it receives there, that it fears to try this exercise again, like something that it knows has given it a lot of pain. So be content, then, in doing well whatever you can manage, which is to be present at what Our Saviour suffered, looking on with a simple and calm view, and with a tender and compassionate heart, and prepared to accept whatever sentiment the Lord might want to give you about what He suffered, and be more disposed to receive the effect, which His mercy might give you, than to express it by force of arms. And when you have done this, do not be distressed about the rest, when it was not given to you.

Fourth Warning

From all the above, we can deduce what manner of attention we must have in our prayers, because it is fitting here first and foremost to have hearts which are not fallen and weak, but lively, attentive and raised up high. But it is also very necessary that our attention be both tempered and moderate, so that it will not be harmful to our health nor impede us in our devotion, because there are some people who fatigue their heads with the excessive force they use to be attentive to what they think, as we have already said. And there are also others, who, in order to escape this inconvenience, are very weak and remiss there, and very apt to be blown away by the wind. To avoid these extremes, it is fitting to hold a middle course, so that we neither fatigue our heads with too much attention, nor do we through negligence and tepidity allow our thoughts to go wandering about wherever they want. In such a manner that, just as we tell him who rides a malicious beast to hold it with a firm rein, that is not too tight and not too slack, so that he is neither forced to turn back, nor travel in danger, so we also must order things so that our attention proceeds moderately and not unduly forced, with care and not with a sorrowful fatigue. More particularly, it is right to warn you that at the beginning of your Meditation, you should not fatigue your head with too much attention, because if you do this, your powers normally fail from then on, just as a traveller cannot keep on going if he journeys too quickly at the beginning.

Fifth Warning

But among all these warning, the principal one is that if you pray, you should not give up, nor desist from this exercise if you do not immediately feel that sweetness of devotion that you desire. It is very necessary to keep up your hope for a long time and persevere for the coming of the Lord, because, given the glory of His Majesty, and the lowliness of our own condition, and the greatness of the business that we have in hand, it is right that we should be continually hoping and watching at the doors of His holy palace. For when you have waited a little time in this manner, if the Lord comes, then give Him thanks for His coming, and if it seems to you that He does not come, then humble yourself before Him, and accept that you do not merit what has not been given to you, and be content with having made a sacrifice of your

own selfishness and denied your own will, and crucified your appetites and struggled with the demon and your own self, and done at least what was given to you to do. And if you do not adore the Lord with all that heartfelt devotion that you desire, then it is enough that you adore Him in spirit and in truth, as He wants to be adored. And believe me, certainly, this is the most testing part of the voyage and the place where the truly devout are tested, and if you come well out of this, then all the rest will go prosperously with you.

Finally, if all the time it seems to you that it was wasted time persevering in prayer and fatiguing your head to no avail, in such a case it will not be held as wrong if, after having done what is in you, you take up some devout book and exchange prayer for reading at that time; whatever you read should not be read either in a rush or superficially, but calmly and with much involvement in what you are reading, mixing prayer with reading many times and in many different places, and this is a very profitable and easy thing for every kind of person to do, even though they are very rough and ready beginners on this journey.

Sixth Warning

And it is not a different warning from the previous one, nor less necessary to warn you that the servants of God are not just content with some little joy that he finds in his prayer (as some are if they shed a little tear, or feel some tenderness of heart, and think that they have already mastered their exercise). This is not sufficient for what we intend here. For just as a little drop of water is not enough to make the earth bring forth fruit, when it does no more than strike the dust and wet the surface of the earth, while what is needed is enough water to sink deep into the soil and give it a good soaking so that it will be fertile, so here also you need the abundance of this heavenly rain and water to make good works bear fruit. And so, therefore, it is with good reason that you are advised to spend as long a space of time on this holy exercise that you are able. And it is much better to spend one long time than two short times, because, if the space of time is brief, it will only be enough to calm down your imagination and quieten your heart, and then, once you have become quiet, it is time to get up from your exercise just when you are really about to begin it.

And being more specific about how much time we should spend, it seems to me that anything that is less than an hour and a half or two hours is too short a time for prayer, because many times we spend more than half an hour in tuning a guitar, and in quietening (as we say) the imagination, and all the rest of our time is needed to taste the fruit of our prayers. It is true that when this exercise takes place after other holy exercises, such as after Matins, or after having heard or said Mass, or after some devout reading or vocal prayer, our hearts are found best disposed for this business and (just as with dry firewood), this heavenly fire is very much readier to catch alight. Also, dawn-time prayers are more likely to be short because the dawn tends to be the most popular time for this office. But if you are poor in time through your many occupations, you cannot fail to offer your poor mite along with the poor widow in the Temple, because if you do not offer this through your own negligence,

then He who provides for all creatures according to their needs and nature, will provide for you also according to your needs.

Seventh Warning

Together with this warning, another is given which is similar to it, and that is when your soul is blessed in prayer, or outside it, with a certain particular visitation of the Lord, do not let it happen in vain, but profit from the occasion that is offered, because it is certain that with this fair wind, you will sail the ship further in one hour than without Him in many days.

And it is said that St. Francis was like this, for St. Bonaventure writes that he was so particular in appreciating it, that if while journeying, he was visited by Our Lord with some particular visitation, he would go on ahead of his companions, and he would remain there until he had finished considering and digesting that morsel that came down to him from heaven. Those who do not do this are normally chastised with the pain that they cannot find God when they seek Him, because when He sought them they were not to be found.

Eighth Warning

The ultimate and most important warning is that, in this holy exercise, we must try to join meditation and contemplation into one, making the one a ladder whereby we ascend to the other, through which we are to realise that the office of meditation is to consider divine things with study and attention, passing from one thing to another in order to move our hearts to some affection and sentiment for them, which is like someone striking a flint in order to draw forth a spark from it. For contemplation, I wish to say, is when you have already drawn forth this spark, and have already found this affection and sentiment that you seek, and to be at rest and silence when you taste of it, not with many discourses and speculations of the intellect, but with a simple view of the truth, and this is why a holy Doctor says that meditation discourses with labour and with fruit, but contemplation without labour, and yet with fruit; the one seeks, the other finds; the one chews its food, the other tastes it; the one discourses and considers, the other is content with a simple view of things, because it already has the love and joy of them; finally, the one acts as a means, the other as an end; the one as a journey and a movement, the other as the final end of this journey and movement.

From here we may infer a very common thing, which all the masters of the spiritual life teach (even if it is little understood by those who read it), that is to say, that just as when the end is reached the means cease, just as when reaching port navigation ceases, so also when you, by means of the labour of your meditation, arrive at the repose and joy of contemplation, you must then cease from that pious and laborious enquiry. So be content with a simple view and remembrance of God (as if you had Him actually present), and taste of that affection which is given to you, be it either of love, or of admiration, or of joy, or some other similar thing. The reason why this is advised is because, since the end of all this business consists more in the love and affections of the will than in the speculations of the intellect, when the will has been captured and overtaken by this affection, we must cut out all the discourses and speculations of the intellect, as far as is possible for us, so that our souls with

all their powers are employed on this alone, without dissipating their efforts on acts at the wrong level. And therefore a Doctor advises, that whenever you feel yourself inflamed by the love of God, you must then leave all these discourses and thoughts (however lofty they may seem), not because they are evil, but because they are now impediments to another greater good, for there is nothing else you can do than to cease the movement which has arrived at its final end, and leave meditation for the love of contemplation. Which, most importantly, may bring an end to the whole exercise, where it comes after the petitioning of the love of God, which we dealt with above; the one, because we have already now presupposed that the labours of the past exercise would have given birth to some affection and sentiment of God, since (as the Sage says), the end of prayer is of more value than the beginning, and the other, because after the labour of meditation and prayer, it is right for you to give a little rest to your intellect, and let it repose in the arms of contemplation, for at this time you may discard all the imaginations that are offered to you, silence your intellect, quieten your memory and fix it on Our Lord, considering that you are in His presence, and not speculate at that time on particular things about God. Be content with the knowledge that you have of Him through faith and apply your will and love, for this alone should embrace you, and in it is the fruit of all meditation, and there is almost nothing which the intellect can know of God, and yet your will can love Him much. Withdraw yourself internally into the centre of your soul where the image of God is, and be attentive to Him there, as if you were listening to someone talking to you from a high tower, or as if you had found Him inside your heart, and as if in all His creation there is nothing else but your soul and Him. And you even have to forget about your own soul and what you are doing, because, as one of the Fathers says: "that is perfect prayer, where he who is praying does not remember that he is praying." And not only at the end of the exercise, but also in the middle and at some other place where this spiritual sleep might overtake us, when the understanding of the will seems as if asleep, we must make this pause and taste of this blessing and then return to our labours, having finished digesting and tasting this morsel, just as a farmer does in watering his land, when after a downfall of rain he diverts some of the run-off water and lets what he has received soak in and spread throughout the dry land, and this done, he returns to his irrigation, so that the land receives even more water and does not dry out again. But what your soul feels then, the light it enjoys, the fullness and the charity and peace that it receives, cannot be explained in words, since here is the peace that exceeds all understanding and the blessedness that in this life can only begin.

There are some so seized by the love of God, that, scarcely have they begun to think of Him, when the memory of His sweet name melts them inside, and then they have very little need of discourses and considerations in order to love Him, like a mother or a bride rejoicing in the memory of her son or husband, whenever he is mentioned; and there are others who, not just in the exercise of prayer, but also outside it, get so absorbed and soaked in God, that they forget about everything else, and themselves too, for His sake, because, if you can intensely love someone many times when they are lost, how much more can you feel the love of that infinite beauty, since grace is no less

powerful than human nature and guilt? For when your soul feels this, in whatever part of your prayers that this feeling comes on, no way must you ever discard it, even though you spend the whole time of your exercise in it, without praying or meditating on anything else that you had decided on, if they are not obligatory, because as St. Augustine says: “we must leave vocal prayer when at some time it is an impediment to devotion, and so also we must leave devotion when it is an impediment to contemplation.”

And here also, it is very much to be noted that, just as we must leave meditation for affection, so as to rise from the lesser to the greater, so, on the other hand, there are times when it is fitting to leave affection for meditation, when our affection is so strong that we fear a danger to our health in persevering with it, as happens many times to those who, without this warning, give themselves to these exercises and do them without discretion, attracted by the power of the Divine sweetness. And in such a case as this, says a Doctor, it is a good remedy to leave it for some affection of compassion, meditating a little on the Passion of Christ, or on the sins and miseries of the world, to relieve and alleviate the heart.

Part Two

Chapter 1

What is Devotion?

The greatest trouble that people suffer, who give themselves to prayer, is the lack of devotion that they very often feel in it; because, when this is not lacking, there is nothing sweeter and easier than prayer. For this reason (since we have already dealt with the material of prayer and the way you should go about it), it would be good to now deal with the things that help us to devotion, and also the things which impede it, and the temptations most commonly faced by devout people, and also certain warning that will be necessary for this exercise. But firstly it will be of benefit to declare what devotion is, so that we may know beforehand what the joy is for which we struggle.

“Devotion,” (says St. Thomas), “is a virtue, which makes a man ready and able for every virtue and awakens him and equips him for good works.” And this definition manifestly declares the great necessity and utility of this virtue, because in it is enclosed more than anyone can imagine.

For this reason you must accept that the greatest impediment that you can have to good living is the corruption of your human nature that comes to us through sin, and from which proceeds the great inclination that we have towards evil, and our great difficulty and reluctance for good; these two things make the way of virtue very difficult for us, when in itself it is the sweetest, most beautiful, most adorable, most honourable thing in the world. For against this difficulty and reluctance the Divine Wisdom provides a most

suitable remedy, which is the virtue and help of devotion; because, just as a fresh breeze scatters the clouds and leaves the sky serene and clear, so true devotion shakes all this reluctance and difficulty out of our souls, and leaves them fit and ready for every good thing, because this virtue is very much a virtue, for it is also a special gift of the Holy Spirit, a drop of heaven, a help and a visitation of God, beginning with prayer, whose condition is that it fights against this difficulty and reluctance, despatches this tepidity, gives it this readiness, fills the soul full of good desires, enlightens the intellect, strengthens the will, ignites the love of God, extinguishes the flames of evil desires, brings about a weariness of the world and an abhorrence of sin, and gives you a renewed fervour, and new energy and breath for good works. In the same manner that Samson, when he still had his hair, had greater strength than any other man in the world, and when his hair was cut off, he was as weak as everyone else, and so also is the soul of a Christian, when he has this devotion; for the soul is weak when this devotion is lacking. This, then, is what St. Thomas wished to point out in his definition, and this is without doubt the greatest praise that can be given about this virtue, that being alone, it is both a stimulus and a spur to all the others; and therefore, if you truly desire to journey by way of the virtues, you will not go without these spurs, for you will never be able to escape from the prison of your evil nature, if you travel without them.

From what we have just said, it seems clear what true and essential devotion is: because devotion is not that tenderness of heart or sense of consolation that those who pray sometimes feel, but that readiness and energy for good works, and very often the one is found without the other, when the Lord sees fit to test his own. It is true that out of this devotion and readiness, consolation is often born; yet, on the other hand, this same consolation and spiritual joy serves to increase that essential devotion, which is that promptness and energy for good works. And for this reason, servants of God may, with good cause, desire and seek these joys and consolations, not through the joy that these things bring of themselves, but because they are the cause of the increase of this devotion which fits us for good works, as the Prophet pointed out when he said: "I have run the way of thy commandments, when thou didst enlarge my heart." In other words, with the joy of your consolation, which was the cause of this running.

Regarding the means by which this devotion is attained, we now propose to deal with it here, and because this virtue is accompanied by all the others that have a special closeness to God, we therefore need to deal with the means whereby we may reach perfect prayer and contemplation, and the consolation of the Holy Spirit, and the love of God and the wisdom of heaven, and that union of our spirit with God, which is the purpose of all spiritual life and so, finally, we need to deal with the means whereby the same God is reached in this life, which is the treasure-house of the Gospels, and that precious pearl, for the sake of whose possession the wise merchant cheerfully sold all his other things. So what we are looking at is a very lofty Theology, since it teaches us the way to the highest good, and rung by rung it puts together a ladder to attain the fruit of this great happiness, as far as it may be attained in this life.

Chapter 2

Of nine things that help us to attain devotion.

1. The things, then, that help us to devotion are many; because first and foremost, it is much to the point to take these holy exercises very seriously, with a heart that is very determined and prepared for everything which may be necessary to attain this precious pearl, no matter how arduous and difficult it may be, because it is certain that nothing great can be achieved without difficulties, and this too, at least in the beginning.

2. It also helps to guard your heart from every kind of idle and vain thoughts, and from all transitory affections and loves, and all disturbances and passionate movements, since it is clear that every one of these things impedes devotion, and it is no less fitting to have your heart attuned to prayer and meditation than a guitar about to be played.

3. It also helps to guard your senses, especially the eyes and ears and tongue, because through your tongue your heart is expressed, and through your eyes and ears it is filled with different sorts of imaginations, with things that disturb the peace and calm of your soul. By which it is rightly said that the contemplative person has to be deaf, dumb and blind, because the less you are disturbed by outsiders, the more you are recollected inside.

4. Solitude helps the same end, because it not only removes the occasions of distraction from your senses and heart, as well as occasions of sin, but it also invites you to look at what dwells inside you and face both God and your own self, moved by the opportunity of the place, that does not admit of any other company than your own.

5. The reading of spiritual and devout books is also very helpful, because they give you material for consideration and recollect the heart and arouse devotion and ensure that people of good will think about what they know implicitly; but all the time your memory reflects what you have in your heart.

6. The continual memorial of God also helps, and going always into His presence, and using those brief prayers which St. Augustine calls *jaculatoriae* (ejaculations) because these guard the house of the heart and preserve the heat of devotion, as we discussed previously. And so you will find yourself ready at every hour to set yourself to prayer. This is one of the foundations of the spiritual life, and one of the major remedies for those who can find neither the place nor the time to give themselves to prayer, and if you always address this concern, then you will gain much profit in a short time.

7. Devotion is also helped by continuation and perseverance in these good exercises at their appointed times and places, especially at night or at day-break, which are the two most suitable times for prayer, as all the Scriptures teach us.

8. It is also helped by bodily austerities and abstinences: a poor table, a hard bed, cilices and the scourge and other similar things, because all of them,

since they are born of devotion, so do they also arouse, preserve and increase the root from whence they have sprung.

9. Finally, it is helped by works of mercy, because they give us the confidence to suffer for God and accompany our prayers with practical service, because they can in no way be called empty petitions, and merit that your prayers be mercifully received, since they proceed from a merciful heart.

Chapter 3

Of the things that impede devotion.

1. And just as there are things that help devotion, so also there are things that impede it, among which the first is your sins, not simply your mortal sins, but also your venial sins, because these, even though they do not separate you from charity, they separate you from the fervour of charity, which is almost the same thing as devotion, and therefore it is right for you to avoid them with every care, not simply for the evil that they bring us, but also for the great good that they keep us from.

2. We are also impeded by a guilty conscience, which proceeds from these same sins (when they are excessive), because they cause a soul which is unquiet, fallen, disheartened and too weak for any good exercise.

3. We are also impeded by our scruples, for the same reason, because they are like thorns, which do not let us rest and be calm in God and enjoy true peace.

4. We are also impeded by a certain bitterness and unpleasantness of the heart and a disordered sadness, because together with this great evil we also taste a little of the joy and sweetness of the good conscience and spiritual joy.

5. We are impeded as well by too many cares, which are like those flies of Egypt that torment the soul and do not let it enjoy that spiritual dreaming that we have in prayer, but instead, more than anything else, worry it and divert it from its exercise.

6. We are also impeded by too many occupations, because they take up too much of our time and stifle the spirit, and so they leave you with neither the time nor the heart to devote to God.

7. We are impeded by the pleasures and consolations of the senses (when we are too much in them), because when you give yourself too much to the consolations of this world, you do not merit those of the Holy Spirit, as St. Bernard says.

8. We are impeded by the pleasures of eating and drinking to excess, particularly large suppers, because these are very bad for our spiritual exercises and sacred vigils, because when your body is heavy and full of sustenance, the soul is very badly equipped to fly aloft.

9. We are impeded by the vice of curiosity, both of the senses and of the intellect, which means wanting to hear and see and know everything, and desire fashionable, interesting and well-prepared things, because all this wastes our time, weighs down our senses, worries our soul and scatters it in every direction, and so impedes devotion.

10. Finally, we are impeded by being interrupted in our holy exercises, for even when we leave them for some well-justified necessity, because (as some Doctor says) the spirit of devotion is very delicate, and after it has once left us, it either does not return at all, or it returns only with much difficulty. And so, just as trees and human bodies seek water and daily food, and if they are deprived of it, then they wither and die, so also with devotion, when it lacks the water and food of consideration.

All this has been said in summary form, so that you may retain it better in your memory, and the evidence for this can be seen by whoever wants to, through exercise and long experience.

Chapter 4

Of the most common Temptations that usually fatigue those who give themselves to Prayer, and their Remedies.

It would be good now to treat of the most common temptations met with by people who give themselves to prayer, and their remedies, which, for the most part, are the following: The lack of spiritual consolations. The war against bothersome thoughts. Thoughts of blasphemy and lack of faith. Disordered fear. Too much sleep. Distrust of benefit. The presumption of being already benefited. Too great an appetite to know. The indiscreet zeal of benefiting. These are the most common temptations which we have on this journey, and the remedies for them are the following:

First Warning

First and foremost, in regard to the lack of spiritual consolations, the remedy is: do not leave your exercise of accustomed prayer for this reason, even though your prayer seems tepid and of little fruit, but place yourself in the presence of God as a culpable sinner, and examine your conscience, and look if perhaps you have lost His grace through your own fault, and petition the Lord with total confidence that He will pardon you, and declare the inestimable riches of His patience and mercy in suffering and pardoning those who otherwise will know no better than to offend Him. In this manner you will draw profit from your dryness, and take the occasion to humble yourself the more, seeing how much you have sinned, and take the occasion to love God more, seeing how much He pardons you. And although you may not find joy in these exercises, do not desist from them, because what is intended for your profit is not required to be always tasty. At least you will find this out through experience, for every time that you persevere in your prayers with a little attention and care, doing well what you can, in the end you will go forth from there consoled and happy, seeing that you have done something of what you should. He does much in the eyes of God who does what he can, even though he can do little. Our Lord does not look so much at your wealth, as at your intentions and will. He gives much who desires to give much, who gives all he has, who does not leave anything for himself. It is not much to endure

much in prayer, when the consolation is much. It is much, when devotion is little, if your prayers are much, and much greater is your humility, and patience and perseverance in good works.

It is also necessary at this time to proceed with greater solicitude and care than at other times, keeping a close guard over yourself and examining your thoughts with much attention, and also your words and deeds; because, since at that time we lack spiritual joy (which is the principal oar with which the boat is rowed), it is necessary to petition God with much concern and diligence for what you lack in grace. When you see yourself in this way, you have to take into account (as St. Bernard says) that the watchmen who guard you have gone to sleep on you, and the walls that defend you have fallen down. And therefore all your hope of salvation is in your weapons, since the wall can defend you no more, but only the sword and your own skills in battle. Oh how great is the glory of your soul when you wage war in this manner, when you defend yourself without a shield, when you fight on without armaments, and without strong fortifications, and, finding yourself in battle alone, you take fortitude and spirit as your company!

There is no greater glory in the world than to imitate the virtues of your Saviour. And among His virtues we consider the main one to be that He suffered what He suffered, without admitting into His soul any kind of consolation. In the same way, if you now suffer and fight, you will be a much greater imitator of Christ the less you care about any kind of consolation. And this is what it means to drink the chalice of pure obedience, without the admixture of any other liquor. This is the principal token by which we test the faithfulness of friends, to see if they are true friends or not.

Second Warning

Against the temptation of bothersome thoughts that we often have to fight against in our prayers, the remedy is to struggle against them with courage and perseverance, even though this resistance cannot be offered without the greatest fatigue and sorrow of spirit, because this business is not about fortitude, but about grace and humility. And so when you find yourself in this situation, you must turn to God without hesitation or sorrow (since this is either not a fault or is very trivial), and say to Him with all humility and devotion: "Do you not see me as I am, my Lord, so what can be hoped from this foulness but similar odours? What can be hoped from this earth that You have cursed, but briars and thorns? This is the fruit that it will give if You, Lord, do not purify it." And when you have said this, pick up the thread of your prayers as before, and hope in patience for the visitation of the Lord, who never fails the humble. And if these thoughts still go on troubling you, and you have persevered in resisting them, and have done all you can, you must take it as certain that you gain much more ground by this resistance than if you had tasted of the full savour of God.

Third Warning

As a remedy for the temptations of blasphemy, you should know that just as no kind of temptation is more terrible than this, so there is none less dangerous, and so the remedy is to not give way to these temptations, since

the sin is not in the sentiment, but in your consent to it and delight in it, which you do not have, but rather to the contrary; and so it is more true to call this a pain rather than a fault, because the less you receive joy in these temptations, the less risk you have of being at fault through them. And so the remedy (as we said) is to despise them and not fear them; because when they are very greatly feared, the same fear dispels them and takes them away from you.

Fourth Warning

Against the temptations of lack of faith, the remedy is that you should remember on the one hand your human littleness, and on the other, the Divine greatness, and think about what God commands you, and not be too eager to try to scrutinise His works, since we can see that many of them are beyond our understanding. and so, if you wish to enter into the sanctuary of the Divine works, then enter in with much humility and reverence, and bring with you the eyes of a simple dove, and not those of a malicious serpent, and the heart of a disciple, and not that of a reckless judge. You should be as a little child, because to such God teaches His secrets. You should not care to know the why of the Divine works, you should shut the eyes of your reason and open solely those of your faith, because this is the instrument with which you should measure the works of God. The eye of human reason is very good for looking at human works, but when looking at the Divine works, there is nothing more inappropriate than this.

But because ordinarily, this temptation is most burdensome for you, the remedy is the same as the previous one, which is not to give way to it, since it is more of a pain than a fault, because you cannot be at fault if your will is against it, as was declared above.

Fifth Warning

There are some who are tormented by great fears and fantasies when they try to find a quiet place to pray at night. Against this temptation, the remedy is to be strong and persevere in your exercise; because when you run away from it, you increase the fear, and when you fight, you increase your courage. So it is profitable to consider that neither the demon, nor anything else, is capable of damning us, without the permission of Our Lord. It is also profitable to consider that we have our Guardian Angel at our side, and in prayer more than anywhere else, because he is there to help us and bear our prayers to heaven and defend us from the enemy, who cannot do us evil.

Sixth Warning

Against too much sleep, the remedy is to consider that sleep sometimes proceeds from necessity, and then the remedy is not to deny the body what is proper, because we are not impeded by what is proper. Other things proceed from infirmity, and then you must not grieve about this, since you are not at fault, and neither must you let yourself be overcome by everything, but for your part, you must do the best you can, so that your prayers do not disappear completely, for without them we do not have security or true joy in this life. At other times sleep is born of laziness or the demon that causes it. Then the remedy is fasting, abstaining from wine, not drinking too much water, and

saying your prayers on your knees, or on foot, or lying down in the form of a cross and not moving, scourging yourself, or some other austerity that arouses and shocks the flesh.

Finally, the unique and general remedy, both for this evil and for others, is to petition it from Him who is equipped to give it, if only there were ever someone to ask for it.

Seventh Warning

Against the temptations of distrust and presumption, which are contrary vices, we are compelled to find different remedies. For distrust, the remedy is to consider that this business cannot be attained by your own powers alone, but only through Divine grace, which is most swiftly attained, the more you distrust your own virtues and confide yourself solely to the goodness of God, to whom all things are possible.

For presumption, the remedy is to consider that there is no clearer indication of your distance from God than to believe that you are very near Him, because, on this journey, those who cover the most ground are those who make the greatest effort to see how much they lack; and so they never worry about what they have in comparison to what they desire. So look, then, as in a mirror, at the lives of the Saints and other outstanding people who are still living in the flesh, and you will see that before them you are like a dwarf in the presence of a giant, and so you will not be presumptive.

Eighth Warning

Against the temptations of too great an appetite to know and study, the first remedy is to consider how much more excellent is virtue than knowledge, and how much more excellent is the Divine wisdom than the human, so that right here you will see how much more you must occupy yourself with those exercises where you attain both the one and the other. Though you may have all the glory of the wisdom of the world, and whatever greatness you might seek, in the end, all this glory finishes with your life. For what could be a greater misery than to acquire with great labour what you can never enjoy? Everything that you can know here is nothing. And if you exercise yourself in the love of God, soon you will go to see Him, and in Him you will see everything. "And on the Day of Judgement, we will not be asked what we have read, but what we have done; not how well we have spoken or preached, but what good works we have done."

Ninth Warning

Against the temptation of the indiscreet zeal to be of profit to others, the principal remedy is, let us undertake the good of our neighbour in such a way that it does not prejudice our own. And that in the same way that we undertake the business of the consciences of others, so should we take time for our own, which has to be such, that it is enough to continually keep our hearts devout and recollected, because this is to walk in the spirit, as the Apostle says, which is that you walk more in God than in yourself. For since He is the root and beginning of all our good, all our labours have to be about achieving such a great and profound prayer life, that it is always enough to place our

hearts in this manner of recollection and devotion, for which any old manner of recollection and prayer is not enough, but it is essential that it be great and profound.

Chapter 5

Of some Warnings necessary for those who give themselves to Prayer.

One of the most arduous and difficult things that there is in this life is to know how to go to God and build a close personal relationship with Him. Consequently, this journey cannot be made without some good guidance, nor even without some warnings, so that you will not be lost on the way, and so it will be necessary to point some of them out here with our usual brevity.

First Warning

Among these, the first is about the purpose which these exercises are to have. So therefore you must realise that (as this communication with God is something very sweet and delightful, as the Sage tells us) this is why many people, attracted by the power of this marvellous sweetness (which is beyond anything that can be said) reach God and give themselves to all the spiritual exercises, both reading and prayer and the use of the Sacraments, for the great joy that they find in them, in such a manner that principal result that this achieves is the desire for this marvellous sweetness. This is a very great and universal deception into which many fall. Because, as the principal end of all our works must be to love and seek God, what we have actually achieved here is loving and seeking ourselves, in other words, our own joy and contentment, which is the end that philosophers pretend to in their contemplation. "And this is also," as a Doctor says "a path of avarice, luxury and spiritual gluttony, which is no less dangerous than the sensual one."

And what is more, from this same deception there follows another no less great, which is when you judge yourself and others by those same joys and feelings, believing that your perfection in each one of them depends on the degree to which you enjoy God, which is a very grave deception. So against these two deception there is this warning and general rule: everyone must understand that the purpose of all these exercises and all your spiritual life is obedience to the God's Commandments and the accomplishment of the Divine Will, for which it is essential that your own will should die, so that you may then live completely in the Divine Will, since your own is so contrary to this other.

And because such a great victory as this cannot be attained without very great favours and gifts from God, we must practise prayer first and foremost, so that through this we may attain these favours and receive these gifts, so that we may bring our enterprise to its completion. And to this extent, and for such an end, we can petition and procure the delights of prayer (as we have said above), just as David petitioned them when he said: "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and strengthen me with a perfect spirit." So in conformity

with this, you will understand what the end must be that you ought to have in these exercises, and you will also understand here how you have to consider and measure your own profit and that of others, in other words, not for the joys that you would like to receive from God, but for what you would like to suffer for Him, both to do His Divine Will, and to deny your own.

The fact that this has to be the purpose of all our readings and prayers is something I do not wish to have to support with more proofs other than that divine prayer or Psalm: “Beati immaculati in via”, which has one hundred and seventy seven verses (because it is the longest in the Psalter), and there will not be found one verse in it that does not make mention of the Law of God and the keeping of His Commandments, which the Holy Spirit wants us to do, so that through this you may see how all your prayers and meditations are thus ordained in total and in part to this end, which is being obedient to, and keeping, the Law of God, and anything beyond this is one of the most subtle and shameful deceits of the enemy, whose aim is to make you believe that you are there for something else. And this is why the Saints have rightly said that your true proof is not in how much you enjoy your prayers, but in the patience of tribulation, the abnegation of self, and the accomplishment of the Divine Will, although great profit is obtained both from prayer and the joys and consolations that are found in it.

So in conformity with this, if you wish to see how much you have profited in your journey to God, look at how much you have grown every day in interior and exterior humility. How do you suffer the injustices of others? How do you know how to excuse the weaknesses of others? How do you meet the needs of your neighbour? How do you have compassion on the shortcomings of others without becoming angry? How do you know how to hope in God at the time of tribulations? How do you control your tongue? How do you watch over your heart? How do you control your flesh with all its appetites and feelings? How do you know how to make use of prosperity and adversity? How do you make amends and reparation with gravity and discretion? And in addition to all this, look if you have died to the love of honour, reward, and the world, and so, according to how you have either profited or not profited from this, you will be judged, and not according to what you feel or do not feel about God. And so you have to always keep one eye fastened firmly, and first and foremost, on mortification, and the other one on prayer, because that same mortification cannot be perfectly attained without the help of prayer.

Second Warning

And if we are not to desire spiritual consolation and delights for the purpose of wallowing in them for the profit they bring us, much less must we desire visions, or revelations, or ecstasies, or other similar things that can be even more dangerous to those who are not well-grounded in humility. And you must not be afraid to seem disobedient to God in this, because when God wishes to reveal something, he knows how to bring it about in such a way that the more you run away, the more clearly He will offer you proof, in such a manner that you cannot doubt it even if you want to.

Third Warning

In the same way, we must be warned to keep to ourselves the favours or rewards that Our Lord gives us, since He alone is our spiritual master. And this is why St. Bernard says that those who are devout should display the following words in their cell: “My secret for me, my secret for me.”

Fourth Warning

You must also be warned to treat God with the greatest humility and reverence with which you are capable, to the extent that your soul is never so rewarded and favoured by God that it can no longer turn its eyes within itself and look at its vileness and fold its angel’s wings and humble itself before so great a Majesty, as St. Augustine has it, of whom it is said he had learnt to rejoice in the presence of God with fear.

Fifth Warning

We said above that the servant of God has to work to have his important times to be with God, for beyond this ordinary time of every day, you must empty yourself at other times of every kind of business, even though they are very great, and immerse yourself completely in spiritual exercises, and give your soul an abundant repast, so that it is recharged again spiritually after it has been run down with the defects of every day, and has recovered new strength to go forward again. And although this must be done at various times, it must be done most especially on the principal feasts of the year, and at any time of tribulation and trouble, after long journeys and whatever business has caused distraction and concern in your heart, so that it may go back to being recollected.

Sixth Warning

There are also others who have little reflection and discretion in their exercises when it goes well for them with God. To those, their very prosperity comes to be an occasion of their danger. Because there are many to whom it seems that He has given them His grace with full hands, and so, since they find the communication of the Lord so sweet, they give themselves completely to it and lengthen the times of their prayers and vigils and bodily austerities, that their human nature, not being able to suffer the continual burden, ends up by bringing them back down to earth.

This causes many to end up overtaxing their stomachs and their heads, with the result that they make themselves incapable, not simply of other bodily works, but even of those same exercises of prayer.

And so it is appropriate to use your common sense in these matters, especially at the beginning, when your fervour and consolations are at their greatest, and your experience and discretion at a minimum, so that you handle your spiritual journey in such a manner that you do not fail in the middle of the way.

At the other extreme we have the pampered, who, being so full of discretion, deprive the body of any suffering, which would be damaging enough in all sorts of people, but which is much more so in beginners, because, as St.

Bernard says: “it is impossible for him to persevere much in the religious life, who, being a novice, is already discreet.” Being a beginner, you wish to be

prudent, and being also new and a novice, you begin by behaving and pampering yourself like an old person. And it is not easy to judge which of these two extremes is the most dangerous, since indiscretion (as Gerson says very well) is the most incurable, because while the body is healthy, it always has the hope that there will be a remedy, but after being wrecked by indiscretion, it is very hard to find a remedy.

Seventh Warning

There is also another danger on this journey, and perhaps this is greater than all the previous ones, and it is that many people, after having sometimes experienced the inestimable virtue of prayer, and found through experience how all the facets of religious life depend on it, they then think that this alone is everything, and that this alone is enough to bring them to salvation, and so they are inclined to forget the other virtues and grow weak in them. So the end result is that, as all the other virtues assist this virtue, when the foundations collapse, the building collapses too; and so when you concentrate too hard on the virtue of prayer, the less benefit you get from it.

So, then, servants of God must set their eyes not just on one virtue alone, however great it may be, but on all the virtues; because just as on the guitar a single note does not make a harmony, unless all the notes are sounded, so also one virtue alone is not enough to make this spiritual song if all the others do not sound out with it. And just as a clock is of no use if one of the hands is held firmly in one place, so it also happens on the clock of the spiritual life if a single virtue fails.

Eighth Warning

Here it is also fitting to warn you that everything which has so far been said to assist you in devotion is to be taken as equipment to help you be properly disposed towards Divine Grace; when you occupy yourself diligently with all this, remember to shift your faith out of it and place it solely in God. I say this because there are some people who make almost a religion of these rules and principles, and so they think that when you take up an office, because you have kept all the rules well, by virtue of this you will then turn out to be a good official, and the same with those who keep to the rules, think that by virtue of them, they will then attain all that they desire, without being able to see that this is making a religion out of grace, and attributing to rules and human artifices what is actually a pure gift and mercy of the Lord.

So it is therefore appropriate to see these things not as a religion in themselves, but as the blessings of grace, because if you see it all in this light, you will know that the principal means that you require is a profound humility and a knowledge of your own wretchedness, and at the same time, the greatest confidence in the Divine Mercy, so that from the knowledge you have of both the one and the other, you may ever proceed with continual tears and prayers, and with these, if you enter by the door of humility, you will attain what you desire through humility, and preserve it through humility, and be grateful for it with humility, without losing your faith, either in your manner of exercises, nor in anything which comes from them

End of the Treatise on Prayer and Meditation.