THE SUFFERINGS OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST
THE SUFFERINGS OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

By
FATHER THOMAS OF JESUS

Edited by
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FOREWORD

We are all inclined to view with a suspicious eye anything which is offered to us “in response to numerous requests”. Experience has taught us that the phrase is generally a harmless little bit of fiction got up by the offerer for the purpose of stimulating the interest of potential takers. I say this by way of disarming in advance those who may raise their eyebrows when I state that this work is being published precisely in response to numerous requests. I must give this as the paramount reason for its publication because it happens to be the literally true one. The requests which have come from all over the English-speaking world and which in volume have swollen to the proportions of a popular demand—have been flowing into the office of the publishers for the past twelve years... ever since, in fact, they sent forth that classic of the spiritual life, This Tremendous Lover, by Father Eugene Boylan, O.C.R. In his Appendix thereto on Spiritual Reading Father Boylan had this to say of the present work:

“They (The Mercier Press) hope to re-publish a book originally written in Portuguese by Fr. Thomas of Jesus, O.S.A.: The Sufferings of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Every second chapter in this book is in the form of a colloquy with Our Lord in some of the sorrows of His life. We know of no work which can be so helpful to those who feel the need of some book to help them at mental prayer, when ordinary meditation fails.”

As Father Boylan’s masterpiece has gone into reprint
after reprint on both sides of the Atlantic so has the distinguished author's unqualified recommendation of this work got wider and wider publicity and so has the demand for the half-promised new edition of it been steadily increasing.

The English translation of the work—which was originally issued in two volumes—has been out of print for over a hundred years, and the present edition is the first to see the light since the forties of the last century.

In order to make it economically feasible to publish this edition at a price which should give it the widest possible circle of readers and to produce it in a one-volume size which can be handled easily and carried in the pocket, some omissions and cutting were necessary. It was also considered necessary to do a certain amount of editing of the English text, mostly in the way of substituting current for archaic words and re-casting some outmoded forms of expression which many readers might find some difficulty in understanding easily. Further than this it was considered undesirable to go. Nothing new has been added, matter, sequence and spirit remain unchanged, and it is the Editor's hope that the old-fashioned flavour of the original translation, which in no little way helped to win for the work the golden opinions of those who possessed or came across the old and rare copy of it, has been faithfully preserved.

Father Thomas of Jesus prefaced his work with some lengthy advice as to how the maximum profit might be drawn from a consideration of the sufferings of Our Lord. Apart from limitations of space, it was not thought necessary to include this section as it was felt that the saintly author has given all the advice that is needed in the work itself and that anyone who applies himself or herself to the reading of it with the proper intention cannot fail to derive the maximum spiritual benefit. The following pieces of sound and practical advice to the reader, however, are quoted:

"1. Let him cast his eyes upon the mystery he proposes as the subject for meditation, not looking upon it as past, but as present, since it is so indeed in the idea of God, for if the action of the mystery has passed the virtue of it has not, nor has the love with which Christ performed it.

"2. Having recollected all his senses, interior and exterior, adored God with profound respect, made the Sign of the Cross, said the Lord's Prayer and Angelical Salutation in order to obtain the light of Heaven, let him begin this exercise by reading attentively that suffering of our Lord on which he is to meditate, stopping his reading at such places where he finds himself moved, that he may hear God and let Him act in him, and afterwards continue with his reading. When it is finished, let him address himself to our Saviour as if he beheld Him with his eyes in that state of suffering which is the subject of our prayer. Let him declare his love for Him by affectionate words, or just by the motions of his heart, according as God shall inspire him, for we must always faithfully follow the impressions He gives us and, since it is He whom we seek, we should remain at ease when we have found Him. Let the understanding act as little as possible, for besides having but little light while the soul is enclosed in this mortal body, it ought to serve only for preparing the way for the will and for opening, as one might say, the gate to love.

"3. The time of prayer being ended, retire from it with a disposition of peace and love as of one who possesses
God within oneself. Apply yourself afterwards to the affairs of your state of life with a recollected mind, and endeavour to preserve the fervour, light and repose of prayer. But if the prayer has been accompanied by dryness, heaviness and other pains, be not grieved thereat, but when finishing it, bless the Lord who is always just in His judgments. Acknowledge your own unworthiness, offer Him your troubles, declaring that you did not undertake this exercise in order to receive the consolations of God therein but in order to do His holy will, to which you entirely resign yourself. Examine yourself to see what may have distracted you. If you have been the cause of it yourself, by your own fault or negligence before or in the time of prayer, accuse yourself of it with sorrow and punish yourself for it by saying some prayer in the spirit of satisfaction. By this means it will happen that, going from prayer humbled and corrected, you will reap no less fruit from it than if you had been filled with consolation therein.

Before the reader places his or her hand in that of this master of the spiritual life, they might with advantage pause and ponder in their hearts this final admonition of his:

"In order to reap advantage from meditation on the sufferings of Christ, the aim of our meditation must be to inflame our hearts with the fire of His love, to resign ourselves entirely to Him, and to imitate Him with perfect fidelity, having always before our minds the thought that, as in Heaven, we shall be like God because we shall see Him as He is ([I John iii, 2]), so we shall also become like Jesus Christ the more often we look upon Him as He is upon the Cross."

Edward Gallagher.

THE AUTHOR

Father Thomas of Jesus, a member of a noble Portuguese family, was born in 1529 and took the habit of the Hermits of St. Augustine at the early age of fifteen. His religious life was distinguished for personal sanctity, zeal for the salvation of souls and a burning love for the poor and the sick. So great was his reputation that when, in the year 1578, the ill-starred expedition to Morocco was organised, the King prevailed on Father Thomas to leave his cloister and accompany the army as a chaplain. During the fighting Father Thomas was wounded and taken prisoner and sold into slavery. His Moslem master at first tried persuasive methods and fair promises as a means to get him to renounce his faith, and when these failed he had him scourged, loaded with chains and cast into a loathsome prison where he was allowed just sufficient food to keep him alive. It was while he was there that Father Thomas, writing for a few hours in the middle of the day, by the aid of a faint light which penetrated through an air-hole in his dungeon, composed his celebrated work on the sufferings of our Lord. Through the efforts of the Portuguese Court he was released from the hands of his Moslem master and went at his own request to a prison which housed two thousand Christian slaves of many nationalities. He could have procured his freedom through the influence of his family, who wished to ransom him, but he preferred to remain with his poor Christian brethren, instructing and sustaining them by
his example and ministrations. Worn out by his ceaseless labours on behalf of his flock, the hardships of captivity and self-imposed exercises of mortification, he died peacefully with the name of Jesus on his lips, on April 17, 1582, in the 53rd year of his age, and the fourth of his captivity.

THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST

I

His foreknowledge and acceptance of what He was to suffer

Our Lord made use of remedies so efficacious for restoring our human nature, corrupted by the sin of the first man, and so proper for the curing of the wounds inflicted upon it, that it may be said that He redeemed us in the most perfect manner. For besides our being born and living in sin, and subject to all the punishments which it has brought upon us, sin so disrupted the true order of our nature and gave it such a violent inclination to evil, that Christ was no less necessary for the re-establishment of that order than He was for the expiation of our sins: we stood in equal need of reformation and redemption. It was for this reason that the Son of God, having condescended in His infinite mercy to redeem the world, was not satisfied with meriting for us, by every action of this mortal life, the remedy for our evils, but He also left us the example and form of all those virtues by which we were to regulate our lives. This made St. Paul say (I Cor. xv. 49) that as by the sins in which we are born, and wherein we live, \textit{we have borne the image of the earthly Adam}, so we ought to endeavour, by an entirely new life, to bear also the image of the heavenly One, especially since by the grace of Baptism we have become one and the same body with
The sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ

Him. St. Paul advises us further (Rom. xiii. 14) to put on our Lord Jesus Christ, and to live as having been redeemed by his blood and instructed by His example.

Jesus Christ, who is both our Saviour and Master, practising the virtues directly opposite to those vices which had destroyed us, observed in the reformation of man the same order which had been pursued in man’s destruction. First, in the place of Eve, as a companion of His labour, he chose the Blessed Virgin Mary, endowed with angelic purity of soul and body, perfectly subject to God and the instrument of all our good, as Eve had been of all our evil. In the second place, Adam was created with great natural advantages and most plentiful helps of grace which should have enabled him to continue in his happy state; nevertheless, he sinned almost immediately after his creation. The second Adam, in order to repair the fault of the first, and being unable to wait the ordinary term of man’s formation, through His impatience to begin the work of our redemption, was pleased that His body should be formed, and His soul and divinity united thereto, in an instant.

As disobedience had been the first sin, so the first action of Christ was an act of obedience. A perverse will and a pleasure delighted in, contrary to the prohibition of the Creator, was the origin of our downfall; the suffering of pain in submission to the order of God was the beginning of our reparation. So our Saviour descended on earth and was united to our nature and, at the instant of His conception, when He might have been truly adored as Man-God, He began His first labour which was also our first remedy. He would permit neither the least delay in beginning His labour nor that there should be a solitary moment in His life which would not be full of mercy and grace for sinners. His eternal Father represented to Him, at the first instant of His life, the labours, troubles, ignominies, sorrows, betrayals, torments, death—in short, all the punishments He would have to suffer, with all their attendant circumstances, their weight, number and measure. And our Lord, who was Himself the fullness of light and grace, from whom nothing could be hidden, and who beheld all these things as vividly and distinctly then as though He were enduring them, submitted Himself joyfully and entirely to His Father’s command. He accepted all that it was ordained that He should suffer from His conception to His death with a will as ready and undivided as though nothing had been prepared for Him but glory and pleasure.

But as, in all the actions of His life, He carried out to the last detail—no matter at what cost to His human nature—the will of God His Father, so we ought to believe that Christ was not content to accept in general all that He was to suffer, but that He then resigned and delivered up in particular His head to thorns, His eyes to tears, His cheeks to buffetings, His face to affronts, and His mouth to gall and vinegar; and that He offered His body, life, honour, and whatever was in Him capable of suffering for the glory of His Father, and for the salvation of men.

This voluntary obedience of the Word Incarnate was accompanied with a profound humility, an ardent love, an extreme sorrow, and an infinite merit. It was so agreeable to God that it was sufficient for the redemption of all men. The eternal Father could then have revoked the sentence and command which He had given to His Son, taken Him up into heaven, and made Him sit
down at His right hand. For the merit of that single action was capable of taking away all the sins of the world, of chaining down the powers of Hell, of filling the whole world with treasures of grace, and of opening to all men the gates of Heaven, because Christ, being a Divine and Infinite Person, and the value of actions corresponding always to the merit of the person performing them, the least of His was more than sufficient for the redemption of a hundred thousand worlds. This is what Isaiah (viii, 3) foretold of Him in these words: *Call his name; hasten to take away the spoils, make haste to take prey: for before the child knows how to call his father and mother, the strength of Damascus shall be taken away*—that is, the power of the Devil and of sin, to which the whole world were slaves. The prophet foresaw that the Messiah would not delay our redemption one moment, and that He would be so eager to accomplish His Father’s designs that, in the first instant of His life, He would abundantly merit for us, by His obedience, all the favours of the divine mercy, not only before He could speak, but even before He was born. Such was the charity which drew down Christ on earth—one single action of His would have been sufficient for our salvation, but it would not have satisfied His love. Behold what a Redeemer, what a Lord, and what a friend we have!

What more salutary instruction for the reformation of our lives, therefore, can we desire than that which this divine Master gave us in the beginning of His life? The want of obedience was the cause of our misery. This virtue having been in Christ the foundation and source, so to speak, of all those graces which He merited for us, He thereby taught us that we ought, like Him, to establish the whole fabric of Christian perfection upon obedience; and as He did not spend one single moment of His life without obeying God His Father, so we ought also to account all those moments lost which we do not consecrate to obedience.

Let us consider then how much of our time we lose in sleep, in eating, in idleness and, what is still more to be regretted, in sinful actions, irregular pleasures, and in all other things which separate us from God. With what faintness and remissness do we seek Him, with what alacrity do we quit His service, and with what negligence do we labour for our own salvation which cost Him so much? If we compare the coldness of our lives and the reasons which prevent us from loving Christ with our whole being, with His ardent desire to suffer for our sins and the immolation of self which He underwent in satisfaction for them, we should be equally covered with confusion for our shortcomings and filled with gratitude in His presence.

So much has been written upon obedience and submission to the will of God that I shall content myself with saying here that Christ, when teaching us how we ought to pray, taught us also how to obey in the following words: *Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven*—*Matt. vi.* For the blessed in heaven not only desire and do nothing other than what God wills, but they cannot even think anything contrary to what He ordains. So we ought not to be satisfied with merely keeping our wills always conformable to the will of God, but we should aspire to that perfection of obedience and submit our understandings to Him also. The worldliness of our hearts and the plenitude of maxims, long-established, sanctioned and even venerated on the score of specious
arguments touching honour, necessity and duty, provide us daily with so many reasons for dispensing ourselves from obedience—often under the cloak of serving God better—that we must be constantly on our guard if we are not to be deceived.

Let us pray, therefore, to the Lord with David to turn away our eyes that they may not see vanity (Psalm cxviii, 37) nor take it for truth. Let us pray to the Lord that He may illuminate us with His light so that we may know His will for us, and that the purity of His doctrine, and the perfection of His example, may be the only object of our thoughts and esteem. For he who shall fix his eyes on Jesus Christ, our Lord and Master, who is the spotless mirror and perfect image of the divine goodness, with a sincere desire of imitating Him and of submitting his understanding to Him, shall immediately be free from a multitude of errors.

**CONTEMPLATION**

O Son of the living God! O my Saviour and Redeemer! O the comfort of my miseries, and the only remedy of my evils! Thou art come into the world to save our lost souls, to show how much Thou lovest sinners, and the desire Thou hast of satisfying for them. Thou burnest with such an ardent thirst after torments and the Cross, that Thou wouldst not live one single moment without suffering: I even presume to say, O my God! that had it been possible or convenient, Thou wouldst have come into the world on the Cross, and have remained fastened thereto, from the first instance to the last breath of Thy life; so incomprehensible is the excess of the love Thou bearest us. But at least, if Thou wast not always upon the Cross whereon Thou died, Thou never lived without suffering; Thou didst not spare Thy holy humanity in a body extremely delicate and but newly formed. How pure, how great, and how divine is Thy love! As Thou didst never judge that body too small to be without the blessed soul that was to animate it, or without the divinity that was to be united to it; so Thou didst always think it big enough to suffer; even to make it feel at once, in the moment of its formation, all the pains it was to suffer at different times, in the whole course of its life. Thou showed it at that time the tears, sorrows, hunger, inconveniences, poverty, fatigues, injuries, and contempts, which it was to undergo, the fetters wherewith it was to be bound, the stripes with which it was to be torn, the thorns it was to be pierced with, the Cross whereon it was to be fastened, the gall and vinegar that were to be presented to it, the extreme desolation whereto it was to be reduced, and, in short, the cruel death that was to consummate its sacrifice.

If at the age of thirty-three years, the only thought of those torments, which were prepared for Thy holy humanity, occasioned it such a profound sorrow, that it was cast thereby into an agony, and bathed in a sweat of blood; what must its grief have been, when at its entrance into the world, everything it was to suffer during the whole course of its life, was represented to it in so clear, so lively, and so certain a manner? I comprehend, O my God! that that punishment was one of the greatest Thou didst ever endure; since Thou wast then man to feel it in its whole extent, and God to foresee it in all its circumstances. Thou didst at the same time
foresee all, accept of every thing, and wast sensible of all; because Thy love permitted Thee not to spare Thyself in the smallest part of Thy labours.

Miserable creature that I am! when I consider Thy eagerness to suffer for my salvation at so tender an age, and in a body scarce yet capable of human figure! What can I say, and how dare I appear before Thee? For, alas! in whatever time of my life I look upon myself, I see nothing but sin; and I think there is no part of myself but what is infected therewith, as there was no part of Thee but what was pierced with sorrow. In my mother’s womb, though I was incapable of action, I was already like the old Adam by original sin, wherewith my soul was defiled; being born, and unable as yet to sin, because I had not the use of reason, I felt violent inclinations to anger, lying, pride, gluttony, disobedience, and to many other disorders, which showed sufficiently at that time what the corruption of my heart was. When I was arrived at the age of discretion, and capable of knowing Thee, O my God! instead of producing those fruits Thou hadst reason to expect from me, into what disorders did I not fall? O infinite mercy! who hast borne with me till now, do not cast me away!

Thou, O my God! as the true friend of my soul, moved with compassion towards it, Thou wouldst not even wait the days employed by nature in the formation of bodies; Thine was formed, animated, and filled with the divine majesty in an instant out of the desire Thou hadst to take advantage of every moment, and to bestow on the work of love and grace the time that nature requires for hers. And for my part, O infinite goodness! though I had not the use of reason till many years after my birth, I did not know Thee even then; and though

I found Thy blessings heaped upon me in the course of my life, I did not seek Thee, nor serve Thee, neither did I concern myself about loving Thee; but I contented myself with a languishing, or rather with a dead faith. I was present in Thy thoughts when Thou began to suffer; Thou knew me when Thou accepted such great punishments, and the foresight of my miseries excited in Thee the impatience of remedying them.

O that I had never offended Thee! O that I had employed the whole time of my life in loving and serving Thee! If in the first moment when I return to Thee with my whole heart, I find myself so touched, so changed, and so different from what I was before; what must I have been, O my God! if I had never departed from Thee? I should have been now Thy faithful servant, wholly filled with Thy love, and wholly transformed into Thy spirit.

Was it not reasonable that Thou shouldst spend the first hours of Thy coming into the world with the most Blessed Virgin, whom Thou found full of grace, love, and purity; and who was so agreeable to Thee, that Thou wouldst become her son? Thou desired that I should have a share in Thy love, and Thou wast at that time wholly employed about my miseries and their remedy. O divine Shepherd! who came to seek, not the just, because there were none, but sinners; how Thou didst love this poor strayed sheep! However, the soul of the Blessed Virgin lost nothing of its right for all those benefits Thou bestowed on us; Thou wast rich enough both for her and us. As Thy love is divine, it is neither limited, nor divided; and Thou givest Thyself at the same time wholly to all, and wholly to everyone in particular. I was no less present to Thy knowledge
and love than the Blessed Virgin, though she was most closely united to Thee by the bond of perfect charity. After what I see, what I believe, and what I owe Thee, O my divine Saviour! can there remain in me anything that does not burn with the fire of Thy love? O the lukewarmness! O the obstinacy of my heart! destroy it, O Lord! and inflame me entirely with that heavenly fire, since all my happiness consists in being consumed therewith.

We are never wearied with what pleases us; we desire it, and love the continuance of it. Thus the abundant communication of Thy blessings, and of Thyself, being to Thee a most agreeable thing, Thou wouldst not return into Heaven, nor be satisfied with those first sufferings, which did but provoke the hunger wherewith Thou wast oppressed; Thou wouldst satiate it, as one may say, by thirty-three years of labours, and the death of the Cross. O love! immense love! infinite love! let every tongue be silent, and every understanding remain in a profound admiration: diffuse Thyself throughout my soul, O holy love! melt its ice; soften its hardness, that Thou may no longer find therein any resistance to Thy divine impressions; inflame, dilate, and fortify my heart; and grant that I may love Thee without measure; for I cannot otherwise correspond to the manner in which Thou lovest me.

O Mother of God, virgin most pure, and dispensatrix of graces! love you that Lord for me, who has granted me so many blessings by you; and since you know the greatness of my obligations better than anyone, obtain for me the pardon of my past sins, and the grace of serving that divine Saviour faithfully for the future. Amen.

\[\text{II}\]

The nine months which He passed in the womb of His Blessed Mother

Because the Son of God was so intent on discovering ways of suffering for us, the smallest detail of His actions ought not to escape our notice but should, in eternal acknowledgment, be fixed deeply in our minds. His love made Him invent a new kind of pain which He alone was capable of enduring. This was a nine months' imprisonment in the womb of His Mother. He rejected everything that could make easier this imprisonment and sought rather to increase its hardship; for very far from receiving any comfort from His divine nature, since He had miraculously suspended the sweetness which His blessed Soul ought, by virtue of the hypostatic union, to have diffused over His body, His divinity served only to make Him suffer still the more.

The Blessed Virgin herself, though she was to Him a veritable paradise of delights, by reason of her perfect purity, could not diminish His sense of corporal pain, because those delights consisted only in the blessings which our Lord communicated to her, and in the mutual love which united the Son and the Mother, but after a most pure and spiritual manner. The fact that she was the Mother of God did not exempt the Blessed Virgin from a human state, and though her pregnancy, which was the work of the Holy Ghost, was free from many miseries common to other women, yet she was subject to all those that could be compatible with her virginal purity and eminent sanctity.
The Son of God, therefore, being willing to become like the children of Adam, embraced all their miseries, sin only excepted, and, so far as His human nature was concerned, there was nothing that could alleviate the inconveniences of His prison. As His most holy conception was the work of God, and not of man, it was accomplished in an instant, and His body was formed by the operation of the Holy Ghost to the full extent required by human nature for the functions of life, but with so many perfections that there was never one more complete. The soul, which was united to it at the same moment, was so full of grace and wisdom that it not only excelled every human and angelic creature, but was worthy of being united to the Divinity and of becoming the most perfect instrument of the wonders which God designed to work for the salvation of men. Christ then possessed that plenitude of grace and wisdom in so eminent a degree that it could not increase in Him with age; that plenitude was no less in His Mother's womb than when He ascended into Heaven and sat at His Father's right hand: for to grow in wisdom would be to imply that some degree of it which He had not had before, would have had to be acquired, and this defect would not have been in accord with the dignity of His person. What reluctance we, with our present reason and knowledge, should have to enter again into our mother's womb and how much more readily we would choose to undergo any other kind of pain! Let us consider this thought carefully and we shall comprehend what Christ, who had more light and reason than all men put together, must have endured during those nine months.

Nicodemus was terrified when our Saviour told him that "unless a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God." (John iii, 3.) For, as he literally understood that sentence, it seemed frightful, and indeed impossible, for a reasonable man, already old, to return into his mother's womb, and be born again. St. Augustine also, in the hymn he sang with St. Ambrose on the day of his baptism, makes use, when speaking to Christ, of this strong expression: O Lord, when Thou took upon Thee to deliver Man, Thou abhorred not a virgin's womb. The expression of horror or abhorrence manifests aversion accompanied by indignant reluctance. Our Saviour, however, allowed no such feelings to hinder Him from shutting Himself up in that strait and incommodious prison; He bore the trouble of it with the same love and patience as He did all the other sufferings of His life, and He remained therein for the same number of months as it is thought that Adam had spent hours in the delights of the earthly paradise.

As Job never gave greater marks of his love for God than when he was reduced from the highest pinnacle of human prosperity to live on a dunghill, so the Son of God expressed his love by descending from Heaven into the womb of a woman, there to remain for several months. His action was in conformity with the opinion of men who believe that the surest proof of friendship is to suffer much for the one loved, and that the more unworthy the loved one is, the more heroic is the friendship. He did not concern Himself with the smallness of our merit but fixed His thoughts solely on the way in which He could express the greatness of His love for us, so that men, who are naturally sociable and capable of friendship, might be touched by the proof of His love and prefer Him to all creatures. His love obliged
Him also to conceal His majesty that we might the more readily come to Him, for as St. Augustine says (Serm. 8 de Nat. Dom.): LOVE CANNOT bear majesty because the one removes, and the other attracts; majesty takes away confidence, and love establishes it; majesty keeps everything below it within the bounds of respect, and love puts those upon a level that love one another. Therefore that we might have recourse in our miseries to the Divine Goodness with greater freedom, It found out that admirable means of hiding Its majesty; and It has had such regard for our lowness that It seems to have sacrificed Its own grandeur to it.

This clearly shows how little God will esteem those who have a great love for themselves. God is high, says St. Augustine, if you exalt yourselves, He will fly from you; if you humble yourselves, He will descend unto you.—(Serm. 2 de Ascens.)

Therefore, although, on account of one’s employment, posts, dignity or for some other reason, one may sometimes conceal from men one’s humility and the knowledge of one’s own nothingness, yet we must confess that nothing shows more fully how near to, or how far from, God one is than the interior appraisement one has of oneself in the presence of His majesty. It is but too easy to be deceived in this and a man who thinks he has but a small esteem of himself often nourishes a secret pride deep down in his soul. In order to avoid being caught in this snare, we should consider whether in common, every-day affairs we love those things which humble us; whether by an interior conviction of the inadequacy of our own means and a true hatred of ourselves we sincerely desire contempt and the lowest place, and whether it is through the fear of displeasing God that we shun being preferred. If these are the motivating reasons, then one may be assured of the solidity of one’s disposition, and when the glory of God, the good of one’s neighbour, and the nature of one’s employment require it, one may maintain one’s authority before men, and still be humble before God.

But if the honour of the world puffs us up, if contempt casts us down and if, when things do not go the way we want them to, we are filled with sadness and displeasure, with indignation and trouble, we ought then, in the presence of God, to lament over our state, beseech Him with tears to instil in us the spirit of humility, and acknowledge how far we are from the purity of His love, since true humility is so necessary a disposition for perfect charity. Above all, we should ask for the grace of being fully persuaded that we cannot obtain the love of God but by such means as Christ made use of when testifying to His love for us.

We must not here forget the extreme desire our Saviour had of being closely united to those souls whom He loved so much. For although He could have built Himself a paradise of delights, as He had done for the first man, and have remained in it after He had clothed Himself with our humanity, He chose rather to conceal Himself in the holy sacrament of the Eucharist so that He might become our nourishment, and unite Himself to our hearts, in the most intimate manner that could be imagined.

He thereby accomplished in an admirable sense those words of St. Paul (Rom. v, 20) where sin abounded, grace did abound more; for grace now reigns where sin formerly did, and Christ dwells in those hearts of which sin had become the master. Man was created not
to be miserable, but to be happy, and for that reason God gave him a paradise in which to abide. Though man lost that place of delights through his sin, God did not change His resolution with respect to him, for He gave him a new paradise in giving him the Lamb of God who is, as St. John says (Rev. xxi, 23), the lamp of the holy city, and the happiness of the heavenly country. It is He who is the source of all those good things wherewith that happy abode is filled, and He makes a paradise wherever He is; He was pleased also to make Himself one of us, by the love He bore us, and those who love Him may possess Him, and find in the possession of Him a continual paradise by penance and love, if they happen to lose Him by sin. In this paradise we are fed with the fruit of life, warmed with the fire of divine love, and honoured with heavenly visits.

Whoever, therefore, shall behold, with enlightened eyes and a pure heart, the manifestations of the divine love, may very well say with David (Psalm lxxiii, 2): My heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God. My flesh, because it sees itself not only united to the Divine Word but also destined to receive Him within itself; and my heart, because it finds itself capable of possessing Him on earth, who is the delight of Heaven, with the glorious certainty of possessing Him also for all eternity.

CONTEMPLATION

Who shall ever be able, O my God! to comprehend the designs of Thy eternal wisdom? I adore Thee to the utmost of my power; and I wish I could do it equally to the deserts of those wonderful works which Thy infinite love caused Thee to perform for my salvation. I desire to love Thee with my whole heart, to serve Thee with all my strength, and to be wholly Thine. But what I offer Thee is nothing in comparison with those infinite mercies, which Thou hast first bestowed on me. Thou came, O Son of the living God! from the bosom of Thy Father, where Thou art the eternal Word, God of God, equal to Him in divinity, in majesty, in power, in greatness, in wisdom, in glory, and in eternity of happiness. Thou came to clothe Thyself with our nature, and thou abhorred not to remain nine months in the womb of a woman, who, though most agreeable to Thy eyes by the sanctity of her soul, was not free from those corporal miseries common to other women. But here is still, O my God! less reason to be seized with astonishment, than to adore and love the immense riches of that divine goodness, which reduced Thee to such a profound humiliation for my sake.

Thou must needs have loved sufferings well, O my Saviour, since Thou inventest new ones, which Thou alone art capable of enduring. Thou wilt surpass all men in all things, in loving without bounds, in humbling Thyself beyond measure, in suffering without sparing Thyself, and in showing my soul that it ought to have no other friend, no other father, and no other refuge but Thee. Whence comes it, then, O my God! that I love not Thee with my whole heart? What can I do for Thee that is not infinitely below what I owe Thee? Thou keepest no bounds in Thy sufferings, because Thy love is the measure of them. But Thou observest not the same method in those Thou sendest me; and Thy goodness always proportions them to my weakness.

But why gavest Thou to our first father, at his
... IN THE WOMB OF HIS BLESSED MOTHER

creation, a place of delights, exempt from all those miseries which we suffer? And why didst Thou choose for Thyself, who art our restorer and true father, only a place full of inconveniences and miseries? O infinite wisdom! O the physician and remedy of my wounds! how clearly hast Thou shown in the creation of the first man, that Thou takest no pleasure in seeing us suffer: and that Thy design was that we should be happy, without labour or sorrow, and brought up like princes in a paradise of delights, in order to pass from thence to the possession of the eternal kingdom. But the weakness of our nature could not bear so great a happiness, without forgetting itself; and since Adam lost it in the midst of pleasures, his children must endeavour to recover it by sufferings.

It is therefore out of necessity and the desire of saving us, that Thou hast put us into this school of labours and tears, that we may learn therein the humility and obedience which we owe Thee: and to express Thy love to us, Thou comest Thyself to seek us in our wanderings, to comfort us in our sufferings, and to share them with us. But this division Thou makest is unequal: for if I receive one stroke from Thy paternal hand, Thou receivest a thousand for me; and if Thou layest any burden upon me, Thou bearest me and it upon Thy shoulders. So that Thy happiness and delight seems to be in comforting me, in instructing, healing, and accompanying me, and in enriching me with Thy blessings.

O infinite Mercy! I blush with confusion in Thy presence, when I consider myself, and compare myself with Thee! Unhappy child of Adam, I am banished out of paradise, and I seek a new one upon earth, although it be an abode of tears and miseries. I am attached to earthly things, so as to ruin myself on their account; they carry away my thoughts, senses, and desires, as if they were true and eternal goods; in order to possess them I throw myself headlong into death, and I abandon Thee, O Thou life of my soul! Thou wouldst not pass one single moment without suffering, and I would spend my whole life in pleasure and delight.

O that I had never offended Thee! Grant me the grace that all worldly pleasures may be changed with respect to me into gall and vinegar; that my whole delight may be in being humbled and in suffering with Thee, O my amiable Jesus! that I may no longer have a relish of anything but Thee, and that I may be sensible only of Thy love. At Thy entrance into the world Thou refused not to lodge in a human body, that I might believe Thee, when thou tellst me I shall possess Thee within mine. It is to acquaint me therewith that Thou enclosed Thyself in that of Thy blessed Mother, and to persuade me beforehand of the desire Thou hast to become our nourishment and very substance. What findest Thou in me to make Thee desire so earnestly to be with me? Thou bringest Thy riches with Thee; what more canst Thou find in a poor creature who is nothing but misery and sin, that Thou art not content with being alone, but desirest to live with it? Thou art Thyself a paradise of infinite delights! What advantage dost Thou pretend to find in my indigence? And how can it be that I should become, as one may say, the paradise of Him who is the eternal felicity of the blessed! Why have not I, O Lord! a sufficiency of Thy light to comprehend Thy wonders, and enough of Thy love to seek Thee without intermission?
Grant me the grace, O my God and sovereign good! to find more joy in Thee than in all creatures; more than in health and beauty; more than in glory and honour; more than in power and riches; more than in knowledge and friendship; more than in reputation and praises; and more in short than in all things Thou canst give me, whether visible or invisible; for Thou art infinitely more amiable than all Thy blessings; Thou alone art most high, most powerful, most beautiful, and most noble. Thou art a true paradise, and paradise without Thee would be a real banishment. My heart can find a perfect peace in nothing but in Thee alone. Thou knowest it, O Lord! and therefore Thou hast invented such admirable means of abiding in me, that I might abide in Thee; Thou seest me when I forget Thee; Thou comest to me when I fly from Thee; and Thou threatenest me with death when I depart from Thee. O Jesus, most pure spouse of my soul! when shall I be delivered from myself, that I may dwell in Thee? Behold me in Thy presence, O Jesus! who art the splendour of glory and the consolation of my pilgrimage; but I know not what to say to Thee, the voice of my poverty will plead better for me than my own, and the abyss of my miseries will bring into my heart the abyss of Thy mercies. Hear that voice, O my God! and make haste to come to Thy poor and unworthy servant, that Thou mayst comfort him by Thy presence; Thou art my joy, and without Thee I cannot be content; I am miserable, and full of blindness and sin, and I shall be always so till Thou hast disclosed Thy countenance to me, and till I am delivered thereby from myself.

O most holy Mother of God! virgin most pure, who deserved to contain that heavenly treasure for the space of nine months; you did not possess it for yourself alone; you kept it, you nourished it, and it was entrusted to you for me; let me then have a share of it, O Mother of mercy! Give me that same Lord, and may I lose everything that separates me from Him and His love; since He vouchsafes to abide in us, and abhors nothing but sin, obtain for me that purity which may render me capable of possessing Him. Amen.
III

The violence He did His love by holding it inactive for nine months

As a natural consequence of that zeal for His Father's glory with which our Saviour was consumed, He suffered also another pain in the womb of His blessed Mother. This pain was the extreme violence He then did His love by delaying to labour in the work for which He came. Love is like a fire; it is the most lively of all the motions of the heart, as fire is the most active of all the elements. In the Old Testament God is called a consuming fire (Deut. iv, 24) because of the unusual works of His love which would appear unworthy of His Majesty if they did not proceed from an infinite goodness. All those names which express His power and greatness, such as strong, invincible, omnipotent, violent, inflamed and transforming are in perfect agreement with divine love and express the property of that eternal fire which is the principle of those wonders which God performs. It was with that fire that the Incarnate Word burned in the womb of His blessed Mother, waiting in the course of nature for the coming of His time and constrained to remain unknown, not only for several months, but for many years, till the moment appointed in the Eternal Counsel.

Therefore, that love finding no outlet, and being violently restrained, it acted upon His heart, devoured and consumed it. If hope that is delayed afflicts the soul, according to the expression in Holy Writ (Prov. xiii, 12), and if the more a thing is desired and esteemed the keener is the sense of loss in being deprived of it, what must then have been the pain of that divine Soul in seeing Itself obliged to wait for the increase of Its body for the accomplishment of Its work of heaping blessings upon us, while at the same time It was oppressed with the weight of all those evils which It had resolved to undergo.

St. Augustine affirms (Ep. 144) that if God were capable of any pain, it would be the pain of love for, as He is full of love, or rather is love itself, nothing could afflict Him but not being loved and perceiving that what He had done and suffered for men would not be turned to profit by them. What He could not suffer in His divine, He suffered in His human, nature and He was willing in the first moment of becoming man to show us the greatness of His love; the time He was obliged to pass in His Mother's womb did not permit this and that delay caused Him extreme pain.

He took upon Him our humanity as the most proper means of demonstrating an infinite love and He was obliged, because of the necessity for waiting, to stop the motions of that love. That this was so was clearly shown when subsequently His love had the power of acting. How harshly did He not treat His sacred humanity and what means did He not discover to make it suffer? And finally our Saviour, seeing that His humanity could not suffer as much as He desired, left us before His death the means whereby He might become our nourishment, so that, making one and the same body with us, He might in the following ages, even to the end of the world, be capable of doing and suffering in us that which He could not do nor suffer in Himself. He was willing also that after His death His side should be
opened, as much to satisfy His love as to proclaim to the whole world that by ascending into Heaven with that wound and those in His hands and feet, these divine sources should be eternally open to us.

Two things may serve to illustrate what we have been saying about the love of Christ for men—the love which the saints have for God and that which worldlings have for creatures. The love of the saints is a spark of that eternal fire which burns in the heart of God, and with which our Lord was inflamed; it also produces commonly in the saints the effects it produced in Christ. It torments them without intermission and makes them lead a life full of sorrow: they suffer because they do not behold Him whom they love and because in their period of exile, being oppressed by the weight of the flesh, they are unable to accomplish all that God requires of them. Hence it comes about that they often lose the relish for sensible objects, spend whole nights without sleep, and that the most innocent activities, even eating itself, become painful to them, because the divine love which urges them spreads bitterness over everything else and does not permit them to be employed with anything but Him. Whatever they do appears to them to be nothing; they burn with the desire of being entirely consumed by that sacred fire, and the soul, oppressed by the weight of the body, being unable to follow the attraction of the spirit, they spend their lives in continual pain. None but those who have experienced it can comprehend the suffering pure love can inflict on the soul it possesses; how difficult it is to express in words that state of sweetness and peace which is always mingled with sorrow and torment; how much more patience, in short, is necessary at that time to support the weight and trouble of life than to endure the evils of this world. It was in this sense that the Apostle thought himself so unhappy (Rom. vii) because the weight of his body permitted him not to follow the motion of the spirit, and it was for this reason that finding Jesus Christ lived in him, he looked upon death as the beginning of his happiness (Phil. i, 2). So it was that David comforted his afflicted soul by making it hope that one day it should be wholly employed in the praise of God, and that tears were his food day and night because he had not his God (Psalm xlii, 4). The holy Prophet made it abundantly clear that the interior torment of his love far surpassed that which he suffered exteriorly.

Now if one single spark of the divine love, which was confined within the narrow bounds of this mortal life, occasioned the saints so much pain that their exile seemed insupportable to them, what must have been the pain felt by Christ who possessed the plenitude of that love when He saw Himself obliged to wait so long for the time when He might labour for the glory of His Father and the salvation of mankind?

There are few who do not know the transports of human love and the violence with which it moves towards its object; hence arises grief from being separated from that object, eagerness to see it, joy in possessing it, fear of losing it, and sorrow for having lost it; such love does not consider whether the nature of the object be good or bad but pursues it with such earnestness that it esteems as nothing the trouble it takes to gain it. Everything that opposes its desires, however just that thing may be, appears unjust and hateful to it; on the contrary, it approves, pursues and embraces,
without distinction, whatever serves to satisfy them; it tries all things, undertakes all things and nothing is hard to bear but being deprived of that which it loves. A man in this condition becomes insensible, blind, obstinate, incapable of accepting any advice and conducts himself in a way he would condemn were he not possessed by passion. This appears more clearly in those who, being moved by grace, endeavour to break their chains and rid themselves of the creature, in order to return to God, for we see then with what obstinacy and blindness can a heart, plunged into these earthly affections, resist right reason, the truth and God.

I omit many other reflections with which experience daily furnishes us and stress only that the pains of this life arise commonly from the dispositions of our hearts which desire too earnestly that which they cannot possess or find no rest in that which, after so long desiring it, they finally possess. This is because the heart of man, being greater than the goods it loves, can never be satisfied therewith and being incessantly agitated, therefore, by its own desires, suffers the just punishment which God has laid down for those who do not love Him. *For Thou hast so ordained, O Lord!* (says St. Augustine) and it always happens that every irregular mind becomes its own punishment.

Now if earthly love, which is at most but a rough image of the divine one, or like a painted fire in comparison with a real one, if this love has so much power over men, what must not that divine love have done which was violently retained in the heart of Christ?

When the Christian comes to consider these two kinds of love, what grounds can he have for confusion? For if he compares his own kind of love with that of Christ’s, he will find himself, as St. Augustine said, speaking of his own wanderings, in a vast and completely dissimilar region. Because the excellence and dignity of the soul consists in bearing the image of its Creator, when it forsakes, like another prodigal child, the happy region of the divine resemblance, it can go nowhere but into a far country where it will be overwhelmed with misery and confusion, and where it can find nothing that approaches to the purity of its Creator. If man cannot comprehend the extent of Christ’s love, he can at least see that he is very remote from it. He can then feel by the baseness of his affections and the displeasure they give him, that he loves only himself; and he will be ashamed that he does nothing for Him to whom he owes all he is, all he has, and all he hopes for.

**CONTEMPLATION**

Thou canst not remain without action, O celestial fire! O divine love! and when Thou seemest to do nothing outwardly, it is then Thou makest the greatest havoc within. Thou art a God of love, O amiable Jesus! Thou art a pure fire, and Thou hast need of nothing but Thy own love for tormenting Thyself. To what extremity dost Thou reduce it, by keeping it thus confined in so small a compass? What violence dost Thou not do it? Thou desired to appear in the world, and Thou art constrained to live hidden therein: Thou desired to declare Thy holy truths, and Thou art obliged to keep silence; Thou desired to call sinners, to heal the sick, to fill the world with Thy miracles and graces, to suffer and die for men, and Thou art compelled to remain
unknown among them. Thou obeyed Thy eternal Father out of love: but obeying Thou desired, and desiring Thou expected painfully the course of nature: Thou art not in a condition to suffer those immense labours to which Thou art destined; but Thou suffered the delay of them; this is a torment for Thee which the world is unacquainted with; it is only he who loves Thee, O my God! who can comprehend it.

If Thy servants, when Thou givest them a small taste of the purity of Thy love, are touched in so lively a manner with the blindness of the world, the continuance of their banishment, the zeal of Thy glory and the salvation of their brethren; if the incapacity of accomplishing whatever Thy love, and the desire of pleasing Thee, inspires them with, be to them a continual martyrdom; if a single spark of that fire, which proceeds from Thee, and falls upon them, consumes them, what a conflagration must there not have been produced in Thee by Thy desire, expectation and delay, with the whole plenitude of pure love?

How remote am I from Thee, O my God! and how opposite is my conduct to Thine! What Thy love performs in Thee in order to bring Thee to me, earthly love does the same in me to separate me from Thee. I run with an insatiate thirst after the goods of this world; I am afflicted when I possess them not, or when they are not such as I wish them. I expect them impatiently, seek them eagerly, enjoy them with disquiet, and lose them with grief; and they justly cause me all these pains, since they separate me from Thee, who art my only repose and sovereign happiness. Miserable wretch that I am! though I know the vanity of these amusements, yet I know not, O my God! either what I am, or what Thou art; otherwise I should die with grief for having esteemed Thee less than the world, and for having forsaken Thee for a moment’s pleasure.

Is it possible that I am still living, O my God! and how can I think on all these things, and confess them before Thee, without dying with grief? O infinite mercy, O immense goodness! O eternal sweetness! How great reason hadst Thou to banish me from Thee for ever, to cast me headlong into Hell and to deliver me up to the rage of devils? And yet Thou wouldst not do it; Thou bearest with me, Thou waitest for me, Thou even sufferest me to despise Thee, and Thou still offerest me Thy hand.

Pardon me, O Lord; pardon me, divine Jesus; pardon me, O Lamb of God! what displeases Thee in me, grant that I may be contrite with sorrow at the sight of my sins: I cast them all, and myself with them, into that fire which burns in Thee; heal me, O Lord! purify me, transform me into Thee, and accomplish the eternal designs Thou hast upon my soul.

When shall I see myself possessed with Thy love in such a manner, that I may truly say Thou art my God, my love, my Lord, my all, and I am wholly thine? When shall I despise all the things of this world, so far as to desire nothing but Thee alone? When shall I be so sufficiently weary of this life as to hate it equally to the love I have borne it? I burn at the moment with the desire of loving and possessing Thee, O Thou life of my soul! grant that this fire may always continue, and that the sufferings, with which it shall please Thee to try me, may never extinguish it. What wilt Thou have me to do, O my sweet love? May everything I have hitherto loved be turned against me that I may be obliged to turn to
Thee. I am resolved to break with all creatures, and to be at peace only with Thee alone. I renounce all things for love of Thee; I desire nothing but Thee; I give myself to Thee, and I resign myself entirely into Thy hands. Make me suffer what Thou pleasest: the severest cross shall be sweet to me provided I be fastened to it with Thy love.

Is there any reason to wonder that I should desire Thee so earnestly, O Thou God of my soul! Alas! I am miserable without Thee; and Thou findest no advantage with me but the pleasure of loving me and heaping Thy blessings upon me: for although Thou remained in obscurity and silence, though Thou suffered not so much as Thou desired during the first nine months of Thy life, yet Thou didst not spend them in idleness. Thou employed all that time in feeling my evils, in offering Thyself to Thy Father to be my remedy, in obtaining for me the pardon of my sins, and in meriting for me an infinite number of graces. I was present to Thee at that time, Thou loved me, and Thy love called me already to Thy union and service. The corporal nourishment and increase thou wast pleased to take, and every drop of blood which was formed in Thy body, were offered to Thy eternal Father for me. In every moment of Thy life, Thy love was renewed, and produced in Thee fresh desires of suffering for my salvation.

What, O Lord, wilt Thou come to me, wilt Thou be sacrificed for me? permit me to ask Thee whether Thou considerest what Thou art, and what I am: art Thou not blinded through the excess of Thy love? It is me then whom thou loveth and seest, O unlimited goodness! O boundless love? Come, O Lord! perform in me what Thou performest in thyself; and since love is the sole rule of Thy conduct, let it be also that of mine.

Remove from me, O Lord! everything that can remove me from Thee, break down that will which separates me from Thee; and may that love which made Thee descend unto me, make Thee also destroy in me whatever is displeasing to thee. Regulate my desire, my hope, my strength, my whole soul, my whole body, and all my actions, according to Thy holy will. Thou alone knowest me perfectly, Thou alone seest the extent of my misery as Thou art its only remedy. Behold me here in Thy presence, O my God! Thou knowest what I desire, with what earnestness, or tepidity, I desire it; what I owe Thee, and the need I have of Thy love. Grant me what Thou knowest to be necessary for me, and prepare me to receive what Thou alone canst give me.

Who can ever comprehend, O most blessed Mother of God! the graces you received during the nine months of your pregnancy? Here also my tongue must be silent to allow my heart to speak. Give me that Lord whom you possess; give Him to me, O mistress of my life! give Him to me, O source of my hope! I can neither wish nor ask for anything better; and you know I desire nothing but Him alone. Obtain for me an ardent heart to desire Him, a pure heart to receive Him, and a constant heart never to lose Him. Amen.
IV

The hardships to which He subjected His body at His Nativity

The hour being come in which the Word Incarnate was to be born of a Virgin and appear to the world, the excess of His joy was so great that the royal prophet has compared it to the first effort of a giant in some great enterprise: *He has rejoiced as a giant to run his race.*—*Psalm* xviii, 6.) Being come upon earth, and finding the indifference of men colder than the season of the year, He called the angels of Heaven to congratulate Him on his coming. The other creatures would have done so in their own way had they been so permitted; but because our Saviour’s design was to spread upon earth a most heavenly spirit, He appeared first in a state which showed no regard for the love of earthly things, and because He came to condemn the vain joys of the world, He would allow nothing but the rejoicings of Heaven. The Blessed Virgin received her Creator alone and greeted Him for herself and for all mankind, because she alone was capable of acquitting herself of that duty and supplying the defect of all human nature.

So when she perceived herself near her time, not by any new pangs as might other women, but by the increase in her love and her desire to see before her eyes, and hold in her arms, the only Son of God and her own, she came to Bethlehem with Joseph, her spouse, in order to obey the emperor’s edict and to pay for herself and her son the tribute laid down.

All who were of the race of David were obliged to repair to Bethlehem and the small city was at that time filled with a great concourse of people. So the Blessed Virgin, finding no inn nor any other house in which she could lodge, was forced to retire to an open stable. It was not by any chance that she stayed here, since she was directed in all things by the Holy Ghost. Though the nearness of her time of deliverance might have provided her with a reason for remaining in Nazareth, yet she had left it to seek the place where she knew that the Son of God made man, whom she carried in her womb, had resolved to be born; and like a faithful servant, a character she esteemed no less than that of mother, she had chosen rather to follow her Son’s will than her own desire of bringing Him into the world in a place less unworthy of so august a majesty.

She retired into a corner of the stable, which was exposed to the cold and the wind, and fell into a profound contemplation. Then at midnight, by His own power and without hurt to the integrity of that most pure Virgin, the Word Incarnate came into the world in a small but perfectly beautiful body, and was laid upon the straw by His Mother. At that moment she found her breasts filled with a most heavenly milk and, prostrating herself upon the ground, she humbly adored the Son of God, and her own Son. She took Him up in her arms, wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, gave Him nourishment, and beheld Him for a long time in admiration and silence. I leave to pious contemplation those things which words cannot describe, and I do not pretend here to represent what the sentiments of the Blessed Virgin were at that time, nor what her heart said to her Son. The angels likewise rendered
their homage to Him, acknowledging and adoring Him as their Lord, and they called the shepherds to the spot by heavenly songs, praising God and saying: 

Glory in the highest heavens to God, and on earth peace to men of good will.—(Luke ii, 14.) These angelical words have several meanings, all of which are of very great consolation to us.

Firstly, they signify that the war, kindled by sin between God and men, is at last happily ended, and that the peace which is newly made and confirmed for ever, by the new-born Saviour, gives free access to God to every good will, to every good desire, and to every sincere love of the heart of man.

Secondly, that men may now shelter themselves from the justice and wrath of God under the protection of the Word Incarnate, because the divine Goodness finds in Him more than sufficient reason for pardoning us, and receiving us into His friendship, and requires nothing but our good will—in short, that peace is now the work of the liberality of God and the good will of men.

Thirdly, these words have another meaning most in keeping with the love which God manifests for us in this mystery. In Holy Writ sinners are called children of wrath, of perdition, and of death, because they are the slaves of sin; but we have now become, through our Lord Jesus Christ, the adoptive children of God. As this happiness proceeds not from our own merits, but from the love and good will which God has expressed for us in giving us his Son, we are called by the angels men or children of good will, that is, of that divine will which is always employed in doing good. Thus the angels declare peace to the children of that paternal goodness which is the fountain of all good things.

These songs of the angels, and all the marks of their joy, must not make us forget the pain which our Saviour is already causing His humanity to suffer, for in the midst of this heavenly rejoicing He is ever mindful of our salvation. He could have been received in purple at His birth, but He preferred to be laid upon straw on the ground and to share a bed with dumb beasts. Thus it is that He begins to treat His body and to fulfil that which David had foretold of Him that He should be a worm, and no man: a reproach of men, and outcast of the people.—(Psalm xvi, 7.)

The state in which He was born must be attributed to a particular disposition of His providence. For, being master of the whole world, He ordained that at His birth the sceptre should have passed from the house of David, whence He had descended in direct line by the Blessed Virgin, His mother, that He might be born of a Mother who was poor; that the Romans should then be masters of Judea; that Augustus should have all his subjects numbered and that those who were of the house of David should be obliged to go to Bethlehem; that His Mother should then be near the time of her deliverance, and that she should not find any other place in which to retire but a stable. He clearly shows from this how far are the ways of God from the thoughts of worldly men, all the maxims of whom He overthrew by His birth alone; the small account we ought to make of temporal conveniences, after which we seek so passionately; and the severity with which we ought to treat our bodies. For if Christ so roughly treated His, which was pure and innocent and perfectly
subject to the divine Will, with what contempt ought we not to treat ours, which is a body of sin and the capital enemy of our happiness?

He was pleased, therefore, that for our instruction His body, sacred and delicate as it was, should be laid on the ground upon a little straw. He knew how dangerous for our salvation is the love of our own flesh and the false peace we keep with its desires, since it causes us to lose all the fruits of those labours which our Saviour endured for us and of the merits which He has acquired for us. Most certainly if self-love, freed from corporal weakness, was the cause of a great number of angels being precipitated into Hell, what will it not do in creatures formed of clay? This made St. Bernard say: “Alas, we shall never be entirely delivered from self-love till in Heaven; it is a natural predilection which we shall carry thither but which will be so satiated there with the possession of God that it will lose all the malignity which it makes use of to pervert us whilst we live on earth.”

Whoever does not strive constantly against self-love in this life and look upon it as an enemy all the more deadly because it so exactly panders to our own inclinations, ought not to hope for salvation.

CONTEMPLATION

It is in this moment, O divine Jesus! that I ought to be wholly inflamed with the fire of Thy charity. Enlighten my mind with Thy eternal light. Reunite the multiplicity of my thoughts; recollect all my interior senses; dispel the clouds and darkness of my soul, that I may see Thee, hear Thee, love Thee, receive Thee and embrace Thee, with a heart pure and worthy of thee. How beautiful art Thou, O spouse of my soul! how rich art Thou, and how many blessings bringest Thou to us in Thy birth! How full of love and goodness towards men is Thy entrance into this place of misery! Thou appearest in a land void of all good and full of all evil. Thou art in the midst of sinners, surrounded by poor shepherds, Thou hast made a heaven of the earth, and of a stable a paradise. The angels descend from heaven to come and adore Thee on earth. Our exile is crowned with glory, and the canticles of the blessed spirits are heard in this valley of tears.

If Thou seest us, O my God! when we seek not Thee; and if Thou vouchsafe to come into our miserable abode without being invited thither, what wilt Thou do for him who desires Thee, invites Thee, and calls Thee? I call Thee, O divine Jesus! with all my power; come, Lord, enter into and be born in my soul, fill it with Thy light, give Thy peace to its good will: for, alas! Thou wilt find no good works in us. We are so destitute of virtues, that we have at most only good desires, and they also must come from Thee. Thou reservest for Thyself all the labour and pain; and it is sufficient for Thee to perceive a good will in us, which Thou Thyself wilt fulfil and give it grace to accomplish what it desires.

How different art Thou from what Thou appearest, O divine Infant! Human eyes are not piercing enough to discover anything else in Thee but a small, weak, and delicate body, frozen with cold, weeping, in want of everything, laid on the ground among beasts, and as it were the outcast of the people: and yet Thou art the Son of the eternal Father, the splendour of His glory,
and the figure of his substance.—(Heb. i, 3.) God infinite, and omnipotent, the treasure of divine riches, the joy of the blessed souls, the delight of those who love Thee, the happiness of those who desire Thee, and the repose of those who possess Thee. How great and how little art Thou at the same time. O infant God! Thou hast put Thyself in this state to draw our tenderness the more easily to Thyself: Thou rejectest none, Thou art born in an open place, everyone has free access to Thee and Thou permittest all to embrace Thee with love. Come then into my arms, O divine Infant! since in embracing Thee I embrace my God and sovereign good.

Adorable Jesus, divine Word, and eternal Wisdom! Thou comest to seek men, why art Thou not born as they are, and amongst them? why art Thou born in a stable? why takest Thou not at least an abode of men? why treatest Thou Thy body so inhumanly? It is neither by chance or out of weakness that Thou usest it so, since Thou art the uncreated Wisdom, and supportest the universe by Thy power: Thou art born thus, because Thou are so pleased; and the usage Thou sufferest is Thy own choice. But why didst Thou choose, O Lord, so rigorous a treatment? why so much severity against so innocent a body? It is because Thou knowest my evils, as Thou art their only and true remedy: Thou knowest that my body and flesh are my most cruel enemies; that the law of my members rebels continually in me against the law of my mind, and makes me lose all the fruit of Thy mercies. Thou treatest Thy flesh, though it be purity itself, and the instrument of those infinite blessings Thou bestowest on me, as I ought to treat mine.

But my body, O Lord! is a part of myself, it walks with me, it accompanies me everywhere, it enters into and is concerned in the same things which affect Thy service; but it would have the first place therein, and I am so remiss as to condescend to its desires. What shall I do, O my God? how shall I be able to support the weight of so many miseries, and this law of my flesh ever contrary to the law of Thy commandments? I can only find in Thee alone, O heavenly physician! the remedy I have need of; and it is to give me it that Thou art born, and already treatest Thyself so severely. Heal therefore the corruption of my heart by the purity of Thine, and support by the vigour of Thy spirit the weakness of mine.

All my misery proceeds from my accomplishing the desires of the flesh contrary to Thy will. Thou knowest my infirmity, O Lord! and the little strength I have for resisting the occasions of offending Thee: nothing but Thy omnipotent hand is capable of fortifying me against myself. I cast myself at Thy feet, I present myself before Thee with all my wounds and miseries. I will do whatever Thou requirest of me, and I desire in all things only the accomplishment of Thy holy will; if my rebellious flesh resists thereto, humble it, O Lord! mortify it, and make it sensible of the force of Thy blessed spirit.

O most holy Virgin Mother! be sensible of my misery, assist me in breaking the hardness of my heart, and destroying the contradictions of this miserable body, that everything in me may be subject to that divine Saviour, and that I may not lose the fruit of His labours, obtain for me the grace of overcoming myself and of serving Him, of hating myself and of loving Him. Amen.
V

The tears He shed for our sins

On coming into the world the first thing our Saviour did was, like other children, to cry. What a subject for admiring contemplation have we not in beholding the Son of the living God thus concealing His eternal wisdom, the divine Word remaining in silence, the joy of the blessed shed tears, and the sovereign Power wrapt in swaddling clothes in the arms of a woman!

As all these appearances of weakness proceeded from love alone, they furnish those who love Jesus Christ with ample matter for profound astonishment at the sight of so many wonders. For though He weeps like other children, the cause of His tears is infinitely different. David had foretold of Him that He should be devoured with zeal for the house and glory of God (Psalm lxviii, 12) so far as to take it upon Himself to expiate all the crimes of the whole world. Indeed, on His entrance into the world He felt so keenly the weight of the infinite number of sins, which His eternal wisdom placed before His eyes, that He then began to weep, and afterwards spent His life, and died at last, in sorrow and grief. Those tears shed for sinners, joined to the dignity of His divine Person, were so powerful with God His Father, according to the Apostle (Heb. v, 7), that they merited for us pardon for our offences. For while our Saviour was interiorly occupied with the thought of our miseries, and His soul with all its powers remained united to God whom it clearly beheld, His body was bathed in tears and His heart penetrated with a most lively sorrow for all the crimes which had been committed from the beginning of the world, and which would be committed until the end of time.

As He never spared Himself in any way in the expression of His love for us, and as the ground was wholly moistened with the blood He sweated in the garden of Olives (Luke xxii, 44), so we may believe that He bathed every place where He prayed with His tears; that His bed was watered with them every night, according to the expression of the royal Prophet (Psalm vi, 7), and that He disposed Himself, by that bath of tears, to the baptism of blood after which He sighed. But how bitter those tears were it would be impossible to express since they were caused by a sorrow so much the more lively as it was more interior and profound.

None but those who have felt the pains of the mind know how far they surpass those of the body. The impression made on the soul by an evil commonly follows from the knowledge it has of it. Now Christ alone, knowing perfectly the number and enormity of the evils for which He wept, was also alone capable of feeling the whole weight of them. This made Him say to His Father by the mouth of David: Save me, O God! for the waters have entered even into my soul. I am come into the depth of the sea, and a tempest has overwhelmed me. I have laboured crying—my eyes have failed—the zeal of thy house has devoured me.—(Psalm lxvii, 10.)

When the saints wish to express the deformity of sin, they affirm that if men saw it clearly the abhorrence they would conceive for it would be capable of making them die. This clarity of vision God gives to some of His servants, but, as He wishes to spare their weakness,
He never gives them that clear sight for long and then only after an abundant communication of His spirit. Though this light be given to them for their own purification, He stands close by them at that time so that they may be able to bear it, and He conceals a part of it from them when it becomes too strong; and He inspires them with a new confidence in His goodness which strengthens them still more strictly to serve and love Him.

If anyone should think that we are exaggerating the horror of sin, let him cast his eyes on Christ and observe that this supreme judge of the magnitude of our sins did not think it too much when He gave His blood, His life and His infinite merits for expiating them. This very idea of the deformity of sin was one of the reasons which occasioned His sweat of blood and the mortal agony He suffered in the garden of Olives.

The Son of God, therefore, having taken upon Himself to make satisfaction for all the sins of the world, the greatness and multitude of which He perfectly knew, it is easy to judge with what feeling and bitterness He wept for them. For though they were the sins of others His pain was not lessened on account of that because His love made Him regard them as His own, and He was as deeply touched by them as if they had been of His own committing; besides which, He not only felt the evil that sin caused to men, but much more the injury which the divine Majesty had received thereby, and this made Him pass His life in continual sorrow.

Though other children, at their coming into the world, have many reasons for weeping since they are born children of wrath and enter upon a period of exile from Heaven which, exposed to a thousand evils, they are in danger of losing and since their exile must be ended by the greatest of all evils, death, joined to the uncertainty of a better life thereafter, nevertheless, as they are born without the use of reason, they are insensible to their misfortune, and know not till afterwards the just grounds they had had for deploiring the misery of their condition.

But Christ, having nothing of childhood in Him except the smallness of body and the outward form, and being at the same time the son of Adam and of the wisdom of God, knew the whole extent of the evils for which He wept; He clearly saw the tyranny of the flesh and the world, the violence of human passions, the neglect of eternal verities, the aversion to holy things, the baseness of earthly cares, the infinite multitude of bad thoughts, criminal desires, lying words, and the unlawful actions of all men who had lived till then, and who were to live until the end of the world. He knew that His mercy, to which He had bound Himself, was the only remedy for these evils.

And nothing affected Him so poignantly as His foreknowledge of the ingratitude of men and of the small profit that would be derived from His labours. His heart was so penetrated with all these considerations that His eyes became two fountains of tears which continually flowed and spurted up even unto Heaven, there to extinguish the wrath of God which had been justly provoked against us. For He was not only sensible of the sins of the whole world in general but of each individual soul, so that there is not one of us but should regard those divine tears as having been shed for himself, enjoy them as a blessing which belongs to him, acknowledge that he is the cause of them, and thus dispose himself
to receive that grace of remission which Christ has merited for him.

God showed in a vision to the prophet Ezekiel a magnificent temple in which was a fountain of living water, which sprang up on the right hand, and which had the virtue of healing all who came to the temple.—(Ezch. xlvii.) By the right hand we must understand, according to the common expression of Scripture, the power of God, and by the fountain, the abundance of good things which are found in the living temple of the Divinity, that is, in Jesus Christ our Lord. In His body, which He Himself called a temple, dwells all the plenitude of the Divinity, and at His birth there flowed from His two eyes, as from two healing fountains, a torrent of living water. We must no longer ask why those who weep are called blessed in the Gospel, since they have Christ’s tears for their consolation; for this divine Saviour, by taking upon Himself His children’s debts, performs on their account the office of a true father: He weeps alone for them, and sends His angels to declare to men the peace and joy which He procures for them by His sorrows. Parents labour and give themselves a thousand pains for the welfare of their children, while the children live and play in trustful contentment. Thus it is that Jesus Christ, our Lord and true Father, behaves towards us; He would have us to be cheerful, content and calm while He labours, suffers and weeps alone for us.

Holy Scripture teaches us a great truth when it says that it is better to go into the house of mourning than into that of feasting.—(Eccles. vii, 3.) This is because not only are the joys of this world closely pursued by sadness or death, but also because there is frequently found in the midst of excessive joys a great forgetfulness of God and eternal salvation. Immersed in these, men arrive at such a degree of blindness that those things which make them weep are no less shameful than those which rejoice them; they esteem riches, the prosperity of this world, the pleasures of the flesh and, again according to holy Scripture (Job xxii, 13), They spend their days in joy and wealth, and in a moment they descend into hell, where they are undeceived too late and weep without consolation or hope. They think themselves unhappy in this life when they cannot satisfy their desires when they want the means of ruining themselves, and when they are in adversity, though it be their surest way to salvation; but they do not deplore the evils of their souls, the offences committed against God, the loss of Heaven, and the danger they are in of eternal damnation.

We see none of this in the stable of Bethlehem. There is nothing in that house of tears, where Jesus weeps, but angelical rejoicings, spiritual delights, celestial favours, and a holy society composed of Mary, Joseph and some poor shepherds. They there bewail their sins, despise pleasures, merit Heaven and taste a solid consolation. It is better, therefore, to go into the house of tears than into a house of joy.

Tears are mostly signs or effects of sadness, because they are occasioned either by the loss of something which was dear to us or by the presence of something which makes us pass in a moment from sadness to joy. This is true of the tears of Christ, for though He cannot feel the want of any good which belonged to Him, since He possesses the plenitude of all goods, yet He is sensible of those we have lost and of the return of those which we recover in Him. Thus is He the companion of our
tears, whether occasioned by sadness or by joy, by the interest and concern He takes in all our good and evil.

It behoves each one of us, therefore, to examine our hearts and find out what are our inclinations and aversions, so that we may judge thereby whether we have any share in the tears of Christ, for a Christian ought to fear nothing more than that facility with which he gives way to earthly affections unworthy of a heart which is made only for God and eternal good things. Hence comes that indolence and false peace which makes one spend one’s life calmly in sin, entirely neglectful of the purity of one’s conscience, as if one had never done anything for which to weep or had no reason to fear death and the judgment of God. People even frequently reckon that to be a happy day in which they have satisfied their most criminal desires, whereas if men made a little reflection upon the unlawful motions of their hearts, and the time they devote to the world, its vanities and its pleasures, they would find grave reason to fear that Christ might have wept unprofitably for them and that they themselves might be condemned one day to weep without avail for all eternity.

O how much wiser is the conduct of a servant of God who, living unknown to the world and judging all vain joys unworthy of him, mingles his tears with those of his Saviour, tastes those spiritual delights which they produce in this life, and expects those which they merit in the next! How much happier is the penitent who, touched with regret for his sins, joins himself to Christ to weep with Him for them and to obtain through Him their remission! How much more prudent is he who, examining his heart, takes an inventory of his past life, reforms his behaviour, is employed in the salvation of his soul, returns sincerely to God, gives himself wholly to Him, and tastes that divine peace which is given only to those who, having wept bitterly with Jesus, find a most sweet consolation in His mercy.

CONTEMPLATION

Whence come these tears which Thou sheddest in such abundance, O divine Infant! Thou who art the consolation of those who weep? Why meltest Thou in tears when Thou enterest into this land of sinners, since Thou comest hither to make them happy? The angels make the air resound with canticles of joy; they declare exceeding gladness to the shepherds, because Thou art born; and they order men to rejoice, because they have a Saviour: it is Thou, O amiable Jesus! who art that Saviour; and there is only Thee alone who weepest amidst the rejoicings of heaven and earth. May Thou be blessed for ever, O my God! Thou comest to us with so great a desire to redeem us, that Thou wilt not interrupt the work of our redemption for one moment: Thou weepest with impatience to die, forgetting nothing for our remedy: and because Thou knowest that many will water Thy feet with their tears in sorrow for their sins, as Magdalen did, Thou wilt be the first in shedding Thine before Thy Father, to render Him favourable to us, and to sanctify our tears by Thine. Thou beginnest at Thy entrance into the world to perform by Thy tears what Thou art one day to perform by Thy blood.

What shall I render Thee, O Love of my soul! for all those blessings Thou bestowest on me? Thou weepest like other children, but Thou hast other reasons for
weeping than they have: they have occasion to weep for the banishment they are beginning, the sin they brought with them, the dangers they are exposed to, and the miseries they suffer; and though they are ignorant of them as yet, nature performs in them what they would do themselves if they knew them. But Thou, O eternal Wisdom! Thou weepest because Thou beholdest the crimes of all men, the injuries done to Thy Father, the ruin of souls, their interior and unknown necessities, the errors which blind them, the pleasures which corrupt them, and the habits which damn them.

But because we find in Thee that only, sovereign and true remedy, Thou wilt have the earth to rejoice at Thy birth, and Heaven, which is to be filled with men whom Thou comest to save, to partake in that joy. Thou alone wilt be weeping, whilst we enjoy the merit of Thy tears: they proceed abundantly from that heart, wholly burning with charity, to heal the wounds and melt the ice of mine: make those divine tears, O fountain of heavenly blessings! flow into my heart, that it may be healed, softened, and purified. I adore Thee, O divine love! O immense goodness! O infinite mercy! I adore Thee, O Lamb of God! who taketh away the sins of the world; I adore that care and eagerness Thou hast for procuring me so efficacious a remedy.

But Thou not only beginnest Thy life by weeping, O Thou God of my soul! Thou continuest it in the same manner, and those tears are only to end by Thy death on the Cross. Thou wilt pass days and nights in prayer, with Thy countenance bathed in tears, and the very ground where Thou shalt pray will be watered therewith; Thou feelest for my evils, as if they were Thy own, and Thou beggest for me the blessings of heaven, as if they were necessary for Thyself. Although Thou shouldst never suffer any other pains, will not those tears, shed for bewailing evils which Thou committed not, and those sighs Thou sendest forth for meriting us the remedies which Thou needest not, suffice to convince me of Thy love and to draw mine to Thee?

O infinite Goodness! always patient in bearing with me, and ever liberal in heaping Thy blessings upon me! where should I have been, if Thou hadst not had pity on me? When I look back on my past life, I find great occasion therein for fear and sorrow, not only on account of those evils which I have never wept for, but even for those which I have hitherto wept for with so much tepidity: for have I ever felt the loss of Thy love, O my God! in as lively a manner as I have that of a temporal good or pleasure? I weep for a father, a brother, a relation, a friend, who cannot deliver me from my evils, and whom I must necessarily lose sooner or later: I lose Thee every day by my sins, O my sovereign good! I deserve to be deprived of the eternal happiness for which I was created, and this loss concerns me not.

I am weak against temptation, overcome in the least assault, lukewarm, without fervour, remiss in good, bold in evil, without light, without charity, without any desire of pleasing, without application to Thy service, without a will to suffer for Thee, without interior peace, in short, without any good, except it proceeds from Thee. But this is saying too little, I am without Thee, O the true life of my soul! I behold myself in the region of the shadow of death, and am unconcerned thereat, neither do I melt into tears before Thee. Art Thou not, O divine Jesus! my true father, brother and friend, the companion of my pilgrimage, my comfort, my treasure,
my glory, and my sovereign felicity? Why then am I
not ashamed to weep for temporal misfortunes, and to
be insensible of the misfortune of losing Thee!

Put an end to my misery, O Lord! and permit me
not to remain any longer in the blindness wherein I am.
I have already sacrificed a great part of my life to earthly
cares; what I have remaining thereof is not too much for
meriting heaven. May I begin at least now to serve Thee,
O my God! I am touched with regret for my sins, and I
sincerely desire to weep for them with Thee. But it be-
longs to You, O powerful tears which open heaven! to
open also my eyes for making mine flow. Wash away, O
sweet tears! all the spots of my soul; kindle in me, O
ardent tears! the love of God, and the hatred of myself.

It is true that tears are commonly the effect or end
of sadness; because sadness being nothing else than
sorrow for having lost a good which was dear to us, we
weep only for the privation of what we love; and when
we recover that good, sadness ends also by tears. It is
for this reason, that Thy servants, who ardently seek
Thee, weep sometimes with sorrow for the evils which
separate them from Thee, and sometimes with joy for the
blessings which Thou communicatest to them; being
unable to support, without melting in tears, either the
sweet impression of Thy presence, or the regret of hav-
ing displeased Thee. But Thou, O divine Jesus! what
reason hast Thou to weep? Is there any good Thou hast
not? Thou Thyself art the sovereign good, Thou possess
all the treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of God;
and as nothing is wanting therein, so nothing can be
added thereto: thus Thy tears are only for men, and
being rich with Thy own goods, Thou desirdest none but
for them.

Let my tears be my food day and night, till I possess
Thee, O infinite goodness? grant that I may weep for
the misfortune of having lost Thee, and for the danger
of losing Thee: fortify me by Thy presence, that my
enemies may be dispersed. I feel myself touched with
the desire of praying to Thee, of loving Thee, and of
wiping off the tears which Thou sheddest for me; but
there is something in me which makes Thee shed them,
and which my blindness hinders me from knowing:
Thou, O Lord! who perfectly knowest me, and seest
the bottom of my soul, heal in it those evils, which
afflict Thee, and give me all those blessings which Thou
desirest for me. There is no pleasure on earth that is not
mixed with sadness, and the purest joy that is tasted
here is to weep with Thee. The just, who spend their
life in tears, and sigh incessantly after Thee, are filled
with consolation; grant, O Lord! that I may be of that
small number. O happy moment! wherein, whilst the
body is bathed in tears, the soul tenderly embraces Thee.
AMEN.
VI

The coldness of the season in which He was born

Christ not only undertook to fight against sin, in order to merit for us the grace and glory which we had lost, but also to leave us examples of virtue which would at once teach us the evil that sin does to us and the means of avoiding it. Therefore, He singled out for particular condemnation those vices which are most predominant in the world, and of which the occasions are most frequent and dangerous, and applied Himself especially to the practice of the contrary virtues, such as humility, patience, the shunning of pleasures and of all the things the world most esteems.

But because the love of the body, and the care one takes of it, is one of those vanities to which men are most devoted and one which causes the greatest evils, the Son of God at His birth, and throughout the whole course of His life, treated His body in such a way that those who have the desire and will to die to themselves find in Him continual examples of mortification; and those who have not the courage to mortify themselves discover at least how much they ought to fear the enemy within themselves which is able to make them lose interior happiness.

Many employ the best part of their lives to the provision of a thousand and one means whereby they may be protected against the inclemency of the weather and the change of seasons, and generally mitigate the impact upon themselves of those things which they cannot avoid. Thus they seek after costly clothes, magnificent houses, commodious apartments, gardens, woods, waters, sumptuous furnishings, rich foods, and an infinite number of pleasures all designed to make life more convenient and pleasant for carnal man. But as there is nothing but treason and rebellion to be expected from a domestic enemy who is too well treated, the holy Fathers, instructed by the divine Spirit, with a view to preventing the flesh successfully rebelling against the spirit, devised that simple and common life which is led in monasteries where, retrenching all luxury and superfluity in lodging, eating and clothing, the inmates content themselves with what is necessary and find frequent occasions for mortifying the body and the senses.

Christ was pleased not only to be born naked like the other children of Adam, but to be born in an inconvenient place, at midnight, in the severest season of the year, trembling with cold, and deprived of all manner of help. He did not change in the course of time that seamless garment which His blessed Mother had wrought for Him with her own hands, but wore it until His death on the Cross. During His hidden life He had not, in the poor house in which He dwelt, the means of protecting Himself against either heat or cold. When He began to converse with men, the ground was His ordinary bed; He was frequently exposed to rain and snow, to the heat of the sun and the dew of the heavens; and after thus spending the day, He would retire in the evening to a mountain, or into a garden, there to spend the night in prayer. He who had marked out the seasons for the profit of men, found only suffering in them for Himself, for He tasted little of their fruits and exposed Himself to all their hardships.
Peter Chrysologus says (Serm. 147), love pleads no excuse on the score of difficulty; the more difficult things are, the more courage it has for undertaking them.

Hence it was that some holy women, of whom Palladius speaks, after having lived for a long time enclosed within four roofless walls, on being asked how they had been able to bear so severe a prison, answered that they were so charmed with the beauty of their Spouse, that they had little feeling for what they suffered while loving and pleasing Him. If worldlings but knew the spiritual delights which God provides for those who quit the world for Him, they would have a great contempt for the pleasures of the body. But because example makes this truth more understandable than do words, it will be sufficient to mention here, by way of giving a faint idea of the happiness enjoyed by the saints in this life, that they live more contentedly in poverty and suffering than worldly men do in the midst of abundance and pleasure, and that they would not change a single moment of the pains they endure for Christ for all the joys in the world.

There are some persons who are neither so blind as to seek the conveniences of this life to the prejudice of their salvation nor so fervent as to resolve to leave all things in order to please God. Although what we have been saying does not apply to them so directly as to those who aspire to Christian perfection, yet it is certain that they find in Christ’s austerity a subject of great consolation and a powerful reason for loving Him. For His kindness towards us is such, that even when He walks before us and gives us such bright examples of the most severe mortification, He does not require us
to practise it to that degree of perfection; and while He refuses Himself all things in order to merit for us eternal blessings, He permits us the use of temporal conveniences, provided they do not destroy in us the love and obedience which we owe to Him. Therefore, although those of whom we speak still permit great liberty to their senses, if they frequent the Sacraments, practise the virtues proper to their stations in life, and do not allow the care of the body to make them neglect that of the soul, God may raise up children to Abraham from those stones, from those thorns, and fruit from that barren ground. They have also the means of drawing down the mercy of God on themselves by being humble in His presence, by comparing their effeminacy with the austerity of their Saviour, by begging His pardon for their remissness and grace to avoid whatever may destroy His love in them; for Christ loves us so ardently, and esteems the humility of the heart so much, that our good desires often make Him excuse our defects.

After his sin our first father was condemned to eat his bread by the sweat of his brow, that is, he could not sustain life except by labouring much, and reaping little from a land which produces everywhere thorns and briars. Christ submitted Himself to the same law in all its rigour. His life was a continual labour for our good, and He drew little profit from His labour because of our badness; He sowed the seeds of life in an ungrateful land which produced fruits of death and eternal damnation.

CONTEMPLATION

Why dost Thou not soften the hardness of my heart, O divine tenderness! that I may love and adore the intentions of Thy mercy! How canst Thou suffer my soul to remain cold and frozen in the midst of so many flames which surround it on every side? Permit not that fire, O Lord! which devours Thee, to be wholly employed in Thyself; make some sparks of it fly unto me, where it will find matter to exercise its activity upon; that is to say, a great deal of hardness to soften, many sins to destroy, and several imperfections to consume.

Thou leavest not Thy works imperfect, O divine Saviour! after having commenced Thy life by suffering, Thou continuest and finishest it in the same manner. Thou always lovedst austerity which we so much hate. For how often has the rising sun found Thee with eyes red, and countenance pale, through the coldness of the night? How many times have Thy hair and clothes been soaked with the rain and dew? And how many times has Thy most pure body been bathed with sweat in Thy labours and journeys? Thou didst know, in creating the world, and disposing the seasons, that Thou shouldst one day feel the rigour of winter, the heat of the summer, and the inconvenience of the winds; Thou wast pleased, as one may say, very soon to enjoy Thy work, by suffering at the moment of Thy birth, the rigour of a very cold night; and Thou hast expressed for those sufferings which Thou prepared for Thyself, the same taste and eagerness which worldly men have for enjoying the gardens and houses which they have built.

O charitable Father of souls! O Master of the pure and eternal truth! O faithful Companion of poor sinners! how remote art Thou from those who perform nothing of what they command others! Thou speakest
not as yet, and Thy works speak already for Thee. Thou seest I spend my time in flattering this miserable body of mine, that I am wholly taken up with the exterior cares, even so far as to forget interior things, that I obey the desires of the flesh even with the danger of losing Thee, and that I live in the arms of so formidable an enemy, without refusing it anything that it desires. I know by my own experience how unprofitable are all the efforts which I use for satisfying it; the more I give it, the more it requires of me; the more I spare it, the more untractable it is; and in order to recompense me for my complacency to it, it separates me from Thee, O my sovereign happiness!

Assist me therefore, O Lord! against myself: Thou knowest what I have to fear, for having given to the care of my body the time I ought to have employed in Thy service; and how I ought to blush for the remissness wherewith I have sought Thee, when Thou sought me with Thy grace: for have I ever done as much for Thee, O divine Jesus! as worldlings are wont to do for their bodies?

Although one single moment of those divine sweet-nesses which Thou makest them feel who love Thee, be infinitely more precious than all worldly delights, yet the men of the world take a great deal more pains for those false pleasures, than I do for the true ones; my soul is so penetrated with sorrow and confusion for it before Thee, O my God! that it is only capable of a profound silence: have mercy on Thy poor creature for whom Thou hast so much goodness. I labour continually for my body, and scarce do anything for Thee; my miseries are proportioned to my wicked heart, which is as expanded for evil as it is small and contracted for good: but the greatness of Thine, O Lord! appears in suffering for me, in loving and pardoning me, in taking no notice of my sins, and in accommodating Thyself to my weakness; for Thou obliest me not to do everything Thou dost: Thou permittest me to take a moderate care of my body, and only requir'est me to love Thee.

O when will the time come wherein the ardour of my love shall supply the languor of my body? O divine love! that canst do all things, make Thyself the master of my heart and work Thy wonder therein. Give me, O Lord! an absolute empire over my body; and if I cannot suffer so much in my flesh as Thou sufferest in Thine, inspire me with so insatiable a hunger after justice, that I may at least have the desire of doing much for Thee, whilst Thou dost much for me. Take from me all superfluity, and teach me to give this enemy only what is necessary: turn all my thoughts towards Thyself, since they are profitably employed on nothing but Thee: take Thou care of what concerns me, that there may no further care remain to me than that of loving and pleasing Thee.

But permit me to ask Thee here what torments Thee most, the cold occasioned Thee by the season, or that which Thou beholdest in my soul? Everything speaks in Thee, O Lord! teach me to hear and obey Thee. Alas! what will become of me, O infinite mercy! I do not remember to have spent so much as one hour of my life in the fervour of Thy love. Thou sufferest cold and heat, as a traveller does who hopes to refresh him-self when he is arrived at his own home; and when Thou comest into my heart, to repose therein as in Thy own house, Thou wouldst gladly find in it affection, sweetness, and peace. O that I always received Thee with
a pure love! that I should never reject Thee by my tepidity!

If I seek Thee at any time without finding Thee, and if Thou delayest to come to me, it is that I may desire Thee more ardently, and have a better relish of the sweetness of Thy presence afterwards; for Thou wilt establish in me Thy abode, Thy repose, and Thy delight. If Thou findest my heart frozen against Thee, or possessed with another love, Thou art deeply concerned thereat: but when the place is vacant, or ready to receive Thee, Thou thinkest Thyself well recompensed for all Thy sufferings. How many times hast Thou knocked at the door of this heart, and I have not opened it to Thee, O eternal beauty! How many times have I banished Thee from thence after having received Thee. How many times have I chosen rather to lose myself than to possess Thee?

Come, my hope and salvation! drive out those usurpers who have taken possession of Thy house, kindle therein the fire of Thy love, shut it up against every other but Thyself, and suffer nothing to go into it against Thy will. Especially, O Lord! have no confidence in me, for Thou knowest that, in Thy presence, I am always rich in promises and desires; and that away from it I become remiss in Thy love, and slow to execute what I have promised Thee. Do Thy work, O Lord! in spite of my resistance; for I can have no good but what comes from Thee.

Thou didst condemn Adam to eat his bread in the sweat of his brow, and often to gather nothing but thorns, where he had sown good grain: and Thou, O my God! who art the new Adam, our true Father, and who hast no sweeter food than the love of our hearts,
VII

His Circumcision

Soon after His birth Christ was pleased to begin the shedding of His blood, and to give us, so to speak, the first fruits of that which He was to spill in abundance for our salvation. Therefore, on the eighth day of His life, in accordance with the command which God had given to Abraham, He submitted Himself to that law, of which He was the author, although He had several reasons for dispensing Himself from it.

In the first place, it had been established as a public protestation of the faith of the Israelites in the promised Messiah. Now Christ being Himself this promised and expected Messiah, He could not expect another, and consequently was not obliged to show by circumcision the faith and hope He had in Him.

Secondly, it was the mark of the covenant which God had made with Abraham, whereby He had engaged Himself to acknowledge Isaac’s posterity as His people, and they were to have no other God but the God of Abraham and Isaac, the other nations having been rejected because of their idolatry. But Christ, that good shepherd, who had come to reunite in one fold all the nations of the world without distinction, and to save all men who should live and die in His faith and love, did not need to bear the character of a contract which, in order to extend it to all nations, He was to change afterwards.

Thirdly, the circumcision of the body obliged the Israelites to cut away the hardness of their hearts and all affections contrary to the love and law of God. But Christ, being of infinite purity, and having come to purify the world, had nothing to cut away in Himself, and so the command did not affect Him.

Fourthly, as it was a sacrament of the old law by which, in making profession of believing and hoping in the Messiah who was to come, deliverance was granted from original sin, the sacrament presupposed the existence of the sin for which it was the remedy. But our Saviour, being the author of grace, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, and consequently sinless both as God and as man, was no less exempt from the obligation of bearing the character of a sinner than He was remote from all sin; and it was an act of extreme humility in Him to deign to subject Himself to a law established for healing an evil so incompatible with His sanctity.

The divine love, which finds no obstacle invincible, was pleased to show the greatness of its power by submitting God Himself to a law so unworthy of His majesty. God is so great that He cannot increase and His greatness appears less in doing great things than in abasing Himself in little things. Therefore, Christ has testified to a greater love for us by subjecting Himself to our miseries, and to the humble actions of our humanity, than by working the wonders of His power. This strikes at the root of that not uncommon kind of pride which makes men not unafraid to commit the most grievous sins in the sight of God nor to pass openly for sinners before men. Hence it comes about, as St. Bernard says (Serm. 1 de Circum.), that they have no shame for the evils of their souls, but have the shame for the remedy which can cure them. Christ, desirous
by His example to destroy in us this unreasonable and unjust inclination, behaved quite differently. Though there was nothing in Him but truth, purity and sanctity, yet He concealed all these perfections under the appearance of sin. He was circumcised, as if He had been a sinner, and He took this remedy for an evil which He had not to teach us that he who passes for a sinner, and is not one, cannot be confounded, but that he who is a sinner, and appears not to be one, is always contemptible in the sight of God.

It would appear that we owe a special debt to Christ for having, in His circumcision, borne the pain and the character of a sinner, for in the other mysteries of His life and death there always shone, through the appearance of sin, some ray of the majesty which was hidden in Him. When He was born weeping and shivering with cold, like the other children of Adam, the angels, the shepherds and the Wise Men came to adore Him. When He was presented in the temple as a sinner, the holy old man, Simeon, and Anna the prophetess, proclaimed His divinity. When He was pleased to be baptised in the Jordan with sinners, the Holy Ghost, who descended upon Him in the form of a dove, the voice of the eternal Father which was heard, and St. John, who baptised Him, declared that He was the Son of God. When He suffered Himself to be tempted in the desert the angels came to serve Him as their Lord and Master. And when He was weakened and oppressed with labours, His miracles manifested His power.

When He permitted Himself to be seized in the garden of Olives, He overthrew by one word those who had come to take Him. When He was fastened to the Cross between two thieves, the sun which was darkened, the earth which quaked, the loud cry which He Himself sent forth at the moment of expiring, the centurion who confessed Him, and the veil of the temple which was rent, all gave so clear a testimony to His divinity that even those who had crucified Him returnedstriking their breasts and acknowledging that He was truly the Son of God. And so, on all the occasions when He had appeared as a sinner, there was always something that made public His divinity.

Only in His circumcision would this appear to have been absent. There appear in it neither angels nor miracles to proclaim who He is, because He was then pleased to taste fully the pleasure He had in seeing Himself like us, and thereby to oblige us to become like Him. Though He afterwards endured greater pains, yet His circumcision ought not to be the less precious to us since, entirely forgetful of His own greatness, He subjected Himself to it for love of us.

Had circumcision had no other pain than that of the flesh, Christ would have submitted Himself to it for that reason alone, for He came into the world with so great a desire to suffer that it was not easy for Him to confine Himself to suffer only what other children suffer. Nevertheless, that pain must have been very considerable because circumcision was made with a knife of stone. Other children suffered it without knowledge, which mitigated it somewhat, but Christ, who at that time had His full reason, felt acutely the pain of that wound, and shed that little blood with the same love as made Him pour it out finally even to the last drop upon the Cross.

God had ordained in the old law that the first fruits of the products of the earth should be offered to Him,
and because His Son was to be born in such great poverty that He should possess nothing of His own, not even a place wherein to lay His head, the eternal Father required the first fruits of the blood of that well-beloved Son. Our Saviour submitted Himself joyfully to this requirement, and would suffer nothing to prevent Him suffering for us at so tender an age. Thus on the eighth day of His life He gave us the first drops of His blood which was to be shed entirely for us on the Cross, and to flow after His death from the opening in His side. Behold what Christ has done for those who pass their first years in ignorance, their youth in disorders, and the rest of their lives in shameful attachment to their bodies. O what great matter for sorrow should not a person enlightened by the divine light discover here, for having so ill requited Jesus Christ, who spent no day of His life without labouring for our salvation and demonstrating His love for us!

In showing us how dearly our salvation cost Him, our Saviour’s design was to make us understand how much more He esteemed us than all the rest of His creation. He created all things by the sole motion of His will, without effort or labour and He would have been but little concerned by the loss of other creatures. Therefore, if He has done and suffered so much to save mankind, it was that we might be made aware of how much He loved us and that, if our creation was so easy to Him, our redemption cost Him infinitely dear. It is for this reason that St. Paul affirms that we are obliged to sacrifice our bodies and souls to His service, because we have been bought with a great price.—(1 Cor. vi, 20.) It is true that, if He had pleased, He could have redeemed us for less, but what was sufficient for our salvation was not sufficient for His love. Nothing could satisfy this other than a laborious life finished by the death of the Cross.

St. Cyprian observes that God was not willing to redeem us at small expense lest, prizing our redemption cheaply, we should sin the more freely, for we are so inclined to evil that if Christ had suffered less for delivering us from it, we should not have realised sufficiently the danger into which sin draws us. If we still fall into sin easily, after all our Saviour has endured, what might we not do had He not shown us, by the greatness of His labours and sufferings, how much He hates sin? Let each one of us, therefore, consider what is the disposition of our heart towards so many actions committed without shame or caution, remembering at the same time that our Saviour did not spare His infancy, and that a death full of sorrow and reproaches was necessary to satisfy His desire for our salvation.

Children were given their names when circumcised, and for this reason Christ was pleased that His holy name, which signifies a Saviour, should be written, so to speak, upon His flesh with that very blood which He was one day to shed for our salvation. St. Bernard affirms that this name was not given Him then for the first time, but that He had brought it with Him from Heaven and that it was only declared in circumcision, because Christ, being the Saviour of the world, was to bring at His birth a name which signified who He was.

The prophet Isaiah (viii, 3; ix, 6) had given Him the names, Hasty to take away the spoils, Emmanuel, Admire, Counsellor, God, Strong, Father of the world to come, Prince of Peace, and several others which are all included in the name of Jesus, and are but
explanations of it. For in order to be truly a Saviour He ought to be ardent in drawing souls away from the power of the Devil, from the tyranny of sin, and from the darkness of blindness; He ought to be a God conversing with men, the master and author of an admirable doctrine for dissipating all our errors; He ought to make peace between Heaven and earth, to be the father of eternal life, to open the gates of Heaven, and to reign with the elect for all future ages.

By taking this name the Son of God expressed much more love for us than we can imagine. God was pleased of old to be called the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, His faithful friends, that He might honour them thereby and in them all their posterity; but the Son of God, who had scarcely any friends left in the world, took His name from His own enemies, whom He designed to make His friends; and in the same way as God had honoured some of His servants by joining their name to His, our Lord was pleased also to honour all men, and to regard them as His friends, no matter how great sinners they might be, by causing Himself to be called their Saviour.

Moses can no longer glory in being the only friend of God, because he beheld Him face to face, nor all the patriarchs because they communed with Him. God has granted us a much greater favour when He deigned to clothe Himself with our nature, to live as a sinner among us, to die between two sinners, and to be called our Saviour in Heaven and on earth. His name has thereby become terrible in Hell, glorious in the world, adorable in Heaven, sweet to the just, salutary to sinners, our safety in dangers, our rest in labour, our help in need, our hope in this pilgrimage, our support in fear, our comfort in sadness, the source of all our blessings, and the remedy for all our evils.

**CONTEMPLATION**

Now is the moment, O Divine Jesus! wherein Thou art going to begin to satisfy the desire Thou burnest with of shedding Thy blood for sinners. Make me enter into that furnace of love, that I may behold therein the fire which consumes Thee, and the earnestness where-with Thou expectest those first pains which Thou art to suffer for us. I owe Thee no less, O Lord! for the love and joy Thy heart feels on that account, than for the punishment Thou endurest, and the profit I receive from thence.

Break thou with love, O my heart! for a God so full of goodness; be thou opened, and dilated, that I may receive Him. Thou findest nothing difficult, O my God! when Thou art to express Thy love to me: the tenderness of Thy age, the greatness of Thy majesty, and the severity of a law which was not made for Thee, prevent Thee not from doing it. The greater, more independent, and absolute Thou art in Thyself, the more amiable Thou appearest to me in humbling Thyself for me. Thy love is the only law Thou followest; Thou dost everything, because Thou lovest; and Thou sufferest because Thou lovest.

It was not enough for Thy love to become man, to be born an infant, poor, weeping, and subject to our miseries; Thou wouldst also appear a sinner, and receive in Thy most pure flesh the remedy of sin, though sin be so remote from Thee, that if Thou wert capable of sinning, Thou wouldst not be what Thou art.
But if Thou hast such an abhorrence of sin, how canst Thou consent to pass for a sinner? It is the deformity of sin which renders Hell so dreadful; it is the stain which it makes in our souls that causes us to lose Heaven and renders us the object of Thy hatred. Whence comes it then, O my God! that being holiness itself Thou sufferest, and seekest the form of a sinner, not only by being born in the flesh of Adam, the first of all sinners; but also by submitting Thyself to a remedy which Thou ordainest only for the expiation of sins.

Thou hatest sin, but lovest the sinner; and Thou vouchsafest to suffer his punishment, though Thou hast no shame in his fault. Thou hast taken my sins upon Thyself, that Thou mightest incur the chastisement which I deserved, and Thou hast more regard therein to my remedy than to Thy own glory. Thou art so high, O my God! that no evil can reach Thee; so pure, that sin cannot defile Thee; and so holy, that the figure of sin cannot hurt Thee: but though it be infinitely distant from Thee, yet nevertheless Thou hast taken it upon Thee. What hast Thou found in me, O infinite love! to love me to that degree? As Thou hast done all things of Thyself, it is of Thyself also that Thou lovest with so much excess: it is for Thy own satisfaction that Thou descendest to what is most abject and humbling: Thou wilt appear what Thou canst not be, that beholding Thee become like me by love, I may comprehend what Thou art, and how much I ought to love Thee.

O God of love! who dost penetrate the bottom of my soul, how many labours didst Thou suffer for enlightening such profound darkness, for humbling such a foolish pride, and for making me return into the good way? When I see Thee so great on the one hand, and humbled on the other, even to my low condition; then it is I comprehend that neither less power, sanctity, nor love were necessary for raising me up and healing me. If it be a great mark of love in Thee to be willing to appear a sinner, though Thou canst not be one; is it not an insupportable pride in me to be willing to be a sinner, and to be unwilling to appear such; to love my wounds, and to be ashamed of their cure; to be destitute of every virtue, and to wish that people would think me virtuous? Destroy in me, O Lord! all these contradictions. I cannot deny but sin is shameful, since I blush to appear a sinner; and yet I am as earnest in committing it as if it were honourable. I am ashamed to be punished, lest I should pass for a wicked person; and I am satisfied with myself when, by offending Thee, I accomplish my own will. My greatest care is to be, in effect, what I cannot bear to be called by others. O strange blindness! O deplorable disorder! I love the evil which destroys me, and I hate the acknowledgement of it which would heal me. I give way to the love of sin, that I may taste the pleasure of it; and I feel the hatred thereof only because I fear its remedy. There is as much evil in hating sin thus as in loving it; for I love it in order to commit it always, and I hate it in order to love it longer.

This disorder produces another, which is no less unreasonable. I believe with a firm faith that Thou art my sovereign Lord, and that Thou dost see me. I know by experience that the men who see me are weak and miserable. I am persuaded that I may be condemned to an eternal punishment by Thy ever equitable judgment, and that the judgment of men, however unjust it may be, cannot hurt me but for a short time. I know that I am truly what I am in Thy sight, and not what I
appear in the eyes of men. I know also that I cannot, with all my disguise, make myself better than I am; and with all this knowledge I blush not, O my God! to be in Thy sight what I am; and I seek to appear before men what I am not, against the very testimony of my own conscience.

O divine patience! who knowest all the miseries I confess before Thee, who hast them present when Thou sufferest for me, and who already preparest Thyself to bear with me, to await me, and to receive me: it would seem Thou despairest of ever seeing me consent to the cure of my evils; and lest they should occasion my death, Thou takest already the remedy of them. What love, what acknowledgment do I not owe Thee?

Is it possible, O divine Jesus! that Thou art punished for me, and that I should still remain guilty? O paternal heart! have mercy on this prodigal child. O divine purity! cleanse this leper. O eternal life! raise up this dead body.

No, Lord? Thou wouldst not have taken the name of Jesus with so much pain, and in shedding Thy blood, if Thou were deaf to the voice of my misery: Thou wouldst, even before Thy birth, have an angel declare that Thou shouldst be called Jesus, because Thou wast to forgive sins. Behold here a sinner at Thy feet, O my Saviour! if Thou sufferest on the eighth day of Thy life, that Thou mightest be able to suffer longer, and if Thou already takest the name of Jesus, that Thou mightest labour immediately in our salvation, begin with me, O amiable Jesus!

Sing forth, O sinful soul! the mercies of Jesus; be no longer afraid of any creature, nor even of Himself. O sing with love, whilst He is in the manger, for thou shalt weep when He is on the Cross! speak not to Him now of thy sins, only say to Him, in singing forth the glory of His holy name, O sweet Jesus, O amiable Jesus, O divine Jesus! O Jesus the most beautiful of the children of men, the desire of the eternal hills, and the companion of my pilgrimage! O Jesus my father, my friend, my Lord, my king, and my all, repose Thyself in my heart, which sighs after Thee, and burns with Thy love. It is true it is the heart of a sinner, but Thou art my Saviour. Ah, Lord! my strength fails me, my voice is weakened in Thy presence, and since I cannot speak, let my love speak for me to Thee, or rather speak to me Thyself, O my God! and make me hear Thy voice in silence.

O Mother of Jesus! how rich are you with Jesus! Enrich my poverty with the treasures you possess in Him. AMEN.
FLIGHT INTO EGYPT AND HEROD’S PERSECUTION

VIII

His flight into Egypt and Herod’s persecution

For thirty years our Lord Jesus Christ instructed men by His example only. During that time He concealed His heavenly doctrine from them because He was to make it public in the last years of His life. He acted thus that the evangelical truths might be made more convincing and that those which run counter to nature and the senses might be made sweeter to us; that the falsity of the maxims of the flesh and the world might appear more clearly; and that our slothfulness might be made inexcusable. For fallen man, being unable to return into the way of salvation but by the imitation of God his Creator, whom he saw not, God became man, according to the observation of St. Augustine (lib. vii. De Trin. c. iii), that man might have at the same time a man whom he could see and a God whom he could follow. Because example speaks louder than words in persuading men to lead virtuous lives, when God became man He spent thirty years practising virtue and only three years preaching it. It did not accord with the mission of our Saviour to be one moment without fulfilling its duties; for that reason He began His work in His infancy, and at that time gave us examples of virtue directly opposed to the maxims of the world.

Following the beaten road and approving or condemning what the multitude approves or condemns is the most common source of error and false reasoning among men. Making the world’s standards their own, they devote themselves to projects of honour, power, ease and pleasure, and propose to satisfy their senses and passions and please the world. By way of excusing their conduct they claim that the state in which they find themselves is not conducive to the practice of virtue and that they must live as those around them live. From this stems that lukewarmness in the love of God, disgust for religious duties, forgetfulness of God, and many other vices. All these evils finally become so much a part of themselves that they are no longer aware of them, and this obduracy is the source of an infinite number of sins, and the foundation of reprobation. Though on the way to Heaven one is surrounded by a thousand dangers, no danger is greater than to begin one’s life neglectful of salvation because this gives the opportunity to our enemies, who never sleep, to lie in wait for us and to do us grievous harm before we are aware of it.

Hence it was that Jesus Christ, the mirror of eternal truth, gave us, before that age when others begin to make use of their reason, examples of virtues opposed to these vices. He was not yet two years old when He left His country and the help of His relations, though they were necessary to Him at so tender an age, and was transported into a place of banishment and exposed to the violence of Herod who persecuted Him without knowing Him.

The entry of the Wise Men into Jerusalem, seeking the new king of the Jews, gave rise to that persecution. Christ, being born in Bethlehem, chose shepherds among the poor, and Wise Men among the rich, to adore Him; but He called the poor, who are less taken up with worldly cares, by the voice of angels, while to the rich, who are commonly more remote from the kingdom of
God, He gave visible signs to which they were accustomed. As the Wise Men delighted in the stars, and professed astrology, He sent them a star to guide them. Thus it is that God frequently acts towards us: He accommodates Himself to our inclinations and makes use of all things for saving us.

There appeared in the heavens a new star, different from others in appearance, situation and motion. It was not fixed in the firmament but suspended in the air, its motion was not from west to east, it appeared larger than it was because it was nearer the earth, and it was so beautiful and brilliant as to suggest its supernatural significance. Joining an interior light to the splendour of the star, Christ made the Wise Men comprehend that a king had been born in Judea to whom divine honours were to be paid.

Unenlightened as to the designs of God, the Wise Men began their journey with no other end in view than to seek the new king in the capital of that kingdom where they expected to find demonstrations of public rejoicing. Our Saviour ordained that they should find nothing answering to the idea they had formed of His temporal greatness, but that they should indeed have difficulty in finding Himself, so that their enquiries making known His coming upon earth, men of good will might be induced to search after so great a blessing, and others to awaken from the deep sleep in which they were buried. Thus when the Wise Men entered Jerusalem they found everything quiet and normal, and no mention at all of the new king whose star they said they had seen in the east.

In accordance with the prophecy of Jacob, who had foretold that the Messiah should come when the sceptre had passed from the house of Judah, Herod, who then reigned in Judea, was a stranger, and the people who groaned under the tyranny of that Idumean prince were so far from thinking on the happiness which was to happen to them, that they even trembled lest the new king, whose birth the Wise Men proclaimed, might be to Judea an occasion of war and misery. But no one was more thunder-struck than Herod by that news, and by the questions which the Wise Men were asking throughout the city concerning the place where the new king had been born. He knew, through his dealings with the Jews, that they expected a Messiah who would deliver them from oppression and he dreaded lest the news being bruited abroad might spell his ruin. He hid his uneasiness, however, received the Wise Men cordially and, under the pretence of wishing to protect them against deception, consulted the most learned among the Jews concerning what the Scriptures had said of the Messiah. The doctors of the law informed him that, according to the prophecy of Micheas (v. 2) the ruler of Israel should come forth out of Bethlehem, but from motives of fear or flattery they suppressed the following words, which proved the divinity of the Messiah and consequently the uselessness of Herod’s precautions: and his coming forth is from the beginning, from the days of eternity.

There and then Herod resolved to put Jesus to death while in the cradle and thus without noise or commotion prevent the misfortunes with which he thought himself threatened. He took great care, however, to conceal his wicked designs, and privately questioned the Wise Men about the nature, time and other circumstances of the star they had seen and about the reasons
which had induced them to come in search of the new king. He regretted that he had been unable to discover in his own kingdom what they had known at so great a distance and desired them to call on him on their return from Bethlehem and report what they had found. In the meantime, while awaiting their return, he would make ready with his whole court to go and pay homage to the new king whom he would have brought up in the royal palace in Jerusalem, with all the splendour that was due to his dignity.

The Wise Men departed for Bethlehem without suspecting Herod’s true intentions and without the company of anyone from either the court or the city, because no one was interested in the most important thing in the world which had just happened. When they left the city they saw the star again which preceded and conducted them at last to the place where Jesus was. At the noise of their entrance the Blessed Virgin took her Son in her arms to preserve, as it were, her treasure, and the Wise Men, interiorly enlightened, prostrated themselves and adored the divine majesty, concealed under the weakness of an infant, and presented Him with gold, frankincense and myrrh. Then God, against whose designs the malice of men cannot prevail, advised the Wise Men in their sleep not to return to Jerusalem and, full of consolation, they went back to their own country by another route.

While Herod awaited the return of the Wise Men, and was employed in other affairs of state, by a special disposition of divine Providence, several days passed during which Christ was presented in the temple and carried to Nazareth. Not that Herod had changed his design, but that he was persuaded its execution did not require haste and that he should always find occasion of ridding himself of that new king, who could not for a long time be of an age to dispute the crown with him. The eternal Father, knowing the thoughts of the ambitious prince, sent an angel to Joseph to advise him in his sleep to retire into Egypt with the Mother and her Child.

The divine revelations which happen in sleep are frequently accompanied with such a light as renders the thing revealed as certain as if one had beheld it with one’s own eyes. So the patriarch Jacob, having seen during his sleep that mysterious ladder on which the angels ascended and descended, said with so much certainty on awakening, *indeed our Lord is in this place, how terrible is this place!*—(Gen. xxviii., 16.) And thus St. Joseph doubted not for a moment but arose immediately and went away at midnight.

From all we have said it is easy to see how soon Christ began to suffer the persecutions of the world, and to teach us that we ought to be as strangers on the earth, who having no fixed abode, sigh continually for the eternal mansion of the heavenly country. The principles of a worldly life are destructive to the foundation and hope of eternal life, which is founded on the moderate use of perishable goods. We are permitted to make use of these but not to enjoy them; being wholly taken up with the term of our pilgrimage, we ought only, and for necessity alone, to take them in on our way. On the other hand, the foundation of a worldly life is to be attached to that which passes away, as if it were to endure for ever, and to live in profound forgetfulness of God and a better life. Hence it is that St. Paul commends so warmly the faith of the ancient
patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. By faith, says he, *they dwelt in the Land of Promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tents—for they waited for a city having foundations; whose builder and maker is God—confessing that they were pilgrims and strangers in the land—they desired a better, that is to say, a heavenly one*, which was so agreeable to God that he was not ashamed to be called their God.—(Heb. xi, 9, 10, 13, 16.)

Travellers are generally content with little and do not expect abundance outside their own homes. The origin of the sins of men, and of their attachment to the earth, is their desire to make their home in a place of banishment, and to establish themselves here below as if they were never to leave it. Christ was pleased in His infancy to suffer the pain of banishment, the inconveniences of a long journey, and the poverty of His parents who were obliged to live by the labour of their hands in a strange country.

The powers of the world persecuted Jesus in His infancy in an endeavour to deprive Him of a life so precious and necessary to the world; and Christ returned nothing but meekness. He suffered in silence, permitted His enemies to undertake against Him whatever they pleased and even concealed the splendour of His majesty that He might be in a position to suffer their violence. He could easily have withdrawn into Heaven during the time of His hidden life, but He chose rather to be subject on earth to all the inconveniences of a troublesome banishment in order to teach us to separate ourselves from the world.

Thus it is that God draws good out of evil, and that the very sins of the world become the instrument of those graces which its Saviour bestows upon it. And yet worldlings cannot tolerate Him; they seek to put Him to death when He commences life; they persecute Him unto death, and when, dying for them on the Cross, Christ expresses His need for some refreshment in the excess of His agony, they give Him only gall and vinegar. Behold what is this world which we serve so faithfully and to which we sacrifice our own salvation! O what strange blindness!

Christ shows us clearly by His example that the prophet Jeremy had reason to say that it is *good for a man, when he bears the yoke from his youth*. In the midst of the misfortunes of the world He shall sit solitary, and hold his peace; because he has lifted himself above himself (Lam. ii, 27, 28), and despising the earth, he has applied himself early to the contemplation of heavenly things; it is in this sense that the spouse says to the bridegroom all fruits, the new and the old, my beloved, I have kept for thee (Cant. vii, 13), that is, I have given thee the first years of my life, as well as the last. David also protested to God that he had not delayed his service until the onset of old age, *I will keep my strength for thee, O God!*—(Psalm lvi, 10.) It is the part of true wisdom to fill one’s life with merits by the exercise of Christian virtues and labours suffered for the love of God. Let it be remembered that it is very difficult for a disorderly youth to be succeeded by a holy old age.

Before He retired into Egypt, Christ was presented in the temple to His eternal Father to receive His blessing. This was to show that we ought to offer ourselves to God with our Saviour and consecrate ourselves entirely to His service.
I will raise up my hope and desires to Thee, O my Lord and my God! the remedy of my wounds, and the light of my darkness, because I find in Thee whatever I can desire. My soul cannot conceive the immense blessings which it may hope for from Thee; it hopes for much, but it comprehends not this much it hopes for; it hopes for all, but this all is above its thoughts; it hopes for infinite blessings, but it knows not the extent of them. Thou art still greater than that much, O thou God of my soul! richer than that all, and more incomprehensible than that infinite.

As thou art everywhere, O Lord! it was easy for me to find Thee, if my sins had not put so great an interval betwixt Thee and me; but I have removed myself from Thee on the one hand, and Thou has departed from me on the other. Thou art so great, so pure, so holy, and so high above me that I shall never be able to come to Thee, if I am not drawn thither: for no man can come to Thee, according to Thine own word, unless the Father draw him.—(John vi. 44.) Draw me therefore to Thee, O Lord! since it is for that end Thou art come upon earth.

Thou beheld my wandering, and Thou came to put me again on the right road; Thou sawest me ready to perish, and Thou came to save me; Thou observest me flying from Thee, and Thou came to call me back; Thou perceived me incapable of coming to Thee without Thy help, and Thou came down to seek me, O my Saviour! my way, my truth, and my life! I am that miserable and wicked wretch, destitute of all good, oppressed with weakness, wholly covered with the wounds of sin and chained down by its wicked habits; and to complete my misery, I discover not the deplorable state I am in, I am insensible of my own misery, I remain without fear in the midst of vanity and deceit, I am continually wallowing in the mire wherein I am plunged, and whilst I am forgetful of myself, Thou art wholly taken up with me, O my God! Thou art full of love for this sinful soul, and Thou perpetually thinkest on the means of bringing back this strayed sheep.

Thou wast no sooner born, than Thou called the poor shepherds, and sent a star into the East to the Wise Men to conduct them to Thee. Thou wouldst not be one moment on earth without seeking us, without drawing us to Thyself, without enriching us with Thy blessings, and without us with Thee; neither wilt Thou be content till we are there for ever.

Thou waitest not for my loving, desiring, and seeking Thee first; Thou stayest not for my beginning to serve Thee, and merit some favour from Thee; Thou takest no account of what Thou shalt find in me; and because Thou knowest Thou shalt find no good in me proceeding from myself, Thou furnishest me with everything from Thyself, by inducing me to consent and co-operate in good for which Thou givest me such powerful helps. Thou lovest me out of pure goodness, drawest me without violence, and only requirest me to receive Thee and allow myself to be drawn.

Thou called the Wise Men, O divine light! by the brightness of a material star; but at the same time Thou induced them by an interior motion to seek Thee; and though Thou wast hidden under the figure of an infant, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and in a poor house, Thou taughtest them to discover Thee and to adore Thee as their Lord and God. It was there that they lost
all earthly thoughts, elevated their desires, consecrated their love to Thee, submitted their mind and liberty to Thy law and service, and regarded Thee as their treasure; and that Thou began in them, as in the first fruits of the Gentiles, to take possession of the souls Thou came to seek on earth.

What thanksgivings ought we not to render Thee, O my God! for all the blessings Thou bestowest on us, even when we are most unworthy of men, and think least of them? How often have I felt my soul awakened by Thy light, and warmed by the fire of Thy love? Then I approach Thee, I find Thee, but alas! I lose Thee instantly after. Sometimes I hold Thee, I embrace Thee, and Thou escapest from me immediately. Often when I think myself agreeable to Thee, I dread I am rejected by Thee; and in this continual change of interior dispositions, I take sometimes one road and sometimes another, that I may meet at last with that which leads to Thee.

Thus my soul loses by degrees the hope it had in itself, without ceasing to hope in Thee; and it knows by its own experience that it desires much, and is unable to do anything. Thou seest its trouble, O Lord! and Thou seemest not to take notice of it till that happy moment, when fatigued with so many vicissitudes, it falls at last into an entire lack of confidence in itself: then Thou openest its eyes, and it begins to see the true way to peace and life. It knows that Thou wast nearer to it than it imagined, and how easy it was for it to have found Thee; it sees, I know not how, but without any doubt, that Thou callest it to Thee; Thou instructest it all at once, without voice or words; it thinks only on what possesses it, abandoning the care of its body, and using it only with contempt and severity; it advances continually, and finally arrives at Thee, without perceiving its motion. It then possesses Thee, and still seeks Thee; and the more it seeks Thee, the less it comprehends Thee. If Thou commandest it to enter, it obeys; and if Thou requirest it to depart, it forsakes Thee not. It sees, without knowing what it sees; it hears, and is ignorant of what it hears; it knows only who He is whom it hears; and because He whom it see falls not under the senses, and He whom it hears speaks to it without any voice, it contents itself with loving Him, and it loves Him continually more and more. Words cannot express, nor the mind comprehend what love receives from Thee, O my God! even in this place of banishment.

O soul of my soul! what is my soul, and what good can it have, when it possesses not Thee? O life of my life! what is my life, when I live not in Thee? Is it possible that my heart is capable of possessing Thee, of enjoying Thee all alone, of extending and dilating itself as much as it pleases in Thee, and that it can nevertheless be so full of miseries away from Thee? Can Thy creature elevate itself thus above itself, to repose in Thy arms, and after that depart from Thee, bury itself in the earth, and forget the blessings which Thou communicatest to those who love Thee?

Fill every place therefore with stars, O Lord! if they are necessary to us for finding Thee? Send Thy angels throughout the world, if we stand in need of them for coming to Thee; but rather, come Thyself, O divine Jesus! into our earthly hearts; show Thy light to our blind spirits, discover to our wandering souls the beauty of Thy countenance; give vent to that fire with which
Thou art consumed, that its sparks may fly everywhere, and that we may be kindled therewith.

Unhappy is that sinful soul that has seen Thy light and plunges itself again into its own darkness; that has felt the heal of Thy love, and resumes its former coldness; that has received the pardon of its sins, and commits new ones; that has known the blessings of Thy sweetness, and the radiance of Thy beauty, and falls back again into a forgetfulness of its sovereign good, sinks into the mire, and returns to its evil ways!

It is with justice that Thou deliverest me up to my enemies, vices, and passions; and that Thou permittest me to be punished and confounded by everything that has separated me from Thee; since after having been introduced into the cellar of Thy delicious wines, I have sought to quench my thirst in the muddy waters of creatures. I was unwilling to remain in Thy house, and by a just judgment, I am now obliged to beg in strange houses, where I find nothing that can satisfy the hunger I endure. Nevertheless, O Lord, in spite of all my perfidy, Thou art always my faithful friend, and the good shepherd of this wandering sheep; for Thou hast not yet precipitated me into Hell, nor abandoned me to the rage of devils; Thou hast not condemned me to be eternally separated from Thee, neither has Thou quite forsaken me; mayst Thou therefore be blessed for ever.

I ask Thee not for those singular favours Thougrantest to Thy faithful servants: I only beseech Thee, O my God! not to turn me out of Thy house, but to receive me still into the number of Thy domestics, and to give me rather for constant food only my tears, till I am as pure as Thou desiriest me to be, till my interior eyes, disengaged from that thick cloud which obscures them, begin to behold again the serenity of Thy countenance, and till Thou sayest affectionately to my soul, I am thy salvation, thy strength, and thy constancy: then humbled and convinced of its own weakness, it shall seek Thee more ardently and Thou shalt be glorified by the return of a prodigal child, by the cure of one who was wilfully blind, and by the change in a faithless servant.

I cast myself at Thy feet, most miserable as I am: I adore Thy divine majesty hidden under the veil of infancy: I consecrate myself for ever to Thy service with those holy kings; and I conjure Thee, O Lord! to receive me with them. I am poor, and have neither frankincense, gold nor myrrh to offer Thee, in acknowledgment that Thou art God, king, and mortal man; but I offer Thee all Thou has given me, all Thou art. I offer Thee the three powers of my soul; my understanding, that Thou mayst illuminate it with Thy light, and eternal truth; my memory, that it may be wholly occupied with Thee, and that Thou mayst put everything out of it that can displease Thee; my will, that it may be purified by the fire of Thy love, and that it may love Thee with all its strength. I offer Thee the three divine virtues which Thou gavest me in baptism; faith, by which I believe in Thee, and acknowledge Thee for my Lord, my Creator, my Saviour, my God, and my all; hope, by which my heart is carried towards those blessings which I can expect from Thee; charity, which makes me sigh after Thy eternal possession. I offer Thee, O divine Jesus! all that Thou art pleased to be for the love of me; I offer Thee Thy most sacred body, Thy most pure soul, and Thy divinity which is the source of
all happiness and wisdom; I offer myself to Thy Father by Thee; to Thyself by Thy Father; and by Thy Father and Thee to the Holy Ghost, who is the mutual love of both.

O Virgin and Mother at the same time, who drawest from their fountain those infinite blessings wherewith you are filled! bestow some share on this miserable creature, I mean not of the gold, frankincense or myrrh which the holy kings offered to your Son, but of those heavenly treasures which you are the dispensatrix of; may I obtain by you something that is worthy of being presented to Him, and that may gain me His love. Amen.

IX

His sorrow at the martyrdom of the Holy Innocents

Christ was in Egypt, but the two years that had passed since His birth had not sufficed to allay Herod's fears. When the Wise Men did not return to Jerusalem, he came to the conclusion that they had penetrated his design to put the new king of the Jews to death. His dissimulation then turned to rage, and, fearful lest Christ should escape him, he cruelly resolved to slay all male children of a certain age. He decided to do this because he could not trust the Jews to discover the Child for him, being persuaded that, to save their Messiah, they would substitute another child in His place.

Thus, having finished the affairs which had delayed the execution of this barbarous design, and considering that the talk which had been aroused in Jerusalem by the Wise Men had died down, he reflected on the time at which they had seen the star and found that it was just two years ago. He then contrived a reason for ordering that all the children who had been born in Bethlehem within two years or thereabouts should be brought into one place. When they were assembled there he had them massacred by his soldiers, believing that the Saviour of the world must surely be involved in the slaughter.

In a short time the whole place resounded with the sighs and cries of grief of those poor mothers for the deaths of their children whose tender age, innocence and great number rendered the massacre still more hor-
rible. The prophet Jeremy had foretold that they would not be comforted (xxxvi, 15), and St. Augustine and many other Fathers have written feelingly about the cries of those despairing mothers and the vain efforts they made to hide, defend and save their children.

What happened in Judea did not pass unknown in Egypt to the eternal wisdom of the divine Infant. His sacred humanity, which saw all things in God, must at the same time have felt the pain of all the children and that of all their mothers, for Christ’s heart was tender and full of compassion for those who suffered as His life on earth showed.

When the people followed Him in multitudes into the desert, He said to His Apostles, I take compassion on the people, for behold they now continue with me three days, and have nothing to eat.—(Mark viii, 2.) Touched by the tears of the widow in the city of Naim, He raised her son to life again. He could not behold Martha, and Mary Magdalen, weep for their brother, without weeping with them. When He entered Jerusalem amidst the acclamations of the people, who had come out to meet Him with palm and olive branches, His knowledge of what was to befall the city caused Him to shed tears and to foretell in moving accents the desolation with which God was to punish the sins of its inhabitants.

We can also learn from other incidents in the Scriptures how sensitive our Saviour was to hardship and sorrow; how great then must His compassion have been for the many innocent victims who had been sacrificed on his account? Had it been fitting to do so, He would have consented to have been slain, and to come to life again, in the place of each child Herod caused to be killed, but because it was necessary that He should live and reserve Himself for a more cruel death for the salvation of all men, His knowledge of the murder of the many innocents, and the grief of their mothers, caused Him most bitter pain. It is true that He was to recompense them abundantly some years afterwards for the death they had undergone for Him by dying in His turn for them and meriting for them a crown of glory, but whatever He designed to do and suffer afterwards did not diminish His sorrowful compassion.

Our Saviour’s compassion was indeed limitless, and during His life on earth one of His greatest sorrows arose from His knowledge of the evils which, banished from their heavenly country, the children of Adam suffered and were to suffer, albeit justly.

To understand this, we need only reflect that, in making man so perfect, God’s design was that he should be subject to no miseries, but that he should attain to the delights of Heaven after having enjoyed those of the earth. He made the other corporeal creatures subject to death and corruption. By the nature of his body man should have been subject to these also, but, by a special privilege, he was preserved in his terrestrial paradise from pain, hunger, thirst, cold, heat, labour, death and from every grievous thing that could befall him. For God was pleased that between the spiritual and corporeal natures there should be a third, at once angelic and earthly. He chose that creature in which He had, so to speak, reunited heaven and earth, that He might work His wonders in it, communicate His divine perfections to it, and make it the paradise of His spiritual delights. When man fell from this happy state by his sin, God, who was unwilling to destroy him, resolved that
he who had been unable to preserve himself in his pleasures, should save himself by his sufferings.

This obstacle which sin placed in the way of God's designs towards man, would have occasioned God extreme pain if the divine nature had been capable of suffering. Holy Scripture affirms that God was inwardly touched with sorrow of heart (Gen. vi. 6), when he was obliged to punish the world by the Flood. Not that God really felt that pain, or that He could repent in time of that which He had resolved to do from all eternity, but that, according to our manner of thinking, He had just reason for displeasure in seeing Himself obliged to chastise so severely a creature whom He had formed to be happy. But what God could not suffer in His divine nature He could suffer in the human nature which He had united to Himself, and in it He wept for all our sins as if they had been His own, and He bore all the punishment due to them as if He had deserved it.

Thus Christ has perfectly accomplished these two things: as God, our sovereign Lord, He makes our miseries turn to His own glory and our spiritual advantage; as man, our companion and brother, He feels all the bitterness of our lot, and He would not subject us to it were He not obliged to do so by the laws of His justice and Providence. Even when we suffer He arranges things so that our pains become more profitable to us than would have been the pleasures which we lost by the sin of our first father; He also has the goodness to sweeten our pains for us, and to bear the greatest part of them that, being sanctified by Him, they may work for our glory. He thereby re-establishes His first design which was that we should be eternally happy with Him and free from all manner of miseries.

If we be truly the friends and servants of God we ought to have continually before our eyes two considerations which are very proper for our comfort amidst the evils of this life.

The first consideration we take from St. Augustine who observes that the holy Church, which began in Adam and his children, has always been bathed in her own blood for the glory of her heavenly Spouse; that the innocent Abel, in the beginning of the world, was washed in his own blood through the jealousy and cruelty of his brother Cain; that at the coming of our Saviour the holy Innocents watered with their blood the city of Bethlehem and the parts adjacent; that Christ Himself consecrated the Church with His own blood by dying upon the Cross; that an infinite number of martyrs have shed theirs for His love; and, finally, that those who died without shedding it did not die without suffering, because one cannot fight under the standard of a crucified God, nor have a share in His glory, but by the Cross.

There are two things which man ought to give to God alone, and of which all creatures are unworthy—the heart and the blood, to love and to suffer. For Christ has raised the value of sufferings so much that they have become more precious, not only than all earthly goods, but even than the rarest favours of Heaven. It is therefore an act of strange blindness to suffer for the world and, by employing so holy a thing in profane uses, to lose all the fruit of it and perhaps render ourselves all the more criminal for having done so.

If men would remember that they owe everything to God, their sufferings would be sweeter and they would not waste as they do the best part of their lives. This loss
arises from their giving to perishable things a heart which belongs to God alone, and of which He is so jealous that He will not permit anything else to share it with Him. God requires our love above all things because love draws everything else after it. Thus to give our whole love to God, who alone deserves it, is to offer Him the most perfect, complete and acceptable of sacrifices.

The other consideration is that God, who intended to take His delight with us, seeing His first design frustrated, and not content with reserving us for the abode of glory, found the means of making us long for it by the sweetness of His communications even in our exile. Hence it is that, in order to comfort the children of Adam for the loss of their earthly paradise, He pours upon them in the midst of their miseries more graces than they would have received in that happy state; for, showing them the admirable works of His love, He so inflames them with the desire of pleasing, serving and loving Himself alone that being inebriated, as it were, with these divine sweetmesses, they are no longer the same: all the pains of this life seem sweet to them, and all its pleasures bitter, and they have no less contentment amidst the most severe sufferings than if they tasted the purest joys.

St. Justin, in his discourse to the Romans about the faith of the martyrs, gave as his chief reason for becoming a Christian that cheerfulness which appeared on the faces of the martyrs amidst fires and racks, because he could not persuade himself that anything which human nature finds abhorrent could be suffered with joy, unless some secret and unknown power had changed such dreadful torments into delights. And the holy martyr added, that having embraced Christianity, he was convinced from his own experience, that there is no bodily pain, however agonising it may be, that can stifle the interior happiness which Christ gives to those who suffer for Him.

St. Paul describes his labours and sufferings as so many triumphs. And David cries out with admiration: How great is the multitude of thy sweetness, O Lord! which thou hast hid for them that fear thee—thee—thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy countenance from the disturbance of men (Psalm xxx, 20–21): that is, Thou defendest them, and placest them in safety by the secret knowledge of Thy perfections, and by the interior communication of Thy blessing. Not that the sufferers are insensible of the pain, but are supported, as one might say, in an ocean of pure delights, of which the world is unaware, which eye has not seen, ear has not heard, and which love alone experiences. God is at that time much more glorified by the joy which His servants express in suffering than if they had remained in their earthly paradise, and they are no less happy because love makes for them a delicious paradise out of their miseries. It is true that this abundance of sweetness is not given to all, but all have at least this consolation, that what they suffer for God is advantageous to themselves, and even of extraordinary merit, when it is suffered patiently. If the labours of this life are not a source of spiritual pleasures to them here, they sow the seeds of glory for eternity.

CONTEMPLATION

I give Thee thanks, O my divine Saviour, for all those blessings Thou hast bestowed on me, not equal
to what Thou couldst but in such manner as my tepidity can manage. Thou art my fortitude and hope, supply by Thy goodness what is wanting in my weakness. Thou art my beatitude, the end of all my designs and desires: if I cannot love Thee in proportion to Thy amiableness, let me love Thee at least according to my capacity of loving Thee.

When wilt Thou come to the assistance of Thy poor creature, O my salvation and only relief! I see myself surrounded on all sides by miseries; above me, there is thick darkness depriving me of the sight of Heaven; below me, the corruption of earthly things; around me the noise and tumult of my passions; before me, the vanities of the world; behind me, the forgetfulness of true goods; within me, the absence of Thy knowledge and love; and among so many obstacles which oppose my happiness, I am so blind as to believe I can live without Thee, and not to comprehend the need I have of Thy assistance.

Thou knowest that I can do nothing without Thee, and therefore Thou comest to seek me that I may find in Thee what I find not in myself; Thou has clothed Thyself with my flesh, that I might have in Thee a companion of my pains; Thou has suffered those which were due to me that I might be less sensible of those which befall me, and to show in Thyself how much greater ones I have deserved. I adore Thee, O my true comforter! Alas! what am I good for to Thee, and what advantage dost Thou find in comforting me? Am I not treated as I deserve when I am oppressed with infirmity, sadness, trouble, disquiet, and with all the miseries of this life? Is it not reasonable that I should suffer chastisement, since I have committed the fault:

that I one should be punished since I alone am guilty? Why then, O divine Jesus! wilt Thou share my miseries with me? When Thou wast upon earth, the evils which I was to suffer during the whole course of my life were present to Thy eternal wisdom; Thou wast touched with them at that time; as a charitable father, Thou feltest all the strokes which I was to receive from Thy hand, and Thou obtained for me at the same time the grace of profiting thereby according to Thy designs. How can I then, O divine pastor of my soul! complain so bitterly of Thy strokes, knowing the pain they occasion Thy paternal heart? Why do I not own how profitable they are to me, by the pain Thou dost in striking me?

Ah! Lord, how deplorable is my error! Thou showest me, O celestial beauty! the tenderness of Thy heart, and the wisdom with which Thy providence governs me; Thou discoverest Thy paternal heart to me even in Thy chastisements; and Thy goodness converts it to eternal blessings the temporal evils which I suffer so justly. Who is like to Thee, O merciful father! When human justice chastises one who is guilty, the unhappy person gets nothing thereby but pain and infamy; but when Thou chastisest us in this world, we are immediately recompensed for the punishment we suffer; for by inspiring us with repentance for our sins, Thou fillest our hearts with a most sweet consolation. The world humbles us to destroy us, and Thou humblest us only to save us. The world loads us to oppress us, and Thou loadest us to refresh us.

O my God, my strength, my repose, and consolation! why am I not inflamed with the desire of serving and pleasing Thee; Thou art not content with comforting
me in my pains, and with drawing from them that eternal weight of glory which Thou preparest for me; but to show how liberal Thou art towards those whom Thou afflictst, Thou also makest them love sufferings, and reducest them sometimes to such a state, that they cannot live any longer without suffering. Disclose to me, O Lord! those divine secrets; teach me to glory in the Cross, and to find what Thou hast hidden in it for those who love Thee. For whom shall I suffer, O my love! but for Thee? When Thou drawest me to Thee, when I closely embrace Thee, and am penetrated with Thy love, I am sensible neither of injuries, disgraces, poverty, contempt, perfidy, nor of any other pain: all my evils are as it were drowned in Thee and Thy presence makes them even sometimes the sweetest food of my soul.

Show me, O divine Jesus! the excess of Thy love and the bitter pain wherewith it rends Thy heart. Tell me who suffers most at the death of the Innocents, whether the mothers losing their children, or the children losing their lives or Thou, O Lord! preserving Thine by their deaths? The pain of the mothers exceeds not the bounds of natural love, and that of the children is without knowledge; but Thy pain, O sweet Jesus! proceeds from an infinite love, enlightened and burning with the desire of dying for every one of them in particular. For a life of a few years, which those infants sacrificed to Thine, Thou preparedst for them an eternal life by the death Thou wast to endure, and Thou died already in them, by waiting till Thou couldst die for them. Thus it is, O Lord! that Thou wouldst not allow the martyrs, suffering for Thee, to suffer more than Thee, since there are none of them whose sufferings

Thou hast not felt with Thy own. Thou hast also ordained, that by dying for Thee, they should have the consolation of living in Thee, and find in their temporal evils the assurance of an eternal happiness. Blessed for ever be Thy infinite liberality; can we be poor with Thee, O my God! in whom we possess all the riches of divine love.

What a loss it is to me, miserable that I am, when I fly from the Cross to indulge my body! Fasting grieves me, prayer wearies me, solitude vexes me, and silence afflicts me. I am impatient in pain, weak in temptations, and attached to sensual pleasures. I can leave nothing for Thee, and what I give Thee I reckon for lost. I dare not oppose my passions; I am afraid of what gives me the least trouble; and whatever constrains my liberty depresses my courage.

Have mercy on me, O my God! excite my zeal, support my weakness, raise up my dejected courage, give me strength to bear the pain which is found in the practice of virtue, in the mortification of the body, and in the exercise of Thy love. Remember, O Lord! that Thou hast said, without me ye can do nothing.—(John xv, 5.) Alas! Thou seest in the bottom of my heart the truth of Thy words.

Succour me, therefore, O Thou strength of my soul! and break my chains. Remember, that weak and miserable as I am, I am no less Thine, than all Thy other creatures. Remember that when Thou came to seek the lost sheep, Thou wast not content to send it back again to the flock, Thou didst carry it thither Thyself, because it was gone too far from thence to be able to return. I am that sheep, seek me, O divine shepherd! for I have
gone astray; find me out, for I am lost: carry me, for I am weak, and bring me back into Thy fold.

Whence comes it, O Lord! that Herod imagines he cannot preserve his crown but by depriving Thee of life? Why will he put so many children to death, assuring himself that Thou wilt be one of them? He will therefore neither live nor reign with Thee, who art the omnipotent king, the master of life and kingdoms. But, alas! the more I detest Herod and his cruelty, the more I condemn myself. Thou knowest, O Lord! whether I resemble him; and perhaps Thou seest in me the same dispositions to sin, that were in him, though I have no share in the murder of the Innocents.

How often have I been willing to preserve my own reputation by destroying that of my neighbour, whom Thou hast forbidden me to hurt! How many times, contrary to Thy law and doctrine, have I endeavoured to please a friend, in view of my own interest, by flattering him in the wrong, prejudicing the truth, and persecuting virtue! How many graces have I stifled in my soul, O infinite goodness! Thou seest daily an infinity of suchlike disorders, and Thou bearest with them. The employment of worldlings is to violate Thy law, to ruin virtue, and to destroy souls: they apply thereto their whole mind, all their care, and industry; and I permit myself to be carried away by that torrent. I forget Thee, O my God! I am a greater homicide of myself, than Herod was of the Innocents; and in the disorder into which my passions throw me, I do not perceive, no more than he did, that Thou escapest me, and that I lose Thee. I am against Thee in all things, O my Saviour! and methinks I am afraid, as well as Herod, of meeting with Thee; nevertheless how poor, miserable,

and abandoned, and remote from eternal life and true happiness, am I without Thee! have mercy on me, O my God, and permit me not to follow my desires; give me not what I desire, but what is convenient for me. Ah, Lord! rather the death of the Innocents, than the life of Herod! May I begin this day to die to myself, and to live in Thee. Inspire me with the love of Thy law, esteem of Thy doctrine, and submission to Thy will. May my greatest desire be to nourish myself with what Thou teachest me, to shed my blood for what Thou commandest me, to live by Thee, and to die for Thee.

O most blessed Mother of God! O sure refuge of sinners! who has always lived in Christ and for Christ; raise up again by your intercession my soul dead with sin. Amen.
X

His Obedience

After Herod's death, Joseph, at the command of an angel, left Egypt with the Child and His Mother to return to Judea, but being apprised that Herod's son reigned there and fearing lest the son should have inherited his father's cruelty as well as his kingdom, Nazareth, a city of Galilee, was selected as their place of residence.

Every year, according to God's command, Mary and Joseph went to the Temple in Jerusalem. When Jesus was twelve years of age, He went with them. They lost Him for three days, at the end of which time they found Him again, and they brought Him back to Nazareth.

From that time until the thirtieth year of His age the Gospel mentions nothing further of what He did except to say that He was subject to them; but that submission of His is the summary of His life and doctrine, the cause of all His labours and, according to the Apostle St. Paul, the origin of all His glory. He became obedient, he says, to death, even to the death of the cross. For which cause God also exalted him, and hath given him a name, which is above every name.—(Philip. ii, 8-9.)

The first of His utterances related in the Gospel concerns obedience. Did you not know, He said to His blessed Mother, that I must be employed about the things that are my father's.—(Luke ii, 49.) And He would not have us know anything else about the first thirty years of His life but that He was subject to those whom His Father had given Him as His superiors.

When He began to move among men His common sayings were I am come from heaven, not to do my will, but the will of him that sent me.—(John vi, 38); my food is, that I do the will of him that sent me.—(ibid. iv, 34); my doctrine is not mine, but of him that sent me.—(ibid. vii, 16); that the cup which He was to drink for us was that which his Father had given him.—(ibid. xviii, 11.) And the last words He pronounced, when He was ready to die on the Cross, were: it is consummated.—(ibid xix, 30); into thy hands I commend my spirit (Luke xxiii, 46), that is, I have accomplished, Father, all that Thou hast commanded Me, and I leave, by dying, to Thy disposal, My life, death and merits, and their application.

Words could not explain the nature of that dependence in which our Saviour lived and died. It is for that reason that St. Luke has described in one word that obedience of thirty years which he could not express in many, and which the other Evangelists have not mentioned. For who can comprehend the perfection with which Mary and Joseph presumed to command Christ and that with which He obeyed them, the respect and humility of the Blessed Virgin towards Him who was her Son and her God, and the difficulty she had in commanding Him? She commanded Him nevertheless as His Mother, because she knew God would have it so, and that in commanding the Son she was obeying the Father. Joseph, as the head of the family, was respected by the Mother and the Son, and that status infinitely humbled him. Christ obeyed them both in silence, with respect and joy, as those who held the place for Him of
God His Father. Behold here the most perfect obedience
that, without doubt, was ever practised in Heaven or on
earth!

And yet all these wonders were hidden from the eyes
of men. To their neighbours Joseph and Mary appeared
merely to be prudent and sensible parents and Christ
an obedient son. In private they very regularly observed
the law of God and lived, by their hand-labour, accord-
ing to their state in life. Our Saviour worked with St.
Joseph and assisted him in all things so far as His age
and strength would permit. God alone knows with what
sentiments the father and Mother received the services
of such a Son, whom they knew to be their Creator;
they admired His humility, obedience, and application
to labour; and familiarity did not in the least diminish
in them the profound respect which they had for Him
whom they commanded only in obedience to God. They
learned from His divine mouth the secrets of heavenly
doctrine, which He communicated to them, frequently
in obedience to their commands. At the end of the day’s
work they retired to pray; but what must their prayer
have been in the presence of Him who was their God
and what abundance of graces must they not have
received therefrom! What a picture does Nazareth not
present—God subject to His own creature, the eternal
Word to a carpenter, and the sovereign majesty to the
most menial employments of a poor household!

Those who obey others in the world have often the
hope of becoming masters themselves eventually, but
Christ knew that He would depart from His obedience
to Mary and Joseph only to enter again into that of His
eternal Father, which was to cost Him His life, and to
end by the death of the Cross.

During the three years that He manifested Himself
to the world by His doctrines and miracles He never
took to Himself the credit for them, but referred all to
the power and wisdom of His Father who had sent Him.
In doing this He taught those in high stations that they
ought not to forget their dependence on God whose
servants they are, even when they command other men.

If we consider our Saviour attentively as the model
of all perfection, we shall discover that, as God has
included the whole observance of the law in charity, He
has also reduced the whole proof of charity to the
practice of obedience. He told us: *If you love me, keep
my commandments. He that hath my commandments,
and keepeth them: he it is, that loveth me. He that
loveth me not, keepeth not my words.*—(John xiv, 15,
21, 24.) So that we do not please God if we love Him
not, and we love Him not if we do not obey Him.
Love and obedience produce the same effects and have
the same reward; the want of either is equally punished
and stands in need of the same remedy; obedience
increases by love, and love is perfected by obedience.
Love sanctifies the soul, unites it to God, and obtains
for it the favours of Heaven; but obedience confirms
and secures the possession of them. By disobedience
love is lost, and temporal and spiritual punishments
incurred; obedience, on the other hand, re-establishes
love and reconciles us to God. In short, all Christian
wisdom seems to be included in this virtue. Had Adam,
in the spirit of obedience, abstained from eating the
forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge, he might have
acquired a new degree of enlightenment; for to know
how to sin is not knowledge, but blindness and igno-
rance. He is the best instructed who knows good without
the experience of evil and who, knowing evil only by its opposition to good, knows it without danger and only so far as is necessary to avoid it.

This made St. Augustine say that God could not have taught us better the meaning of obedience than by forbidding our first parents to do something which appeared of small consequence, which was not bad in itself, and which might even be good. We understand from this that the perfection of this virtue consists no less in doing without something good which has been forbidden, than in doing that which has been commanded, and that its value lies in itself and not in its object. The wisdom of the Christian consists in obedience, and so it was that David begged God so often for it: *Teach me, O Lord, to do thy will, because thou art my God. One thing I have asked of our Lord, this will I seek for, that I may dwell in the house of our Lord all the days of my life, as a faithful servant who knows and does the will of his master.*—(Ps. cxlii, 11; xxvi, 4.)

Disobedience commonly proceeds from three poisoned sources. The first source is that self-esteem which is nothing else than a blindness of soul which, preventing us from seeing our own weaknesses, makes us intolerant of a superiority in another which we think should belong to ourselves. This presumption precipitated Lucifer into Hell and the contrary virtue exalted the Blessed Virgin to the dignity of Mother of God. It is to counter this great evil that the saints have armed themselves with obedience, have submitted themselves to everyone, have always chosen rather to do the will of others rather than their own and, to humble human pride in themselves, have obeyed even those who had no right to command them. They inwardly esteemed themselves unworthy of living among the servants of God, all of whom they regarded as their superiors and, because such humility of heart is not acquired without great pains, they continually begged God for it by fervent prayers.

The second source of disobedience is attachment to our own judgment. This infatuation is always attended by obstinacy and pride. Hence spring heresies and schisms in the Church, rebellions in states, troubles and disorders in religious communities. To check the disorders of their own judgment, and to expel so dreadful a poison by any remedy, however bitter, the saints therefore engaged themselves by vow to obey another person, though he were no better than themselves. As the cure for this evil must come from Heaven, we ought to ask God for it, and to endeavour, at the same time, to repress in ourselves the spirit of contradiction, to keep our reason under strict silence, to despise ourselves interiorly and not to prefer ourselves to anyone. We ought to be persuaded that God communicates His light to superiors, that He assists them with a particular protection, and that it is better to submit ourselves to the will of another for the love of God, than to expose ourselves to those misfortunes into which our own wills will lead us.

The third source of disobedience is the inordinate or irregular affection for anything whatsoever, for when we are in possession of it we are liable to dispense ourselves from obedience either for our own satisfaction or to please those we love. Thus it was that Adam fell. He was not so foolish as to imagine that he could become like God or that he could ignore His threats, but the fear of displeasing his wife, and the desire to satisfy himself, rendered him disobedient. For the remedying
of this evil Christ tells us in the Gospel, *if anyone will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.*—(Matt., xvi, 24.) Yes, let him follow Christ who in the whole course of this mortal life found neither pleasure nor rest in anything but obedience.

Since the virtue of obedience is, as it were, the general remedy for all evils, it is not surprising that the Scriptures and Fathers have lavished such praise upon it. It is necessary everywhere, for this visible world subsists only by that subordination and dependence which God has established among its composing elements. States, armies, and all organisations are maintained only by order, and order cannot exist without obedience. Thus David having asked, *Wherein doth a young man correct his way?* answers immediately, *In keeping thy words. I am delighted in the way of thy testimonies, as in all riches.*—(Ps. cxviii, 9-14.) This whole Psalm is full of the praises of obedience and of the blessings it procures for us.

Obedience may be considered with relation to three sorts of persons: those who, by the duty of their state, command others; those who neither obey nor command anyone; those who have made a vow of obedience. The first class are exposed to great dangers, but they also have many occasions for gaining great merit; the second class walk with greater safety, but the third are infinitely happy, when they know how to relish the happiness of their condition. All ought continually to refer to the law and will of God as the mariner refers to his compass.

Let those who command propose to themselves above all things to imitate the conduct of God, whose place they hold, and to gain obedience by means of justice and virtue rather than severity. Nothing is more productive of either good or evil than the example of a superior. If he has nothing to offer but the rule of justice, untempered by sweetness or a desire to please, inferiors lose their esteem for him, and pass easily from contempt for the superior to contempt for obedience. But all these marks of virtue and goodness ought to be directed to God, since superiors are the ministers of His will and not the owners of their power.

It is deplorable blindness in those who command to regard the exercise of their power as an attribute which belongs to them, and not as an act of obedience which they pay to God. *And now ye kings understand,* says David, *take instruction you that judge the earth. Serve the Lord in fear,* in the stations in which He has placed you, *and rejoice in him with trembling* (Ps. ii, 10-11), you who are elevated above others and placed, as one might say, between Heaven and earth, consider yourselves rather as the servants of God than the superiors of men: *embrace discipline, lest sometimes our Lord be wroth, and ye perish out of the just way.*—(Psalm ii, 12.) For those who are placed above others, unless they take great care to practise humility, frequently fall into the fault of ascribing all things to themselves, of desiring to be applauded for everything they do, of believing that they are deprived of any honour that is not paid to them, and of being offended by everything that is not done for them. Thus they take amiss any advice that is offered to them because they imagine that it arises from a want of faith in their judgment, and they are ashamed to be guided by any knowledge which they themselves do not possess. If, in the discharge of their duty, they
sought only the will and service of God, they would joyfully listen to all good counsels, from whatever quarter they came, and they would choose rather to be assisted than to be applauded by everyone.

Such will not be the faults of those who live independently, without necessity either to command or obey. Their whole obedience consists in the observance of the will of God. But, alas! how many are faithful to this? We ought, they say, to live like everyone else and to follow the common ways of the world, but this life and these ways proceed from the prudence of the flesh which, according to the Apostle (Rom. viii, 6), is death, and from the wisdom of this world which is folly with God. —(I Cor. iii, 19.) The flesh kills us because it deprives us of the life of grace, and the world deceives us, because all its precepts are but vain and illusory. True prudence is to live according to the law of God: for much better is obedience, says the wise men, than victims (Eccl iv, 17), and he who is subject to God in all things offers Him a continual and always acceptable sacrifice.

The obedience of religious is imperfect unless the execution of commands is accompanied by the will to obey and the submission of one's own judgment. Those who arrive at that perfection and simplicity of obedience which makes them regard the order of their superior as the will of God, enjoy continual peace; but he who behaves in such a manner as to acknowledge no commands but such as he pleases, who examines and judges his superior, who when obeying has more regard to the will of man than to that of God, ought not to flatter himself that his obedience is true.

For all those who consecrate themselves to God in the religious life it is a most prudent counsel not to place their consolation in a natural attachment to their superior, nor to perform from motives of human friendship that which ought to be done only from motives of divine charity. In addition to there being nothing holy about obedience given on grounds of friendship only, this false obedience is the source of a thousand disorders in communities. As it is founded on self-love, it frequently produces murmurings, cliques, dissensions, and introduces the spirit of the world into the house of God. We ought, therefore, to obey every superior irrespective of whether he is good or bad; if he is unfavourably disposed towards us, our obedience will be all the purer. A regular community whose subjects are submissive from motives of holy obedience, and whose superior is without virtue, will always be a much better one than the community whose superior is holy and subjects disobedient. Such is the obedience which Christ taught us when He said to the Jews (Matt. xxiii, 2-3): The Scribes and Pharisees have sat on the chair of Moses: observe therefore and do all whatsoever they shall say to you; but do not according to their works. And St. Peter commands us to be subject to every human creature for God's sake—not only to the good and gentle, but also the froward.—(I Pet. ii, 13-18.) Therein consists the perfection of this virtue and from this we may draw the following three maxims of vital importance to the religious:

The first is that he who seeks to do his own will, or endeavours to influence his superiors into doing it, has neither the peace nor the merit of obedience. The second, that in a religious state there is neither holy zeal, nor virtuous prudence, if both are not founded upon a perfect submission, in everything that is not contrary to
the law of God, to the rule and to superiors. The third, that whosoever desires to find that internal peace promised to the truly obedient, ought to obey man for the love of God.

CONTEMPLATION

O Sovereign Majesty, omnipotent God, my Lord and Creator! whence comes it that Thou dost vouchsafe to have a continual intercourse with Thy miserable creature, and that Thou canst not like it to have any other rule or conduct but Thy will? What am I in Thy presence, O my God! and how dare I so much as lift up my eyes towards Thee, to dive into Thy designs and receive Thy orders? The earth is the place which belongs to me, O my God! it is my mother, from it Thy hands formed me, it is my residence and true abode.

O infinite wisdom! though Thou has formed me of clay, Thou has made me for Thyself; Thou has taken me out of the earth, not that I should fall into it again, but because Thou art pleased to live in my soul, which Thou hast enclosed within this earthly body. Thou wilt be my wisdom and light, for disclosing Thy mercies to me, and for showing me Thy will; that by endeavouring to imitate what I perceive in Thee, I may elevate myself above myself, and not remain always plunged in my original mire. Thou vouchsafest to abide in me, as in Thy own house, and to leave nothing in it but what is subject and pleasing to Thee. I adore Thee, O divine Master! teach me what Thou wouldst have me to know, and suffer me not to know anything else; guide my steps, my senses, my powers, affections, desires and reason; and let Thy will be done in me, as it is done in heaven.

It is Thy will, O Lord! and Thou hast created our nature in this so perfect an order: but, O heavenly Physician! I must here disclose my wounds and infirmities to Thee. The law of sin lives in me, and resists Thy will. I believe by faith what Thou teachest me, but when I am to accomplish it, I find myself so weak, that I yield to the desires of the flesh. The world calls me; and though I plainly know, that whatever it offers me is nothing but deceit, yet I follow it. Vanity allures me by a thousand false promises, and I believe it.

How deplorable is this state, and how worthy my extreme misery of Thy compassion? I fear Thee, O Lord! and I fear myself. My vicious habits, and Thy holy law, torment me equally; the things which Thou requirist of me, and those which I have hitherto loved, rend my heart; and yet I can neither forsake myself, nor seek Thee. O Prince of Peace! O divine Deliverer! quell this internal war, deliver me from this torment, break my bonds, that all may be reunited in me, to sacrifice to thee a sacrifice of praise, and that I may be entirely Thine.—(Psalm cxv, 17). Since Thou grantest me the grace of knowing the danger which I am in, grant me also that of not losing the light which Thou givest me, of not relapsing into my blindness, and of never sleeping in that abyss of sin, where Thy voice is no longer heard, Thy light is no longer seen, and where I am no longer sensible of that mortal poison which kills the soul, by separating it from Thee, O my God! who art its true life.

Present Thyself therefore to my soul, O mirror of eternal truth! that it may discover in Thee its spots and
blemishes. But Thou showest them continually to it, O Lord! I behold in Thy life the defects and vanity of mine, and I cannot excuse myself on account of my ignorance. Thou art my God! to Thee alone belong glory and majesty; everything is naturally subject to Thee; and yet, to confound my pride, Thou concealest Thy greatness: Thou subjectest Thyself to Thy creatures, obeyest the work of Thy own hands, and dost the will of those whom Thou dost feed and govern. Is the Blessed Virgin the less Thy creature, for being Thy mother? Whatever she has, and whatever she is, does it not come from Thee? Has her quality of Mother taken from Thee the sovereign dominion Thou hast over her? Whence comes it, then, that Thou dost oblige her to command Thee, and dost observe, in respect of her, an obedience of thirty years? What need hast Thou of her conduct, Thou who art the infinite wisdom, and governest both those who command, and those who obey?

Be Thou always before the eyes of my soul, O faithful Mirror of all virtues! that I may learn from Thee to know and hate myself, to imitate Thee, and to wash out all the stains of my life by the imitation of Thine. How can I, by seeing Thee, not submit myself entirely to Thy will, and not even obey all creatures? What evil can there happen to me, though I should put myself under the feet of everybody for Thy love? There it is, O Lord! I shall find Thee, and shall be like Thee, who was trodden under the feet of sinners; but if I exalt myself, I lose Thee, because Thou hatest the proud; and when we depart from humility, we always depart from Thee.

Thou seest, O my God! how full I am of presumption and vain esteem of myself; whence proceeds that confidence in my own knowledge and slavery to my own will, which hinders me from submitting myself to those whom Thou commandest me to obey, makes me lose interior peace, and is in me the source of an infinite number of sins.

When I would serve Thee according to my own wishes, I begin to displease Thee; because by following my own light, I forsake Thine; and this is what renders my faults inexcusable, my blindness more dangerous, and my wounds more incurable: for the more I depend upon myself, the less I know myself, and the more guilty I am. Thou wouldst have me to possess my soul, and find a solid peace in my submission; and seek trouble in my own will. Thou art willing to protect me by obedience, and I expose myself by disobeying, to all the designs of my enemies. When I resign myself to the conduct of others, Thou takest mine upon Thyself; and yet, I choose rather, by withdrawing from obedience, to take upon myself the whole account I am to give to Thee. But if Thou enterest into judgment with Thy servant, O my God, and sovereign Judge! what shall become of me? What shall be the lot of this earthly man, full of miseries and sin? I may indeed deceive myself; but I cannot deceive Thy infinite wisdom. Convert me, therefore, O Lord! and humble my pride, before the day of Thy wrath.

When I abound in my own opinions, I often scandalise my neighbour, I despise him and admire myself; I flatter myself with being wise, and I know not myself; I think I walk in safety, and I behold not the precipices which surround me; I continue given over to myself, deprived of Thy help and light; and I am unconcerned amidst so many subjects of fear.
Teach me, O heavenly Master! the value of this virtue which is so dear to Thee, which attended Thee everywhere, and made Thee obey without resistance, not only Thy blessed Mother and St. Joseph, but also the unjust judges who condemned Thee, and the executioners who crucified Thee. When they demanded Thy hands to load them with chains, Thou gavest them. When they commanded Thee to take or put off Thy garment, Thou didst so. When Thou wast obliged to sit down to be derided, Thou complied. When they presented Thee with gall and vinegar, Thou didst taste of it. When they ordered Thee to extend Thyself upon the Cross, Thou obeyed them, and Thou fulfilled the will of the persecutors, as if the eternal Father had spoken to Thee by their mouths.

How difficult is it for me, O Lord! to enter into the holy freedom of Thy children, since I love the slavery of my blind and disorderly will! If Thou exactest painful and troublesome things of me, what ill can befall me from thence, since it is Thou who recommendest them to me?

Ah, Lord! Thou seest the bottom of my heart, and Thou knowest I lose interior peace, when I distinguish between those who command me. Grant me grace to consider nothing in them but Thee alone, and to resign myself entirely to the conduct of Thy providence. For then, although Thou shouldst subject me to my cruellest enemies, Thou wouldst guide their heart and mouth, and they should command me nothing but what would be profitable for me.

If Thou shouldst give me a superior who was unjust, wicked, or my enemy, Thou wouldst turn all his malice to my advantage; and whilst he should ruin himself by his bad intentions, I should save myself by the sincerity of my obedience.

I cast myself therefore at Thy feet, O Thou God of my soul! conduct me by what way Thou pleasest; govern me by whom Thou wilt, since Thou art continually in all things, and in every person, my superior, director and master. Thou knowest, lovest and guidest me by that knowledge and love, let it be through what instrument it will.

Hear me in this moment, O God of love! and receive the most humble prayer I make Thee. What Thou requirest of me above all things is that I would obey Thee, and the first thing Thou commandest me is to love Thee. Can I find there any reluctance in obeying Thee? No, my Lord; and I conjure Thee to accept at present what I offer Thee, and to confirm by Thy grace the protestation which my miserable heart is about to make Thee.

I, a miserable sinner, in consideration of that love wherewith Thou hast given Thyself wholly to me, here make a public profession of perpetual obedience to Thy love. Receive, O divine love! these hands, these feet, these eyes, this tongue, all my senses, my whole body, my will, memory and understanding, the desires, sighs, intentions, and all the motions of my soul. Receive, O Lord! all the hours, moments, and accidents of my life, and my whole self, interior and exterior. Thou hast said, that we can do nothing without Thee; nor remain with Thee, but by the union of Thy love. Ah! let that love be then the superior of Thy creature; let it govern my senses, powers and actions; let it regulate my labour and rest; let it make me go and stay where it pleases; let it reign over me absolutely; let it afflict and comfort me;
let it humble and exalt me; let it consume my imperfections; let it keep my whole interior in dependence.

O most pure Mother of God! the humblest and most obedient of all creatures! consider the dreadful crimes my pride and disobedience have engaged me in, and obtain for me of Christ, your Son and your God, the grace of doing always His holy will. Amen.

XI

His Poverty

Since St. Luke (Acts i, 1) affirms that Jesus began to do, and afterwards to teach, we ought to believe that, by way of example for all who would be entrusted with the instruction of others, He practised for thirty years of His life all the perfection which He taught in the last three. Words which are not accompanied by deeds soon fade from the minds of those who hear them, but God remembers them for the condemnation of those masters who practise not what they preach. On the other hand, words which are reinforced by actions are of great weight with men and very meritorious with God.

For that reason our Saviour, though He did not need the help of works and was of Himself worthy of all credit, employed more time in practising virtue than in teaching it. He did this to teach us the small esteem they deserve who aspire to acquire the authority of being believed, not by the example of their lives, but by the quality of their persons. As they attribute to themselves that which belongs to God alone, it frequently happens that, by a just judgment, their lives are at once rejected by God and their persons despised by men. And though this contempt may not always be expressed publicly, the reputation which remains to them is a weak defence against the reproaches of their conscience.

By all that Christ preached in the latter years of His life, we may know what He had practised in the former, and as He began His Sermon on the Mount, which is a
summary of His doctrine, by praising poverty, thereby giving it first place in evangelical perfection, we may judge how much He loved the practice of this virtue.

Though He was the King of Glory, and possessed all the treasures of Heaven and earth, He was pleased to be poor for love of us. For His birth here on earth He chose a poor place which did not even belong to Him. He chose a poor woman for His Mother and a poor worker for His foster-father. His first courtiers were poor shepherds; and He was presented in the temple, and redeemed as the poorest of men. During the last three years of His life, He had not where to lay His head, being poorer than the foxes and birds of the air, which have their holes and nests. — (Matt. viii, 20.) His disciples gathered ears of corn, rubbed them between their hands, and ate the grain to appease their hunger. Nothing could be found one day for Himself and His disciples but five barley loaves and two fishes. — (John vi, 9.) The Apostles whom He chose were poor, and He commanded those who were willing to follow Him to give to the poor whatever they possessed. He was content with the seamless garment which His blessed Mother had made for Him. In short, He died naked upon the Cross, and was laid in a borrowed tomb.

It is easy to judge from the beginning and end of His life, what the middle portion of it was like. None but those who have experienced the hardships of poverty can understand what it must have cost Jesus Christ. His diet was poor, often bad, and such as His parents could gain with Him by their hand labour, most of their time being taken up in prayer and attention to divine things, rather than in procuring the conveniences of life. In a word, the King of the universe divested Himself of everything, even His own body and life which He sacrificed for our salvation.

He would not have set before us such great examples of poverty had it not been the basis and foundation of Christian perfection. For the principal end of His doctrine was to kindle in us a pure love for those things for which we were created; in that love He found a general remedy for our wrong-doing which may be summed up as consisting of an indifference to, or a contempt for, eternal things, and an attachment to temporal ones. The heart of man is so often taken up with temporal things that it neither believes in, nor hopes for, anything beyond them, and refusing to love that which alone deserves it, forsakes that which alone can make it happy.

The more the heart seeks those false things which corrupt it, the less it is satisfied; they serve only to deprive it of the relish and esteem for eternal things. Thus it falls from one evil to another. It divides itself up among different objects, each incapable of satisfying it, and abandons the one thing necessary on which it could concentrate its whole love, and in which it would find repose, be delivered from a thousand difficulties, repair its interior losses, and be purified through the reception of the divine blessings for which it was created. For the happiness of the soul consists in the unity of its love, its misery in the multiplicity of its desires. Now it is poverty which sets us free and, by depriving us of an infinite number of distractions, disposes us to receive the riches of divine love.

Therefore Christ who, according to His own testimony, came upon earth to kindle the fire of divine love, gave the first place to poverty among all the virtues
which were to serve for the execution of His designs, and to induce us to embrace it. He made use of examples, promises and exhortations. Seek first the kingdom of God, and his justice, and all things shall be given you besides, be not solicitous, saying: what shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or with what shall we be clothed? Your father knows that you stand in need of all these things. Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.—(Matt. vi, 30, 31, 32; v. 3.)

St. Augustine (Ep. 120) gives to poverty the name of humility, because it tears up in us the roots of pride by destroying that presumption and vain confidence with which the prosperity of this world inspires us. It is also in this virtue, adds the same Father, that the first gift of the Holy Ghost consists—that is, filial fear, which keeps the soul in a loving apprehension of being separated from God by sin, and preserves it pure and free from all attachment to the creature.

Religious orders are founded on this virtue, and though they make use of different means, yet they have all the same end, which is to separate the heart from earthly affections which might take the place of divine love. Among these orders the Church prefers those which make profession of the strictest poverty, because she judges them richer in the love of God and better fitted to preserve it.

The Model of all perfection, in whom was included all that we could possess or desire, was pleased to live and die poor on earth that we might not be dazzled by the splendour He could have displayed, but should see Him as Himself, as He sought nothing in us but our hearts. For, properly speaking, poverty of spirit is an interior disassociation from mean and contemptible things so that one may be enriched by those which can never be sufficiently esteemed.

Hence it is that the saints judged themselves poor amidst the riches of this world, and rich amidst the greatest poverty, because they realised that the sum total of earthly goods is incapable of filling the heart of man which can be satiated alone with the spiritual goods one possesses in God. Thus evangelical poverty ought to be called plenty rather than poverty, had not our Saviour, to make Himself understood, spoken the language of men.

Our common experience teaches us that no person has a greater opinion of what he does than he who is capable of doing little, and that, on the other hand, he who can perform a great deal is rarely satisfied with his own work. The generous man never thinks he gives enough, and the avaricious man always believes he gives too much. The glutton looks upon one day’s fasting as an heroic action, and the passionate man imagines he has made a great sacrifice when he does not pursue a quarrel. Again, the poor in spirit considers himself indulgent when he permits himself something extra due to necessity; the patient man thinks himself hot-tempered when he takes cognizance of an injury; the temperate man believes himself guilty of gluttony when he spends some days without fasting. And so it goes on, because the disposition of our hearts is almost continually the rule of our judgments.

Thus, when we feel ourselves strongly drawn towards temporal possessions, we admire the poverty of St. Francis, whereas those who have tasted the spiritual sweetness of poverty are astonished that he did not extend it further. While we are in love with riches, we
look upon poverty as a misery, but when we are full of the divine love we find in poverty inestimable treasures.

There are in the Church two sorts of poor. The first, who possess an abundance of earthly wealth, have not their hearts in it; the others renounce it for ever so that they may serve God with greater freedom. That religious might not be puffed up on account of their poverty, and that the rich of the world might find no excuse for using their riches badly, God has permitted that perfect men should be found among the first sort. Thus Abraham was a perfect model of obedience amidst grandeur; Susanna a rare example of chastity in marriage; and Job’s heart was poor and unworlidy in the midst of his riches.

Prodigality and avarice are the two dangers which the rich, who aspire to poverty in spirit, have to fear. Of the two, avarice is the more odious, for the prodigal man does good to many, but the avaricious man does it to none, not even to himself. The one loves to give, the other to receive, and our Saviour has said that *it is more blessed to give than to receive.*—(Acts xx, 35.) The prodigal man is less attached to earthly wealth, and if he has other vices, the avaricious man is not free from them either, or at least does not avoid them from love of virtue but for fear of expense. The prodigal man is less remote from the Kingdom of God and he may be cured by being deprived of that which enables him to live as he does; but the appetite of the avaricious man is insatiable, and his attachment to worldly goods presents an almost insurmountable obstacle to his conversion. The prodigal son, chastened by his disgrace, returns to his father, but the avaricious rich man, insensitive to the miseries of Lazarus, is buried in Hell.

Those who have renounced the riches of this world by embracing the religious life ought to remember that the poor Jesus is their treasure, and that in His poverty consist all their riches. To those who have thus offered up all without reserve in the sincerity of their hearts, Jesus is that mysterious book written within and without (Apoc. v, 1) wherein they read this excellent truth; but He is a book shut and sealed with seven seals which can neither be opened nor read by those whose sacrifice is imperfect and who commit theft upon the offering. Hence it is that these are often in as much trouble about the loss or refusal of a trifle as an avaricious person would be at the loss of his treasure. Unless the religious be sincerely devout, he cannot be truly poor in spirit. It is prayer which detaches him from the earth and purifies his love. Although he may satisfy his conscience by avoiding all possessions, he will never attain to evangelical poverty, nor savour the sweetness of it, except he lives in the constant recollection of the presence of God.

The truly poor in spirit build in gold, silver and precious stones, according to the words of the Apostle (I Cor. iii, 12), while others build houses of nothing but wood, hay and stubble. Both classes may be saved, but the latter will be like those rescued from a great conflagration who have to pass through the midst of flames: for fire shall try all our works, and whatever is earthly in them must necessarily be consumed either by the fire of the love of God or by that of His justice. The figure of this world passes away (I Cor. vii., 31): happy the man who adheres to what is solid and places his heart wherein lies his true treasure.
CONTEMPLATION

O treasure of celestial riches! O abundant source of all blessing! O infinite happiness of souls desiring thee! O Jesus, my God, my Lord, my King, my only good, and all my greatness! Let my heart be sensible, and my spirit know, by means of the divine light, the designs of that eternal love. Grant, O Lord! that I may love what Thou givest me the knowledge of, and that my will being perfectly conformable to Thine, I may live in Thee and Thou in me. Immortal thanks be given Thee, because Thou vouchsaferst to be my riches and felicity. I possess all in Thee, and I possess it securely; for Thou art so high that evil cannot reach Thee; so powerful, that nothing can be wanting to Thee; and so rich, that no misery can be found where Thou art. Thou possess a thousand times more riches than I can know; Thou promisest me more of them than I can desire; and Thy goodness is infinitely above all that I can comprehend.

Thou possess in such a manner everything that can render me happy, that I find nothing but misery away from Thee; and since Thou art pleased it should be so, O my God! how can I desire it should be otherwise? I accept, O Lord! of this incomparable mercy; teach me to desire, love, and preserve it. Separate my heart from the earth; take from my senses the relish of everything that brings me not to Thee; deliver my mind from those vanities which amuse it; fill Thou alone that space which Thou hast made only for Thyself, that Thou mayst be in me what Thou desirst to be; and that I may sigh after and embrace none but Thee, who art all my happiness: but a happiness which is wholly mine, great and certain.

Undoubtedly it is to bring me to this disengagement, that Thou wouldst not possess anything in this world. Thy design was that in beholding Thee I should see nothing but Thee alone, to whom I owe all that I am, and who alone deservest all my love. There is nothing in Heaven or on earth but what is Thine: everything is governed and directed therein by Thy orders; this is a demesne which Thou canst not alienate. Although Thou hadst employed, during Thy mortal life, all creatures in paying Thee service, Thou wouldst not have been more powerful thereby; and such an example could have inspired me with nothing but the desire of earthly goods. Thou wouldst not make use of them, though they were Thy own, out of regard for my blindness and weakness. Thou wast born poor, lived poor, and died poor; and Thou hadst not so much as either where to lay Thy head whilst alive, or wherewith to be buried after death. If Thou hadst not whereof to eat, and suffered hunger, if anything was given Thee, Thou returned thanks for it as the poor do; and if it was refused Thee, Thou murmured not. On Calvary they stripped Thee of Thy clothes, which were the booty of those who crucified Thee; on the Cross Thou wast deprived of the small comforts Thou hadst need of in the excess of Thy pains, and Thou died thereon entirely resigned and forsaken.

O Jesus, poor and abandoned! is it possible that Thou art in want of all things, and every thing is Thine; but also dost Thou not want all things that I might find nothing in Thee but Thyself?

Have mercy on me, O Lord! and grant to Thy poor creature the grace of possessing Thee alone, and giving himself wholly to Thee. But alas! wretch that I am, I let Thee go, seek what Thou fliest, submit myself to what
Thou disdainst, and run after the meanest things with an insatiate hunger; and I am blind enough to think that I can find therein sufficient to satiate myself away from Thee. What profit can I receive from the conveniences of the body, which Thou hast rejected; the favour of men, which Thou hast despised; the temporal goods, which Thou hast renounced, and the pleasures of the world, which Thou hast deprived Thyself of?

What hinders me from loving and esteeming Thee as I ought, O divine Jesus! is the placing of my love and esteem on everything Thou hast judged unworthy of Thine. But Thou art not surrounded by any of those things which I love, how then shall I find Thee in them?

Thou seest, O Lord! that what I possess on earth affectionately, or earnestly wish for, takes up my whole mind, carries away all my thoughts, and destroys my peace. Whilst I am infatuated therewith, I forget Thee, and am no longer able to pray, or adore Thee in spirit and truth; I think no more of my obligation of loving Thee; I reject the graces which Thou offerest me; and, what I cannot confess before Thee, O my God! without an extreme confusion, if I have any weak desire to fly to Thee, I find myself so oppressed with misery, that I have not the strength to lift up my eyes to Heaven. I am tied down by a very trifle, a childish amusement, or a passing fancy. The least pleasure draws me away, although it has no solidity; and I find nothing in it but my mortal poison, and such things as Satan makes use of for withdrawing me from Thee. But the height of my misery is that I do not as much as perceive the state I am in, nor am sensible of the temptations and dangers whereto I expose myself, till I have fallen over the precipice. Thou knowest my miseries, O Lord! and Thou alone canst remedy them.

O divine light! O Thou only treasure of my soul! hearken to it, O Lord! and answer it interiorly. Speak to me, O eternal word! and grant that I may desire nothing but what Thou wouldst have me ask of Thee. But since poverty is so dear to Thee, and Thou wilt love nothing earthly, wilt Thou not also reject the weak desires of this heart, which has been so long attached to the earth? My heart, wholly blind as it is, answers me, Thou wilt not; and it would not give me this answer, if Thou didst not inspire it therewith. Yes, O my Saviour! it is to be alone with me that Thou hast divested Thyself of everything else; and Thou wilt be poor, only that my heart may take the place with Thee of everything Thou forsakest. Thou desirest to find in me Thy food, clothing, and repose; and I alone am sufficient for Thee.

It is true, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter into my soul; but since my unworthiness has not hindered Thee from calling me, it ought not to hinder me from following Thee: and when Thou saidst, that if I be lifted up from the earth I will draw all things to myself (John xii, 32) Thou didst not exclude me. Remember, O Lord! that Thou didst not despise any sort of poor; Thou wast born of a poor mother, in a poor place; Thou drewest to Thy manger poor and simple shepherds: choose poor and ignorant disciples; called to Thyself poor sinners; lived among sinners; and died between two sinners. There is no poverty but what Thou hast loved, either to practice, heal, or enrich it. Thus I shall not be excluded; I am poor enough to come to Thee, O divine Jesus! and I have a lawful title to enter into Thy
society; receive me, therefore, O Lord! into the number of Thine; Thou wilt find in me whereon to bestow Thy riches and exercise Thy mercies.

When I see Thee so poor, I know not what my heart feels; but I cannot separate myself from Thee. There is a greatness and charm in Thy poverty, where-with my soul is overjoyed; I adore it as much as I can; grant, O my God! that I may love it as much as I ought. All those things whereof Thou deprive Thyself on earth, serve only to impoverish those who possess them affectionately: and Thou heaviest true riches upon those who despise them, and givest them a most solid consolation.

When will the happy moment come, O my God and my all! when, far from all worldly joys, content with Thee alone, and plunged in the ocean of Thy riches, I shall say to Thee, in a transport of love and gratitude, O my father, my treasure, my repose, and my happiness! It is true, O Lord! that Thou art always so; but I feel it only when Thou pleasest: that is, when Thou touchest my soul interiorly: dispellest its darkness by a ray of Thy light: consumest in it what is mean and earthly by the fire of Thy charity: and re-unitest in Thyself alone the multiplicity of its desires. How different is my heart from itself when, full of Thy gratitude and love, it cries out, my God, my riches, my strength and delight! It enjoys Thee, then, as a blessing that is its own, and everything else is nothing to it. Begone from me earth, world, and riches; let me embrace Jesus, poor, abject, and despised, O my Jesus! O my love! O my life! O my all!

In thee, O divine Jesus! have I hoped, let me not be confounded for ever (Ps. xxx, 1). All my fears vanish at Thy sight. I shall never be ashamed nor repent of having loved Thee, believed Thee, and left all things to follow Thee. Although all creatures should rise up against me, my heart shall not fear, because Thou art my defence. Armed with Thy poverty, I shall be invulnerable against the designs of my enemies; and they shall not know on what side to attack me.

When Thou commandest me to follow Thee, and to renounce everything for Thy love, Thou knowest my weakness; wherefore, Thou engagest Thyself at the same time to become my strength, and to have regard, not to the merit of my works, but to the greatness of Thy mercy.

I cast myself therefore, O my Lord and my God! with my miseries, weakness, and sins, and the good desires Thou inspirsest me with, into Thy paternal arms; I commend my spirit into thy hands, which made it after Thy own image; reform it by Thy wisdom and truth; grant I may discover their secrets, love their conduct, and execute their designs. May that hand, without which I can do nothing, not refuse me its help, that being poor in heart, and cut off from everything that separates me from Thee, I may esteem those spiritual riches which are to be found in Thy poverty, as I ought.

O most pure Mother of God! imitatrix of Jesus's poverty, and dispensatrix of His riches; you are not so the mother of the poor, but you may be also that of sinners; obtain for me that poverty of spirit which filled you with so many heavenly riches. Amen.
His Austerity of Life

Voluntary poverty is mostly accompanied by corporal austerity. The saints who have been poor in spirit, and those who have been so in spirit and body, by renouncing worldly riches for the love of God, have joined to that renunciation an austere and penitent life. They have done so, each one in his own way and according to his own strength, that they might subject the flesh to the spirit and practise that holy hatred of their bodies which Christ so much recommended to us. While He lived on earth He provided us with great examples of this virtue, and though He was not obliged like us to mortify His body, which was always subject to the spirit, yet because He came on earth, not only to be our remedy but also our model, He was pleased, without considering whether they were consistent with the dignity of His Person, to show us in Himself the form of all virtues, and especially those most necessary for us. For, having undertaken to make reparation for our sins, and as in His Passion He did not avoid any of the torments which were inflicted on Him, so during His life He omitted none of those painful works which could mortify His humanity.

The Saviour of our souls recognised how necessary penance was for us, and because interior penance, which consists in sorrow for sins committed, was incompatible with His infinite purity, He embraced exterior penance, which is nothing else than an austere and laborious life. He recommended this life to us and, to render it more profitable, he consecrated it in His own person.

There have been many saints who seemed more austere than Jesus Christ. St. John the Baptist had neither ordinary food nor clothing, and this austerity won for him the admiration of the multitude which always judges the merit of virtue by its outward form; thus were the Pharisees scandalised by seeing our Saviour eat with sinners. Yet all the austerity of the saints, though it might seem to be greater, was much less perfect than His, for they were performing only the lowest form of penance, which was to labour for the cure of their wounds, to stop the disorders of corrupt nature, and to repress its appetites. But Christ’s austerity gave a value and efficacy to that of the saints, and merited for the penitent those great graces which make them such acceptable victims to God. The aim of the saints in their practice of penance is to destroy in themselves that which vitiates the purity of divine love, but our Saviour’s penance was the effect of His love and proceeded from an infinite charity. Thus the practice of penance ought to have been more rigorous in the saints, who were sinful men, but more exemplary and imitative in Christ who was to be a model whom the weakest of us could follow.

Christ showed Himself superior to men only in those things in which He would not be imitated, such as the power of working miracles, the authority of His word, and the sublimity of His doctrine. In what He required or advised us to imitate Him—the daily round of living—there were no extremes which might have the effect of discouraging us. Here all was steadiness and faithfulness to serve as a corrective to the giddiness and thoughtlessness of our nature. He wore a woollen garment, ate the common fare, often contenting Himself with water
and barley bread, and if He partook of a richer fare when He was invited out to dine, He resumed His rigorous regimen immediately afterwards. To that severe life He added great labours, journeys, watchings, long prayers night and day, continual fastings, and many other austerities which are not set down in writing.

Since all men have not the same strength, the same needs nor live in the same circumstances, it is not easy to show in general how and to what degree we ought to imitate Christ in His austerity. For the moment we will content ourselves with saying that, on the one hand, we must avoid excess, and, on the other hand, we must not neglect the virtue.

The chief part of penance is an interior sorrow and detestation for the sins we have committed. In this we can never practise excess because sorrow increases in the soul in proportion to the light and love which God infuses into it; and in this life we can neither know the whole deformity of sin nor return God a love adequate to His goodness. Although He graciously deigns to be content that we should weep for our sins, according to the measure He gives us of His light and grace, we ought at least to endeavour to obtain that sorrow by exercises of piety, the practice of good works, and by every means in our power. When we neglect those means, we are always in grave danger of losing our souls.

The person who will not draw from his knowledge of his sin the lesson of how to avoid the occasions of it, who does not confess it sincerely, who dissembles, softens and disguises it, who does not resolve to correct and punish himself for it, and to mortify those inclinations which lead him into the commission of it, vainly flatters himself that he is truly penitent. All these things show a lingering affection for the sin and very little sorrow for having committed it. Yet these reactions to sin and sorrow for it are all too common, especially among young people who seldom detest sin heartily, do little about avoiding the occasions of it, and do not hate in themselves those propensities which corrupt nature.

The mark of sincere penitence, according to St. Jerome (I, 4, Ep. ad paenit), is to hate the sin in proportion to the love we have borne it; according to St. Ambrose (I, 2 de paenit, c. 4), to suffer willingly, in detestation of our past life, all manner of injuries in order to repair those we have done to God; and, according to Thaulerus, by an entire resignation to the divine justice, to be no more desirous of the pardon than the punishment it entails. In this last attitude consists the perfection of interior penance. Because it is not common, holy scripture admonishes us that we should of the sins forgiven be not without fear.—(Ecclus. v, 5.) This admonition is given not because God will call us to account for sins once remitted, but lest the assurance of forgiveness should make us sin the more easily. Besides, without a special revelation, we cannot know for certain whether our sins have been pardoned; we must merely rely on our own belief that we have used all the means prescribed by God for obtaining His mercy, but here again we cannot be sure that we have used all these means to the utmost of our ability.

So we ought always to weep for sins once committed and to be continually on our guard and in fear of committing new ones. Since after penance we can still feel ourselves inclined to evil, we may humbly fear lest our detestation of sin has not been sufficient to enable us to pluck up the deep roots it has struck in our souls.
Therefore, the saints teach us that penance ought to continue till death, that sin is a great evil, that we ought not to believe that we can expiate it by any sorrow which extends over a shorter period than our lifetime, and that God, when He pardons sin, does not dispense us from the obligation of weeping for it. Though the saints make satisfaction for their sins, they never satisfy their sorrow; they weep for sin, they detest it, fly from it, and continually fear it. Others, on the contrary, quickly lose the memory of their sin. The less they feel its weight, the more easily they are persuaded that they have obtained pardon for it, and in that belief they live in a state of false tranquillity.

Let them consider what Christ did, what He suffered, what our salvation cost Him, and they may judge whether they have not more reason for fear than for assurance. Let them consider in that divine Model the three signs of true penitence, which we have mentioned, and they will find that the most abandoned sinner never enjoyed as much pleasure in his sin as Jesus Christ suffered pain in making reparation for it. They will find that our Saviour endured more in reproaches than the most ambitious man desired glory in the world; that *having joy proposed unto him*, according to the testimony of the Apostle (Heb. xii, 2), *he underwent the cross*; and that not content with obtaining for us a complete pardon, He was pleased to endure pains capable of equalling and surpassing the greatness of our offences. He well knew the inconstancy and badness of our hearts, and in order to make His labours profitable for us, He included the virtue of them in the sacraments and sanctified our painful works by His own, so that, while being continually beset by our sinful inclinations, we might also have ever-present means for helping us to resist them. Thus a man who knew perfectly what sin is would not cease to weep for his own and those of others and to bewail the dangers that surround us of relapsing into them every moment.

From the foregoing we must draw two truths: The first, that God is always ready to pardon us, when we return to Him with a sincere regret for having offended Him. The second, that the love which we owe Him ought always to preserve in us a sense of sorrow for, and remembrance of, our sins so that we may commit them no more in the future.

All Christians ought to imitate the exterior penance and austere life of Christ, but with a discretion suited to each one’s strength, condition and state. In this matter the following rules may be observed:

1. We should have respect for the necessities of the body but not for its appetites. As it is impossible to prescribe a rule that will hold good for all persons, each one must apply himself to finding out just what his body needs having regard to the circumstances in which he finds himself—environment, employment, health and so forth. But it may be said in general that a religious deceives himself when, under the pretext of necessity, he procure for himself choice and superfluous things to the prejudice of poverty, temperance, mortification, recollection, freedom of mind, and even charity towards his brethren, one of whom may often want necessaries while the other enjoys superfluities. And the worldly man who follows nothing in this matter but the inclinations of corrupt nature, and who regards everything he earnestly desires as a necessity, falls into an infinite
number of disorders. Thus the surest guide for both religious and laity is to consult a prudent, virtuous and experienced confessor and to abide by his directions.

2. We must be extremely cautious in allowing nature anything which it seeks abnormally. In this respect we must study all its vicious inclinations because these are the source of all excess.

3. Everyone ought to be attentive to his spiritual advancement, always believing that he does less than it lies in his power to do, and that he deceives himself when he imagines that he does more than he ought. If he bears this in mind he will use with more fear, and less freedom, even those things which are necessary.

4. Practise especially that kind of austerity which attacks the vice to which you are most inclined and into which you fall most frequently. All remedies are not equally good for all sorts of evils. An unbridled tongue is cured better by silence than by fasting; impurity, by a guard over the senses and fixing our attention on God, than by silence. Those who do not observe this rule are often very austere without becoming any the better for it.

5. Penance which takes the form of fastings, watchings, haircloth, disciplines, a hard bed and mean clothes is always beneficial when it is imposed upon us by the precept of the Church, the rules of our state in life, or the counsel of a wise director. It is hurtful when it hinders us from discharging our obligations and blameworthy when it proceeds from self-will. The better it subjects the flesh to the spirit the more commendable it is, provided, however, that we do not neglect the other more important mortifications.

6. The safest and most necessary form of austerity is that which concentrates upon disciplining the senses and the passions, the tongue and conversation; which cuts out idleness and all occasions of sinning, and mortifies self-will, obstinacy in our own opinions, and the vain esteem of ourselves. It has the advantage over the exterior form of penance that it can be practised without danger, that it is difficult to run to excess in it, that carnal man fears it much more than the other form, that he is always conscious of it and never can accustom himself to it.

7. But the form of penance which is the most severe of all, according to the testimony of the saints and those experienced in the spiritual life, is interior recollection and continual prayer. Those who apply themselves to that form of penance would agree with that opinion, and there are very few who, were they to listen to the dictates of nature, would not willingly employ in the most painful corporal labour the time they spend in prayer. This is because this form of penance forbids that freedom of thinking which is so natural to man; it represses his appetites, restrains his emotions, binds his will, and requires that his mind be closed to anything which might distract it or trouble the repose of his heart. In short, the whole man must become captive, and cannot move towards what he loves nor enjoy what he desires. Though by long practice one arrives at a state of life which is quiet, content, and full of those holy sweetenrnesses which proceed from divine love; though everything should then be in order and the body in subjection to the spirit, it can often happen that the body has become so weakened in the process that it stands in need of some easement of its condition, yet great reserve must be observed in granting that easement. This is lest the refreshment of the body might weaken that sense...
of the continual awareness of death and prejudice the
union of the soul with God.

The best advice that can be given to persons whose
health or the nature of their state or employment renders
less capable of bearing corporal austerities, is to apply
themselves faithfully to the exercise of prayer in which
they may excellently practise the virtue of penance.

From reading the lives of the saints many are moved
with the desire to serve God and to labour for their
salvation, but they are discouraged by what is recorded
of the penances to which these mortified souls subjected
themselves. Let them know that this discouragement is a
snare set for them by the Devil who hopes to retain
them in a state of tepidness; that God does not require
them to imitate the austerity of the saints but to follow
their spirit; and that if they do that God will then en-
lighten them as to the means most proper for them to
use in order to expiate their sins and to destroy in them
whatever is opposed to the perfection of divine love. In
the meantime, let them bless God in His saints, whose
penances they admire, humbling themselves and urging
themselves to do whatever lies in their power. And let
them not forget that in Heaven there are many mansions
and stars of different magnitude.

CONTEMPLATION

O Lord! the hope and desire of Thy servants, the
physician and remedy of all my evils! behold me here
before the eyes of Thy mercy, covered with an infinity of
wounds, which Thou seest much better than I do my-
self. I know the sin which occasions me them, the
punishment I deserve, and the injury I have done Thee;
but Thou alone knowest the enormity thereof, as Thou
art its only remedy. I neither can nor will conceal myself
from Thy justice; I heartily submit myself to every
stroke of that paternal hand; and however ungrateful I
am for the blessings I have received from thence, I still
expect the chastisement and cure thereof. I disclose my
evils to Thee, O charitable physician! grant that I may
know their greatness, that I may understand them, weep
for them, and extinguish by my tears the fire of Thy
wrath, I know that I cannot present Thee with anything
but what Thou mayst justly reject; that I bear my
condemnation written upon my interior and exterior
senses, and in the actions of my life; and that no man
living shall be justified in thy sight.—(Ps. cxliv, 2.) These
eyes which I ought to elevate to Thee, O my God! are
witnesses of the evil they have made me commit against
Thee; this tongue, which begs Thy pardon, is convicted
of having spoken a thousand times against Thy will;
these ears which hear Thy word, are full of all the vani-
ties they have heard against Thy law; and this whole
body is marked with the characters of sin wherein it has
been the instrument.

Thou knowest, O Lord! that I cannot even know
the evils which draw Thy wrath upon me. How then
can I satisfy Thee? and what can I offer Thee when I
appear before Thee? I deserve nothing, O my God! but
the chastisement and just condemnation which Thou wilt
pronounce against me, if Thou lookest not upon me
with the eyes of Thy mercy. Thou hast borne with the
wanderings of my youth, and the disorders of my life,
with a paternal goodness.

I am that miserable sinner whom Thou hast so long
awaited, though Thou wast neither ignorant of my evils, nor of the blindness which hindered me from knowing them. Alas! I know them not yet. What shall I do then, O my God? For Thou forbiddest me to despair, though I find in myself no ground of hope. O charitable shepherd of strayed sheep! who hast not been pleased that I should find without Thee any remedy for the evils I have committed against Thee, who hast given me Thy merits to make me hope in Thy mercy, and hast Thyself taught me to return to Thee by penance; open my eyes, that I may know and detest everything in me that has displeased Thee.

Immortal thanks be given to Thee, O divine shepherd of our souls! for the mercies which have induced Thee to take my sins upon Thyself, I adore that infinite charity which made Thee embrace so many labours for comforting me.

Give me, O Lord! the gratitude I ought to have for all Thy bounties. In those long nights which Thou spendest in prayer, for obtaining for me the blessings of Heaven, those criminal nights wherein I was to offend Thee were present to Thy mind; in suffering hunger and thirst, Thou thoughtest on my intemperances; in Thy labours, Thou foresawest my sloth; and when Thou didst shed tears of affection over me, Thou knewest the whole obstinacy of my heart: full of that eternal love, which delivered Thee unto death for me Thou sawest me void of love for Thee; amidst the austerities of Thy life, Thou beheldest the licentiousness and effeminacy of mine; in the prevision of Thy infinite wisdom I was already running to my ruin, whilst Thou was employed about my salvation. I fled from Thee, when Thou endeavoured to allure me by the charms of Thy love.

I then took pleasure in sin for which Thou wast resolved to suffer, and was taken up with indulging my body, whilst Thou wouldst afflict thine. As a merciful father who wills not the death of a sinner, but his conversion and life, Thou laboured in saving me, and I thought of nothing but what might ruin me. Ah, my God! behold here the sinner for whom Thou hast suffered so much, the same who was then present to Thy eternal knowledge, and is always poor, miserable and faithless. I cast myself at Thy feet such as I am, but with me I bring the merit of Thy sufferings, and the promise of Thy mercies. I offer thee Thy fastings, watchings, prayers and austerities. Regard the evils which Thou hast endured, and pardon me those I have committed. If Thou wilt not that the sinner be condemned, because he is the work of Thy hands, and because Thou lovest everything Thou hast made, how canst Thou suffer me to lose the fruit of so many labours, and that Thy merits should be unprofitable to me?

Thou hast seen so much malice and enormity in my sins, that Thou thoughtest Thyself unable to blot them out but by Thy blood; Thou judgest Thy sufferings necessary for remedying so great an evil; and Thou hadst no repose, till I was fully healed. And I, who am the author of my own evil, and bear it within myself, I eat, sleep, and live in tranquility with my enemy; I regard him as the companion, and often even as the sweetness of my life. Commiserate my blindness, O divine goodness! and since Thou didst penance so many years for expiating my sins, I conjure Thee, by that same penance, to communicate the fruits of it to my soul—that is, a perfect knowledge of my crimes, and a sincere sorrow for having committed them.
I know not how to ask what I desire, nor even know what I ought to desire. If I were illuminated with Thy light, O my God! however long my life were, I would spend it all entirely in weeping, though I had committed but one sin only; and I am unconcerned after having committed so great a number of them. But since I neither know how to desire, nor how to ask Thee for what is proper for me, O God of mercy! do Thou ask that spirit which conducted Thee during Thy mortal life, why it made Thee fast, watch, and suffer so much for my sins? and according to the answer it makes Thee, give me what I know not how to ask Thee for. Cast Thy eyes upon Thy own sufferings, O Lord! and grant me by them what they have merited for me.

Apply to Thy service, O Lord! my senses and whole body. Thou knowest that this earthly body opposes my happiness, and often stifles the holy seeds which Thou sowest in my soul; give me strength and courage to resist this enemy; teach me to discover its artifices, and the malice of its excuses; for what can I do without Thy help, against so formidable an adversary? Thou hast given me it for the companion of my pilgrimage, with the obligation of nourishing it, lest it should faint; and of chastising it, that it may be subject: how ill do I observe that so necessary a medium! for I am much more inclined to flatter my body, than to correct it; and this gives it the boldness to rise up against me.

Thou knowest, O Lord! the innumerable sins which the irregular love of my body has occasioned me to commit; allow me to confess them also before Thee in the bitterness of my soul, in running over all the years of my life.

[One may accuse oneself here of one's particular sins and afterwards say the following prayer.]

O charitable Physician! fortify my weakness, that I may be able to resist my corrupt inclinations. Thou seest the deep roots they have taken in my heart, and the fruits of death they produce therein. Pluck up these fatal roots, even to the smallest fibres; teach me how Thou wouldst have me to serve Thee, and give me the will and strength to execute what Thou shalt teach me. Grant me grace to love what afflicts me, and to be pleased in tribulation; since I find therein the means of making satisfaction for my crimes. Grant that I detest them with as much sorrow as I have had pleasure in committing them; and that I may have as much love for penance, as I have had for sin. But Thou knowest better than I, O my God! what is proper for me: I resign myself to Thee: pardon me what Thou pleasest, and punish me as much as Thou wilt. I only beg of Thee the grace to desire nothing but what Thou wilt do. Smite, burn, cut, and spare me not in time that Thou mayst spare me in eternity.

O Jesus, my salvation and life! Thou canst put an end to my evils. Thou desirest no less the friendship and love of converted sinners, than of souls that have always been innocent. When Magdalen the sinner had cast herself at Thy feet, and bathed them with her tears, Thou didst regard her as one of Thy faithful lovers, and she was soon allowed to pour out her perfumes upon Thy head. Paul Thy persecutor had no sooner expressed his readiness to obey Thee than Heaven became his school, and Thou didst vouchsafe to instruct him Thyself. Raise up my dejected spirit also, O thou life of my
soul! I embrace Thy sacred feet; I desire to love Thee, O divine Jesus! I desire to love Thee, serve Thee, and be wholly Thine. Let my crimes be absorbed in the abyss of Thy mercies, and may the very remembrance of them be lost.

O Mother of God and refuge of sinners, faithful companion of the labours of your only Son, the only one among pure creatures, exempt from all sin! have pity on this miserable sinner; obtain for him the pardon of his sins, and the grace of serving your Son faithfully. Amen.

XIII

His Hunger and Thirst After Justice

Jesus Christ has numbered hunger and thirst after justice among those great evangelical virtues which lead us securely to happiness. By the word justice we must understand the sanctity of Christian virtues and the observation of the divine law, which justify us, remove us from sin, and convert us to God; which enlighten and purify us, and dispose us to the perfection of His love and to the reception of His gifts. This hunger and thirst after justice, which is nothing else than a fervent desire for sanctity, is so precious in the sight of God that He thought Himself obliged to reward it with the greatest of all blessings—the perfect accomplishment of all our desires. Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice, for they shall be filled.—(Matt. v, 6), that is to say, for they shall enjoy that happy state in which God is loved and served without imperfection, for this is what the just desire above all things.

Now this hunger after justice works in two ways: one relating to our own sanctification and the other, to the sanctification of our neighbour. In the first place we desire to see ourselves freed from the love of the world and of ourselves, that we may no longer love any person or thing save God alone; in the second place we wish to see God known, loved and served by all men. The recompense for those who hunger for their own sanctification is that meat with which Jesus Christ was fed when He said: My food is, that I do the will of him that sent
me.—(John iv, 34.) For these souls submit themselves in all things to the divine Will and enjoy God in the exercises proper to their station until they possess Him fully in eternity. As to hunger for the perfection of our neighbour, this seldom finds a recompense except in the next world, because in this world one meets with nothing but lukewarmness and disorder. And the saints will not be satisfied till there be no more vice to root out, nor tepidity to warm, nor anything to be desired for their neighbour but his eternal happiness. As he cannot gain that here on earth the saints can know no satisfaction here.

There is no virtue which is of more unremitting concern to the servants of God than this thirst for the salvation of their neighbour. As to what concerns their own particular perfection, they are employed in rooting out of their hearts all earthly love, in resisting the inclinations of corrupt nature, in overcoming themselves and mortifying their flesh. In regard to the salvation of their neighbour, when they have once begun to love God with their whole heart, the divine light increases in them and makes them know how much God deserves to be loved. Then they become acutely sensible of the misery of those who live in sin, are oppressed with a continual desire to see all men subject to the law of God, and are filled with no less sorrow for the straying of others than for that which they themselves formerly did.

But because this twofold hunger devours the saints in this life, God has promised, as a reward, to fill them in the next. This observation is made by St. Augustine (Serm. Dom. in Mont.) who, making the Beatitudes of the Gospel correspond to the gifts of the Holy Ghost, adds that “hunger after justice is nothing other than the gift of fortitude, because we need a great deal of it to root out of our hearts the love of the earth; and he, who is touched with the divine love, has need of a powerful help of the Holy Ghost for supporting the grief which the ruin of his brethren occasions him, and for undertaking all the labours necessary to their conversion, without fearing either contradictions, affronts or death itself.” Thus is this virtue the source of so many heroic actions which the saints have performed for the glory of God and the salvation of their neighbour.

Christ suffered in the fullest measure all the painful solicitude which this virtue can produce, because of the ardent and continual thirst which burned in Him to see all men obey the divine law, practise virtue, avoid sin, allow themselves to be guided by the motions of the spirit of God, increase in His knowledge and love, and emulate the measure of love which He had for His Father. And because He regarded our evils as His own, He felt as acutely our deprivation of so many blessings as if He had been deprived of them Himself.

This sensitiveness to our evils continued throughout His life on earth. St. Paul (II Cor. xi, 28, etc.) who had but a spark of that immense fire which burned within our Saviour, said that the care of all the churches devoured him; that he was consumed interiorly by the scandals he beheld; that he was no longer his own but that the charity of Jesus Christ urged him to become all things to all men; that he esteemed himself happy in suffering for the elect; that though Jesus Christ was his life, and death his happiness, he knew not which he should love best if he had his choice, whether to be dissolved and be with Christ or to remain in the flesh for the saving of souls; that he loved Jesus Christ so much
as to defy all creatures to separate him from that love; and yet that the Holy Ghost was his witness, that the obstinacy of the Jews penetrated him with such great sadness and continual sorrow of heart that he wished to be an anathema from Christ for the love of his brethren. (Rom. ix. 2, 3.)

If such were the sentiments of the Apostles, what must have been those of Christ whom an eternal love had brought upon earth for the salvation of men? Of Christ, who lived the space of thirty-three years in a continual hunger and thirst after our justice, to whom were present all the sins committed and to be committed from the beginning to the end of the world, who, by His divine wisdom, distinguished their number and weighed their enormity, and who wept for them in proportion to His love and to the extreme desire He had to deliver us from them?

It may be said that this knowledge caused Him so much sorrow and bitterness of heart that He suffered as many deaths as He beheld sins and as He desired to save souls; for He preferred their salvation to His own life and offences against God were more severe to Him than the Cross. He offered His blood for every one of us in particular, and His greatest grief was to foresee that His death would be of profit to so few.

After having so grievously offended God, it is our duty to consider what we owe to this divine Saviour who wept so bitterly for the sins we daily commit so easily and thoughtlessly. Of our own knowledge we cannot be convinced of the greatness of our obligation; only pure love can make us comprehend it.

We know with what care and affection parents bring up their children, and how greatly upset they are when they see them give themselves to vanity, passion and bad company, and despise the advice of those who love them. God often reproaches us in the same manner by His prophets. He complains that His children bestow the love they owe Him on things which are injurious to them, that they forsake Him, offend Him, even make Him subservient to their sins, and He has the more justice in His complaints as His love for us is much greater than that of any mother for her children.

What a subject of shame it should be to us to see, on the one hand, Christ's anguish for our salvation and, on the other, our indifference to our true happiness, and the blind passion which makes us run after perishable things and love them more than God.

There is no greater mark of reprobation than to lose entirely the relish for heavenly things. For God has ordained that all the faculties of our body and soul should relish such things as are proper for them, so that they may desire them more earnestly, receive them with more pleasure, and enjoy them with more profit. Hence it is that *the eye is not filled with seeing, neither is the ear filled with hearing* (Eccles. i. 8); hence it is that hunger and thirst render food and drink more agreeable to us. It is the same with the other senses, and when any of them neither desires nor relishes what is proper for it, then one may affirm that it is either diseased or destroyed.

Thus when the soul, which eternal things alone can satisfy, wholly taken up with earthly affections, happens to lose the relish for heavenly truths, when it is unconscious of them, indifferent to them, and has for them a feeling of disgust and aversion, it is in evident danger of eternal ruin. This evil, which the saints call insensi-
bility, is that of which God complains by the mouth of His prophet when He says (Jer. v. 3) that He has stricken them and they were not sorry; he has broken them and they refused to receive discipline; they have hardened their faces more than the rock, and they would not return: that men like furies run into their own misfortunes without fear; lose God without disquiet; spend their time in forgetfulness of eternity; and fall in a moment into Hell.

To such persons, if they are to entertain an expectation that God, moved by their parlous condition, will deign to draw them from it by the light of His truth and the warmth of His love, I would give the following advice:

Firstly, let them praise and approve of virtue wherever they encounter it, although they have not yet resolved to follow it. Let them show favour to virtuous persons and let them, if they are remote from sanctity, at least not persecute it, which would be partaking in this life of the malice of devils. Then God, perceiving them approve in others that which they themselves have not the courage to do, will perhaps have pity on them, as it often happens, and will fortify them with His grace.

Secondly, let them blame and hate the hardness of their own hearts, considering how different their conduct is from that of the servants of God; let them humble themselves and acknowledge that truth in His presence. By this means the divine light will not be quite extinguished in them, there will always be some tie to keep them close to God, and they will not live peaceably in sin.

Lastly, let them speak willingly of God with good people whose conversation and example will by degrees soften their obduracy, and if the Lord shows any ray of His light to them, let them read or consider the life of Christ, and their own obligations. This is a most efficacious remedy for drawing a soul out of its state of insensibility, of advancing its desires, and of exciting in it the loss of those treasures which are contained in Jesus Christ. But let those whom the divine goodness inspires with any feeling of love, watch over themselves, and they will soon perceive that God does not cease to urge them inwardly and to make them feel what He requires of them. They ought to make themselves attentive to His voice, and faithful in responding to its promptings, lest a culpable neglect should give entrance to earthly desires and their second state would be much more dangerous and incurable than their first.

Let them remember that under the Old Law God would see no other fire burn upon His altar than that which came from Heaven, and yet He gave it only twice to His people: once in the desert under the government of Moses, and secondly under Nehemias on the return of the Israelites from Babylon. At all other times they took great care to continue that sacred fire and to prevent it being extinguished. The desire of pleasing God, the hunger and thirst after justice, is a heavenly flame which the Holy Ghost kindles in our hearts, but it must be fed by ardent desires, fervent prayers, and holy actions; when these are neglected, the fire is extinguished, and it is very difficult to kindle it again. Nehemias, after pouring upon the victims that thick water into which the first fire had been changed, waited until God should kindle it, and beheld at last the victims miraculously on fire. So when, with humility and perseverance, we offer to God the small remains of our first desires, He suffers
Himself to be moved and by His mercy awakens in us
the fire of His love and the spirit of penance.

Hunger and thirst after justice produce zeal, so neces-
sary to a Christian, but so difficult to practise with that
discretion which ought to accompany it. As the salvation
or ruin of souls often depends on the good or bad use
that is made of zeal, we ought to observe great circum-
spexion in respect of it, because, judged by its outward
appearance, it greatly resembles indignation and anger.
It is very easy, therefore, if we are not upon our guard,
to push it beyond the limits of good humour or reason-
ableness, and to scandalise our neighbour, to whom we
thereby render the instrument of his conversion more
hurtful than profitable.

Zeal proposes for its end the glory of God and the
salvation of souls and it sometimes happens that some
over-fervent persons, strongly believing themselves
obliged to follow some inspiration, do not consider suffi-
ciently the time, place, manner and other circumstances
which the One most zealous for all good observes
always, with so great order and wisdom, in respect of us.
From the disturbance of that harmony which consists in
the union of zeal and prudence there can follow nothing
but tumult and confusion to the prejudice of soul and
the service of God.

The sole idea behind zeal being understood, the
moderation and other qualities which it ought to have
will follow. For, from the standpoint of love, zeal is
nothing other than care in preserving the good we
possess, and of removing everything that might destroy
or change it; and this care arises from the love and
esteem we have for what we love. Thus holy zeal has
its source in the true love of God and in the esteem in

which we hold His glory and the spiritual profit of our
neighbour. Therefore it has the same qualities which
St. Paul gives to charity: Charity is patient, is kind;
charity envieth not, deals not perversely, is not puffed up;
it is not ambitious, it seeks not its own interest, it is not
provoked to anger, it thinks not evil, it rejoices not
upon iniquity, but rejoices with truth; it suffers all
things, believes all things, hopes all things, bears all
things.—(I Cor. xiii, 4.) Behold the description of true
zeal!

The duty of a zealous person, therefore, is first to love
God and his neighbour, and then to seek only the glory
of God and the profit of his neighbour. He ought to
begin to practise his zeal for the service of God by first
destroying in his own heart and conduct everything that
might hinder the fruits of his zeal: he may exercise it
afterwards in respect of his neighbour. To neglect our
own salvation and to labour for that of our neighbour,
to be circumspect in his affairs and foolish in our own,
earnest concerning his faults and unconcerned about our
own, is to have an irregular zeal, which profits little, is
unfavourably taken, and often falls into an excess of
rigorism, because feeling has a greater part in it than
virtue.

Christ gave this rule to the Pharisees when, out of
zeal for the law, they accused the adulterous woman
before Him and would have had her stoned: he that is
without sin among you, let him cast the first stone at
her.—(John viii, 7.) For it is not from a just, discreet
and regular zeal that he who deserves to be stoned
should resolve to stone another. A zealous person ought
not to seek his own glory, otherwise his zeal degenerates
into ambition. He ought to have compassion for the
weaknesses of his neighbour, ought not by too much rigour discourage him who has sinned, nor reject his repentance, nor shun his conversation, nor refuse him the honour which is his due. Rather he ought to help him, spare him, honour him and endeavour to gain him in order to cure him. Let him place himself below the sinner whom he desires to correct, and think himself a greater sinner, lest he should despise him and thereupon his zeal be changed by degrees into disgust and aversion.

Those from whom, by virtue of their office, zeal for souls is demanded, are exposed on that account to certain particular dangers. Though with little or no virtue themselves, they are nevertheless obliged to exhort others to virtue. In this position they have two things to fear. On the one hand, they may act too weakly for fear of drawing upon themselves the reproach of demanding from those, whose models they ought to be, that which they do not practise themselves. On the other hand, they may act with too much severity in order to appear more zealous than they really are. Whatever methods they pursue they will do very little good if their lives are not exemplary. It is most desirable, therefore, that superiors should first submit themselves to the law they impose upon others, for by doing this they will neither be scandalously lax nor hypocritically severe.

But though superiors may not perform what they preach, it ought not to be necessarily concluded that they have not true zeal or that their zeal is unprofitable to those under them, because Christ, who has redeemed with His blood the souls He has entrusted to such superiors, can give to these imperfect men for those souls that which they are unworthy of having for themselves. It is in this confidence that the faithful ought to be perfectly subject to those who have been placed in spiritual authority over them. Both superiors and subjects ought frequently to cast their eyes upon the One most zealous in the pursuit of His Father’s glory and in the salvation of our souls. From Him they will learn the science of perfection. They will see in Him an inexhaustible patience in dealing with the crudeness and ignorance of His disciples; a charming sweetness towards sinners that He might gain them for Himself; an heroic constancy in doing good to those who offended Him—in short, a zeal always full of charity, which made Him take upon Himself all the rigours and hardships that we deserve, while He made all things easy and sweet for us and heaped blessings even on those who were most unworthy of them.

This is the model to follow for those who are employed in the salvation of souls. If one’s zeal is not meek, charitable and disinterested, though one should labour without stint, one will harvest very little fruit.

CONTEMPLATION

O source of all riches! I return Thee a thousand thanks for having made me so poor, since my continual miseries urge me to have recourse to Thee. For what is there in me that desires not Thee, O my God! although my blindness hinders me from knowing my own desires? Thou art the author of all heavenly blessings, because they are included in Thee; and of all earthly ones because Thy divine hand distributes them according to my corporeal necessities. It is from that liberal hand
that my eyes expect the light, without which they would be covered with darkness; it is from it my body begs the air it breathes, the bread it eats, and the water it drinks; health in sickness, the day for labour, and the night for rest; strength to move, success in affairs, and a remedy for all the evils wherewith it is surrounded.

For what shall my soul do, which is so poor of its own nature, and still poorer through its fault? to whom shall it have recourse but to Thee, O my God! Thou bearest with it when it sins, bringest it back when it strays, inspirest it with virtue, and teachest it the truth; Thou givest it the will to desire, strength to accomplish, and constancy to persevere. Thou givest it faith to know Thee; hope to invoke Thee; and charity to love Thee. Without Thee, all its faculties suffer an insatiable hunger, because Thou alone canst satiate them.

O thou only and perfect repose of Thy miserable creature! cast upon me the eyes of Thy mercy: re-establish by love what Thou hast created by love, and what I have destroyed by ingratitude. For Thou hast made me for Thyself alone, and wouldst alone be my true and solid happiness. Thy hands have formed me in such a manner that the interior and exterior man depend equally on Thee, that they need Thy assistance every moment, and that my body and spirit are oppressed with a continual hunger; and the reason is, that when I seek Thee, O my sovereign felicity! I may relish Thee more joyfully, and receive Thy benefits in greater abundance.

Thy mercy, O divine goodness! is better than many lives (Ps. lxii, 4) because all those lives are full of miseries, and lead to death. Extinguish in me this vile and earthly life, which keeps me in a shameful slavery, that being restored to the liberty of Thy children, I may henceforth love nothing but Thee alone. Show Thyself to this blind soul, O pure light! that it may see the filth wherein it is plunged, and begin to desire Thy help. Inspire me with the fear of pleasures which may hurt me, and the dislike of those which I have loved. Give me that interior purity, which shows the value of everything, lest I should lose, through my ignorance, the relish for those spiritual blessings Thou communicatest to them who love Thee.

O divine Jesus! who knowest me so perfectly; Thou art my Saviour, Redeemer, and the remedy of all the evils Thou seest in me, and sufferest with an infinite patience. Look upon the abyss of my miseries, that it may draw down that of Thy mercies. If Thou plungest me into this second abyss, I shall come out pure, changed, and renewed, in order to begin to love Thee with all the tenderness of my heart, and to seek Thee with all the fervour of my desires.

Have mercy on me, be my deliverer, and purify my desires; that I may seek Thee with an ardent hunger, and be filled in finding Thee. From the depths I have cried to Thee, O Lord! Lord hear my voice. Let thy ears be attentive to the voice of my petition.—(Ps. cxxix, 1.) May I seek only Thee, may I find nothing but Thee, and mayst Thou alone be my food and life; may I offer Thee nothing but pure praises in this valley of tears, that my soul, disengaged from earthly affections, may rejoice only in Thee!

Thou canst not refuse me, O Father of mercies! what I beg; for Thou whisperest to my heart that what I beg of Thee, is what Thou art willing to give me. I earnestly entreat Thee to destroy everything in me that opposes
the communication of Thy gifts. I know that I am unworthy of this favour: but grant, O Lord! to Thy love and my desires, what Thou canst not give to my merits. Thou owest me nothing, I deserve nothing; I acknowledge also that I have rendered myself positively unworthy of all Thy favours, by the baseness of those affections which Thou seest and hastest in me. But remember, O charitable Father! that for the space of thirty-three years Thou wast inflamed with the desire of doing me good, of converting me, and of elevating my love and desires unto Thee.

It is thou, O true friend of our souls! that suppliest us with everything we want. When Thou lived with us on earth, and beheld the corruption of our desires, Thou employed the purity of Thine for their remedy. It was for that reason that Thy eyes shed so many tears; that Thy ears were always open to the voice of our necessities; that Thy mouth cried out all the day, and that Thou spentest the night also in sighs before Thy Father for the salvation of all men. It was for that end that Thou lamentest continually over the obduracy of our hearts; and that Thine, always tender and charitable, had no pleasure more ardent than to mollify ours, and to kindle the divine love therein; nor sorrow more acute than to see that sacred fire extinguished in any of us. In short, Thou sufferest that interior hunger and thirst for me, and for everyone in particular, as if Thou hadst had but one single person to save.

I love Thee, O my God; and desire to love Thee daily more and more. Far from me be all other love; for Thou alone deservest to be loved by my whole heart. I know that it is what Thou wouldst have of me: for as Thou hast ordained, that when I merit anything with

Thee, I cannot be worthily recompensed unless Thou Thyself art my recompense; Thou claimest also, and with great justice, to be alone worthy of my love. What, O Lord! dost Thou give Thyself to me, and shall I after that basely deliver myself up to things unworthy of a heart capable of loving Thee! and since Thou elevatest my soul unto Thee, permit it not to fall back again into its ancient unworthiness. I offer Thee all that is in it, and everything that depends on it. I receive Thee as my only happiness; receive me also as a property which Thou hast purchased. Preserve me as Thy inheritance; lose me no more, and never let me lose Thee, O my Lord! my God, and sovereign happiness. AMEN.
XIV

His public life among those whose manners were so different from His own

Hunger and thirst after justice frequently causes the servants of God the spiritual pain of having to live among people whose conduct is diametrically opposed to their own, but whom they must not avoid because the charity of Jesus Christ urges them to make Him known, loved and served by all men. They have a vivid sense of their obligation to labour for the salvation of their neighbour and of the ingratitude there would be in refusing God what they owe Him. Thus when they behold, on the one hand, man’s forgetfulness of God, and, on the other, his attachment to the world, and the great number of sins that are committed daily, their hearts are pierced with sorrow. But there was never any sorrow like to that felt by our Saviour. This is what obliged Him to conceal His majesty, to choose a poor and common life, to have nothing singular in His exterior, and to live undistinguished among men.

He lived in a poor cottage, which was open to everyone, that He might give an example to all of an innocent, modest and regular life. Peaceable and subject to the law of God, He showed not that greatness and divine wisdom the fullness of which He possessed. He remained in silence, because the time of speaking and working miracles had not yet come. They had little consideration for His person, and small esteem for His sanctity, because He was regarded as an ordinary man; but He was acutely affected by the disorders, malice, quarrels, violences, injustices, falsehoods, blasphemies and licentiousness of the Jewish people. He beheld with extreme pain the ambition of the great, the hypocrisy of the priests, the vanity of the doctors of the law, the avarice of the magistrates, the vexation of the innocent, the oppression of the poor, the pride of the rich, the contempt for virtue and truth, and the general forgetfulness of God and salvation.

The imagination cannot conceive what the majesty of His person must have suffered among so many brutal and ignorant men; what His sanctity, in a vicious and worldly nation; what His zeal for His Father’s glory, surrounded by every form of sinning. In a word, all our Saviour’s perfections contributed to torment Him, and all the disorders committed before His eyes were so many daggers piercing His heart. He could have spared Himself the sight of them by going, like St. John the Baptist, into solitude, but having come to save gregarious man, He chose for Himself the common life, because it gave Him more occasions for suffering, and because He was to be the master and model of all men.

It would seem that by this social life on earth He designed to teach us in particular three things. Firstly, the manner of dealing profitably with men; secondly, the mildness with which we ought to bear their faults; thirdly, the fortitude with which we ought to resist their bad examples and despise their false judgments.

Holy Scripture contains some general rules concerning the first of these matters. Christ Himself said: *so let your light shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father, who is in heaven.*—(Matt. v. 16.) He would have us lead our lives openly in conformity with the divine law, unlike those persons
who subscribe in secret to the precepts which God has given us, but who set them at naught in their public behaviour through respect for worldlings. It was to these spineless Christians that Christ referred when He said that *he will deny them before his Father, since they deny him before men.*—(Matt. x, 33.) As, at the Last Judgment, He is to glorify His faithful servants in the sight of the whole world, He justly requires them to glorify Him on earth.

It is not sufficient to have good intentions. We must show them by good works so that we may not give scandal to our neighbour. *For woe to that man by whom scandals come; it is better for him that a millstone were put about his neck, and he be cast into the sea.*—(Luke xvii, 1-2.) Our Lord requires us to give good example, not that we may be held in greater esteem, but that God may be glorified by it.

St. Paul gives us another rule, which is to *owe no man anything, but that of loving one another; for he that loves his neighbour has fulfilled the law.*—(Rom. xiii, 8.) By this he teaches us the spirit of holy freedom and Christian independence in which we ought to live among men, not following our own humour, but our duty. For when we are motivated solely by whim or fancy, and have no regard for those with whom we live, we offend them. Afterwards we are obliged to make them satisfaction, and we can lose some of our freedom of action thereby.

This rule teaches us also how we ought to behave in friendship, in which we must do nothing for our friends which is contrary to our conscience, because the service that we give to men ought to be founded on the love of God and on charity towards our neighbour. On the love of God, to observe His law faithfully on all occasions, without regard to human respect; and on charity towards our neighbour, in doing good to everyone as far as we are able but always from motives of divine love.

If we have little power, let us have a great deal of good will, and let us be more intent on seeking occasions for obliging than reasons for excusing ourselves therefrom. By that we shall testify that we are the true children of that heavenly Father, who is the author of all blessings. In short, let us act towards all men as we would wish them to act towards us, doing and procuring for them, by our words and actions, all the good and all the advantages we have the power to confer, having less regard as to who they are than to what they need.

As to our choice of friends, St. Paul (I Cor. vii, 11) forbids us to eat with the wicked, unless it be to do them good, lest we should imitate or seem to approve of their conduct. But if zeal for their salvation obliges us to have dealings with them, charity will teach us the time and manner of performing them, without prejudice to ourselves or scandal to our neighbour. If possible, we should be on terms of familiarity only with those persons who have the same inclination for virtue as we have; if we can find no such persons, it would be better to behave civilly, mildly and affably to all and to be familiar with none. Those whom we consult for advice ought to be reliable, prudent and well-intentioned, capable of appreciating our needs, of considering our good and ill as their own, of making us follow good counsel, and of adding authority to their words by their virtue.

But just as in common life there are many occasions for doing good, so also are there many of offending God,
and he who resolves to live among men ought to preserve the purity of his behaviour with extreme care. Then God will not fail to give him light and grace to conduct himself without danger to himself and with profit to his neighbour. Let him also be on his guard against a very common, but mistaken notion, that the practice of virtue, and exercises of religion, are incompatible with an active life, and in this belief to put off the amendment of his life to a time of repose, which perhaps he will never enjoy. This is an excuse suggested by corrupt nature which seeks always to shake off the yoke of virtue. It is known by experience how dangerous this illusion is, and that he who is not desirous of being holy everywhere is holy nowhere.

If therefore you look forward to labouring successfully for your spiritual advancement in retirement, do not neglect it amidst the interests and cares of your active life. God deserves to be served at all times, and there is no moment of our life of which we must not give Him an account. Jesus Christ, our model, drew no such distinction; in the midst of men He was always attentive to the will of His Father. His life was so pure that He defied His enemies to convict him of sin (John viii, 46), and never was anything more admirable than the moderation, meekness, tranquillity, recollection, and all the other marks of perfect holiness which He displayed in the midst of a restless people who followed Him in crowds even into the desert.

Amidst their worldly affairs, therefore, let the servants of God remember to preserve, after the example of our Saviour, an interior spirit, attention to God, and fidelity in the practice of virtues. For the designed and natural effect of the actions of Christ on our actions, when we study them with a view to imitating them, is to give to ours the light, order, efficacy and sanctity with which His are filled.

From His example we learn also to bear with the faults of those among whom we live. For it is to Him that the prophet Isaiah refers when he says that he shall not cry, nor except persons, neither shall his voice be heard abroad—he shall not be sad nor turbulent. (xlii, 2.) He heard and saw many disorders, was profoundly moved by them, and yet He kept silence because His time to remedy them had not come.

It is a great virtue to know how to suffer and be silent. Without this virtue we cannot possess interior peace, which is so necessary when we are obliged to converse with persons whose manners, condition and actions are different from our own, for most people cannot bear to be reproved, either because they do not think that what pleases them can displease others, or because the most just and moderate of contradictions always offends their pride.

To see continually and to take no notice of things which displease one, and of which with reason one disapproves, is one of the greatest trials of life, particularly for good people. No matter with what discretion the servant of God seeks to become all things to all men in order to gain all, his life is still so much in contrast to that of sinners that it often excites against him murmurings, contempt and persecution. But however severe the trial may be, let him not change his conduct but understand that the Devil raises this storm only to shake him in his holiest of resolutions, and to make him at last abandon his undertaking, and yield to the temptation.

Then he ought to have recourse to Christ and ask Him
for His constant light, that he may not lose the interior sight of truth; to arm himself with constancy, that he may not quit the work of God; to humble himself before Him, and acknowledge himself worthy of the contempt of all men, who by that revenge the injuries he has done to God. Let him give Him thanks for the desire he has to serve Him; and for the other gifts which he has received from His bounty. Let him say to himself that he is more obliged to bear with others than others are to bear with him; that Heaven is to be purchased by patience; and that if others were to bear with his faults, these would but take the deeper root in him.

Let him remember that, since the success of his labours and the conversion of sinners, whom he so sorrowfully beholds perishing, does not depend on him, he ought not to be disturbed by this, but to have compassion on their misfortunes. Let him, in short, be comforted by these words of Isaiah (xxx. 15): If you return and be quiet, you shall be saved: in silence and in hope shall your strength be. For the relief of good people is to be silent, and to await the moment of the Lord, and as they can still find many faults in their own conduct, they ought to be their own judge, and not wonder at their failing to gain over others that which they have not gained over themselves.

St. Paul says, on the one hand (Gal. i, 10), that if he did not yet please men, he should not be the servant of Christ; and he affirms, on the other (I Cor. ix. 22) that he became all things to all men, that he might save all. He said this to teach us that, never departing from that pure virtue which Christ has taught us, we must accommodate ourselves to the weaknesses of men with the design of gaining them for Christ. This is a very difficult state to maintain in the midst of the world where the most virtuous are too often led astray by the pressure of the multitude, relaxing by degrees their first fervour, and becoming at last like the others. For we need a robust virtue to do, in the sight of and against the continual opposition of parents, friends and those among whom we live, those things which they neither do nor like, and to displease them in order to please God alone.

Let a good man, therefore, despise the talk of worldlings when he gives them no just grounds for murmuring. Let him be attentive to his duty, shutting his ears to everything else, and preparing himself to resist with constancy the worldly-wise and powerful in all that affects the perfection of a Christian life. We are incapable of this resolution while we subscribe to worldly views and pretensions; he alone can put it into execution who seeks only the glory of God, and who considers as unworthy of himself all that greatness and power which the Gospel rejects. Let him not wonder if he is accused of being deluded and eccentric. On the contrary, he can satisfy himself that it is his accusers who are deceived, and that one is not eccentric when he has Christ, the Apostles, the martyrs and a host of saints on his side.

This counsel holds good also in respect of religious living in communities. Though they all make profession of the same kind of life, yet we ought to imitate only those who fulfil the obligations of their state. Let them distinguish themselves, therefore, by their obedience towards their superiors, their patience in contradictions, their sweetness in respect of everyone, by the simplicity and humility of their conduct, the desire of perfection, and the exact observance of their rules.
living in this way be eccentric, then I advise them to be so. But to maintain peace, they must observe the following precepts:

1. Let them not seek the favour of those who govern them, but obey them with a perfect submission, so that they may honour God in the person of their superior.

2. Let them maintain no friendship which may distract their mind or disturb their heart.

3. Let them seek nothing in religion but the peace of the heart and the purity of the soul.

4. Let them behave well even towards those who have used them ill and let them remember, that to regard anyone as an enemy in the house of God, is a source of division and trouble.

5. Let them tenderly love the most contemptible of their brethren and bear towards them a holy desire of doing them good, for the less they are in the eyes of men, the more power they have with God, and hold in religion the same rank as Christ held on earth.

6. Let them not be dazzled by the authority of those who possess the first places. The lowest employments are no less estimable than the highest in religion, and to think ourselves honoured because we are above others, or despised because we are the last of all, is a sentiment altogether unworthy of a religious.

7. Let them apply themselves freely to the practice of pure virtue, in peace and silence, even though others should neglect it.

8. Let them support themselves by hope in their community troubles and persecutions, and be persuaded that Heaven is promised to them at that price. This indeed can be an extremely severe cross to bear for the several reasons that it can be continual, that one is being ill-used by one’s own brethren, and that those who pass for virtuous persecute virtue itself under the pretence of zeal.

9. When calumny attributes any evil to them which they have not done, or gives a wrong impression of the good they do by making them pass for hypocrites, let them pray for their accusers and suffer this injustice in silence and peace, with meekness and fortitude. Let them humble themselves before God, because they have need of so violent a remedy for the cure of their wounds, and because it is necessary for their salvation that the servants of God should become their persecutors.

10. Let them carefully preserve the love of suffering, judging themselves unworthy of having even any share in the chalice of our Lord, and let them often beg of God that they may never lose that light which shows them that the way of the Cross is the best and safest for them. Let them endeavour to do good to all, and to serve them as their masters and superiors, without expecting from them either favour, praise or recommend; and let not the evil that may be said about them divert them from the right path.

11. If they see the regular discipline relaxed, let them thereupon apply themselves seriously to their own reformation, and remember that they have entered religion to serve others and to bear with them, and not to be spared thereon. If any wrong is done to them, let them not complain, but look upon themselves as slaves whom their masters may maltreat as they please. Those who have not these sentiments, and on whom such sound advice makes no impression, hide a worldly and secular heart under a religious habit.
CONTEMPLATION

O master of eternal truth! O charitable shepherd of strayed sheep! O divine Jesus, repairer of our losses! what then must that love be, which binds Thee so closely to us, that in spite of our corruption, which Thou hast so great an abhorrence of, Thou canst not separate Thyself from us. Thou hast filled Heaven with angels, who praise Thee, love Thee, adore Thee, and serve Thee without interruption; and Thou descendest from Heaven upon earth to live the space of thirty years among men who have neither respect nor love for Thee. Thou dwellest in the midst of a disorderly, unjust and impious nation, where Thou beholdest nothing but sin.

Thou wast the Father of all without being loved; the God of all without being honoured; the treasure of all without being esteemed; the happiness of all without being desired; the shepherd of all without being followed; and the sovereign good of all without being sought after.

Happy would he have been who could have approached Thee, conversed with Thee, seen Thee, and heard Thee, during the whole time of Thy mortal life! But art Thou now, O Thou life of my soul! less sweet, less affable, and less accessible? Thou art still the same; Thou seest me, and bearest with me. Thou art so near me, and Thou conversest with me in the bottom of my heart. Thou dost overlook my faults; and waitest till I am attentive to Thy voice and careful in loving and serving Thee. Be not in me, O my God! as a light in darkness; enlighten my soul, and pierce it quite through with the rays of Thy splendour. If I had presumed to desire anything, and had it been permitted me to have begged a favour of Thy Majesty, I should have esteemed myself too happy that I could have been the last in Thy house, and were to abide always at the door, that I might kiss the marks of Thy feet, and the ground whereon Thou didst walk.

The royal Prophet well understood that one single day spent in this manner was better than a thousand lives. But that was too little for satisfying Thy love, O infinite goodness! Thou comest to seek me Thyself. Thou enterest into my house, Thou dwellest in my heart, and I find Thee therein when I please; Thou overlookest the evil Thou seest there, and in spite of all my miseries Thou hast not yet abandoned me. It is because Thou art willing to heal me, provided I would return to Thee, love Thee, and converse with Thee.

Turn therefore towards Thee, O God of love! all my desires, affections, and thoughts: for what can I desire, or what canst Thou give me better than Thyself? Thou art the most precious of all Thy goods: one cannot desire anything beyond Thee, and Thou givest me all that Thou art. Where am I, O my God! when I seek anything but Thee? What do I when I love not Thee? Where are all my senses, when I am not attentive to Thee?—Enlighten me, O eternal light! speak to me, O divine shepherd! may I hear Thy voice, may I know it, and may I never follow any other.

I confess before Thee, O my God! all the evils which Thou seest, that Thou mayst heal them in such a manner as Thou pleasest; may I be sensible of them, may I avoid them, and may Thy goodness pardon me them.

My sole application is to please men with whom I live; and I am as much afflicted with having displeased
them as if my happiness depended on them. I esteem their praises, as if they were the deserved recompense of my actions; I am sorry when they are discontented with me, and rejoice when they are satisfied with me. I am ashamed with being like Thee, with being humble, meek, patient, and with despising the judgments of men. I esteem what they approve, although it be contrary to Thy law. For satisfying them I neglect Thy service, and depart from the purity of Thy doctrine. Pardon me, O divine mercy! that little respect I have had for Thee. Thou knowest how much greater power the discourses of men have over me than the consideration of Thy Majesty. I think myself great when they esteem me, although Thou despisest me. I am humble when they reject me, although I be agreeable to Thee. Thus I overturn the truth, and confound all the perfection and purity of virtue.

I do with great application everything that appears laudable before their eyes, and if they refuse me their approbation, I am grieved thereat. I persevere in all the exercises of Christian piety, whilst they see me; and before Thee, O Lord! I am lukewarm, languishing, and am contented with the little I do for Thee without considering what I owe Thee. What advantage then do I find in the affairs of the world, O Thou God of my soul! but to live among mortal, miserable, and banished men, superficial in their views, uncertain in their opinions, blind in the knowledge of truth, deceived in the judgments they pass on good and evil, obstinate in vice, wavering in virtue, and living in a continual disquiet?

I shall be judged according to what Thou seest in me, O just judge of the living and the dead! Men see only to the exterior, dive not into the bottom of anything, nor do they know the truth; and yet in deference to their judgments, I lose myself and abandon Thee.

The disorder of mind which Thou beholdst in me on that subject is inconceivable. I know the vanity and false lustre of those goods which dazzle me; I know they can neither render me better nor more happy; that nothing will remain to me of their possession but a most bitter repentance, and a more certain assurance that we can only find in Thee alone the true repose.

Immortal thanks be given to Thee, O my God! for having disposed things in such a manner that I cannot be satisfied, but in possessing solid and eternal goods. Turn away my eyes from vanity; deliver me from everything that deprives me of the true goods; fortify me against the false opinions of men; and grant that the delusion and enchantment of trifles may never separate me from Thee, O immutable truth! O sovereign happiness!

But Thou hast commanded me, O Lord! to love those very men whom Thou forbiddest me to follow that I might follow none but Thee alone. Thou knowest my small light, and how incapable my weakness renders me of satisfying that obligation. Instruct me, O divine master! since it is for our instruction that Thou descended from Heaven, and hast vouchsafed to be the companion of our pilgrimage. I am willing, O my God! to bear with everyone, to serve everyone, to be despised and maltreated by everyone, if Thou hast so ordained it. I am ready to suffer all men to rise up against me, if Thou permittest it. Only dilate my heart, that I may love them all out of that pure charity which I ought to have for Thee; teach me to prefer it to every other love, and not even to suffer any other in my heart. Conduct me, O
I find in Thee, when everything in me is employed about Thee? Rectify, O Lord! my intentions and designs, that I may resolve to please only Thee alone: for to whom ought I to consecrate my interior, but to Thee? And who can satisfy me except Thee, O my God and my all? If Thou who art the divine fire, warmest not my soul, how can it love Thee? Become so present to it, O my God! that in sleeping, eating, or speaking, at all times, in every place, in action, and rest, I may behold Thee, that I may live before Thee with the fear and respect which is due to Thy presence, and that I may always adhere to what is most agreeable to Thee.

O most pure Mother of God! you who found on earth, in the conversation of Jesus, riches infinitely more precious than all those of the powerful of the world, and were more agreeable to Him than all creatures, introduce me into His presence, make me enjoy His conversation and may all other enjoyments become insipid to me. Amen.

I heavenly guide! in all my ways, that I may not go astray amongst the vicissitudes and inconstancy of human things.

Teach me, O Lord! how much I ought to esteem Thy doctrine and imitation: for alas! I lose very little, in losing credit, honour, and reputation among men, if I am so happy as to be agreeable to Thee.

Give me those virtues whereby I may please Thee, that I may not be to anyone a just occasion of scandal and sin. Give me an extension of heart which may make me love and serve everyone for the love of Thee. Draw all my hope and desires to Thee, since they are due only to Thee, and are ill employed for everything else but for Thee. Restrain my tongue and fortify my heart, that I may suffer in silence every affliction that shall befall me.

Undeceive me as to all false appearances that I may follow only the pure truth, that Thou mayst be my sole recompense, that I may prefer Thee always, as I ought, to all the wise, to all friends, to all relations, and to all the saints living on earth; and that nothing may hinder me from accomplishing what Thou inspirest me with, or make me abandon Thy doctrine. Support me, O Lord! Thou who knowest my weakness, among the contradictions I shall meet with in Thy service, lest I should yield thereto. Defend me, guide me, instruct me, and enliven me, O my fortitude, my way, my truth, and my life!

How easy is it for Thee, O eternal beauty! to draw upon Thyself the eyes of my soul. I plainly know that I live only because Thou protectest me against my enemies; and that, if I am not yet lost, it is because Thou takest care of me, and governest me. But if I find this support in Thee, even when I forget Thee, what shall
XV

His Fasting and Life in the Desert

When the time arrived for Christ to show Himself to the world by His doctrine and miracles, the Holy Ghost brought St. John the Baptist out of the desert to preach penance to the Jews and to proclaim the coming of the Messiah who had been promised to them so many ages before. But St. John had never seen Him, and lest he might be blamed for bearing witness for one with whom he was unacquainted, he gave them a sign by which they themselves might know Him, telling them that He was the Christ, upon whom they should see the Holy Ghost descending in the form of a dove. Thus while John preached penance and baptised in the Jordan those who came to Him confessing their sins, the Saviour of the world came with sinners and requested Baptism. He had already assumed the flesh of sinners at His incarnation; He had taken the resemblance of them, and the punishment due to them, in His circumcision, and in the penitential works which He practised all His life; but to become also like a penitent sinner He would be baptised with them, and sanctify the waters by which the children of Adam were to be purified. John knew Him immediately, even before the descent of the Holy Ghost in the form of a dove, which showed that this sign had not been given to him for his own information, but that it might give authority before the people to the testimony he bore to Christ.

It was easy for so holy a soul, burning with love for the divine Spouse, to know Him at first sight. How could the light be hidden from eyes so pure and always open? How could he who, when shut up in his mother's womb, had felt the presence of his well-beloved, fail to recognise Him again when he beheld Him with his own eyes? If lambs can distinguish their dams in the midst of a flock, why could not St. John distinguish among a thousand Him whose spirit and love were his only food? It is the quality of pure love to know God everywhere, and to perceive Him under whatever form He hides Himself. If anyone should doubt this truth, let him love God, and then complain that he cannot know Him.

St. John was reluctant to baptise our Saviour. Rather he desired to receive Baptism from that divine Hand which he knew to be the source of all heavenly gifts. He did not think it was fitting that he should baptise among sinners Him whom he was to declare the Son of God. But when Jesus told him that so it became them to fulfil all justice, and to give to the world that example of penance, St. John obeyed and baptised Him. — (Matt. iii, 15.) For only when the divine will is unknown to them do the saints follow their own light in what affects the service and glory of God. When they know the will of God by any means whatsoever, they submit themselves to it in spite of their own views, and think no further than how to execute it, without desiring to penetrate into the reasons for it or the judgments behind it. Thus St. John consented to our Saviour being declared a child of Adam by receiving Baptism, and was content that, in order to accomplish the order of Heaven, He whom he baptised should be the Son of God, leaving to the divine Wisdom the way in which
that truth should be confirmed and the world convinced of it.

Thus it happened that, immediately after Baptism, he saw the Holy Ghost descend in the form of a dove and rest upon Jesus Christ, whereupon he declared to the people that Jesus was the Lamb of God, that it was He who taketh away the sins of the world.—(John i, 29.) That testimony was then confirmed by the voice of the eternal Father coming from Heaven and saying: This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.—(Matt. iii, 17.) By this He gave us to understand that He no longer had the same aversion to sinners as before since His only Son had become man and had taken the form of a sinner.

St. John the Baptist gave the same testimony to truth on other occasions also. When the Pharisees, astounded by his severe life, asked whether he was the Messiah, he constantly protested that he was not. He said that he was to be humbled, and the Lamb of God exalted; that he was only the voice of one crying in the wilderness, and the latchet of whose shoe he was not worthy to loose.—(John i, 13, 17.)

Christ being now ready to support the testimony of His Precursor by His doctrine and works, prepared Himself for His mission by a retreat of forty days. Although we know that in all things He followed the motion of the spirit of God, the Scripture expressly states (Matt. iv, 1) that it was this that led Him into the desert. The reason for the emphasis in this particular instance is to teach us that His sacred humanity gained from this retreat new strength for the approaching combat and the great things He was about to undertake. Nothing is said, however, about His period in the desert except that He fasted and was tempted. St. Luke (iv, 2) says only that in those days he ate nothing while St. Mark (i, 13) says that he was amongst beasts, and angels ministered to him. They leave to our imagination what He must have had to suffer from the inclemency of the weather during the months of January and February, without shelter, lying on the ground, walking among stones and briars—in short, inflicting a thousand punishments on His innocent body.

Thus was our Saviour's fast accompanied by many other corporal sufferings, while His mind was united to God by continual prayer. He would not permit Himself the indulgence He granted to Moses and Elias, who, being supported miraculously, felt neither hunger nor thirst during their retreat of forty days. But from the desire of making satisfaction for us, He preserved just sufficient strength to enable Him to pray and suffer, so that hunger and thirst might finally have cost Him His life had it not been supported by the divine power which reserved Him for greater sufferings. Thus it was that He, who wrought so many miracles for comforting His servants, wrought one for tormenting Himself.

We must not here forget St. Mark's observation that when our Saviour was in the desert He was in the midst of beasts. So much did He humble Himself for us. In these beasts He saw a picture of the brutal life of sin. When the beasts came to Him at His call and, forgetting their natural ferocity, lay down at His feet He lamented over the state of men and particularly of those who, after having been so often drawn by the charm of His sweetness, were to persevere in their obstinacy and perish eternally.

Beasts surrounded Him, angels approached and served
Him; man alone, for whom He had descended from Heaven, appeared not; and Christ prepared to seek out him, who came not of himself to find his deliverer but on the contrary fled from him as from an enemy.

We ought to envy those animals who became tamē in the presence of their Creator, and imitate the angels who acknowledged their Sovereign in the midst of savage beasts and applied themselves to serve Him. They are not about Christ to hinder us from approaching Him but rather to introduce us into His presence. He is accessible to all, and always ready to receive us, whether we come to Him, as the beasts did, by renouncing the ferocity of our manners; or as the angels, to serve Him with purity and love. For it was not to fly from men that He retired into the desert, but that He might seek them afterwards with so much the more goodness as He had a keener sense of their absence.

This conduct of our Saviour contains a wonderful instruction for us in which He teaches two great truths. First, of what importance is the salvation of souls, since He would not begin His mission until, by a fast of forty days and long prayers, He had appeased the just wrath of the eternal Father and drawn down the heavenly blessings upon His doctrine and labours. Being holy, great, eternal and happy without us, Christ could have been indifferent to our salvation or perdition, but since He had taken our reconciliation upon Himself, His infinite charity forgot nothing that might accomplish that work. Because all our happiness depends on the salvation of our souls, all that He has commanded is directed to that end. He would have our salvation to be the dominating purpose of our lives, and nothing is agreeable to Him that diverts us from that purpose. And yet we live in forgetfulness of it or regard it as the least important of our affairs, though Christ says to us, what doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul?—(Matt. xvi, 26.) We forget it although He tells us of the unhappy end of the rich worldling who, thinking of nothing but how to fill his granaries, and forgetting his salvation, heard the voice from Heaven: Thou foolish man, this night thy soul is required of thee; and the things thou hast provided, whose shall they be? To which Christ added: Thus it is with him that heapest up the treasures to himself, and is not rich towards God.—(Luke xii, 20, 21.)

You are foolish, therefore, in the judgment of the eternal wisdom, you kings, nobles, learned men, prelates and pontiffs; you are foolish, you soldiers, captains, magistrates, private persons, poor, rich, merchants and workmen; you are foolish if, being too much taken up with the cares of this life, you neglect your eternal salvation. What will it profit you to be full of earthly treasures, if you are empty of the heavenly ones? You shall at last lose both the one and the other. Perishable goods will soon leave you, and you will also be deprived for ever of eternal goods.

Have we not reason to tremble when we behold an Apostle, confirmed in grace, chastise his body severely lest, after having saved others, he might become a reprobate? St. Augustine, after his conversion, dared no longer to teach human learning for fear of taking that time from the care of his salvation. The Apostles and martyrs were torn to pieces, burnt and tormented in a thousand ways; whole legions of saints retired into the deserts; others built monasteries as so many prisons to keep
them away from the world: all, in short, laboured continuously to secure the salvation of their souls.

Have we not new subjects for fear when we consider that we walk with vain confidence in the midst of snares and dangers? that we are losing time which ought to be devoted to securing us eternity? that we allow our senses complete licence? that we employ in prayer and the care of our souls only such spare moments as the world does not require and that, although these moments be full of distraction, lukewarmness and remissness, we consider we have done well? And if we are insensible to these things, is it not a matter for grief that we should be unconcerned about that which made the saints tremble?

To remedy this evil we must cast our eyes upon Jesus Christ and earnestly entreat Him to have mercy on our souls, which have cost His love so dearly. For, as it is certain, according to the doctrine of St. Augustine (Lib. 1 ad Sempl. q. 2) that He who redeemed us without us, will not save us without us; that no person will be saved unless he is called by God; that none of those who are called will do the works of salvation unless they be assisted by grace; and that none will deserve to be assisted unless they pray: so it is also certain that, if the wicked are lost because God permits it, they are never lost because He wills it; that He calls us without our asking it, because the vocation depends on Him alone; that He is ready to succour us before we ask Him, that none may be excused from praying; and that it is always our own fault if we do not pray, and if we neglect our salvation. From the labour Christ expended on our salvation, let us learn the care we ought to devote to it ourselves.

The second thing which Christ teaches us is the manner in which we ought to practise fasting and other exterior virtues in order that they may be an efficacious remedy for the evils of our souls. To fast and to sin, it has been observed, is to imitate the Devil, who is always wicked and never eats. Our Lord’s fast was accompanied by prayer and solitude. Far from the noise and affairs of men, He was wholly employed with God. The holy Scriptures also reject the type of fasting which is joined to self-will, to bad works, to a disorderly life, and to inclinations contrary to the law of God. St. Gregory compares those who fast without mortifying their passions to Simon the Cyrenian, who carried the cross of Christ but did not die upon it with Him. Fasting alone does not root out vices from the soul nor plant virtues therein. The fasting which is most agreeable to God is to abstain from what is detrimental to the soul.

One does not do ill to fast while in sin, for though such fasting may gain little or no merit for us from the point of view of our salvation, nevertheless, if it served no other purpose than to make it easier for us to fast in the time of grace, the practice would be profitable. But I say that when mortification of heart, and the exercise of the other virtues, are joined to the practice, it cannot be done without benefit.

In the practice of fasting there are two extremes to be avoided: the one, of seeking so many mitigations that it loses its true character, and makes of abstinence itself, as St. Augustine observes (Enor. in Ps. xliii), an occasion of intemperance; the other, of weakening nature to such an extent that we are unable to discharge our duties and apply ourselves to prayer. We must also be on our guard against being deluded by the Devil into preferring those fasts which are not commanded more than those which are. For that enemy of our salvation,
inspiring us with fervency towards austerities of our own choosing, endeavours to render us incapable of that which the Church imposes on us, and to make us find more relish in our private devotions than in what is according to God's order. But every virtue, in which there is more self-will than obedience, ought to be suspected, and Christ, who sacrificed Himself upon the Cross out of obedience, loves obedience better than sacrifice.

CONTEMPLATION

What thanks shall I give Thee for all the blessings which Thou hast bestowed upon me, and still bestowest upon me every moment of my life, O the glory of angels! O the faithful companion of poor sinners! O divine Jesus, my Lord and my God! May all creatures praise Thee with me; and because Thou art above all praise, may Thy works, Thy perfections, and Thy greatness praise Thee; since they are the measure of those blessings which Thou heapest upon me, and since Thou hast so little regard to my meanness.

Thou knowest, O Lord! that though Thou shouldst centre in me the love of all the just, who are in Heaven and on earth, and that I should love Thee with all their love; it would be a small matter in comparison to that which Thou hast for me. Thou hast loved me from all eternity; before I was born, I was present to Thy divine wisdom, and Thy infinite mercy had already caused Thee to take upon Thyself my sins, my miseries and my salvation. Thou knewest that Thou hadst no need of me; but that eternal love wherewith Thou lovest me, obliges Thee to have mercy on me, and to omit nothing that depended on Thee for preventing me from being condemned by Thy justice.

I adore that infinite love; I adore that paternal heart wherein I was written; I adore that amiable care which Thou hadst for my salvation. Ah, Lord! let not Thy poor creature perish, neither let it be said that Thou hast laboured unprofitably for it. It is for my love that Thou goest into the desert, remainest there among beasts, and receivedst the service of angels therein. It is for me that Thou fastest forty days, sufferedst hunger and faintings, and art exposed to the sun, wind, and rain therein. I neither have nor hope for any good, O divine Jesus! but what I am indebted for to those tears, those prayers, to that penance, that fasting, and that love which Thou hadst for me, before I was, before I knew Thee, before I loved Thee, and before I could pray to Thee.

Thou knowest, O Lord! what he is for whom Thou labourest; Thou seest in me what afflicts Thee, but Thou findest in Thyself what is proper for me. Perform in the soul of Thy servant what Thou knowest, what Thou canst, and what Thou wilt. Grant, O divine light! that I may see myself in Thee; grant that I may know, hate and fly myself; and that I may seek Thee, O my God! who canst alone deliver me from all my evils, and heal all my wounds. Is it possible that Thou shouldst undertake with so many cares and sufferings the affairs of my salvation; and that I should rather choose to ruin myself than to co-operate with Thee about it? Thou hast laboured therein all Thy life, from the moment of Thy conception to that of Thy death; and as for me, unhappy and blind that I am, I will not so much as look upon the dangers which surround me on every side; and I have as little thought for Thee and myself as if my eternal
salvation was not concerned therein. The time Thou hast
given me for serving Thee and meriting Thy kingdom
is slipping from me every moment, and I employ it in
offending Thee: I even seek amusements to keep off the
thoughts of those blessings I am losing.

Childhood, youth, and all the rest of my life slips
away in such a manner that I cannot say with truth that
I have spent one single day of it without fault, and in a
perfect application to my duty. My thoughts are
distracted, my desires unruly, my memory full of vain fanciess, my understanding wholly taken up with earthly things, and my will engaged in mean and shameful affections; my very prayers, fastings, and other actions whereby I might please Thee, are so full of tepidity, selflove, faults, and imperfections, that Thou mayst justly punish me for them.

In the ordinary occupations of my life, I am fickle,
fretful, uneasy, and always agitated by some passion of sadness or joy, of fear or hope. Thus this miserable heart
being perpetually rent by contrary motions, and dissipated by a thousand different objects, when I resolve to
co-operate with Thee, I find myself so estranged from
Thee, that I can scarcely believe I am the work of Thy hands. I am as mere a novice in spiritual things, as
obdurate against the impressions of Thy spirit, as little acquainted with the practice of pure virtues, and as insensible of everything that can unite me to Thee as if I had not been born to love and possess Thee eternally. I ask for Heaven of Thee, as if it were my due; I live with
as much assurance as if I had deserved it, and I am so
well satisfied with myself in the little good, or even in
the sole appearance of the good I do with tepidity and
remissness, as if I thought I could not lose the kingdom
of Heaven. Hence it is that what ought to be my chief occupation, is the least of my care. Thou seest, O Lord! to what dangers this vain confidence exposes me, and I will not see it; and the love Thou bearest me causes Thee all the pain which I ought to have myself.

O fountain of mercy! O divine shepherd! O Son of the living God! who art descended from Heaven to find the lost sheep, and comest to seek them Thyself, because Thou knowest they can lose themselves without Thee, but cannot return into the fold unless Thou bringest them back to it. I am lost as a strayed sheep; I have forsaken Thy sweet and rich pastures, to run after withered and poisoned grass. I have separated myself from Thy flock by shunning obedience; and have followed the wolves which devour me.

Thou hast said, O Lord! that no one can come to
thee unless the Father draws him.—(John vi, 44.) Thou
knowest the saints have no need of being drawn, but the sinners, that they may become saints; that the good and the gentle need not be gained by compulsion, but the obstinate and ferocious. Since Thou permittest beasts to approach Thee, and even drawest them by Thy caresses, wilt Thou not also allow me to remain at Thy feet? They only love Thee when they see Thee, and will resume their former ferocity when they are no longer with Thee. But if Thou shalt graciously draw me to Thee O my God! Thou wilt change me entirely; Thou wilt make of a wolf a lamb, of a lion a sheep, and of a rebellious slave an obedient servant, who will never forsake Thee more.

By a prophet, Thou hast promised those souls who are at a distance from Thee, that thou wilt lead them into
the wilderness, and will speak to their hearts.—(Osee ii,
14.) Thou knowest, O Lord! what that wilderness is
where one hears Thee speak far from the noise and hurry of the world; I know it not fully; but methinks, if I were in any place, where I should hear nothing but Thy voice, and where Thou shouldst speak to the bottom of my heart, I should be full of Thee and Thou wouldst be content with me. O solitude, wherein all blessings are to be found, shall I never find thee? Ah, Lord! lead me into that place, and there speak to my heart: speak, Lord, and Thy servant shall hear. Let all other voices be silent for me: for sweet is Thy voice, and charming are Thy words.

O Mother of God! O most pure sheep, from whence came forth the Lamb without spot, you never went astray, you always followed the Lord in spirit, and you alone received more blessings from Him than all creatures together: impart some share thereof to this miserable sinner, obtain for me the grace of being a true servant of God, and that no creature may divide my heart with Him. AMEN.

XVI

His Temptation in the Desert

After forty days without food, Christ’s sacred humanity had become so weak that the Devil thought the occasion opportune to tempt Him, without disclosing himself. For a common artifice of his is to observe every favourable moment for seducing men, either by some appearance of good, or by a pretence of necessity, or, if there be any obvious sin in what he suggests, in order to avoid some greater evil. But he stands in need of neither wile nor force in respect of those whom sin has made subject to him. They make no resistance but grant him whatever he desires, and are less afraid of committing sin than of being healed of it. When God calls them to penance, and when they resolve to follow His inspiration, then it is they begin to feel the weight of sin, the importunity of temptation, and the force of the enemy who does not easily surrender a place in which he has ruled so long. Thus, properly speaking, none are tempted but those who resist, and it was especially for their instruction that our Saviour allowed Himself to be tempted with so much artifice, after a retreat of forty days spent in the contemplation of heavenly things and in an intimate union with God His Father.

It is very astonishing that our Lord should have suffered so hateful a creature to approach Him and even to presume to tempt Him, but because for our salvation He had offered Himself to all the evils that could be endured without sin, He would not have Himself exempted from temptation, which is the most severe and
dangerous trial borne by His servants, nor give us any grounds for complaining that having become the companion of all our labours, He abandoned us in this. It was for that reason that He not only concealed His divinity, but also the glory of His blessed soul, from the angel of darkness, who would never have attacked Him had He known Him, because he knew that the blessed are no longer capable of being seduced. He was aware that he had an unlimited power to tempt Christ exteriorly, and that power was not given him without restriction in respect of other men, even the most holy. He observed also in the Son of God so great purity of heart that he did not know on what side to attack Him, but he was so blinded by his pride that he could not comprehend that a God made man should humble Himself so far as to suffer Himself to be tempted. He imagined that what appeared extraordinary in Christ were acquired or infused graces and not natural perfections. He suspected, however, something divine in Him, and that was what gave Him such a great desire to find out the truth.

He presented himself to Him, therefore, in the guise of an inhabitant of those regions, making the signs of hunger and faintness which he beheld in Him the grounds for accosting Him and having compassion on His suffering. No doubt he reminded Him of the favour He had lately received on the banks of the Jordan when God by a heavenly voice had called Him His well-beloved Son; he represented to Him that He who had made water issue from the rock to quench the thirst of His people would easily change, if so desired, the stones into bread, to assuage the hunger of His Son. In short, concealing who he was, the tempter posed as a charitable man whose counsels sprang from his character.

The holy fathers explain in different ways the temptations undergone by our Saviour in the desert.

Some compare them to those of our first parents in the terrestrial paradise, and say that our Saviour was first tempted with gluttony, in order to expiate that of Adam, which had brought so many miseries upon us; secondly, with vain glory, for repairing the desire which Eve had conceived of becoming like God; and lastly, with idolatry and avarice, for remedying those two great evils which have corrupted the whole world.

Others affirm that the manner in which Christ was tempted shows the deplorable state of those who suffer themselves to be overcome by the Devil. For in the first temptation is disclosed the blindness of carnal men, given up to good cheer and those gross pleasures which cannot satisfy a soul created for heavenly blessings, no more than stones can be food for our bodies. In the second temptation we see that pride elevates the proud to the height of worldly grandeur, only to precipitate them afterwards into an abyss of wretchedness. The third temptation teaches us that the inordinate love of riches is, according to the expression of the Apostle (Ephes. v. 5), true idolatry, since the covetous man considers them as the divinity which he adores.

Some add that the words which our Saviour used when resisting the Devil are the most powerful weapon against all sorts of temptations, and most certain means for bringing back strayed souls into the way of salvation. But because this subject is so extensive, we will content ourselves with observing here, in company with several spiritual writers, that the Devil, always on the watch to do us harm, carefully observes our inclinations, in order that he may deceive us by the appearance of virtue, if
they be good, and that he may openly second them, if they be bad. He hides his designs and snares, and when he finds all the avenues shut on that side, he intrudes himself among the gifts of God, that he may enter the soul without being perceived. He examines whether the soul desires these gifts with mixed feelings, whether it relishes them with eagerness, whether it receives them with ingratitude, and as a matter of right, and whether it commits any imperfection in them which would enable him to spread his venom. Thus it was that, finding no entrance into the soul of Christ, because of the admirable purity of His virtues, he made use of those very virtues to tempt Him.

It is the property of perfect virtue, especially of charity and the pure love of God, to inspire us with an entire confidence in Him, to suffer nothing in us that can possess or divide the heart, and to make us resign all the events of life to divine Providence. Such was the interior disposition of St. Paul, the hermit, whom God miraculously fed in the desert for the space of ninety years. Such was that of many other saints of whom He took care, for God is faithful, and lets none who put their trust in Him want for anything.

But this entire resignation is virtue of such sublime degree, by its resemblance to the life which the blessed lead in Heaven, that though we ought all to desire it, yet it is certain that it is given to a small number of chosen souls only. For when God has once introduced the soul into that happy region, He takes its conduct upon Himself, removes all error and delusion from it, and deprives it of all uneasiness about temporal things, so that, being wholly employed with God, it does not so much as think whether He takes care of it or whether He forgets it. But those who enter without being called into that state of perfection, and erect so great an edifice upon weak foundations, are exposed to dangerous falls, because they have not received the gift of God's grace, and, abandoning the necessary occupations of their state, instead of finding peace, they fall into trouble and the snares of the Devil.

The spirit of darkness, perceiving that Christ had lived so long without any food, that He received no help from any person, that no angel came to bring Him bread, as with Elias, that He was not raised into glory as was Moses during his fast upon Mount Sinai, judged Him to be a great saint whom he must not attack as he did ordinary men. He considered at first, therefore, whether he might not try to make Christ carry His confidence in God too far, and thereby fall into presumption, by endeavouring to persuade Him that, after so long a fast, He well deserved to be fed by a miracle. This was a very cunning and dangerous temptation in the circumstances for it might have seemed better to expect with confidence that God should work a miracle for supplying so pressing a necessity than that one should distract one's self by seeking human assistance. And yet it is certain that we must have recourse, in acknowledgment of our own unworthiness, to lawful and ordinary means, and that it is reversing the order of charity to seek the nourishment of the body from the merit of our confidence in God.

The Devil, by saying to Christ (Matt. iv, 3) _command that these stones be made bread_, intended to see whether He would command in the manner that God did, who _spoke, and they were made_, who _commanded, and they were created_ (Ps. cxlviii, 5) or whether, being but a
mere man, He would obtain a miracle by way of prayer, or whether, in short, He would show, in so pressing a situation, that perfect confidence which proceeds from the pure love of God. But our Saviour rendered the artifice unprofitable and cut through all the Devil’s wiles by this single answer: Not by bread alone doth man live, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.—(Matt. iv, 4.)

This is what Moses had said to the Israelites when, impressing upon them that their chief care ought to be to fear God and observe His law, he reminded them that for forty years they had been fed with heavenly bread in the midst of the desert, and that one never wants what is necessary while one is faithful to God who can, when He pleases, preserve men’s lives without the help of ordinary food. Christ answered the Devil in the same sense, that He had no need of that miracle since God had already supported Him so long without bread. From this we must conclude that it is unworthy of a heart capable of possessing God and His eternal blessings to depend more on corporal things than on Providence who governs and nourishes all creatures.

The two other temptations tended also to overthrow the foundations of perfect charity, for the Devil, believing our Saviour to be but a mere man, carried Him up to the pinnacle of the temple, pretended that he was edified by so great confidence in God, exhorted Him to persevere in that, telling Him that the servants and children of God had nothing to fear, and that no evil could befall Him since it was written: he hath given his angels charge over thee; to keep thee in all thy ways. In their hands they shall bear thee; lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.—(Ps. xc, 11, 12.) He told Him that He might therefore cast Himself from the top of the temple and that He would be supported in His fall as He had been in coming up. It is not credible that the Devil had assumed any strange body, or that he transported Christ by touching Him, but carried Him up by a natural power which spirits have over bodies. Now the design in this temptation was to inspire our Saviour with self-esteem and confidence in His own virtue on an occasion wholly rash, whence no glory could accrue to God, and on which, on the contrary, His power was tempted.

The Devil had learned by his own punishment that nothing displeases God more than self-esteem. He was provoked by finding so much resistance and, as it always happens to him when he is repulsed courageously and his artifices are discovered, could scarcely dissemble any longer. But though he had suppressed, for fear of making himself known, the following words from the same psalm (Ps. xc, 13), thou shalt walk upon the asp and the basilisk, yet he had not succeeded for Christ confounded him by saying, thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.—(Deut. 6, 16.) At the same time our Saviour showed us how far that perfect confidence inspired by pure love ought to extend, for when pure love is once well established in the heart, man resigns himself entirely to the conduct of the divine spirit, but with such humility and contempt for himself that all the glory redounds to God. He obeys humbly, without presumption or rashness, and accommodates himself to all the vicissitudes which Providence ordains, without losing that interior recollection which keeps him united to God. The Devil’s constant aim is to disturb that harmony by withdrawing the soul from its union with God through esteem for itself.
When, full of rage and pride, the Devil took off the mask and all his dissimulation was changed into impudence, God so permitted it in order to confound that proud spirit and to teach us that, having in vain employed all his wiles against a man constant and faithful in temptation, the Devil no longer uses artifice but assaults him openly. We can see from this how much more prudent the humble servant of God is than his enemy who, by disclosing himself, loses his advantage and becomes easier to overcome.

The Devil then transported Christ to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, probably by a view of the imagination, and said to him: all these will I give thee, if falling down, thou wilt adore me.—(Matt. iv, 8, 9.) The Devil by this designed to inspire Christ with some feeling of pride—weak effort of an exposed enemy who, despairing of victory, makes use of anything that comes in his way! But that very temptation often assaults the servants of God in a more subtle way when, seeing the corruption of the world, they think themselves capable of remedies it, set themselves to the task without any call thereto, and thus lose, without profit to others, the interior peace they possessed.

True virtue never allows good people to consider themselves suited for those employments to which God does not call them, and even when He does call them to such tasks they judge themselves to be capable of performing them only in so far as they are governed, instructed and supported by the spirit of God.

Christ put an end to the Devil's impudence and commanded him to retire, saying to him: Begone Satan, for it is written, the Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and him only shalt thou serve.—(Deut. 6, 13.) Even then the Devil did not know that Christ was truly the Son of God because the manner in which the temptations had been overcome was such as virtuous persons practise daily.

The words used by our Saviour to drive away the Devil clearly show how efficacious is a firm and resolute will in foiling all the attempts of an enemy who cannot overcome us unless he is in league with our own will. Hence it is that he employs so many artifices to gain it. He begins by designing to be heard; then he gets us to fix our minds upon the thoughts he suggests in order that we may take pleasure in them. After that we have greater difficulty in forsaking the occasions which produce them. The soul is weakened by degrees; the remembrance of and respect for God's omnipresence is taken away; finally the will totally consents, and the Devil does not relinquish his grip on it until the action is accomplished. Experience of sin makes us more keenly desire sinful acts; repeated acts form a habit of sin, which is that fatal chain, so difficult to break, by which the Devil drags us into Hell. But when Satan finds a will resolved to fight against him, deaf to his first suggestions, and one that immediately repels him with courage, that cowardly enemy is soon repulsed and never gains any advantage.

Since a heart determined to serve God is so strong against temptation, it follows that, if temptation increases, it is commonly our own fault, for God, who always gives His grace to those who ask for it with humility, knows that the temptation is never beyond our strength except when our will is weakened and we neglect to resist the temptation in the beginning.
St. Luke (iv, 13) adds that the devil departed from Jesus for a time, from which we are to understand that afterwards, by the agency of Judas and the Jews, he assaulted Him whom he dared not attack directly, because he could find no entrance into a soul so pure and entirely free from the weaknesses of the flesh, which are the most common means he employs for making us fall. God seems to have three designs in permitting men to be tempted: one to try their virtue, two to exercise it, and three to weaken our enemy.

Firstly, God often permits His servants to be tempted that their virtue, which remains hidden in time of peace, may shine forth in combat, and that each of them may discover his strength or weakness. A state of peace commonly conceals the want, as well as the perfection, of virtue, and temptation discovers both. Thus it was that Abraham’s obedience shone resplendently when commanded to sacrifice his own son; Job’s constancy, on the loss of all he possessed; Tobias’s patience, on his blindness, and Peter’s cowardice, on the occasion of declaring himself Christ’s disciple. Thus it was also that our Saviour’s humility appeared in affronts, His meekness in contradictions, His fortitude in labours, His love in torments, and all the other virtues on the occasions of His practising them, not for His own needs, but for the example and sanctification of men.

Secondly, temptation exercises virtue in us in order that it may increase by use. It exercised virtue in Jesus Christ in order to teach us the purity and perfection of virtue for, as it could not increase in Him, He practised it solely for us. So whenever Satan sees us intent on forming ourselves according to the model set by our Saviour, he loses courage, because he perceives in that imitation the means that overcame him. But if he sees that we are negligent, if he finds us cold in the exercise of virtue, he lays hold of our weakness and attacks us with advantage.

Thirdly, our Saviour was pleased to be tempted in order to weaken our enemy, not by depriving him of the power to tempt us, but by lessening the right he had acquired over us to attack us with all his strength. He was stripped of that right not, according to St. Leo’s observation (Serm. I de Quadr.), by violence but by justice. By bringing about the punishment of the Cross for the Son of God, who was innocent, Satan deserved, for so great a crime, to lose his right over the guilty who, being delivered thereby from his tyranny and having become again the lawful heirs to that inheritance from which he had become excluded, now defend it against the usurper. So that all the wiles and combats that men suffered before as a just punishment for their sins, are now a seed of glory to them.

This made St. Eusebius, Bishop of Ephesus, say that the Devil’s state was a miserable one since all this hatred becomes to the servants of God a sure means of obtaining for them that which he would deprive them of, and since the violence he directs against them enriches the Church with merits, perfects souls in virtue, crowns the labours of the just, and fills Heaven with martyrs and confessors. But it must be admitted that still more miserable than he are they who suffer themselves to be overcome by a disarmed enemy, who voluntarily resume the yoke from which they were delivered, who give him for use against themselves those arms which Christ had taken from him, who provide him with the occasion to triumph over their fall, and who finally lose all those
eternal blessings which our Saviour had purchased for them with His blood.

CONTEMPLATION

O Almighty God! whose infinite power chiefly appears in pardoning sinners, whom Thou hast created after Thy own image, have mercy on me according to Thy great mercy. Nothing in nature opposes Thy will; Thou canst reduce us to the number of those things which are not, and justly destroy those who have so justly offended Thee, without meeting with any resistance. But to soften the hardness of my ungrateful heart, to stop the just complaints which Thy justice makes against me; and to pardon with mercy him who is unworthy thereof, requires an infinite power; and because Thine is such, Thou canst do in me whatever Thou pleasest, without prejudicing Thy justice, or destroying Thy creature.

O God of Majesty, before whom the angels tremble with respect, Who is so great, so powerful, so just, and so merciful as Thou art? Be Thou for ever blessed for the faith Thou hast given me, whereby I acknowledge Thee for my God; for the hope with which Thou inspirest me, whereby Thou obligeest me to expect eternal blessings from Thee; and for the charity which Thou art willing to kindle in my heart, whereby Thou wilt have me to love Thee with all my strength.

But it depends on Thee, O Lord! Who canst do whatever Thou pleasest, to make my soul sensible of the infinite greatness which is in Thee. Thou canst, if Thou wilt, enlighten my blindness, fortify my weakness, replenish me with Thy grace, subject me entirely to Thee, and elevate my meanness even to participation in Thy essence.

The great things that Thou hast done for me, only because Thou wouldst do so, teach me that I ought to hope for everything that I have need of from Thy love. Thou wast pleased to become man for me; and Thou wast so because Thou wouldst be so. Thou wouldst take the form of a slave and of a sinner, and resemble me in all things except sin. Thou wouldst take my debts upon Thee, and satisfy them by Thy love. Thou wouldst instruct my ignorance by Thy heavenly doctrine. Thou hast overcome my enemies. Thou hast taught me the manner of fighting against them. Thou hast abased the majesty of Thy divine person so far as to suffer Thyself to be tempted by a cursed creature, whom Thou hast rejected forever, and who will always hate Thee. Thou didst permit his infernal malice to attack Thy sovereign purity. Thou didst allow that spirit of darkness to transport Thee whither he would, and to go so far as even to ask Thee to adore him. It is true he knew Thee not; but Thou, O my God! who suffered him to do it, Thou perfectly knew Thy own greatness, and his baseness.

It was an extreme humiliation for Thee to see Thyself, in the time of Thy passion, trampled on by the executioners: and yet Thou loved them, however wicked they were; and all their cruelty hindered Thee not from praying and dying for them.

But Satan being always an enemy to Thy love and to Thy children, always limitless in his hatred, obstinate in his malice, insensible of Thy goodness, and unworthy of Thy presence—why didst Thou permit him to have the boldness of approaching Thee, of speaking to, and of tempting Thee, as he tempts sinners? Why didst Thou
permit the infernal spirit, after being overcome, still to discharge his rage against Thee by the means of his ministers, so far as to fasten Thee to the Cross; and to be able to boast of having thwarted Thy designs, and of having taken away Thy life! All I know on that point, O my God! is, that Thou wouldst have it so, and hast done so out of the love Thou hast for me. But the reasons of that love are not to be found in me, they are all in Thee, O Lord! Thy wisdom and mercy have invented that admirable order and harmony, by which God is glorified and man saved.

What hinders then at present, O my God! Thy goodness from willing and Thy power from doing what I desire Thee? Communicate to me Thy light, Thy love, Thy purity, Thy sweetness, and Thy strength, and put this poor creature in such a state as Thou wouldst have it in. It is true I am unworthy thereof, and Thou seest nothing in me but reasons for refusing me: but is not Thy goodness greater than my unworthiness; and are not the motives which Thou findest in Thyself for succouring me, infinitely stronger than those which Thou findest in me for abandoning me? Have mercy on me, therefore, O Lord! for Thy own sake; assist me, heal me, restore me, and make me such as Thou desirest.

Thou seest, O Lord! that since Satan presumed to tempt Thy incomparable holiness, over which he had no power, and which, on the contrary, he had so many reasons to fear; since he assaulted an infinite innocence, an invincible force, and a consummate virtue; and since he opposed Thy eternal designs, in order to frustrate them; what will he not undertake against a weak man as I am, born in miseries, plunged in mire, and full of corruption?

Thou knowest, O Lord! that this roaring lion never sleeps, that he seeks to devour me, that he omits nothing for hurting me, that he insinuates himself everywhere, that he continually seduces me to evil, that he corrupts the good I do, and that he is always intent on setting snares to entrap me. I am not even safe from him whilst I sleep, nor when I awake; he tempts me at all times, on all occasions; he sometimes transforms himself into an angel of light; he hides himself under the appearances of virtue, under my own inclinations, and often even under a show of Thy favours. He assaults me everywhere, and in every manner, within and without, in good and bad things, in labour and rest, in prayer and action, and enters so secretly into my thoughts, desires and affections, that I perceive him not.

I know that Thou never permittest my enemy to tempt me above my strength; that I can always overcome him with Thy grace; that I reap a considerable profit from that victory; and this is what renders me inexcusable. I confess it before Thy mercy, not desiring to justify myself, but acknowledging my misery, and imploring Thy help. O God of goodness! by whose patience I live, who bearest with me and expectest me, and seest all the advantages which that enemy obtains over me. I give ear to him, I open to him the door of my heart, and receive him therein, whilst this heart is shut against Thee.

I feel myself weaker every day, since my will has refused Thy help; and acknowledge that my weakness proceeds from my own fault: for that accursed spirit would have no power over me, if my remissness and negligence had not given it him. It is with justice, therefore, that he accuses me before Thee, O ever equitable
judge! because he knows he can neither overcome me, nor hurt me, unless I am willing. But, alas! I have consented, miserable creature that I am, and thereby have fallen under his power. He has drawn me into an infinite number of miseries; he still treats me as his slave; and in all that I can only blame myself alone.

Shall I remain without a remedy before Thee, O my God! Who art an ocean of mercy? Why art Thou my Redeemer, if it be not to set me at liberty? Why art Thou my sovereign good, but to deliver me from all evil? O ineffable goodness! sanctify me. O eternal sweetness! pardon me. O infinite power! deliver me from my enemy and from myself. Thou knowest, O Lord! that he will never cease from persecuting me, till he sees me undone to all intents and purposes. Fight then still for me, O Lord! and triumph in me over my enemy.

Behold what my misery is, but Thou art my Lord, _and with thee there is mercy._—(Ps. cxxix, 4.) I have strayed, O good Shepherd! I have sinned, O divine Jesus! behold what I am capable of. Thou hast said, _that man lives not by bread alone_, but by all the works of Thy hands, the goodness of Thy heart, and the sweetness of Thy words. If, therefore, O Lord! I cannot cease from being Thine, and if Thou art wholly mine, how can I die? Open Thy treasures, O infinite bounty! elevate my lowness, fortify me against my enemy, pardon me my past weaknesses, give me life and strength, and make me fight for the future with a courage equal to the cowardice I have hitherto had.

But I can neither fight nor overcome without Thee, Thou art my head; Thou hast overcome my enemies by Thy humility, and Thou hast left it to me as a buckler impenetrable to all their darts. I own, O God! that I can do nothing without this divine virtue; and though I should not acknowledge it, my own failings would bear witness against me, since I have fallen through my pride into an abyss of miseries, out of which I cannot come without Thy assistance. My present will is to offend Thee no more, and never to follow that of my enemy; but I also know very well that I shall not have the strength to resist him, unless Thou fightest for me. Amen.
The defects of His disciples

After having overcome Satan, our Saviour began His much more violent war against the world with its errors and malice.

When He had resolved to go through the towns of Judea preaching and working miracles and manifesting Himself to the world, to show its errors and to bring it back into the way of salvation, He had chosen twelve Apostles and several other disciples. He had chosen them after a whole night spent on a high mountain in communion with His eternal Father. He did this to teach us, firstly, the infinite care He took about those things which affected our salvation; secondly, to show us from whom we ought to ask counsel in our affairs, which cannot achieve real success unless they have the support of God's blessing and guidance.

Although the Evangelists do not distinctly describe the vocation of each of the Apostles, it is certain that our Lord declared to them, in His discourse at the last supper, that He had chosen them to be the princes and pillars of His Church. You have not chosen me, He said to them, but I have chosen you; and have appointed you that you should go and should bring forth fruit; and your fruit should remain.—(John xv, 16.) He chose also, some time after, seventy-two disciples whom He sent through all Judea with the power of working miracles, commanding them to go to all the cities and villages whither He was to come after them, declaring the kingdom of God and healing the sick. They executed His orders with great zeal, and those among them who remained with Christ until His death, greatly assisted the Apostles in the preaching of the Gospel. St. Matthias was chosen from among them to take the place of the traitor Judas, and the whole world was filled with the admiration of their sanctity, with the fruits of their labours, and with the fame of their miracles.

St. Paul exhorts us to consider, as a subject for astonishment, the choice of men our Saviour made for converting the world: For see your vocation, brethren, that there are not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble: but the foolish things of the world hath God chosen, that he may confound the wise; and the weak things of the world hath God chosen, that he may confound the strong. And the base things of the world, and the things that are contemptible, hath God chosen, and things that are not, that he might bring to naught things that are: that no flesh should glory in his sight. But of him are you in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and justice, and sanctification, and redemption: that, as it is written: he that glorieth, may glory in the Lord.—(I Cor. i, 26-31.) Therein appears the divine power which erects so magnificent an edifice upon such weak foundations.

One of the greatest debts of gratitude we owe to Christ is for having communicated His gifts to us through such channels, whereby we can acknowledge the hand whence all blessings come. Because He foresaw that this corrupt world would not submit to faith, and would contradict His doctrine, Christ was pleased that the sages of the world, who could not arrive at the knowledge of God by the light of their own intelli-
The Defects of His Disciples

But all that could not be done without a great deal of labour. What pain and humiliation was it not for our Lord to be always with men who were uncultivated, dull, ignorant and unworthy in every respect; who possessed none of the attributes necessary for so great a work; whom He was consequently obliged to instruct, polish and cultivate continually with extreme care and indefatigable patience in order to render them capable of receiving the fullness of the Holy Ghost.

It may be thought, perhaps, that I am unfair to the Apostles when I put their backwardness among the sufferings of Christ, who always treated them as His children and who foresaw that, having received the Holy Ghost, they would labour in the Lord’s vineyard, even to the giving of their lives for His glory. But I am sure they will not think this, when I relate what their origins were and how much their instruction cost that heavenly Master, since they themselves acknowledged it afterwards. That thought was to them a continual subject for humiliation and surprise. They could not be wearied with admiring the divine mercy, which had raised them from extreme weakness to so high a degree of perfection; they tenderly remembered Him who had overlooked and supported with a most paternal goodness such gross defects, in order to draw such great advantages from them. And they did not think that their services, labours or the shedding of their blood sufficiently repaid so loving a Father for the pains they had cost Him.

The Son of God having, therefore, gathered together some disciples, mostly fishermen, uncultivated in their views, judgments and affections, He bore with them as a father and instructed them as a master, with all the patience they then stood in need of, for their minds being heavy and attached to the earth did not rise to divine things.

When Christ spoke to them of the kingdom of God they could imagine nothing beyond the temporal kingdom of Judea, and each of them thought of holding the first rank therein—some because they had been called first, others, because they were our Lord’s relations according to the flesh, all of them from mean and human reasons. And as such thoughts are always accompanied by many other defects, they promised their kindred riches, dignities and favour.

Whilst at His last supper, where He instituted the sacrament of His body and blood, the Lord spoke to them of the highest mysteries of religion, they disputed among themselves the question of leadership, even making use of the interest of others for obtaining what they desired. John and James employed their mother to ask for the first places. All were weak—often wavered in the faith, and abandoned their master in the time of His passion. Peter denied Him; Judas betrayed Him; others doubted and with difficulty believed He had risen again. Even when He was preparing to leave them to ascend into Heaven they were still possessed with thoughts of His temporal kingdom.

Several of the disciples, when they heard Him say that He would give His body to eat and His blood to drink, were scandalised and some went away. When He spoke at supper of the necessity for spiritual arms for overcoming temptations, they ignorantly answered that they had two swords and, having protested that they would die with Him, they fled at the first sight of danger. When they experienced any feeling of zeal they
were for making fire descend from Heaven upon those who refused to hear them, and seeing others cast out devils in the name of Jesus Christ they were jealous and complained of it. They committed also many other faults which showed the narrowness and dulness of their minds.

Notwithstanding all this, Christ bore with them. He reproved them with goodness, and instructed them with as much familiarity and mildness as if they had been perfect men. He treated them as equals; gave them, as companions, reasons for His conduct; defended them as His children against those who assaulted them; and disclosed to them, as to confidants, His designs and the most profound mysteries of His kingdom, although they understood everything in earthly terms. He kept them near Him while He spoke to the people, assembled them before prayer, visited them from time to time during His prayers, exhorted them to love prayer and to persevere in it: in short, the extreme care He took of them appeared in all His actions. If He spoke sometimes obscurely in public, and if He concealed His doctrine in the language of parable, He afterwards explained it to them in private, thus showing that they were dearer to Him than all others. He answered their questions, however foolish or pointless they might be, as if they had been reasonable and full of good sense.

Although their manners, minds and behaviour were so utterly different to His, He never expressed either displeasure or uneasiness with them; on the contrary He concealed their defects, overlooked their ignorance, bore with their crudeness, and supported the whole weight of a conversation which, had it not been for love of us, could not have been agreeable. In a word, He had them always with Him, at table, on his journeys, in public and private, within and without, until He had raised them to an eminent degree of virtue and wisdom. He sowed in that uncultivated ground the divine seed which afterwards, by the operation of the Holy Ghost, was to bear fruit a hundredfold, and He comforted Himself, in the midst of His pains, with the hope of a plentiful harvest, that is, with the conversion of the world.

What a great subject for meditation have we not here as we behold the eternal Wisdom speak in the midst of these ignorant men of that which is most sublime, and labour so long to make them esteem and relish those heavenly truths which It could have imprinted on their souls in a moment—as It did afterwards—by sending them the Holy Ghost! No wonder the Apostles could not afterwards remember the mildness of Christ without being overwhelmed by love and humiliation. That remembrance at once humbled and inflamed them, and it cannot be comprehended how sweet it was for them subsequently to spend themselves in the service of so loving a Master and to give their blood and lives for Him.

The manner in which our Lord conducted Himself towards His Apostles contains a wonderful lesson for all those who labour in the conversion of souls. By His divine sweetness He accommodated His zeal to their capacities, not urging them too quickly for fear of destroying instead of edifying, not exaggerating their faults, because they proceeded rather from ignorance and simplicity than from malice. Because the Apostles had not yet sufficient light to know in what they failed, joining example to words, He inspired them by degrees
with humility, and applied Himself to correct their faults, not by the severity of His reprimands but by the persuasiveness of His conversation.

He knew that the human heart is not capable of great virtue except when it is inflamed with divine love, just as iron cannot be made pliable until it is made red-hot. He knew also that our vices are more profitably disclosed to us in the beauty of virtue than in their own deformity which is only made clear to us in proportion to our increase in the love of God.

Thus it is that we ought to deal with our neighbour, bearing with his faults until he knows them himself, and endeavouring in the meantime to propel him mildly towards the love of virtue. By this means we shall the better dispose him to receive grace, the light of which will afterwards disclose to him the true value of everything: *Jacob shall not now be confounded, neither shall his countenance now be ashamed; but when he shall see his children, the work of my hands, in the midst of him sanctifying my name.*—(Isaia. xxix. 22.) Because the time of his shame has not come—he esteems vanity—he still loves the evil he has done; but when he begins to resolve to serve God sincerely, then he will be conscious of the obstacles he has put in the way of that, and he will blush for the baseness of his affections and the falsehood of his judgments.

A great deal of prudence is necessary if profit is to be gained in this way in the conduct of souls. St. Paul (Gal. vi. 1) gives this advice to the perfect: *if a man be overtaken in any fault, you, who are spiritual, instruct such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.* And the prophet Isaiah (xlili, 3) foretold of Christ that *the bruised reed he shall not break, and smoking flax he shall not quench.* For though the smoke be troublesome, yet it shows some remains of fire, and prudent charity, far from extinguishing it, awakens it by its breath, so to speak, in order to make it increase.

We must observe, however, that this meekness is mostly unprofitable with those who wish continually to be excused in their faults. With such persons, a little rigour is beneficial, because there would appear to be malice in them, since, knowing their own weakness, their conduct testifies to their willingness to persevere in it. In religious communities we often find these sort of people who would have their superiors accommodate themselves to all their inclinations, but the same charity which demands that toleration for certain persons who, by reason of natural weakness, cannot raise themselves higher, forbids it in respect of those whom a too great attachment to their own will renders difficult their being brought to obedience.

What ought to comfort us here, when we consider the little good we do, is that Christ accepted the services and good will of the Apostles, though they were very imperfect, with as much goodness as He afterwards accepted their great labours and heroic actions. He said to them the night before He died: *I will not now call you servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doth. But I have called you friends; because all things whatsoever I have heard of my Father, I have made known to you.*—(John xvi, 15.) And elsewhere, you are they who have continued with me in my temptations.—(Luke xxii, 28.)

Consider who it is who says these things, and to whom He says them! It is the Son of God who speaks
called. For while they were attached to the corporal presence of our Saviour by a human love they were incapable of receiving the divine light, and it was necessary for Him to depart from them in order to purify their love.

Secondly, that being designed for great things, for which they needed to receive extraordinary graces, they had first to be made humble, so that, when they were afterwards filled with the Holy Ghost, they might despise themselves by the remembrance of their former weaknesses. Those pillars of the Church needed to have foundations of humility in proportion to their greatness, and nothing was more capable of establishing that virtue in them than the knowledge of their own past state.

God deals daily in the same way with those whom He elevates from earthly love to the contemplation of heavenly things. He bears with their weakness, ignorance, complaints, and their other imperfections. He comforts them sometimes by His presence, and afflicts them by withdrawing Himself. He makes them feel sometimes the sweetness, and sometimes the severity of His spirit. He raises them up with great care; He supports them and humbles them; He chastises them and caresses them; He restrains them and encourages them. He behaves, in other words, as a father full of goodness, who makes himself a loving occupation of the education of his children.

The Apostles were not the sole objects of His friendship. He still stretches out his arms to us all. His power has not diminished, His goodness is always the same, and He is as anxious at this day to maintain His spirit in every one of us as He formerly was to preserve it in His disciples. Therefore, we ought to have the attitude...
CONTEMPLATION

Show me interiorly, O Lord! the time wherein Thou wouldst have me to bless Thee; and imprint in my heart all the acknowledgment I ought to have for Thy benefits. Thou callest us all, but who can come to Thee, if Thou dost not bear him up? The obligations I lie under to Thee urge me continually; but I can only satisfy my obligations and gratitude by Thee; and without Thy goodness, without Thy help, and without Thy conduct, what can I do, O thou God of my soul?

I confess, O Lord! that I am unworthy of the favour I beg of Thee; that I even deserve to be punished, and cast far from Thee, for presuming to ask new favours, after having abused those which Thou has already bestowed on me, and without having expiated the sins I have committed against Thee. But the sinners whom Thou has received, the thief to whom Thou gavest Paradise, and the sinful women whom Thou didst fill with Thy grace, support my confidence, and give me hopes Thou wilt not reject me; for they could never have been converted, nor sought, nor followed Thee, if Thy light and divine power had not incited them interiorly.

Why should I not, O divine Jesus! expect all from Thee, since, in order to declare Thy truths to me, Thou has sent, not angels from heaven, but ignorant, weak, and sinful men in whom I see no less the defects of our nature than the gifts of Thy grace? Such were Thy disciples, even when they were with Thee; ambitious, jealous, vain, wavering in the faith, and full of base views and earthly affections. Thou didst choose them nevertheless such as they were, and didst take them with Thee everywhere.

As the best of fathers Thou trestest them with a charming sweetness, and they did not learn to love Thee. Thou wast their defence, and they were afraid of everything. Thou communicated Thy divine secrets to them, and they did not beg Thy spirit of Thee, in order to penetrate the depth of them. Thou promised them eternal blessings, and they had nothing but temporal views. Thou taught them a heavenly doctrine, and they profited not thereby. What do I say, O Lord? they beheld Him with their eyes, whose life was the admiration of angels, enriched Heaven, filled paradise with joy, and they knew Him not.

Why didst Thou suffer them, O Lord! to be at the same time so near and so far from Thee? How couldst Thou restrain Thy love so long, and not inflame them at first with that divine fire? Why didst Thou wait till they should see Thee no more for bestowing Thy gifts upon them, since Thou lovest them so tenderly? Without doubt it was on my account, O eternal wisdom! that Thou dealt so with them: for I am persuaded that it would have been more agreeable to Thee to have reigned absolutely in them from the first moment of their vocation, to have purified the bottom of their hearts, to have possessed them entirely, and to have filled them with the riches of Thy grace, as Thou didst afterwards. But Thou didst judge it more proper to bear with their defects for some time, to show me in those, who were to be the masters of Christian perfection, the pillars of the truth, and the light of the world,
what I ought to hope for from Thee, and that all my miseries are not capable of stopping the course of Thy mercies.

O certain refuge of Thy poor creature! it is not only in Thy father’s house that there are many mansions, there are also many in Thy heart, since Thou receivest all into it.

What then! shall this heart so great, so open, so charitable, be shut against me alone, O my God! and shall Thy miserable creature find a place in it, where it may behold all its vices destroyed, and its spirit renewed by the power of Thine? Receive me, O divine Jesus, into that heart, where I presume to hope my name is written by Thy eternal love. Where shall all my weakness be consumed, except in that furnace of love? And if there be not room for all, how, O my God! art Thou the Saviour and redeemer of all?

It is true my vices are much greater than the imperfections of Thy apostles; for they proceeded only from weakness, ignorance, and simplicity. They did not leave; they accompanied Thee everywhere in prayer, in Thy journeys, at table, in labours, and in poverty. They remained with Thee in Thy temptations; they loved Thee in such manner as they could, and their defects were not capable of separating them from Thee. But mine, O Lord! proceed from malice. I fly without being pursued; I depart from Thee daily; I am inconstant in Thy service; and I do not even stay for the temptation to abandon Thee.

Thy disciples heard Thee with eagerness, and I shut my ears against Thy word. They humbled themselves when Thou didst reprove them, and I excuse myself when corrected. They addressed themselves to Thee in their miseries, in order to be cured of them, and I am filled with presumption in mine. Their simplicity attracted Thy love, and my pride renders me worthy of Thy hatred.

Is it Thou then, O divine Jesus! who seekest me? and am I him whom Thou desirest to unite to Thee? Behold me here before Thee, O my love and sovereign good! Who hinders Thee now from obtaining what Thou desirest? Who stops the execution of Thy designs? Wouldst Thou have me remain such as I am? Wilt Thou still bear longer with me? Art Thou resolved to leave me separated from Thee in the region of the shadow of death? Why dost Thou not cast Thy eyes upon me? Shall I be the only one whom Thou forgettest?

What dost Thou desire of me, O Lord! Wouldst Thou have me to repent, to amend my life, to love and serve Thee, and to persevere in Thy love and service? I will do it, O my God! as far as I am capable: yes, I will be wholly Thine, to love Thee always, and never to forsake Thee; I will do whatever Thou desirest me; support my will and my weakness. I am willing, but I neither know how I will nor how long this will shall remain. I even feel myself already drawn back towards the earth by my own miseries, which follow me in all places. It seems as if they were afraid I should forsake them, and my flesh prepares to assault me violently. Thou who supportest me by Thy goodness, fight also for me by Thy power. Defend me, O Lord!

I cannot complain of Thee, O Father of mercies! I can only complain of myself; for Thou hast always filled my soul, however miserable it has been. Even when I fled from Thee, Thou didst take away the snares
pardonest me as many sins as I should commit, hadst Thou not the goodness to preserve me from them.

Thou, O Lord! knowest that what hinders me from profiting by all those graces is that I have not recourse to Thee in all my necessities, and that I love something besides Thee, which I love not for Thee.

If Thou hadst appointed only one hour every year to give me audience, to supply my wants, and to declare Thy will to me, ought I not to sigh after that hour during the whole year, and prepare myself to meet Thee, to hear Thee, and to receive Thy benefits, which would be the food of my soul for the whole ensuing year, till the return of that happy hour? Whence comes it then that I do not converse with Thee every moment, as with a wise and faithful friend, and with a powerful protector, whom neither the government of the universe, nor the weight of all eternity, hinders from thinking of me.

Why do not I come, in my troubles, to lay open my heart before Thee; to expose to Thee the words which offend me, the thoughts which grieve me, and every troublesome thing that befalls me? Why do not I take care to offer Thee all my actions, since Thou vouchsafest to accept the little I do for Thee? If I were faithful in this practice, Thou wouldst heap blessings upon me; because, if for tepid prayers, and for weak desires, Thou grantest me a thousand times more graces than I can merit of myself, what would it be if I should offer Thee all, and if I were wholly Thine?

There is one thing wanting to me, O my God! which alone could restore me, and without which I do not even feel the evils which surround me on all sides—it is humility, which is the fountain of all blessings. Thou knowest, O Jesus! the most humble of all men!
that I can only by it obtain the contempt for myself, the fear of displeasing Thee, and the happiness of sighing continually after Thee: it alone can teach me how important it is for me to know Thee, and I know how agreeable it is to Thee.

O most humble hand-maid, and most worthy Mother of God, you who were never separate from Him! since He was not only content with being my refuge, but was also pleased that you should be my advocate, refuse me not your protection. Although you are exempt from my miseries, you are the daughter of Adam, take pity on flesh, and obtain for me the spirit which animated your conduct. AMEN.

XVIII

His Journeys

The Good Shepherd began with His little flock to traverse Palestine and to gather together the strayed sheep of the house of Israel. His care extended further afterwards, and to fill up the places of those who, by their blindness and obstinacy, were to reject His words, He prepared Himself at that time to draw all the nations of the world unto Him. But that the Jews might have no reason to complain, He left nothing undone for their conversion—He told them about the kingdom of Heaven, the law of grace, and the divine riches which He had brought them.

Although He was the true Messiah whom God had promised them for so long, whom their fathers had so earnestly desired, and whom they themselves ought to have sought out, as He had come particularly for them, He found them living in profound forgetfulness of their salvation. He called them, offered them His grace, and spared neither care nor labour in instructing them, withdrawing them from their vices, and in heaping His favours upon them.

Leaving His most blessed Mother, under whose obedience He had lived so meekly, He went to Capharnaum, a city of Galilee, situated on the boundaries of the tribes of Zabulon and Nephtali, near Jordan, by the side of a salt lake called the Sea of Galilee. Here He began to preach His gospel, according to that prediction of Isaias (ix, 1, 2): At the first time the land of Zabulon,
and the land of Nephtali was lightly touched—the people that walked in darkness saw a great light: to them that dwelt in the region of the shadow of death, light is risen. Here He broadcast His doctrine so abundantly; here He wrought so great a number of miracles; and here He spent so much time that He commonly called it His own city. He called it this only because He found in it so much upon which to exercise His zeal and to work the wonders of His power.

Christ, the sun of the heavenly city, having appeared upon an earth covered with the darkness of sin, visited all the desolate cities of Israel whose number in Josue’s vision amounted to three hundred, without reckoning either those that were built since that time or the castles and the other small places. The tribe of Juda alone had a hundred and fifteen cities. Christ entered into the synagogues to proclaim the kingdom of God; into the gardens and upon the mountains to spend the night in prayer; into the houses to heal the sick and to instruct those who dwelt therein. He worked miracles in the public places; assembled the people in the fields and by the riversides to preach penance to them; fed them sometimes even miraculously; raised the dead to life; rejected no person; drew sinners to Him by the attraction of His divine virtues, and filled them with admiration and joy by the sublimity of His doctrine and the sweetness of His grace.

He also visited every place both on this and on the other side of the Sea of Galilee, after He had sent His disciples in advance to declare His coming. And though the places were large enough to justify the employment of the seventy-two disciples He had assigned to them, He Himself went over them all one after another. He re-

mained in each of them as long as was necessary, and when He departed He left behind His holy spirit which caused the divine seed He had sown to germinate.

Such were the continual cares, desires, labours, and journeys of Christ. He traversed a rough country on foot, through valleys and over mountains, suffering cold and heat, wind and rain, and often He found Himself so fatigued that He was forced to stop and take a little rest on the way.

When He had arrived at His journey’s end He began to instruct the people and to work the wonders of His power and goodness. While His disciples were thinking about His bodily needs, He was engaged in the salvation of souls. In some places they were received well, in others, badly. Sometimes they even drove Him away, and then He retired without complaint or murmuring, being always as patient in injury as He was liberal in pouring forth His blessings on those whom He found disposed to receive them.

One day His disciples being incensed to the point where they desired to have fire brought down from Heaven upon an ungrateful people, He said to them with His customary tranquillity: You know not of what spirit you are.—(Luke ix, 55.) He said this to show them that His was the spirit of peace, meekness, patience and longanimity, which waits for the sinner and offers him grace without doing him any violence. On another occasion, when they were dissuading Him from going into Judea where He had been in danger of being stoned some time before, He answered: Are there not twelve hours of the day?—(John xi, 9.) By this He meant them to understand that men of apostolic zeal employed eleven of them profitably in patient expectation of persons,
who had rejected it during the preceding hours, receiving grace in the twelfth.

This is the way our Saviour behaves towards us always. He invites us into His company by His gifts and grace. When we refuse, He retires reluctantly and, instead of rejecting us with the just indignation such refusal deserves, He returns again at another time and knocks at our door. If He finds us disposed to receive Him, He forgets the previous affronts and treats us as if we had received Him with joy every time He had come to us.

It would be impossible to say how many graces our Saviour bestowed on men in all the places through which He passed, for though the Evangelists have related a great number of His works, St. John affirms that, if it had been necessary to have recorded them all, the whole world would have been full of books. And yet all this was done, not over a long period, but in three years, and not by others but by Himself. By the short time He required to perform such great things He designed, no doubt, to show us that a short life full of good works is infinitely better than a long and unprofitable one, and that much time is not necessary for the acquisition of many virtues and merits.

If God should behold in us days well spent, and a life wholly employed in His service, He would perhaps shorten the period of our exile, and being in a few years enriched with His blessings, we might the sooner be conveyed into His kingdom. But because the greatest part of our life is spent in sin, we have need of time in which to lament our sins, to expiate them, and to merit Heaven, and God in His goodness often prolongs our banishment only because He expects our conversion.

But the just that is dead, condemneth the wicked that are living; and youth soon ended, the long life of the unjust.—(Wis. iv, 16). The just man, in the few years he lives on earth, acquires spiritual goods sufficient for himself and for giving to others, and a virtuous youth holds the rank of an honourable old age full of merit in the eyes of the Lord. But the long life of the sinner, who passes so many years without thinking of his salvation, is full of sin and completely unprofitable.

This made Seneca observe that the wicked die not, for who can say that he can die who did not live or can end his life who never began it. But with more truth it may be affirmed that the sinner dies continually, because he never learns to live. For as that cannot properly be called life which is deprived of the good things which make us live eternally, so he who lives only for eternal death begins to die before he begins to live, since he is never in the way of true life. Thus those who live long, without living as true Christians, resemble a storm-tossed ship which makes many movements but little way.

The just man, who is wholly employed in the matter of his salvation and the service of God, finds in a few years much time for prayer, fasting and penance; for assisting his neighbour by his counsel, example and charity; for bearing the crosses which Providence sends him; and for practising the other Christian virtues, because he makes good use of all his time, and everything becomes for him an occasion of merit. Whereas he who neglects the cause of his salvation, and devotes himself to satisfying his own desires, has need of much time for pleasure, ambition and vanity, in order to satisfy the false standards which the world exacts, and which God does not require. He should have as many lives as there
are different occupations among which he is obliged to divide that short and uncertain life which God has given him for meriting eternity.

So it is that, even if he has the intention to do something about his salvation, worldly amusements and affairs leave him insufficient time in which to implement it, and it is only when he comes to die that he begins to see what he ought to have done to have lived well. But as things done in haste are scarcely ever satisfactorily executed, how can a person, who delays until that last hour to labour for his eternal salvation, expect in so short a time, oppressed with pain, seized with fear, and disturbed with a thousand thoughts, to be able to prepare that nuptial garment without which none enters into the hall of the celestial banquet? And if he fails in what he ought to do at that last moment, on which eternity depends, what loss, what misfortune, and what despair must follow!

Our Lord, in the three last years of His pilgrimage, found time enough to visit all those cities; He found time for restoring health to the sick and life to the dead; for making several very painful journeys; for suffering many labours and torments; for dying; for rising again; and for ascending into Heaven. He found time for all this because He applied all His thoughts to the work of our salvation, for which His Father had sent Him on earth.

One day He sat down to refresh Himself by the side of a fountain near the city of Samaria. From what passed there, it is easy to judge what thoughts occupied His mind. While His disciples were away in search of food a woman came to the well to draw water, and He asked her to let Him drink. Out of the aversion the Samaritans had for the Jews, she refused Him, and our Saviour, who earnestly desired the salvation of the poor creature, spoke to her immediately of those divine waters which from the heart of the just spring up into life everlasting. —(John iv, 14.)

When He had produced in her a desire for this heavenly water, and in order to remove at once what might hinder her receiving so great a blessing, He showed her, with sweetness and wisdom, the dangerous state in which she lived. Then, because a knowledge of, and faith in, the Mediator was necessary for her conversion, He declared to her, in terms more distinct than He had ever used to the people in public or to His Apostles in private, that He was the Messiah whom God had promised, and that He had come no less to save her than the rest of the world. Thus being enlightened and converted in so short a time, she proclaimed everywhere the wonders of divine grace.

The disciples came afterwards and desired Jesus to eat what they had brought, but He said to them that he was nourished with a food which they knew not, that is, with the accomplishment of His Father’s will concerning the salvation of souls.

While He was speaking, some inhabitants of Samaria arrived, who conveyed Him back with them, listened to Him, and acknowledged Him to be the true Messiah.

Behold what His food was that day—the only food that could satisfy Him and which always appeared infinitely delicious to Him.

The divine goodness having resolved, therefore, to deliver us from the superfluous cares of this life, commanded us to seek first the kingdom of God and his justice.—(Matt. vi, 33.) For when we make the affairs
of this world our chief concern, it always happens that either they do not succeed or they are accomplished only with vexatious delays, or the success we anticipated is not worth the pains they gave us, or they are mingled with a thousand disappointments or—in short—they are full of fanciful designs which unprofitably consume our whole life. He alone enjoys true peace who seeks God before all things, because nothing happens to him from which he cannot draw some advantage: in the loss of temporal goods he enriches himself by his patience, comforts himself with the blessings he receives from God, and finds, in the very prosperous of this world, sources of merit for Heaven.

When the desire for Heaven is deeply implanted in the heart, one is content with a little on earth, but when one has not that desire, the whole world cannot satisfy one’s desires. The rich and bad man in the Gospel, in the abundance of his wealth, had never enough, and refused a little bread to poor Lazarus, and when, from the bottom of Hell he beheld Lazarus in Abraham’s bosom, he begged him for just a drop of water to cool his tongue. Since it was sufficient for our Lord, in order to appease His hunger and refresh Himself after His labours, to seek our salvation, to remedy our evils and to enrich our poverty, is it not fitting that our food should be to love Him, serve Him and please Him?

CONTEMPLATION

O divine Power! Who art the strength of the weak, and the relief of sinners. O my God, my Lord! and all my hope! what shall become of me, if Thou dost not cast upon me the eyes of Thy mercy? How long ago wouldst Thou have abandoned me, and I should have been lost, if Thou hadst noted my sins to punish me for them, and not to have pardoned me for them? How many times should I have offended Thee, and where should I have been now, if Thou hadst left me to follow my own desires? I live only by Thy goodness: and if I have not fallen into the abyss of all miseries, it is because Thou hast supported me with Thy hand, hast supplied by Thy merits the want of mine, hast not rejected me, and hast always made me hope for pardon; and because Thou still invitest me to participation in Thy blessings.

O God of my heart! who wilt not abandon me, because Thou hast made me for Thyself, but on the contrary wilt Thyself enlighten my darkness, heal my wounds, expiate my sins, instruct my ignorance, and enrich my poverty; Thou knowest how I can become Thy temple in the midst of so many miseries. For that reason it is Thou wouldst separate me from myself, and unite me to Thee. But if it be so great an advantage to me, and if Thou desirest it so earnestly, what can keep me one single moment at a distance from Thee?

O that I were as conscious of my evils, as Thou art! that I abhorred them as much as Thou dost! that I were as desirous of forsaking them, as Thou art to deliver me from thence! and that I did for myself what Thou dost for an ungrateful servant, I should not be in the state I am.

Thou, O divine Jesus! who knowest the greatness of my sins; the evil they occasion me, and the blessings they deprive me of; who beheld long before I was in being, how insensible I should be of my own ruin; who wast concerned thereat for me, and hast suffered so
much to heal me; Thou hast taken care to seek me.
Thou hast shown Thyself, O divine light! to those that
sat in the shadow of death: Thou hast run after Thy
strayed sheep, O charitable Shepherd! among the rocks,
over the mountains, in the valleys, and through the cities
and villages; overwhelming that innocent body with a
thousand fatigues, which Thou wast not obliged to
hasten, since it followed the motions of Thy will without
resistance.

When anyone invited Thee, Thou went to see him,
didst overlook his little faith, hadst the goodness to
supply his wants, didst recompense him by most abun-
dant graces for the little good he did Thee, because
Thou knewest the want he had of Thee.

Thou came upon the sea-shore to take fishermen, in
order to make them Thy disciples. Thou didst go to
meet an afflicted widow, to raise up her son, who was
dead in the city of Naim. Thou didst approach the pool,
to heal a paralytic who was forsaken by everybody. Thou
madest a journey to Tyre and Sidon, to meet the
Chanaanite woman. Thou entered into the house of the
Pharisee, to sanctify a sinful woman; and into Peter’s,
to assist his mother-in-law. Thou took the road along
which Thou knewest Zaccheus was to pass, and
bestowed a thousand blessings on him and on his house.
Thou soughtest the Samaritan woman with a great deal
of fatigue, to make her taste the sweetness of Thy grace.
Thou visited sinners, and didst eat with them, in order
to teach them heavenly truths. Thou went to meet the
blind, to restore their sight; the possessed, to deliver
them; the lepers, to heal them; the afflicted, to comfort
them; those that were gone astray, to bring them back
again into the right way; the obdurate, to soften the

hardness of their hearts; and Thou didst not make one
step but in order to do good.

Though the people followed Thee in crowds, through
the fields and over the mountains, to hear Thy doctrine,
and though they found with Thee the nourishment both
of body and soul, yet Thy charity was not satisfied; and
Thou went also into every part to seek those whom the
negligence of their salvation, or the care of temporal
affairs, hindered from following Thee. Thou couldst not
suffer that anyone should desire Thee in vain; Thou
presented Thyself to all those who sought Thee, and
even called those who sought Thee not.

Open, O divine Shepherd! the eyes of my soul, to
make me see that I am truly that lost sheep, which Thou
hast sought with so much perseverance, and with such
great labours. For that divine voice called me then, that
mercy invited me, that doctrine instructed me, the hope
Thou gavest sinners supported me, Thy miracles healed
me, Thy labours refreshed me, and those eyes which con-
verted hearts looked on me with pity. Thy body was
there, but Thy spirit was with me. There Thou
bestowed Thy blessings on men, but Thou called me to
give me a share of them. What return shall I make Thee,
O Lord, for so many favours.

O divine Jesus! since Thou hast sought me with so
much pains, grant they may not be unprofitable to me.
I am no less miserable than those among whom Thou
lived, and Thou art my Saviour as well as theirs. Give
me therefore a place with Thee at Mathew the publican’s
table; let me enter with Thee into Zaccheus’ house;
suffer me to embrace Thy feet, and to water them with
my tears, with Magdalen; let me beg of Thee, with the
Chanaanite woman, some crumbs of the celestial bread,
and with the Samaritan woman, a little of that water which purified her in a moment.

O heavenly Father, who beholdest me and whom I do not behold, grant that I may see Thee as Thou seest me, and that I may know Thee as Thou knowest me. Thou seest my interior poverty, and how far distant I am from Thee; for this reason it is Thou seektest me with so much care. Thou seest, O eternal Son! how blind I am in the knowledge of Thy perfections, therefore Thou risest upon me, and comest to enlighten this region of darkness. O that Thou wouldst descend into my interior miseries, which I cannot sufficiently know nor confess! Thou beholdest them, bearest with them, and commiserates them; but Thou beholdest also the blessings Thou dost possess, and which might make me happy, and I behold them not.

No, Lord, I do not sufficiently comprehend that Thou art my father, my spouse, my shepherd, my food, my soul, my treasure, and my beatitude. I know not the love wherewith Thou supportest me, but by feeble comparison; the beauty of Thy works, but by conjectures; and Thy infinite blessings, but by the crumbs which fall from Thy table. I see not that immense ocean of riches which is in Thee, and which is all for me: and though I believe it, my faith is cold and languishing, because I have neither the knowledge nor experience of pure love.

Thou seest nothing in me, O divine Jesus! that can comfort Thee; but if I beheld Thee, if I knew Thee, what could hinder me from loving, embracing, and possessing Thee! Discover then to me, O king of glory! the charms of Thy beauty; enter into and reign in my soul; open this iron gate; break down this brazen wall; soften the hardness of this heart; and penetrate the bottom of this obscure den whither Thy enemies retire; dissipate them by Thy presence; and return victorious, O divine shepherd! bearing in Thy arms Thy recovered sheep; heal it of all the evils it has suffered from the fury of the wolves; make it acknowledge Thee, and never forsake Thee. O when will that happy moment come!

How important is it for me, O my God! never to be separated from Thee! When I behold men like myself so unprovided with reason, and so great enemies to themselves as to reject Thee when Thou comest to them, I cannot but cry out: O blindness of the human heart! O foolish temerity! to imagine that in losing Thee we shall be able to find something better than Thou art!

But, alas! how often have I banished Thee from my heart! how often have I rejected Thy inspirations, and refused Thy company! this is so great a matter of confusion to me, that I know not how I dare appear before Thee, O my God! What did I seek for when I forsook Thee? whom would I have obeyed when I disobeyed Thee? what did I gain when I lost Thee? Have mercy on me, O Lord! I have compared Thee with Thy works; I have preferred my own corrupt desires a thousand times to the sanctity of Thy law.

What then restrained Thy hand? what hindered Thee from bringing down fire from heaven to consume me? from opening the earth to swallow me up? or from delivering me to the cruelty of my enemies? But rather what obliged Thee to return so often to knock at the door of my heart? to call me, to urge me? Was it not my duty to have sought Thee? It was Thy infinite love, O my God! which called to Thee continually to help me. O love that hast spared me, defended me, and supported
me, and that still drawest me to Thee! Thou art my creator, my protector, my salvation, my physician, my father, my Lord, my only remedy, and my whole happiness; help me, change me, and heal me.

O divine mother of God! you who always received into your soul that divine Saviour, and never forsook Him, not even when He departed from you to seek me; receive me into the number of your servants; give me some small place in your house, that your well-beloved Son, who takest a pleasure in abiding with you, may find me with you. Amen.

XIX

The Hardness of Heart and Obstinacy of the Jews

The fatigue of travelling was not the severest hardship our Saviour had to bear in His journeys: it was the obstinacy of the Jews which caused Him the greatest pain. This was a vice inherent in that race as sacred history amply testifies. For although God had preferred the Jews to all other peoples, and had worked miracles on their behalf which astonished the rest of the world, all His favours were unable to produce in them a constant fidelity to Him.

He had made them descend from the blood of the holy Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; He had carried them in his arms, according to the expression of the Scripture; He had heaped benefits upon them, had promised them the Messiah, had sent them several prophets, had chastised them as one would one’s own children when they went astray, had received them into favour when they returned to Him, had delivered them from their enemies, had provided for their necessities. Yet despite all this they had shaken off the Lord’s yoke, and were always rebellious, always murmuring, always perfidious and perjured, even after the most solemn promises.

They were ready to stone Moses their leader in the desert; made themselves a golden calf to adore it in the sight of God, who spoke to them from the midst of the flames; they killed the prophets, set up idols in the temple, sacrificed to the gods of the Gentiles, and abandoned the God of their fathers.

All the means that God had made use of for bringing
them back to Him having proved unavailing, He sent them as the final remedy His only Son, and instead of receiving Him, they nailed Him to the Cross and made Him die in agony.

Although the purity of His doctrine, the greatness of His miracles, and the multitude of His benefits were sufficient to soften the very stones, yet He could find among the Jews only twelve Apostles, a small number of disciples and some devout persons who would follow Him. If there were many more who acknowledged Him for what He was, they concealed their sentiments for fear of others. Even when they beheld that what had been foretold of the Messiah was accomplished in His person, they shut their eyes, retired, set traps for Him, contradicted His doctrine, discredited His miracles, and practised base ingratitude, for, after seeing Christ heal the sick and raise the dead to life, they sought the means of destroying Him.

As He was explaining to them one day a passage in Isaias, which was accomplished in Him, they drove Him out of the city, and led Him to the top of a high mountain whence they intended to hurl Him to death. They could not bear with His working miracles on the Sabbath, they outlawed those who followed Him, and showed on all occasions their obstinacy in the hatred they bore Him. He knew their thoughts and disclosed them often to themselves; He answered all their questions convincingly; put their priests to confusion in the presence of the people; and though they were touched by His doctrine and miracles, yet they did not cease to follow their leaders, to conspire against Him, to demand His death, and to take the vengeance of His blood upon themselves and upon their children.

That unbelieving nation opened not its eyes to the light and awakened not from its state of spiritual torpor neither by the arrival of the Wise Men, who proclaimed the birth of our Saviour, nor by the joy of the shepherds who had seen the new-born Infant, nor by the testimony of St. John the Baptist, nor by the sound of the heavenly voice which was heard at our Lord’s baptism, nor by His presence, nor by the sanctity of His doctrine, nor by the power of His miracles, the effects of which they saw upon themselves, their relations, children, neighbours and friends. And yet more, when the rocks were rent, the earth quaked, the sun was darkened, and an idolatrous centurion confessed that Christ was the true Son of God, that unhappy people persisted in their obstinacy and their hearts hardened daily more and more.

To understand with what feelings of grief and compassion our Saviour beheld the Jews running headlong to perdition we have but to consider the tireless zeal with which He laboured for their salvation, although He laboured in vain. It caused Him so great pain, indeed, that He tried to ensure that His disciples, finding the like obstinacy in their brethren, might not lose courage but might be comforted by the example of their Master who, though He was the Son of God, could not overcome the obstinacy of the Jews nor induce them to embrace His heavenly doctrine.

We see in two things particularly how great an evil is obstinacy. Firstly, because a finite goodness could never have borne with it, and to pardon it calls for the exercise of an infinite goodness. To be reconciled to him who submits himself, to pardon a guilty person who acknowledges his fault, is within the power of ordinary mercy; but to do much for an ungrateful wretch who does not
concern himself about what is done for him, to suffer much for a miserable creature who will try to gain no profit from that suffering, is the property of an immense and incomprehensible goodness.

Secondly, what also clearly shows the greatness of this evil is that Jesus Christ, the master and model of all perfection, seems to have reduced the whole doctrine to this single point, which is, that we should learn of him to be meek and humble of heart.—(Matt. xi, 29.) This is because meekness and humility are the foundation of all other virtues, produce an excellent disposition for the reception of the divine light and to all the gifts of grace, and are directly opposed to hardness of heart. Why does man so obstinately refuse to bear the Lord's yoke? Where can he place his confidence more securely? Where can he find more solid support? And what is he himself but a vessel of clay, full of rottenness and corruption?

Why does the Son of God abase Himself so far as to tolerate our continual disobediences? Why does He restrain His anger? Why does He not reduce into dust these worms of the earth who presume to resist their Creator? He puts up with these things because He desires our unworthiness should serve to make His mercy more resplendent. He abases His majesty, conceals His power, and becomes to us a model of meekness and humility so that He may confound the pride and obduracy of the human heart, so rebellious to the divine will. This made St. Paul write these terrible words about man's obstinacy: Knowest thou not, that the benignity of God leadeth thee to penance? But according to thy hardness and impenitent heart, thou treasurest up to thyself wrath, against the day of wrath.—(Rom. ii, 4, 5.)

There is no vice more contrary, not only to the spirit of God but even to the nature of man who, being subject to change, can pass from evil to good, and be governed by reason, than this invincible obstinacy. Because they are by nature incapable of changing when they have once chosen, there remained no remedy for the angels after their sin, and no purpose would have been served in giving them a longer period of time in which to examine the resolution they were about to take since they knew from the first as much about it as they could have learned in a longer space of time. But man, because of his human nature, does not see things all at once and has need of time to consider them. Hence it is that he may discover his mistakes, change his resolutions, and correct what he has done wrong. So it is that when he hardens his heart he runs counter to his own nature and, like those rebellious angels, remains inflexible in sin, and justly suffers the same punishment after his death as he had the same obduracy in his lifetime.

Adherence to our own judgment and will is the most frequent source of this vice, the fatal consequences of which we do not sufficiently appreciate. We even sometimes make it pass for virtue, but if we are not careful to correct it in time we become by degrees so attached to our own opinions as to hold to them as the truth while we are in dire error, and fall at last into entire obstinacy.

From an adherence to our own judgment and will there can arise many forms of obstinacy which lead by degrees, as it were, to that fatal obstinacy. In the first place, the habit of following our own judgment only,
renders a person less faithful in observing the law of
God, and he more easily takes the liberty of sinning,
though he does not do it as yet without scruple, but by
his frequent falls, and the little care he takes to amend
his way, he becomes spiritually weakened. He would like
to be able to leave the state he is in, but he finds no
disposition in himself to weep for his past faults, though
he acknowledges them and has the inclination to hate
them. In this position the most efficacious remedy is to
cast ourselves at the feet of Jesus crucified; to humble
ourselves before Him, as far as it lies in our power to
do so, and, acknowledging our own helplessness, to be-
seech Him to apply the divine virtue of His precious
blood to softening the hardness of our hearts.

When we neglect to correct the first obduracy, we fall
into the second, which consists in loving sin, in living in
it with a sense of false peace, and in being willing to
persevere in it. We recognise the evil, but we have
neither the inclination to regret it nor the resolution to
resist it. At this point man is much more conscious of
the pleasures of sinning than he is of his miserable
condition.

Those who are in this state, and on the brink of
stifling what remains in them of good will, have need
in the first place to frequent the sacraments, so that, by
often renewing in themselves the spirit of grace, they
may acquire the strength necessary to resist sin.
Secondly, they ought to submit themselves to the
guidance of a prudent confessor who, knowing their
temptations, inclinations, passions, and the circum-
stances in which they live, may prescribe suitable reme-
dies for their condition. If those remedies are then ne-
glechted, the sinner will soon arrive at that stage of
obduracy in which his disease becomes incurable, be-
cause he becomes insensible to it and refuses all reme-
dies.

Then follows the third and last degree of hardness
of heart. The sinner can no longer bear either counsel
or reproof. He is ashamed to amend, and has carried his
pride in his obstinacy to such a point that, if he had
before conceived any design of changing his life, an
advice or exhortation to do so would be sufficient to
make him abandon the design. He looks upon the most
charitable correction as an affront, the most beneficial
advice as an impertinence, and chooses rather to re-
nounce all fear of God than to lose the least human
respect.

If a person in this deplorable condition does not make
every endeavour to free himself from it, he builds a
brazen wall between God and himself, accustoms him-
self to his wounds, and becomes so corrupted that he
turns his remedy into poison, and the good that is
offered him often does him more injury than the evil
he has committed. Such in olden times was Pharaoh,
whose obduracy was increased daily by the miracles he
beheld. Such were the Jews, of whom Isaias foretold that
seeing they should not see, who were so blind as to
oppose their own cure, whom the instructions and
miracles of Christ rendered still more criminal, and who
became more wicked by everything that was capable of
making them become better.

Would to God that this obduracy had ended with
them! But unfortunately it is still to be found to this
day among Christians, and though our Saviour does not
feel it in Heaven, whither sorrow does not ascend, it is
certain that it was present to His mind while He lived
on earth, and that it oppressed Him more than did that of the Jews.

To abandon men to their passions, and to allow them to sin as much as they please, is the most dreadful chastisement of the wrath of God, and the beginning of that eternal banishment which is to continue in Hell. This hardness of heart is the source of all great evils. It was this that fastened the Son of God to the Cross, that persecuted the Church, that made heresies spring up, that corrupted so many souls, and spread so many errors against the faith and the law of God. In short, it is the mother of damnation which brings forth children for Hell. And since Christ by His presence could not overcome the obduracy of the Jews, what ought he not to fear who, far from this divine Saviour, spends his life in obduracy, in the embrace of Satan?

CONTEMPLATION

O Jesus! meek and humble of heart, Son of the living God, Lord and master of my soul, powerful and charitable Physician! Thou hast no less power to heal my evils, than patience to bear with them, since Thou bearest with them only that Thou mayst cure them. Permit them not to augment, to become incurable, nor to separate me for ever from Thee. O my salvation and life! Thou knowest how many reasons I have for distrusting myself, and for imploring Thy mercy continually. Continual dangers of losing Thee arise in me, and I cannot be saved but by Thee.

Thou hast said, that *a good man out of the good treasure of his heart, bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of an evil treasure, bringeth forth evil things.*—(Matt. xii, 35.) Who is truly good, O Lord! if Thou art not; and who is truly bad, if I be not so? It is from my heart that all the evils proceed which Thou beholdest and bearest with; those affections, which remove me from Thee; that interior deafness, which hinders me from hearing Thy voice; that obstinacy, which renders me rebellious to Thy orders; that tepidity, which makes me lose the relish of Thy truths; that negligence in Thy service, and all the other faults which displease Thee in me.

O my Creator! who has formed me of the same mass with the rest of sinners, I am a greater sinner than others; if I am less so, it is to Thee that I am indebted for it. The Jews were, and are yet to this day, the children of Adam as we are: Thou honoured them with Thy promises, and heaped Thy favours upon them: Thou lived among them, and taught them Thy divine truths: Thou wrought Thy wonders before them, and showed them in Thyself the perfection of all virtues, and the accomplishment of all the prophecies, and they knew Thee not.

Is it possible, O divine Jesus! that darkness should be stronger than light; that it should increase near Thee, and that Thou shouldst endeavour in vain to dispel it? Thou couldst not overcome the obduracy of the Jews, neither by the benefits Thou bestowed upon them, nor by the evils from which Thou delivered them, nor by the eternal pains with which Thou threatened them, nor by the charms of Thy presence and conversation.

No person has done violence to them, none has either blinded or hardened them: they have blinded themselves, they have hardened themselves. Hell has known Thee, O Lord! the devils have trembled at Thy word, death has obeyed Thee, the beasts and elements have
heard Thy voice; Heaven, which had been shut against the just, was opened at Thy command, to receive the good thief; and hearts, whom Thou createst for Thyself, who are Thy proper abode, and whose happiness Thou art, know not Thee, hear not Thee, desire Thee not and receive Thee not.

I complain not of Thee, O Lord! I know that my evil proceeds from myself alone. Thou art always with me, but I am not with Thee: I confess my faults to Thee, but do not amend them. I receive Thy holy body, I keep it within me; and yet I hear Thee not, love Thee not, and find Thee not. O divine Jesus! my obduracy is greater than that of the Jews. But they believed not in Thee, and I believe that Thou art the Son of the living God; they received Thee not, and I receive Thee. It is true that I cease not to live in my sins, to entertain my imperfections, and to remain in my miseries; and perhaps, O my God! I still love them; for if I hated them truly, I should be delivered from them.

Be not Thou hardened, O my God! towards this poor sinner who desires nothing so much as to be able to melt with love for Thee. St. Peter was so obstinate in renouncing Thee, that if Thou hadst not looked upon him, he would have renounced Thee still; but he was softened and converted by a single motion of Thy eyes. Have those eyes then lost the virtue of softening hearts? Cast upon me such a look, O Father of mercy! and I shall be healed. What was the thief’s obduracy when he was crucified with Thee? He had offended Thee all his life, and blasphemed Thee also at his death; but the virtue of Thine eyes changed him in a moment, and opened paradise to him.

But what will it avail me, O Sweet Jesus! to beg of Thee that tenderness of heart I desire, if I harden myself, if I render myself deaf and insensible to everything that is most necessary for me? I find Thee hard only when I am far from Thee; and Thou art meek and easy to receive me when I return to Thee. I cannot complain of Thy conduct towards me; I ought, on the contrary, to bless Thee always, O Lord! because having come to Thee, loaded with sins, obdurate and dejected, I returned from Thee comforted, softened, and full of confidence.

If, falling back again into my former ways, I had lost the relish of Thy presence, and oppressed afterwards with the weight of my corruption, I had returned to Thee in order to be comforted; I found Thee the same; always easy, mild, faithful, and merciful. What is become of that sentiment, O eternal sweetness? Where have I lost it?

Whence comes it that I have forsaken Thee again, O Thou God of my soul? Who has been able to separate me from Thee? Why have I deprived myself of so great a blessing? How have I fallen back again into obduracy? Is it not a greater evil to become hardened, after having received so many marks of Thy goodness, than if I had never experienced it? I implore Thy mercy, O my Saviour! suffer me no more to depart from Thee, nor to be blinded by my own will, in the midst of so great a light, lest I sleep at last in the hardness of my heart. Though I deserve not the blessings of sweetness, which I have so often lost by my own fault; at least refuse me not the knowledge of my own misery, and of the need I have of Thy help, for fighting against myself. Give me strength to beat this heart continually, more hard than iron; that I may at least preserve a regret for the bless-
ings I have lost, and a hatred of the evils I have committed.

Give me Thy love, divine Jesus! and engrave it so deep in my heart, that I may truly say, as Thy apostle did, who shall separate me from the charity of Jesus Christ? Is there anything in the world that deserves my love, and that can indemnify me for the loss of Thine? When I lose Thee for a friend, for any interest, or for a pleasure, what advantage do I reap from thence? If I renounce Thy love, for avoiding a little pain, I am immediately carried away by the love of other things, which gives me a thousand displeasures. If I forsake Thee for my friends, I soon experience their infidelity. If I seek to divert myself, or take any pleasure without Thee, I find myself in the end full of trouble and sadness. If I cease praying, out of remissness and tepidity, I fall into temptation. In short, in whatever manner I lose Thy love, I remain deprived of Thy blessings, languishing in Thy service, and earnest in satisfying my corrupt inclinations.

Humble me as much as Thou pleasest; make me diffident of myself, and careful to amend; that, as I owe Thee already all that I am, and all that I hope for hereafter, may I also owe to Thee the cure of all the evils I labour under at present.

O Queen of angels, advocate of sinners, chaste abode of our Saviour, and charitable intercessor for hardened hearts! our Lord will have me to obtain of you what I cannot deserve of myself. Since you see the evils which obduracy produces, make that living water flow from the source of mercy which you have given to the world, that it may fall upon me, and soften at last the hardness of my heart. AMEN.

XX

The false judgments that were passed on His actions

The obduracy of the Jews produced so many other evils in them that it is a matter for everlasting wonder that the patience of Christ was not finally exhausted. One of the worst of these evils was that they always judged adversely of His person, words and actions, a manifest proof of the poison hidden in their hearts which by degrees corrupted what natural integrity remained in their minds. For right reason is naturally inclined to judge things according to their appearances, and what did they see in Christ that had any appearance of evil? The malice in their hearts must, therefore, have obscured the light of their minds, for, unless it be deceived by some colour of evil, the mind always judges advantageously of good. But was there any colour of evil to be found in our Saviour's conduct? For that reason He said to them with so much assurance, Which of you shall convince me of sin?—(John viii, 46.) Not only could they not convict Him of it but, whatever hatred they had against Him, they could not even accuse Him of it, and they did not know what answer to make Him.

When they made it a crime for Him to heal the sick on the Sabbath, He placed them in such a dilemma that they dared not reproach Him with it any more. They blamed Him because He called God His Father, but He proved Himself to be the Son of God so clearly by His works that they remained silent. Annas, the high-priest, having asked Him for an account of His doc-
trine, our Saviour referred him to those who had heard Him speak in public, though they were His enemies. And when, being unable to lay any crime to His charge before Caiphas, except manifestly false ones, they resolved to compass His end by an outcry of sedition.

Those who had more favourable opinions of Christ regarded Him as a holy prophet only. Others formed their individual judgments of Him according to their outlook and disposition. When He was with sinners, though His conversation was always edifying, and though He sought nothing but their salvation, yet He passed for one who liked to eat and drink with them. Some said that His doctrine was new, which was in accordance with the custom of the corrupt world which regards everything as novel which opposes its old errors and its ancient disorders. Others, seeing Him followed by a great crowd of people, who were desirous of hearing His word and seeing His miracles, accused Him of being a seditious person and a disturber of the public peace. Many held the view that He ought not to teach publicly, but should do so in private and in houses, in order to avoid tumults and large crowds.

In this latter respect the world does not change—it is to-day what it was then. It approves of crowds of people assembling for secular reasons, for sport and for amusement, but it disapproves of crowds flocking to the churches, to the sacraments or to take part in the most sacred ceremonies. This is not to be wondered at, because the world gives its blessing to that which maintains its vices and condemns that which seeks to destroy them.

In short, the Jews arrived at such a pitch of wickedness that, not being able to deny the miracles worked by our Saviour, they attributed them to a secret pact He had with the Devil, and thus they made the latter, whose will they followed in all things, the author of many wonders.

This final piece of wickedness was much more obvious to Christ than it would have been to any ordinary man.

In the first place, he of whom the world judges wrongly is not always aware of it, for he is often deceived by the dissimulation of those who, pretending to honour or love him, in secret despise or hate him. But the most hidden sentiments of His enemies and their plans to destroy Him were an open book to our Lord, and what touched Him much more than the injuries done to Himself were the obstacles they placed in the way of all the blessing which He designed to bestow on them. For as love makes us acutely sensitive to everything which can harm those we love, and as these evil judgments of Christ recoiled upon those who held them, so the love He had for the people and for their salvation rendered Him infinitely conscious of the injury they did to themselves.

In the second place, the great ones of the world, though they are the most exposed to public censure, are nevertheless, speaking generally, the ones most sparingly dealt with, for the reason that, being powerful, their protection or patronage is sought after and their displeasure feared. He who despises them in his heart often commends them in their presence, and sometimes praises them for the very things for which he despises them. At the least, everyone hides the bad opinion he has of them either out of respect for their position or fear of their power. But Christ, by way of example and consolation for His servants, who were to imitate Him in
this kind of suffering, was pleased to bear the unjust judgments of the world, with all the attendant circumstances which could augment the pain of them, and He suffered people to say to His face, without any reservation, the most outrageous things they could think of Him.

In the goodness of our intentions we commonly find something to comfort and defend ourselves against the adverse judgments which are passed upon our actions, even when defects in these may seem to give grounds for such judgments. But, in addition to our Saviour's intentions being always upright, His actions were so irreproachable that, supposing He had been capable of any bad design, the most observant and severe of critics could never have discovered it in His outward conduct, so holy, consistent and uniform was it. And yet we daily see that a bad intention cannot be long concealed and that some mark of it must appear sooner or later.

We may easily see, from a reading of the Psalms, how much sorrow these judgments occasioned Christ. Thus He says to God, by the mouth of David (Ps. xlii, 1): Judge me, O God! and distinguish my cause from the nation that is not holy; deliver me from the unjust and deceitful man. Or again: Judge me, O Lord! for I have walked in my innocence. Prove me, O Lord, and try me; burn my reins and my heart. For thy mercy is before my eyes; and I am well pleased with thy truth.—(Ps. xxv, 1, 2, 3.) He complains also in the Gospel that the Jews put a bad construction upon everything that He did, and He said plainly to them: Judge not, that you may not be judged.—(Matt. vii, 1.) And through one of His Apostles (James ii, 13) He says that judgment without mercy shall come upon him that hath not done mercy.

If those who so readily judge others only stopped to consider the injury they do themselves, and the punishments they bring upon themselves, they would no doubt be more hesitant in their judgments. For whether they judge the good actions of others too severely or condemn the bad ones without mercy, they can have the assurance that the same judgment awaits themselves. And if they should judge that to be bad which is good, let them hear the judgment of the Apostle (Rom. xiv, 4): Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? For wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou dost the same things which thou judgest.—(Rom. ii, 1.) Or at least, adds St. Chrysostom, explaining this, thou judgest amiss of thy brother's actions, only because thou feelest the same inclinations in thyself which thou thinkest thou seest in him.

When an impatient man, for example, sees another bear something meekly, he judges him by his own reactions and concludes that his weakness is not the result of patience but of dissimulation. The impious and lukewarm regard as a hypocrite the person who appears assiduous in prayer and other Christian practices because they themselves know that they could not do as much except through hypocrisy. The wicked attribute all the good works which they see good people perform to hatred, anger, baseness, pride, dissimulation, or to some other vice which they feel in themselves, for bad judgments proceed generally from the bad inclination which is in the heart of him who judges. Experience shows this but too often. The same good work which edifies one person, scandalises another. Fasting, prayer
and pious conversation daily produce opposite judgments, for the one and only reason that in judging men do not follow the light of their minds but the disposition of their hearts.

If two persons see a bad action committed, one will be touched with compassion and will try to remedy and conceal it, the other will seek to have it made public and punished. Thus the same thing will excite mercy in one and vengeance in another.

It is therefore true, according to St. Paul’s words, that he who judges ill of another condemns himself because he discloses by that blaming of evil in his brother that he has at least the root of it in himself, and that, if God does not assist him with His grace, he will fall into the same sin of which he believes the brother he condemns guilty.

Although we ought not to judge that to be good which is obviously bad, since such a judgment would be contrary to that of God, yet it is certain that we must always judge with a sufficiency of caution and reservation which excludes self-love and corruption of heart, otherwise, by judging our neighbour, we shall condemn ourselves.

If we find ourselves subject to this fault, we ought frequently in the presence of God to consider ourselves more wicked than those we judge, and to remind ourselves that if we do not commit all the wickedness of which human nature is capable, it is because grace has saved us therefrom. This thought is neither erroneous nor unjust, for of a surety we would not find so much evil in others were we not full of it ourselves. And if we cannot suspend our judgments, let us at least be on our guard against giving them tongue, so that this evil in us, remaining concealed, may not give scandal to anyone.

We must likewise turn against ourselves all the bad judgments of our neighbour which we form, acknowledge in ourselves the corrupt root which produces these judgments, and always seek the means for excusing others. If we can find no excuse, let us acknowledge, in the presence of God, that we are worse than these others, since we resist Him despite all the knowledge He gives us, while if the others, who seem so imperfect to us, had the light that we have, and if they saw their faults as we see them, they would amend their lives and become better than us.

Those who are in duty bound to judge and correct others ought first to humble and condemn themselves in their own heart, so that they may not afterwards judge their brethren without the fear of God.

Let us all, in short, never forget that those whom God preserves from the sins into which they might fall owe Him still greater gratitude than do those whom He pardons after they have committed them: as I am more obliged to the man who prevents me from being wounded than to him who cures me of a wound I have received.

This makes St. Augustine say (Enar. in Ps. cxx) that “God pardons us all the sins we are able to commit, and should have committed, if He had not prevented us by His grace; and that one man commits no crime which another might not commit, if he were not preserved from thence by Him who made man.” Thus everyone may with justice believe himself to be as wicked as he who appears so to him, and ought to give thanks to God if he does not fall into all those evils into
which he sees others fall, and earnestly entreat Him not to permit him to fall into them.

The servants of God ought not to allow themselves to be upset by the bad judgments of men, since they cannot avoid them, and since Christ Himself was not exempt from them. On the contrary, let them appreciate fully that, when they engage themselves in the service of God, the world, which did not spare the Master in this matter, will certainly not spare the servants.

Let them remember, in order to encourage themselves to be faithful and resolutely to follow the way He has pointed out to them, all that they owe to God. Let them bear in mind that if the world judges ill of good people, it is not from the hatred it has of evil but solely to discredit virtue, for it loves vice—even though it knows it is wrong—and in order that it may follow it more freely it approves it, supports it, elevates it and even gives its name to virtue. It calls piety, hypocrisy; zeal, passion; justice, rigour; and so with others, its object being to make virtues pass for vices so that they may lose their esteem among men and that there may no longer be any shame in being vicious.

If you had been of the world, says Christ to His Apostles (John xix, 19) the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. If virtuous men were really wicked, and such as the world judges them, it would undoubtedly praise them, just as it praises the revengeful for being courageous, the proud for having honour, and the prodigal for being liberal; it would be favourable to them, in fact, if they had those vices which its false judgments attribute to them. But because the world knows that by the conduct of the just it stands condemned, it hates them, and persecutes them as wicked in order either to draw them to itself, by giving them a disgust of virtue, or at least to so weaken their power by defamation that they may be no longer capable of hurting it.

But as, in other matters, one pays no attention to the judgment of the ignorant, so, in what affects virtue, we ought to pay no attention to the judgment of those who know nothing of it.

I do not say this in order that the servants of God may regard all others as wicked, but that they may beware of the artifice of the Devil who endeavours to shake their constancy by human judgments, and that they may surmount this obstacle by their patience, pray for those who persecute them when persecuting virtue, and that they may take these words of St. Paul (I Cor. iv, 3) to be their guide in the matter of judgments: But with me it is a very small thing to be judged by you, or by man's day: but neither do I judge my own self. For I am not conscious to myself of anything, yet am I not hereby justified; but he that judgeth me is the Lord.

We give here three important precepts.

Firstly, we should not regulate our conduct by human judgments alone, whether they be favourable or unfavourable. For as men are weak and inconstant, they often condemn and approve without reason and rather by fancy or passion than by the light of truth, and so we should never consider their approbation or condemnation a sufficient reason for acting or not acting. In addition, if we become slaves to the judgments of men, it would be impossible to please everybody, since each one has his own particular opinion, and so, whatever
we do, we will always be in the unpleasant position of disobliging many.

Secondly, in what affects ourselves, a matter into which self-love so largely enters, we should not confine ourselves to our own judgment. Let us have a proper intention and the fear of God, and let us afterwards, whenever it is necessary, with the counsel of a prudent and virtuous man, do what appears best to us and most agreeable to God. For our obligations to please God and to labour for our own salvation are so pressing, and we ourselves are such poor creatures, that we ought not to flatter ourselves that God is satisfied with us nor that we are justified before Him. To do so would be to attribute to ourselves a judgment that belongs to Him only and to put ourselves in danger of losing humility.

It is a temptation common to good people to be desirous of knowing themselves sufficiently well as to be able to judge with certainty the state of their souls, but God, who loves us so tenderly, would not have concealed this from us if it had been profitable for us to have known it. Our business, therefore, is to labour in the service of God to the best of our ability without being desirous of penetrating into what He conceals from us, and to believe that we always do less than we ought to do, and that our judgment will never be more sincere, more just and more perfect than when we judge ourselves most severely.

Thirdly and lastly, he who would, among the judgments of men, preserve the tranquillity of his soul, ought to raise his thoughts to God and remember that, being governed by a wisdom that sees all things and weighs all things, we can never lose anything that is our due, that He who judges us fortifies and augments the good He sees in us by His grace, and, when we return with sincerity to Him, supplies what is wanting on our part by His mercy.

CONTEMPLATION

O Judge infinitely wise! who penetrated the bottom of our hearts, from whom nothing is hidden, and whose eyes are always open on the good and the bad, Thou seest my interior, and everything that displeases Thee. Thou knowest what I owe Thee, and how ill I satisfy the obligation I lie under of serving Thee. Where shall I shelter myself from Thy judgment?

Judge me, O Lord! according to thy justice and according to my innocence in me (Ps. vii, 9) which is the fruit of Thy labours and merits. Judge me according to the eternal love Thou bearest me; judge me according to what is in Thee; for what is in me is against me; and if Thou wouldst have any good to be found in me, which might defend me against Thy justice, communicate the merits of Thy blood and sufferings to me. Give me Thy innocence and sanctity. Read in Thyself the reasons that justify me, and according to them pronounce sentence upon me. Consider, O Lord! this inclination to sin, this opposition to virtue, and this root of all evil planted in the midst of my heart: exert Thy justice against it, tear it up without mercy, and put in its stead wholesome plants, which may produce nothing but good fruits.

When I enter into myself, O divine Jesus! and find myself so full of evil, I fear Thy sight, and am obliged to say to Thee with David (Ps. i, 11): Turn away thy
Behold me here before Thy mercy, O my Saviour! Hearken to the complaints and sighs of my heart. Thou sayest, that *all our thoughts are prone to evil*, and I daily see, in the conduct of the children of Adam, the truth of Thy words; they cannot consider but as evils the very blessings Thou bestowest upon them. I come to Thee, O infinite goodness! because I cannot fly from myself but by Thee. I feel in myself the same disorder. I look upon that as good which Thou forbiddest me. What gives me death makes the sweetness of my life; and I seek comfort in what separates me from Thee.

When wilt Thou deliver me from myself, O my God! What is there in me but what tends to evil? The very blessings which Thou bestowest on me, often become for me a source of bad judgments. For I sometimes judge, in consideration of Thy mercy, that I may abandon myself to sin; in consideration of Thy patience, that I may persevere in it; and in consideration of Thy goodness, that I may be saved, and satisfy Thee, though I gratify my sinful appetites at the same time. Thus I am wicked, because Thou art good; and slow in being converted, because Thou art patient in bearing with me. I judge that I may reconcile the divine nourishment which Thou givest me with the grievous faults into which I fall; that Thy justice will spare me; and that I shall be justified without amending my faults. In short, I find nothing in me but false judgments. What shall become of me, O Lord! if the goodness with which Thou sufferest my evils does not also extend itself so far as to heal them.

Thou seest, O my God! that sick as I am, I feel not my disorder; and that I glory in the little good I do, or desire, though that action and desire proceed from Thee.
I would pass among men for a person other than I am, and I cannot suffer them to pass any disadvantageous judgment upon me, though they can never believe me as wicked as Thou seest I am. Heal, O Lord! by Thy power, these dangerous wounds; grant that I may lift up my eyes to Thee; illuminate them with Thy light that they may behold in Thee the blessings I find in Thee, and in myself the evils which displease Thee.

One of the most dangerous illusions of my pride is to set too great a value upon the opinion of men. Thou seest, O Lord! how far this vanity extends, and how hurtful it is to me. What good, or what ill, can human judgments do me? I am truly such as Thou judgest me, and I neither become better by men's esteem, nor worse by their contempt.

What do I then complain of, O ever equitable judge! I complain because men censure me: I consider in everything I do what they will think of my actions; I direct my conduct, measure my emotions, and weigh my words, that I may please them; and I would willingly unite in my favour all their affections and commendations. But how vain is that pretension, and how far does it separate me from Thee, O my God! It weakens in my soul the spirit of prayer, possesses me with unprofitable cares, gives me a thousand displeasures, and fills me with an infinite number of thoughts, displeasing to Thee.

There is still greater vanity in the complacency I feel, when I think I have done or said anything well; when I am informed that people are satisfied with me and my conversation; when I desire, with so much earnestness, to know what is thought of me; not to amend any fault I have committed; but for my own satisfaction. Happy is the soul that is so pure and disengaged as to neglect all these considerations.

Draw unto Thee, O Saviour of my soul! all my thoughts, sentiments, and intentions; have mercy on this distracted heart. It is not difficult to please Thee, because Thou art satisfied with a little, and Thy goodness accommodates itself to my weakness. Thou hast made known Thy will to me in those things which affect my salvation, lest I should go astray; but in those which are of less importance, and wherein it is not necessary that Thy will should be clearly shown me, Thou art satisfied with the sincerity of my intentions, though they be not entirely conformable to Thine.

When Thou seest me ready to fall, Thou supportest me; if I do fall, Thou helpest me up again; and however wicked I be, I am never so very wicked but Thy goodness still finds some reasons for doing me good. I am always sure of satisfying Thee, O my God! when I am willing to do it. But how can I satisfy men, who see not the dispositions of my heart; very frequently judge of me by themselves; and, without examining anything, condemn or approve what pleases them?

Infinite thanks be given to Thee, O my Creator and divine Master! for having been pleased to deliver me from all these cares, and to reduce all my thoughts and obligations to one only, which is to love and serve Thee with all my heart. If Thou hadst obliged me not to offend any person, and to satisfy everyone, it would have been impossible for me to have obeyed Thee. Gather together the dispersed of Israel (Ps. cxlei, 2), reunite in Thyself alone the multiplicity of my desires, and pluck from my heart the esteem of human judgments, whether they be good or bad.
permit me not to desire to satisfy the world which
Thou didst not satisfy, nor to listen to its judgments
which judged so ill of Thee. I desire only to satisfy
Thee alone, O my God!
O Mother of God! full of grace, and full of our
Lord, who is always with you; how rich were you in
the eyes of Him who did such great things in you! but
how unknown were you to the world! I conjure you
by those chains of pure love, which so closely united
you to your God, your Lord, your spouse, your Son,
and your treasure, to obtain for me the favour I beg
of you, that my heart may remain fixed to Him, with
an upright intention and a pure love, and that no
creature may ever separate me from Him. Amen.

XXI

Men’s murmurings against Him

From bad judgments commonly arises slanderous talk
which causes good people great pain as they are not
used to it. Such sort of talk is, as it were, the execu-
tioner of bad judgment, for a wicked heart cannot do
much harm if it does not entrust the tongue with the
execution of its bad design. As almost all persons, in
some degree or other, are subject to this vice of the
tongue, we ought not to flatter ourselves that we will be
able to avoid slanderous and malicious talk. Christ Him-
self did not avoid it, and all the sanctity of His person
and all the innocence of His life did not protect Him
from it.

He suffered this form of persecution with the same
patience as He did all others. They murmured against
Him without any restraint, in the streets, in public
places, in private houses, in the synagogues, in the
councils of the Jews, and there were few social gatherings
at which they did not speak ill of Him and His followers.
If anyone presumed to defend Him, he only provoked
the others, and their hatred was exasperated in propor-
tion to the opposition it encountered.

They said that a sinner could not work miracles, and
that he was truly a sinner who did not observe the
Sabbath. The priests affirmed that He was despised by
persons of standing and responsibility and followed by
the populace only. The doctors murmured because He
called Himself the Son of God. The Pharisees, who
thought themselves saints, made Him pass for an im-
postor who had dealings with devils; they could not per-
mit Him to have any even with sinners. They ridiculed His disciples because they were almost all poor and of lowly birth. They jeered at those who heard His doctrine. All these affronts returned upon Christ. The malice of the Jews, joined to an elaborate embellishment of false circumstantial detail which always accompanies such talk, was the cause of so many murmurings, and of such intense pain to our Saviour, that we are no less indebted to Him for not allowing Himself, because of these cruel tongues, to be withdrawn from His design of redeeming us than we are for the very work of our redemption itself.

Without having actually experienced it, we cannot appreciate the power this sort of obstruction has to paralyse the will, take away the inclination to bestow favours on those who engage in it, and make us abandon the good which we have begun.

The Son of God, when He became man, suffered all murmurings without ceasing to do good even to those who slandered Him. He commanded His Apostles, in the work for the conversion of the world, to behave in the same way, and He advised them to place themselves above such talk by telling them that it is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his Lord. If they have called the good man of the house Beelzebub, how much more them of his household?—(Matt. x, 25.)

When the servants of God are censured, it is of great comfort to them to know that they thereby become the servants of Him who was calumniated before them. But in order to sustain that honour, and to be worthy of that inestimable privilege, they ought to be faithful in imitating the way in which their Master bore the murmurs of men. The world being a place of trials and miseries, no person can escape unscathed, and patience in bearing them alone distinguishes the servants of God from the men of the world. The latter suffer against their wills, and with a heart so full of bitterness and impatience, that they often render themselves more guilty even than those who make them suffer. The servants of God, on the other hand, humbly accept the punishment which they think they deserve for the expiation of their sins or, if they feel that they have not deserved them, they bear them joyfully because they have been judged worthy to resemble Christ, who offered His blessings no less to those who would not receive them than to those who received with thanksgiving.

The most Christian and efficacious means of confounding slanderers is to give them instruction in virtue by patience, meekness and good offices. There is no time less profitably employed than that which is spent in trying to hinder men from talking. He who loves malicious talk does not seek to have a reason for what he says but only to have something to say, and he never feels a greater inclination to talk than when the gravest reasons are put before him for remaining silent. He talked before against your actions only, now he will attack your reasons; soon he will pass on to your intentions and whatever you say to him will serve only to furnish him with new matter for talk.

Silence, meekness, perseverance in good works, and a holy and prudent discreetness are the strongest arms that can be made use of against slander, for, if it proceeds from malice, the anticipated pleasure of satisfaction cannot be gained from an enemy who does not defend himself, and it is sufficiently punished thereby. If it pro-
ceeds from ignorance or bad habit it is soon put a stop to by silence.

If there be any remedy for the evil things that are said about us it consists in not regulating our conduct by the talk of men but rather in giving them no just grounds for blaming it. If we order the intentions of our heart, and the actions of our life, according to the holy precepts of the Gospel, we ought to give ourselves no trouble about what men say of us. Nay more, experience teaches us that there is nothing more dangerous in the way of virtue than to pay attention to what people will say, and that the person who slavishly does so will not long remain faithful to God. For there are few people who have sufficient strength to resist a friend, a superior, an equal or the weight of many opinions. The fear of displeasing one single person who says, against all reason, whatever comes into his mind, has often more power to discourage us than our most pressing duties have to support us.

For that reason Christ often forewarned His servants that they would not be free from the reproach of unjust tongues, but that in order to please Him they ought to shut their ears, and concentrate on their duties, without considering what is said of them. Let no good people, therefore, allow themselves to be moved by slanderous or malicious talk, but let them endeavour to raise themselves above it by their constancy in the practice of virtue.

Christ said, through the mouth of David (Ps. cxix, 1, 2): *In my trouble I cried to the Lord; and he heard me. O Lord, deliver my soul from wicked lips, and a deceitful tongue.* He gives thanks that God heard him against those who murmured, not by stopping their murmurs but by giving him strength to bear them. For the complete victory of the just, which consists in confounding injustice, is reserved for the day of the Last Judgment, when the unjust, who have lacerated the just here with their slanders, seeing the latter elevated into glory, will say: *These are they, whom we had some time in derision, and for a parable of reproach. We fools esteemed their life madness, and their end without honour. Behold, how they are numbered among the children of God, and their lot is among the saints.* (Wis. v, 3.)

The servants of God ought to understand, therefore, that it is a waste of time to try to appease those who speak against us, that this life is short, and that the best way is to suffer them with patience, to imitate our Lord and to leave everything to Him.

It may sometimes happen, however, that we are obliged to give a reason for our conduct, either in public or in private, when the salvation of our neighbour, the good of the Church, and the glory and service of God require it. In these circumstances we must behave with such moderation that, in exactly satisfying the truth as far as we can, we allow no passion to colour our language and that we do not murmur against those who slander us. Otherwise, by justifying ourselves on the one hand, we fall on the other into the crime of our accusers.

But because we nearly always carry to excess everything which concerns ourselves, we ought in this juncture to follow the advice of some servant of God. Above all, we should take care not to complain too much against those who use us badly, and not to exaggerate the injury they do us. The more just these complaints may appear, the more dangerous they are to the soul,
for by thus complaining, it loses the purity of patience, falls into presumption, disedifies neighbours, weakens the vigour of charity, and attributes to itself a part of the judgment which belongs to God alone. It is much better to make our complaints to God, who sees all things, desiring none but He to be the witness of what we suffer, pouring out our hearts to Him, and remembering that in silence and meekness of spirit there is a hidden treasure of spiritual goods, which is ours for the finding. Happy is the person who finds it and enjoys in secret that precious gift with which slanderers are unacquainted.

Slander is an incurable vice. It is, therefore, unprofitable to try to stamp it out, and we ought to despise it if we are desirous of preserving the tranquillity of our heart. Most of those who indulge in slander do it either to divert themselves or to injure us. Those who slander merely for the pleasure of slandering, have few scruples about it, irrespective of the pain they may cause, and do not imagine that they stand in need of any remedy. Their pleasure is even increased when one is upset by what they say and they are the more inclined to talk the more impatiently they see their words are being borne.

For this reason the ancient philosophers very prudently advised us to look upon slanders as sources of salutary instruction or a mirror, as it were, which reflects our defects. For what a friend excuses out of friendship, or dissembles out of consideration, or does not see through negligence, the slanderer speaks about freely, and shows us clearly the vices of which we ought to be afraid. This made St. Bernard (Lib. de Consid.) say that virtue would be weakened, and would lose its whole lustre, if it remained without exercise; that slanderers and persecutors are they who exercise it; and that by suffering their violence, and doing them good for evil, it becomes purer and more perfect.

St. Bernard added that religious were very subject to murmurings. May God grant His grace to all those who are religious that this reproach may not fall upon them, and that we may all have continually before our eyes that sentence of the Apostle (St. James i, 26): If any man think himself to be religious, not bridling his tongue, but deceiving his own heart, this man’s religion is vain.

CONTEMPLATION

I adore thee, O infinite goodness! O my Lord and my happiness! I give Thee a thousand thanks for all the means Thou makest use of, and for all the pains Thou sufferest, in order to disengage me from the love of earthly things. If I had my eyes open, how could I remain one moment fixed to the world, whose malice is so great, that it presumes to rise up against Thee, O my sovereign happiness! how could I live without blessing Thee? Why am I in this life? Ah, Lord! put me in a place where I may praise Thee without interruption; lead me into the company of those pure spirits who behold Thee, prize Thee, love Thee, and adore Thee; and whose whole occupation is to glorify Thy holy name. But till Thou bestowest this favour upon me, give my heart a profound contempt for human praises, and of all those tongues that know not how to honour Thee.

Is there anything in Thee, O Thou love of my soul but what we might and ought to praise? Why should we refuse Thee praises? Is it because Thou eateth with sinners? observest not the Sabbath day? and conversest with poor and mean people, rather than with the proud
and rich of the world? Is it because the Pharisees say
that Thou art possessed of the devil, and art a
Samaritan? that Thou hast done no good to men? that
they have found nothing commendable in Thee, nor
have felt the effects of Thy divine virtues? Were they
not sensible of Thy mercy and meekness? and were they
so blind as to see nothing in Thee but their own vices?
How then, O my God! can I desire that the world
should see in me what it has not seen in Thee? and
that it should say the good of me which it did not say
of Thee?

I adore that charitable condescension, O my Saviour!
which made Thee converse and eat with sinners that
Thou mightest gain them to Thee. For, alas! what
should become of me if Thou didst converse only with
the just? What hopes should I have of obtaining the
pardon of my sins if I saw none but saints in Thy com-
pany? What would become of my wounds and infirmi-
ties if Thou didst not enter into the houses of the sick?
Let the Pharisees say what they will of Thee, Thou art
my salvation, my mercy and my refuge. The table
of sinners is no less suitable to Thee than that of angels:
and the fire of Thy love will also the better disclose its
strength on matter that is hard and difficult to burn.
Enter, therefore, into my heart, O God of love! abide
and eat with me: and since Thou knowest how Thou
shalt be received, and the little I can present Thee with,
Thou wilt have the goodness to bear with the poverty
of this house. Everything in it is poor, cold and disagree-
able. Thou wilt find nothing in it but faint desires,
corrupt and sinful works capable of disgusting Thee.
Thou canst not however, O Thou Lord of my soul!
dispense with Thyself from entering therein, since I
desire it; and Thou inspiriest me with the desire thereof.
Thou wilt put all things there in such a state as Thou
wouldst have them, all blessings will come thither with
Thee, and Thou wilt receive Thyself therein.

I bless Thee now, O Lord! for being pleased to take
no other rest on the Sabbath day, than that which Thou
foundest in doing good to men. When Thy divine love,
always active, after having created the world in six days,
rested on the seventh, it was not that it might remain
in idleness. The Pharisees, who were ignorant of that
secret of Thy love, murmured at the good which Thou
didst at that time: they knew not that Thy Sabbath, O
my God! is to take Thy rest in my soul, and that for
this reason Thou hast commanded that I should be taken
up with nothing else but Thee alone on that day. But
let the world say of me what it pleases, I acknowledge
and adore that eternal love which induced Thee, for my
good, to create so many creatures from nothing. I adore
that desire whereby Thou art willing to dwell and repose
in me; I adore that goodness, by which Thou callest
Thyself the Lord even of the sabbath (Matt. xii, 8), in
order to bestow favours upon me on that day, as well as
on all the others in which Thou didst create the
universe. Let not my sins, O my God! hinder the effects
of so beneficent a will.

On the one hand, Thou wast afflicted to see that those
slanderers acknowledged not the grace Thou granted
them; and on the other Thou hadst an extreme desire
that they would permit Thee to heal their wounds. Thou
wast not pleased that charity towards our neighbour, of
which Thou hast given us so express a command, should
make us have any neighbour dearer to us than Thou art.
Thou, O Lord! art our best and true neighbour, do
Thou Thyself observe the law which Thou hast given us; perform Thou in respect of me what Thou wouldst have me to perform in respect of Thee; love me, make me feel the effects of Thy love; be ever with me; have Thy eyes continually upon me; since it is from Thee I am to receive the power, strength, and light which I need for accomplishing what Thou desirest of me.

I also bless Thee, O divine Jesus! and adore with my whole heart, that great mercy which Thou hast testified to sinners; when without entering into the houses of the priests, the doctors of the law, and the great and powerful of the world, Thou heard the desires of Zaccheus the sinner, who was desirous of seeing Thee, and receiving Thee into his house; though Thou knewest they would murmur thereat. Whence comes this, O Lord? Is it therefore possible that the desires of sinners, imperfect as they are, should be so precious in Thy sight?

But is there, O my Jesus! a greater sinner than I am? I desire Thee, as Zaccheus did, O my salvation! I desire Thee, O my sovereign good! I desire Thee, O my mercy! I desire Thee, O my riches, my friend, my redeemer, my father, my treasure, my whole glory, and all my felicity! I languish with the desire of seeing Thee; but I am so little, as well as Zaccheus, that the multitude wherein I am encompassed hinders me from seeing Thee. All my comfort is that Thou seest me, knowest me, and dost not require my desire to be perfect, provided it be sincere.

I bless Thee, O my God! for all the favours Thou hast bestowed on the world, and which it has not acknowledged; for all the actions on account of which it murmured against Thee: and I give Thee a thousand thanks for having vouchsafed to suffer the persecution of those venomous tongues, for my consolation. Teach me that sweet truth, which Thy holy prophet declared to us, when he said of Thee: Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy face, from the disturbance of men. Thou shalt protect them in thy tabernacle from the contradiction of tongues.—(Ps. xxx, 21.)

If Thou be my food and life, what matters it to me their saying I am poor and miserable. If I am wholly possessed with Thy love, ought I to be afflicted when they shall say I am good for nothing? Let me, O my God! be unprofitable to the world, provided I be possessed with Thee. Let them say what they please, provided I hear Thee. Let them murmur against me, provided I enjoy Thee. Let them reject me, provided I find Thee. Let them tear me to pieces, provided I satisfy Thee. What hurt will all their discourses do me, or rather what advantage shall I reap from thence if I love Thee, O thou only happiness of my soul! Break asunder, O ye heavens! be opened, ye eternal gates! and let me behold my Lord and sovereign good. But what do I say, O my divine Jesus! Heaven is deaf and hears me not; Thy heart is my true heaven; it has eyes to see me, ears to hear me, wisdom to know me, light to guide me, and beauty to charm me.

O King of glory! who suffered Thyself to be called Beelzebub, for the consolation of Thy servants, and hast so sensibly felt the pains that I ought to endure; and in order to mitigate them for me, hast vouchsafed to endure them before me in all their rigour: teach me to value the happiness of resembling Thee.

I receive from Thee all the goods of body and soul, and also expect those of heaven from Thee. Is it there-
fore so great a punishment to bear with wicked tongues for the love of Thee? If I am so happy as to please Thee, ought I not to be comforted when I displease the world? Thou knowest, O divine wisdom! the imperfection of my heart; Thou seest how sensible it is of what is said, and how afraid it is of what shall be said. Illuminate me with Thy light, that I may discover that truth; and support me by Thy power, that I may give no just occasion for murmuring against me; that I may sincerely seek to satisfy Thee; that I may not be withdrawn from thence by anything men can say; and that I may not lose time in justifying myself with them; but let my whole life be spent in the desire of pleasing Thee, and of suffering everything for Thy love.

O master of eternal truth! Thou hast commanded us to pray for those who calumniate us; and Thou wilt not be prayed to but that we may be heard. I beseech Thee, therefore, O my God! to pardon all those who speak ill of me. Thou knowest that they say much less of me than I deserve; and that the malice with which they persecute me equals not the goodness with which Thou supportest me; but Thou, O Lord! canst remedy everything, by giving me grace to amend, and to them, that of slandering me no more.

Instruct those criminal tongues to sing forth Thy mercies that they may honour Thee after having offended Thee. Infuse Thy charity into their slandering hearts, that they may help me to correct in myself what they find to reproach me with; and unite us all by a sincere love that we may bless Thee altogether.

Obtain for me, O Mother of God! and for all those who speak ill of me, a place among the domestics of your Son. Amen.

XXII

The contradiction of His doctrine and the censure of His works

One sin that grows into a habit frequently draws after it many others which are often even greater and more dangerous than the first. St. Gregory says “that fault, which is not washed away by penance, draws us by its own weight into new disorders; and a man who watches over himself, knows by his own experience, that if he neglects to mortify the inclination which he feels to any particular vice, that vice presently opens a door to many others.” For that reason Satan applies himself above all to cultivate in us an inclination to a particular vice and, provided he succeeds in doing that, he takes very little trouble about opposing us in the good we do otherwise, for he knows that while this door is open to him he will always find the occasion and means of doing us harm. It is also of very little concern to him whether the sins be greater or small so long as they be habitual, for though a person does not often fall into very grievous faults, the lightest become dangerous when they are neglected, as it was written, He that contemneth small things, shall fall by little and little. (Ecclus. xix, 1.)

This is often to be seen in religious houses where everyone is particularly occupied with the pursuit of perfection. One does not here fall suddenly into bad ways by great faults, but by degrees, by small negligences. Neither do all fall together; the evil begins with one or two, who are followed by some others, and
at last by all. They fall back by degrees, slacken at
first from their original fervour, neglect silence, and
give way to easy living. Then they fall into murmuring,
then into impatience, afterwards into disobedience,
and at last into disgust with their rule and discipline.

Some lose interior recollection by slothfulness, others
by their affection for trifles, many by visits and by
correspondence with the world. Thus, from these small
beginnings, which appear nothing at first, through the
neglect of superiors, who are attentive only to great
disorders, are forged such strong bonds as cannot easily
be broken.

The natural inclination we have to sin will always
produce these evils if we are not careful to stop their
progress in the beginning. What disorders, for example,
does not the habit of murmuring cause, which seems
at first to be only a diversion? From it proceed lies,
rash judgments, malicious interpretations, slander, false
witness, anger, indignation, contempt, mockery, and
afterwards the obligation of restoring honour, which is
scarcely ever done. In short, the custom of murmuring
at everything spreads so much corruption over our
judgments that good is called evil and virtue itself is
reproved.

We need no other proof of this than that furnished
by the excess into which those fell who murmured
against Christ, since they soon went so far as to con-
tradict His doctrine and censure His works. The
clearer His doctrine was, the more they endeavoured
to obscure it, and the more admirable His works were,
the more they endeavoured to decry them.

The spirit of murmuring, because it was not stifled
at birth, occasioned all these evils. In addition to the
injury it did to those who gave themselves up to it, it
was also an extreme affliction to our Saviour for it
hindered the progress of the Gospel, gave scandal to
the weak, gave pause to the strong, encouraged the
wicked, hardened the incredulous, and obliged Christ
to employ in resisting evil the time He had appointed
for doing good.

When He made them hope for the pardon of their
sins, they accused Him of blasphemy; when He proved
Himself to be the Son of God they said that He gave
testimony of Himself. They asked Him in public, in
order to destroy His credit with the people, by what
authority He presumed to preach and work miracles.
When He worked any in the synagogues, in order to
give authority to the doctrine He preached therein,
they turned out the people under the pretence that it
was the Sabbath. On the pretext of the public good
and for fear, as they said, that the Romans should think
the people were being stirred up to sedition, they often
prevented Him holding meetings. If His secret disciples
said anything in His defence, they were howled down
by the outcries of the mob.

The Pharisees, seeing that the truth always prevailed,
said among themselves (John xii, 19): Do you see that
we prevail nothing? Behold the whole world is gone
after him. Which clearly shows that the malice and
aversion they had in their hearts against His doctrine
was even greater than what appeared outwardly. But
Christ knew their intentions and, by His divine wisdom,
could penetrate their most secret thoughts.

Seeing Him one day followed by a great crowd of
people carrying palm branches and calling down a
thousand blessings on Him, they were transported with
rage and complained loudly because He did not make the people hold their peace. They proposed to Him, in the presence of all the people, such questions as they thought to be difficult, in order to confound Him, but finding themselves confounded by His answers, they were forced to have recourse to more secret stratagems for ruining Him.

Christ thus spent the three years of His public life in continual contradictions until His enemies, perceiving that all their efforts were proving availing, resolved to seize Him, but the officers who were entrusted with the task returned without executing it, being charmed with the doctrine of our Saviour. They then forbade the people to follow Him, under severe penalties, and as they were daily informed of the miracles He worked, they took care to examine strictly all those who had been cured, in the hope of finding, even in His miracles, some grounds on which to condemn Him.

It was thus that they behaved towards the paralytic healed at the side of the pool and towards the man born blind who, having too clearly satisfied all their questions, was shamefully turned out of the synagogue. They would likewise have put Lazarus to death again because many people believed in Christ on account of that miracle. In short, they persecuted that divine Lamb on all occasions. He had complained of it long before through the prophet Isaiah (lxx, 2) and He has complained of it since through the Apostle St. Paul: All the day long I have spread forth my hands to a people that believeth not, and contradicteth me. (Rom. x, 21.) He withdrew sometimes from Judea to give way to the storm, or else remained hidden there for some days, returning from time to time to see whether His enemies had not softened a little. When He disappeared, they demanded to know where He was, and when He showed Himself they were annoyed because they could not hurt Him. They followed Him everywhere, in order to find occasions for opposing Him, and thus they caused Him, who sought only their salvation, a thousand troubles.

It would be impossible to describe how grieved He was by their ingratitude; it would be just as impossible to describe the lengths of malignity to which the human heart will go when it once becomes obstinate in contradicting the known truth and the works of God. What reason had they to persecute Christ in the way they did? He did not avoid their company; He did not refuse to eat with them; He went into their houses when invited; He healed their sick; and, with admirable meekness and patience, He taught them heavenly truths.

He never sought to lessen their credit, reputation, goods or freedom. He even publicly declared that the people were obliged to obey the Scribes and Pharisees and to do everything they commanded. After expressing to Him that, upon His word, they were ready to acknowledge St. John the Baptist for their Messiah, they would not receive Him in that quality on His own word.

But obstinacy in contradicting the truth did not end with that ungrateful people. This is a form of persecution which good people, for the testing of their virtue, still suffer daily, not only from strangers, but from their friends, relations, brethren, from those whom they have obliged, and often from persons of the greatest reputation and authority, whose hatred is so much the more dangerous as it is commonly cloaked
by a veil of justice and piety. This cross is so severe that the servant of God requires a great deal of constancy, in order not to become discouraged, when nothing is left undone to deprive him of all credit in the employments of his zeal.

It is the custom of the corrupt world to discredit those who are most necessary to it and from whom it might draw the greatest advantages, not that it fears any harm from them, but because it chooses rather to be deprived of all those benefits, and to remain in its misery, than to see the success and reputation grow of those who are not of it. A secret jealousy has more power over it than justice, conscience, the love of our neighbour, or the consideration of the public good and its own interest, and its first care is always to oppose the designs and reputation of the servants of God.

Such was the malice of the Jews, for nothing could have been either more glorious or more profitable than to have adhered to Christ the Lord of Heaven and earth, the holy of holies, the master of the elements, and the tree of life and death. But lest it should be thought that they had any esteem for Him, they resolved to cross Him in all things. When the poison of envy has once seized those who make profession of virtue, they become cruel persecutors. It is, in fact, almost impossible to reclaim them, because, under the pretence of zeal, they abandon themselves entirely to their passion and persecute virtue, persuading themselves that they at the same time support it.

Many things might be said here for the consolation of the just, who suffer a like contradiction, which is always extremely distressing for those who truly love God and their neighbour. But since the Lord, whom they serve, will have it so for the enriching of their crown of glory, they ought to be satisfied to cast their eyes upon Christ and to give thanks that they have been judged worthy to be treated like Him, who is their model and judge.

Much more might still be said for the correction of those who are subject to this vice; but since they shut their eyes against the light, who can cure their blindness? Let us endeavour at least to hinder others from falling into it. We might show them that passage from the prophet Osee (iv, 1, 2) wherein God said that He could no longer refrain from punishing the great sins of His people because there is no truth, and there is no mercy and there is no knowledge of God in the land. Cursing, and lying, and manslaughter, and theft, and adultery, have overflowed, and blood hath touched blood. God then added, by way of showing the height of the people's evilness, that they were as those that gainsay the priest, which was saying in effect that their wickedness had increased to that degree of enormity that it equalled contradicting the priests. For the priests having been given to them for the preservation of religion, the knowledge of the true God, and the purity of His law, to contradict them was to deprive themselves of all relief and to despise all remedies. What a crime was it not then to contradict the Sovereign Truth, the Son of the living God, the eternal Priest, according to the order of Melchisedech, the Redeemer and Saviour of all men?

And because it can happen that one may sometimes, without knowing how great an evil it is, fall into the habit of contradicting the known truth, we ought to learn here that this habit of contradicting good is a kind of
compact with the father of lies, a sin against the Holy Ghost, and an almost invincible obstacle to salvation, because every portion of truth, in whatever man it may be found, is a part of the divine wisdom. Thus, to oppose the truth which is preached to us is to oppose God Himself, and he, who accustoms himself to maintain, contrary to the light which is given to him, that proposition which he has once put forward, and who will not withdraw when he perceives his error, goes so far by degrees as to lose all respect for truth and virtue, and to contradict, without scruple, everything that is most obvious and holy.

Holy Scripture advises us that we should speak not against the truth, but be ashamed of the lie of our ignorance. (Ecclus. liv, 30.) For there is no more certain mark of a weak mind than to be able neither to maintain the truth nor to renounce error. Truth is so beautiful, and so agreeable to our nature, that it perfects a man and makes him free, according to the words of the eternal Truth. (John viii, 32.)

CONTEMPLATION

O divine Word, Son of the living God, Eternal and Sovereign Truth! in order to bless Thee, I join myself to all the angels, to all the blessed, and to all the just; to all Thy holy church, to all Thy creatures, to all Thy perfections, and to all Thy works, which glorify Thee continually. Thou art my way, my truth, and my life. Thou art the way whereby I come to Thee, the truth whereby I know Thee, and the life whereby I live in Thee; the way without danger, the truth without deceit, and the life without death. He who walks not with Thee, goes astray; he who sees not by Thy light, is blind; and he who lives not in Thee, is ever dying. Thou art a secure way, a pure truth, and a true life. Thou art the living God, whom I serve; the true God, whom I adore; and the infallible God, whom I follow. Conduct me, O Lord! that I may never follow any other way; enlighten me, that I may continually behold Thy truth; and live always in me, that I may have no other life but Thee. And because good can only come from Thy hand, deliver me from the evil which I ought to fear from my enemies and from myself. For if Thou deliver me not from thence, I shall soon fall back again by my own weakness, and shall then become so much the more miserable, as Thou hast the more liberally granted me Thy mercies.

And now, O Lord! canst Thou refuse me what I ask Thee, though I be unworthy thereof, and know not how I ought to beg it of Thee? Art Thou not the same most merciful Lord, who didst spread forth thy hands all the day full of blessings to an incredulous people, rebellious and contradicting? (Isaïas, lxv, 2. Since Thou art the same, and Thy arm is not shortened, or Thy love diminished; and since Thou art no less my Saviour than that of all men, hear me, help me, and make me sensible of Thy mercies.

Remember with what goodness Thou treated that incredulous nation, with what meekness Thou bore with it, and with what patience Thou overlooked their continual contradictions. Thy light had blinded them in such a manner, that they could not suffer others to be enlightened therewith.

It would have been much easier for Thee, O divine
Lamb! to have died daily, than to see the contradiction of those faithless hearts, which was the source of their eternal misery.

Ah, Lord! turn towards me those amiable cares. I confess the truth which they did not believe, adore the virtue they persecuted, and praise the works they contradicted. Since Thou didst so much for those who rejected Thee, come, O my God! to those who call Thee. Thou hast said, open thy mouth and I will fill it. (Ps. lxxx, 11.) Ah! let all the powers of my soul, and all the parts of my body, be changed into so many open mouths, that Thou mayst fill them. I dilate my heart as much as I can, by my continual sighs, and I desire nothing so much as to behold it filled with Thee and with Thy spirit. Come then, O Lord! send forth thy light and thy truth, with all the graces wherewith Thou art wont to enrich Thy servants. (Ps. xlii, 3.)

I know very well, that if Thou examinest my merits according to the rigour of Thy justice, Thou wilt turn away Thy eyes, lest they see the vanity of my works; Thou wilt shut Thy ears that Thou mayst not hear my voice; and Thou wilt deprive me of Thy sweet presence, since I am no less guilty than those who contradicted Thy words and actions with so much obstinacy: for in believing what they denied, and adoring what they contradicted, I am nevertheless rebellious to Thy light, and deaf to Thy voice.

I am one of those whom Thou so justly complainest of, who have turned away their faces from thee; and given thee their backs. (II Paral. xxix, 6.) Thou hadst Thy eyes fixed on me, and I looked only upon the earth; Thou soughtest me, and I departed from Thee; Thou lovest me, and I loved creatures; Thou wast wholly in me, and I was wholly out of Thee. If I have not contradicted Thy truths by my belief, I have contradicted them by my works; and if I have not censured Thy doctrine, I have abandoned Thy service.

I cannot confess with sufficient sorrow, O God of mercy! how much I have resisted Thee, and how much I still resist Thee daily. I am supported by Thy grace, and yet always weak; enlightened by Thy doctrine, and always blind; filled with Thy blessings and always miserable. It is in vain, O my God! to lay open my miseries here before Thee: they are better known to Thee than to myself; but since Thou beholdest them with the same goodness that makes Thee bear with them, heal them with the same love that obliges Thee to give Thyself to me. It is true that after having so many times rejected Thee, I deserve not to find Thee at the first endeavour I make for returning to Thee: but, at least, refuse not my humble acknowledgment and sincere sorrow for having displeased Thee.

Wilt Thou not deal by me in such a manner, O my God! that the world may reject me, that it may despise me, and judge me unworthy of it, from the attachment I shall have to Thee? Thus it was that it treated the man born blind in publishing the wonders of Thy power; but being cast off by the world as a man adhering to Thee, and being unable to seek Thee, Thou soughtest him Thyself, didst judge him worthy of beholding Thee with those eyes Thou hadst opened for him, and of suffering for Thy love what the world looked upon only with horror. Then it was that he truly saw Thee, acknowledged Thee, adored Thee, and followed Thee and that Thou received him for ever into the number of Thy disciples.

O wealth unknown to the world! why dost Thou let
me beg so long for such weak helps among creatures? 
Discover Thyself to me, O my treasure! appear to my 
eyes, O infinite beauty! Thou didst require nothing 
from the blind man but that he should believe in Thee, 
and desire to see Thee, and Thou didst immediately 
show Thyself to him. Behold me here, O Lord! in the 
same disposition. I believe, and desire with all my 
heart to see Thee, know Thee, and love Thee; refuse me 
not what Thou makest me desire. It is true that blind 
man had seen nothing before Thee that possessed his 
heart; and the Pharisees, on the contrary, full of earthly 
views and affections, would not know Thee. But Thou 
hast not limited Thy mercy to the blind alone: St. 
Paul was not so when Thou struck him blind to 
show Thyself to him. If it be necessary for seeing 
Thee to see nothing but Thee, I consent that Thou 
shouldst shut my eyes, O Lord! that they may not see 
vanity, but only contemplate Thee alone, O pure light! 
O divine truth! O sweet and eternal repose of my soul! 
O most holy Mother of God! O most humble hand-
maid of the Lord! who always preferred the submission 
of a handmaid to the dignity of a mother, grant that my 
heart may be humbled, undeceived in all the illusions 
of the world, and submissive to the truth, that the 
truth may make it free. AMEN.

XXIII

The snares laid for Him to encompass His death

The sorrow which these continual contradictions of 
His teaching occasioned our Saviour was also much 
increased by the intrigues of the leaders of the people, 
the priests, doctors and Pharisees, who endeavoured 
to trap Him in His words that they might have some 
pretence for proceeding against Him. This was not 
among the least of our Saviour’s sufferings. Many 
circumstances combined to intensify its pangs and the 
prophet speaks with singular bitterness of the snares 
which were continually laid against Christ for destroy-
ing Him by those whose mouth is full of cursing, and 
of bitterness, and of deceit: under whose tongue are 
labour and sorrow. They sat in ambush with the rich 
in private places, that they may kill the innocent. 
(Ps. ix, 28, 29.) They dug a pit before my face. (Ps. 
lx), 7, 8.) From unjust men deliver me. Who have 
proposed to supplant my steps; the proud have hidden 
a net for me. And they have stretched out cords for 
a snare: they have laid for me a stumbling-block by 
the wayside. (Ps. cxxxix, 5, 6.) The sorrows of hell 
ensnapped me; and the snares of death prevented 
me. (Ps. xvii, 6.) The prophet spoke thus because all 
the designs of His enemies had the sole aim of depriving 
Christ of life.

They followed Him wherever He went in order to 
lose no opportunity of obstructing Him. When they 
saw the people assembled around Him they came 
forward and put a thousand questions to Him with
great insistence, laying in wait for him, and seeking to catch something from his mouth, that they might accuse him. (Luke xi, 54.) The Sadducees and Pharisees appeared sometimes themselves, and sometimes they sent their disciples. Sometimes they used artifice, as when they asked Him whether they might dispense themselves from paying tribute to Caesar, and sometimes they employed public clamour as when they brought before Him the woman taken in adultery.

One might find reason for amazement at the persistence of their malice for, seeing all their wiles exposed and themselves often convinced by the answers they extorted to the extent that they had not one word to make in reply, as a result of which they drew upon themselves the contempt of the people, they were nevertheless not discouraged. Losing all shame, they openly persecuted our Saviour even unto death, but could never confound Him. He gave thanks for this to God His Father through the mouth of His prophet and exposed the injustice of His enemies: Thou hast protected me from the assembly of the malignant; from the multitude of the workers of iniquity. For they have whetted their tongues like a sword; they have bent their bow, a bitter thing, to shoot in secret the undefiled. . . . They have searched after iniquities; they have failed in their search. . . . The arrows of children are their wounds, and their tongues against them are made weak. (Ps. lxiii, 3-9.) And elsewhere He says: For without cause they have hidden their net for me unto destruction: without cause they have upbraided my soul. (Ps. xxxiv, 7.) Their foot hath been taken in the very snare which they hid. (Ps. ix, 16.)

This clearly shows that, for defending itself against malice, virtue stands in no need of anything other than itself. It is strong enough when it appears in its true light. He who persecutes it, therefore, has no other aim than to disfigure it by giving it the colour of vice. This is almost the only way in which virtue can be injured, is the one commonly employed in intrigues and injustices, but it avails little when virtue entrenches itself behind its true colours.

This is a truth which even pagan philosophy acknowledged when it was said that the fortress of virtue cannot be carried either by force or surprise; that, as the sun obscures small lights, so virtue surmounts pain and injustice; and that adversity has less power over virtue than tempests have over the sea. Tempests may indeed put the sea into commotion, but very far from destroying it, they only purify it, and the sea returns at last to its pristine calmness. So patience in the end appeases anger; truth dissipates lies; humility confounds pride; and the Lord, according to the expression of the royal prophet, will not leave the rod of sinners upon the lot of the just; that the just may not stretch forth their hands to iniquity. (Ps. cxxiv, 3.

From the malice of the Jews we also reaped this advantage that it gave Christ the occasion to reveal many divine secrets to us, which enlighten our faith, kindle in us the love of God, and are the most solid consolation of His servants.

When they accused Him of not observing the Sabbath because He healed the sick on that day, He taught us that man was not made for the Sabbath but that the Sabbath was made for man that he might spend it in the service of God. Thus He cleared away for us the vain superstition of the Jews in this matter.
When they tempted Him by asking Him for some heavenly prodigy, He taught us this terrible truth that the incredulous, who profit neither by the graces they receive nor by the signs they see, shall have no other sign given them but the sign of Jonas the prophet (Luke xi, 29) who, after being three days in the whale’s belly, converted the city of Ninive by his preaching, thereby referring to His own glorious resurrection and the spread of His gospel. He added that the queen of the south . . . came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon (Matt. xii, 42), and that He was more than Solomon or Jonas and they would not believe in Him.

When they asked Him whether a married man could put away his wife, He explained the nature of the law of marriage, which had been altered by the interpretation of the Jews, and He taught them, what they had never heard, that chaste persons should be like the angels of God.

Being asked by what power He worked miracles, He proclaimed His divinity by saying that the Messiah was more than a man since He was the Lord of David, though He had descended from him according to the flesh.

On being asked whether the tribute which the Jews paid to Caesar was lawful, He taught us that the way to preserve interior peace was to render to God what belongs to God, and to the world what belongs to the world.

When they reproached Him because His disciples did not fast, nor washed their hands before meals, He replied to the first reproach that it was not customary to fast in the presence of the bridegroom, the conversation His disciples had with Him supplying the want of fasting, that is, of great austerities. To the second reproach He answered that one ought to be more anxious about the purity of the heart than the cleanliness of the body.

Being accused of eating with sinners, He set before them the example of the prodigal son received by his father, of the strayed sheep brought back to the fold by the good shepherd, of the lost piece of money sought for so carefully, and added that mercy was more agreeable to God than sacrifice.

When they brought before Him the adulterous woman to see whether He would condemn her to be stoned according to the law of Moses, or pardon her, contrary to the express prohibition of the law, He gave us the excellent instruction that if we are to judge our neighbour fairly we must know ourselves, and that he who finds himself guilty ought to be extremely cautious about condemning others. Immediately afterwards He was pleased to show us with what ease He pardoned sinners by saying to that poor woman the most comforting words: Neither will I condemn thee. Go, and now sin no more.—(John viii, 11.)

And comment is superfluous upon His answer to those who asked Him to tell them which was the greatest commandment of the law: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like to this: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.—(Matt. xxii, 37.)

They also asked Him other artful questions concerning the resurrection of the dead, miracles, and His own
person, which He answered in the same way for the instruction of His Church, thus putting the malice of His enemies to the service of our salvation.

So it is that the servants of God, secure in the testimony of their own conscience, ought, when they are persecuted, to labour with fear and love, not in search of the means to resist the wicked, but to reconcile them to God, persevering in the practice of virtue, profiting by the opportunities of testifying their fidelity to God, remaining ever faithful imitators of Christ, enemies of His enemies, depositories of His truth, defenders of His Cross: and victorious over the malice of the world.

**CONTEMPLATION**

O sweet Jesus, love of my soul! how can we resist the sweetness of Thy spirit? Thou lovest, O amiable Saviour! and art not loved. Thou shinest, O divine light! and art not known. Thou receivest all, O source of heavenly blessings! and we come not to Thee. Thou seest us, O life of my soul! Thou searchest, as a favour, that we would give Thee our hearts, and we reject Thee, and fly from Thee. How comes this, O divine Jesus? Is there anything hateful to be found in Thee? or rather, what can be found without Thee, and out of Thee, which deserves to be loved? But, O my God! let not our ingratitude provoke Thee.

Remember that Thou hast said that there are *twelve hours of the day*.—(John xi, 9.) Thou mayst give me one of them for knowing and loving Thee. Begin by this, although it comes very late, and perhaps may be the last of my life. Since I have been so unhappy as to spend the others without loving Thee, may I begin at least like those who, after spending the whole day without doing anything, came in the evening to labour in Thy vineyard, and satisfied Thee notwithstanding, because none but those who refuse to come are displeasing to Thee. Forget, therefore, what is past, O my God! receive me this moment into the number of Thy servants. Let my heart love Thee, my spirit adore Thee, and my whole interior embrace Thee.

When shall I be able to say with truth, as Thy Apostle did: *Who then shall separate us from the love of Christ?*—(Rom. viii, 35.) But if I love Thee truly, why shall I not be able to say it with truth? No, Lord! the fear of death shall not separate me from Thee, since Thou art my life; nor the love of this life, for I am quite ready to lose it for Thee; nor the powers of Heaven, because Thou art more powerful than they; nor things present, because they pass away; nor things to come, because I love nothing in them but Thee alone; nor tribulation, because Thou comfortest me; nor anguish, because Thou dilatest my heart; nor hunger, because Thou fillest me; nor poverty, because Thou enrichest me; nor dangers, because Thou securest me; nor persecution, because Thou protectest me; nor sword or torments, because they are sweet to me on account of Thy love; nor slavery, because I shall find true freedom in Thee; nor freedom itself, because I desire to be a slave to Thy love; nor creatures, because they are nothing before Thee; nor the vicissitudes of this world; nor the wiles of my enemies; nor my own miseries; because Thou changest all these evils into so many blessings for me.
The sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ

If Thou art for me, O my God! who shall be against me? If Thou hast given Thyself to me, with that unbounded charity, why wilt Thou not give me all things with Thee? By loving Thee, I am strong, patient and meek; I believe all things, hope for all things, am all things, expect all blessings, and avoid all evils. For by loving Thee, I possess Thee; and by possessing Thee, I am in want of nothing. By loving Thee, I am a man, I am an angel, I am happy, I am dead to sin, and I live only for Thee. Without Thy love, what good can I have? and what evil have I not! I have but one thing to regret, O my Saviour! it is for having lived so long without loving Thee. But after all, this is the sorrow of a living man: for when I feel it not, I am as one that is dead. Grant, O divine Jesus! that I may be contrite with sorrow for not having loved Thee, in order to be inflamed with love, when I begin to love Thee.

How much is he to be lamented who loves not Thee, O my Saviour! He lives only for his own misery and ruin. He is foolish, because he is governed by himself, and not by Thee. He is more than sick, because he hopes he can be healed without Thee; and more than dead, because he imagines he can live without Thee.

Thou seest all the thoughts of Thy ungrateful people, their hatred of Thy person, their attempts against Thy virtue, their artifices against Thy innocence, and their designs against Thy wisdom. Thou seest who they are, against whom they rebel, what makes them do so, and what end they propose to themselves; Thou beholdest them and art silent; and sufferest all.

I adore Thee, O divine heart, ocean of all blessings, continual source of mercies, furnace of love, and treasure of sovereign happiness! In peace in the selfsame I will sleep, and I will rest. For thou, O Lord! singularly hast settled me in hope. —(Ps. iv, 9, 10.) O that those miserable people had never laid snares against Thee but to draw Thee to them. How many graces wouldst Thou have bestowed on them! What pleasure wouldst Thou have taken in disclosing Thy divine secrets to them, had they only examined Thy words to penetrate into the depth of them! How willingly wouldst Thou have allowed Thyself to have been deprived of all had they sought only Thy blessings! It is Thy custom, O Lord! to do so and it would seem that Thou lovest to be deceived. For I call Thee, and Thou comest, though Thou knowest I shall soon forsake Thee. I beg Thy pardon, Thou grantest me it, and acceptest my resolution of sinning no more, though Thou knowest I shall sin again. Thou consentest to the covenant I make with Thee though Thou seest I am soon to break it and thus Thou reliest on me, because Thou continually awaitest the hour when I shall at last give myself to Thee, never to forsake Thee more.

But who has used most stratagems, O divine Jesus! men for surprising Thee or Thou for gaining them? How miserable am I! is it possible for me to be so weak a creature, and that Thou shouldst use so many endeavours for subjecting me to Thee? How can I escape the nets of Thy charity, which I find spread on every side for catching me? There are so many of them in tribulation, in temptation, in Thy instructions, in the warnings of Thy justice, in the gifts of Thy mercy, upon earth, in Heaven, and in Hell; and I avoid them all.

Break my bonds, O Lord! that I may fall into Thine, and then I will sacrifice to Thee the sacrifice of praise, and I will call upon the name of the Lord. —(Ps. cxv,
17. But how can they be broken, O Thou salvation of my soul! It is true Thou layest snares for me everywhere; but Thou wouldst have me fall into them voluntarily, because Thou wilt not have constrained love, and when it is constrained, it is not love. Break Thou Thyself, therefore, O my God! the chains which keep me bound to the flesh and to the world; and I will freely sacrifice to Thee, and love Thee with all my free will. — (Ps. liii, 8.) For though I freely love the things which separate me from Thee, the habit of loving them forms in me so strong a chain, that even when I see good and approve it, I depart not from evil. I desire Thee, O Lord! but I do not desire Thee perfectly, because I desire something with Thee, which I desire not for Thee. Nothing but Thy grace can break this chain, deliver me from myself, and transform me into Thee. Accomplish Thy work, and grant that I may become for ever the slave of Thy divine love. Amen.

XXIV

The Ingratitude of the Jews

There is so great a connection between sins that any one sin seems to be the origin of all the others. Hence it is that some saints have said that the root of all evil is in pride, others, in disobedience; some have affirmed it is in love of self, others again, that it is in ingratitude. St. Bernard calls this last vice "the enemy of the soul, the destruction of merits, the dissipation of virtues, and the loss of all graces: a burning wind which dries up the fountain of piety, the dew of mercy, and the channel of divine communications." Thus it is that he attributes all evils to ingratitude. Though the Jews had many others, any one of which was alone capable of ruining them, it is certain that ingratitude was one of their most dangerous vices, since it was strengthened by all the others and since, at the same time, it rendered them more odious and incurable. However that may be, we may affirm that it caused our Lord such pain as only invincible patience could sustain.

It is easy to understand how gallingly it is to meet with nothing but bad treatment from those upon whom we have heaped benefits. The priests and leaders of the people were the most ungrateful of all and, lest it should be thought that they were obliged to Him in any way, they defamed Him everywhere, and their hatred increased in proportion to the favours He dispensed. Others who followed Him with a view to some temporal advantage withdrew when He spoke to them in terms not in accordance with their desires, as did those whom He had miraculously fed with five loaves and two fishes. Having designed to make Him king, in the expectation of living pleasantly under His reign, they abandoned
Him when they heard him speak of that heavenly bread which He was to give to the world. Some after having been healed, did not even thank Him for it, like the nine lepers, and many even of those who had followed Him became His persecutors.

In short, these miserable people upon whom He had showered His favours, after having received Him with great rejoicings and acclamations, acknowledged Him as having been sent from God, and having wished to touch only the hem of His garment for their cure, joined His enemies, preferred a murderer to Him, demanded that He should be crucified, and led Him themselves to the place of execution.

But what can never cease to fill us with wonder and admiration is that our Saviour, knowing their intentions and foreseeing their ingratitude, did not cease to instruct them in His divine truths or to bestow on them a thousand blessings, going so far as to give Judas himself, who betrayed Him, marks of His tenderness, and to restore to Malchus, who had come to seize Him, the ear which Peter had cut off.

Ingratitude destroys the oldest of friendships, and those who may be reconciled to one another afterwards give no other reason for the reconciliation than that it is the nature of virtue to forget evil, and to do good even to those who are most unworthy of it. For nothing can excuse ingratitude. The more one endeavours to justify it, the more untenable one’s position becomes, and the best excuse is to acknowledge simply that we have no excuse. But however the matter may be handled, human friendships are almost invariably weakened by ingratitude. Only the divine love with which Christ was filled could be increased by ingratitude, for, far from being extinguished by it, or changed into hatred, as commonly happens among men, His love became all the more ardent. The ingratitude of the Jews, instead of shutting up the heart of Jesus, made the treasures of His wisdom and mercy flow with greater abundance, and those who afterwards acknowledged their fault were received with as much kindness as if they had never been ungrateful.

But we, who are born within the pale of the Church, who are nourished in the bosom of the Faith and charity of Christ, who see the wonderful effects of His power, hear the divine truths by which He has taught us the way to Heaven, and can draw waters with joy out of the Saviour’s fountains (Is. xii, 3), are we less ungrateful than the Jews? We reject all those graces, run after the deceitful image of earthly pleasures, with as great earnestness as if they were solid and eternal, and live in an entire forgetfulness of what we owe to God. We dare even to present ourselves before His majesty in this state, and stay in His house with as much tranquillity as if we were faithful to Him. We go into His temple, as if He should see nothing but good in us, and we exercise His patience no less than did the ungrateful Jews who crucified Him.

Theologians teach that the sin into which we relapse is greater than the first, because there is ingratitude in committing again an offence for which we have been forgiven. How then shall we reckon those offences into which we daily fall, after God has given us pardon for them a thousand times?

If we add to this our abuse of temporal goods, which have been given to us for meriting Heaven, and which we so often use in a way to deserve Hell, our contempt for spiritual goods, our negligence in serving God, in
preserving grace, in making good use of time, in corresponding with divine inspirations, while we are wholly employed in the cares of this world, with our passions and earthly pleasures having more power over us than the infinite majesty, the greatness, truth, eternity, power and glory of God, by whose goodness we live and whose severity we cannot avoid, our ingratitude would at last become to us an abyss of woe and perdition. There would remain no longer any hope for us but in the infinite charity of Christ who, foreseeing the hardness of our hearts, vouchsafed to be crucified for ungrateful wretches, and is still ready to forget our ingratitude if we return to Him sincerely. But let us remember that this patience, which bears with us so long, may be turned into a just wrath, and that without it we should have been already lost.

The mercy which God shows in respect of us is not only to us a matter of comfort but is also an example which He sets us in order that we may do good to those who are ungrateful towards us, and that the obligation under which we lie to Him may have more power over us than our own resentments. For this reason He commands us to love our enemies, for if you love them that love you, what thanks are to you? For sinners also love those that love them. And if you do good to them who do good to you; what thanks are to you? For sinners also do this. . . . But love ye your enemies: do good, and lend, hoping for nothing thereby; and your reward shall be great, and you shall be the sons of the Highest: for he is kind to the unthankful, and to the evil.—(Luke vi, 32, 33, 35.)

The very heathens have owned that he who refuses to oblige an ungrateful person does more injury to him-
serpents. The serpent carries his about with him for hurting others, and is not incommode by it himself, whereas the ungrateful person is punished by his own ingratitude.

Since the example given by God, and human reason itself, induce us to oblige the ungrateful, it is sufficient to add here that there is scarcely anything in this world more worthy of holy emulation than to return good for evil, because of the interior graces with which God always fills those who suffer evil by doing good, and who cease not to do good although the receivers refuse to acknowledge it. Experience of what I have said will prove the truth of it.

CONTEMPLATION

Is it possible, O my Saviour! that there is no sort of affliction but what Thou hast been pleased to suffer and that after so many pains endured for us, Thou still sufferest men to be ungrateful, so far as to make use of Thy own benefits for offending Thee? Blessed be the love which made Thee support such an ingratitude. Let me see, O sweet Jesus! the secrets of Thy heart. There never was any so sensible of ingratitude, and yet that vice, which ought to have dried up the fountain of Thy blessings, makes them flow abundantly even upon those who refuse them.

Thou seest, O Lord! the extreme ingratitude with which people endeavour to destroy Thy favours, and to return Thee nothing for so many blessings, but injuries, contempts, torments, and a cruel death. The sick whom Thou has healed, and the ignorant whom Thou hast instructed, rise up against Thee. Yet that source of goodness is not drained, nor that furnace of charity extinguished; far from depriving these ungrateful people of the hopes of receiving new favours, Thou still offerest them some every day.

What can they desire more when they possess Thee, O source of all good! with what excuse can they cover their ingratitude, when they reject Thee? When they have not whereof to eat Thou fillest them. If they want anything, Thou resteth not till they ask it of Thee, that Thou mayst give it to them. They find in Thee the physician and the remedy both of soul and body.

The Queen of Saba might well have said to Thee, with much more reason than to Solomon (III Kings x, 8, 9) blessed are thy men, and blessed are thy servants, who stand before thee always, and hear thy wisdom... the Lord hath loved Israel for ever, and hath appointed thee king to do judgment and justice. That Queen saw nothing in Solomon but exterior and limited qualities which she admired, but she would have found in Thee a divine power, a divine wisdom and a divine love; and if Israel was beloved of God, because Solomon governed it, how much more happy ought it to have esteemed itself in having Thee for its king.

O how true is it what Thou hast said, O Lord! that those who will not receive Thee, who in the name of the Father comest to them full of grace and truth, will receive another with open arms, who shall come in his own name to seduce and destroy them. Since they prefer themselves to Thee, love the promises of the world more than Thine, and the accomplishment of their own carnal desires, more than the communication of Thy divine blessings, they shall find eternal death in the midst of the life which Thou bringest them. Thou seest their evils, and art sensibly touched therewith,
whilst they suffer them without concern. May Thy infinite love be praised and glorified for ever.

But alas, O Lord! when I admire Thy patience in supporting the ingratitude of the Jews, have I not reason to weep before Thee for my own past and present miseries, and to disclose to Thee my old wounds, which have so often broke out again, and which Thou alone canst cure? Though I have not seen Thee in Thy mortal flesh, I believe that all Thou didst on earth is for me an inestimable treasure of spiritual blessings. For Thou wast born for me alone, as well as for all others, and as Thy person is of an infinite dignity, the virtue of Thy divine works can never be exhausted. In Thy actions, words and merits, I find my support, my direction, my food and life. From thence it is that I hope for, and believe, what I do not see.

Behold what Thou givest me, O my God! but if I think on what I return Thee, how shall I presume to appear before Thee? What ought I not to fear, O Lord! if Thy mercies rise up against me; if Thy benefits condemn me, if Thy whole goodness confounds me, and if what Thou hast prepared for my remedy becomes to me a mortal poison? What service have my eyes, tongue and ears, my whole body, understanding and will, my memory, soul, and all that I am, rendered Thee? What has my gratitude been to Thee for Heaven, earth and elements; for my being, life, and all the temporal blessings which Thou hast bestowed on me, or rather, how have I not abused them, in offending Thee with extreme ingratitude.

But my ingratitude will appear much greater, if besides the benefits which are common to me with many others, I call to mind the particular graces which I have received from Thee, the sins Thou hast pardoned me, the temptations Thou hast made me overcome, and the dangers from which Thou hast delivered me. When I confess before Thee the particular acts of ingratitude I have fallen into, after so many favours, my heart is so full of sorrow and confusion that I reckon all other miseries of my life as nothing. Against Thee only have I sinned, O my God! and I ought to have loved nothing but Thee alone. I have done evil before thee, and confess it in the sight of the whole world that Thy mercy may triumph over my ingratitude. I was conceived in iniquities; for that reason it is I am so prone to commit them, and Thou art so easy to pardon them. Thou hast loved truth; Thou hast always fulfilled Thy promises, and I cease not by new sins to violate those which I have made Thee so often.

The uncertain and hidden things of thy wisdom Thou hast made manifest to me, which found out the means of elevating me by Thy humiliations, of enriching me by Thy merits, and of defacing my ingratitude by Thy sufferings. Thus the only confidence I have left is, that thou shalt sprinkle me with hyssop, and I shall be cleansed; thou shalt wash me, and I shall be made whiter than snow. To my hearing thou shalt give joy and gladness, and the bones that have been humbled shall rejoice.—(Ps. i, 6-10.)

O powerful Queen of heaven! in whom grace was never unprofitable, and who hast acquired, by your fidelity, an immense treasure of celestial blessings, God has been pleased that you should be our refuge; help me, assist me, an ungrateful person, unworthy of everything that is good. May I return into the house and friendship of our Lord, who rendered you so perfect, and may I never forget His mercies. Amen.
XXV

His human fear of His Passion

The Son of God, in becoming man, set before Himself three main objectives as the end of all His labours: His Father’s glory, the establishment of the law of grace, and the redemption of mankind. The glory of God was to be made known to the whole world by the death of our Saviour, the law of grace, which He proclaimed, was to be confirmed by His sufferings and the redemption of mankind was to be consummated by the shedding of His blood, but the desire He had to see His Father glorified, the new law established, and men redeemed, was so ardent that one may say, without any fear of exaggeration, that this desire was the greatest of all His torments.

The zeal for God’s house, with which Christ was consumed, urged Him interiorly to accomplish His work, represented to Him continually what He had to suffer, and gave Him no rest. It is true that our Saviour was pleased that it should be this way so that the longer this pain continued with Him the more full of grace and merit it might be for us; but He was also pleased to make us understand thereby that so painful a death, far from being the effect of chance, or of the sole malice of men, proceeded from a profound wisdom and a charity which could brook no delay.

For we must not judge of the length of Christ’s sufferings by the period of His Passion, which lasted only about twenty hours. He not merely felt the pain and ignominy thereof at that time, but they had been present to His mind during the whole course of His life, and His sacred humanity was continually oppressed therewith.

He expressed His desire and fear in these words, so full of love: I have a baptism wherewith I am to be baptised; and how am I straitened until it be accomplished?—(Luke xii, 50.) He also calls His Passion a baptism when He asked the children of Zebedee, who desired to have the first places in His kingdom, Can you drink of the chalice that I drink: or be baptised with the baptism wherewith I am baptised?—(Mark x, 38.) If these terms of chalice and baptism denote anything agreeable, it is because our Saviour’s love could find no comfort but in that chalice, and in that bath of blood, wherein He was to wash away our iniquities.

Holy Scripture is full of the praises of that precious blood. It calls it the blood of the new testament (Matt. xxvi, 28) in which we shall be purified, and says that it intercedes for us with God; that it was by his own blood (Christ) entered once into the holy, having obtained eternal redemption; that as in the old law without shedding of blood there was no redemption, so in the new law how much more shall the blood of Christ . . . cleanse our consciences from dead works, to serve the living God.—(Heb. ix, 12, 22, 14.) And as Christ was pleased to be baptised in the Jordan in order to give to the waters the virtue of sanctifying our souls, He was also pleased to be washed in His own blood to teach us that that blood is not a sign of wrath and death, but a fountain of life and grace.

When He healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, speech to the dumb, life to the dead, and saw the people full of joy and wonder, He wished that all the nations
of the world would receive in their souls, by virtue of His blood and in a spiritual manner, the graces that so small a number of people had received in respect of their bodies; and His heart desired, with a holy impatience, that these blessings might be communicated to all men. He spoke of this continually, and on every occasion, because He was wholly taken up with it.

Considering the ingratitude of the Jews, He foretold that the Gentiles should take possession of the blessings which the Jews had refused. Speaking of eating and drinking, He frequently fell upon participation in His body and blood, which was to give life to the world. Sometimes He spoke of sheep, which He was to bring from all parts of the world into His fold; sometimes of those who were to come from the east and the west to sit down at His table. He exhorted His disciples to view the fields already white and ready for the harvest. He affirmed that when He should be elevated on the Cross He would draw all to Him, and He neglected no opportunity of expressing His extreme desire for our salvation.

Thus when He said (Luke xii, 49), I am come to cast fire on the earth: and what will I, but that it be kindled? He knew very well that that fire could be kindled only by the baptism of His blood, and seeing that baptism delayed, He cried out feelingly, How am I straitened until it be accomplished?—(Ibid. 50.) What zeal! what love! what tenderness! What can men be thinking of not to converse continually with a God so good, a friend so affectionate, and a father so charitable who, forgetful of Himself, is wholly taken up with our necessities?

Behold here the mirror in which we may discover whether we are far from or near to God, and whether our views be pure and disinterested. For the ardour with which He desired the accomplishment of our salvation rendered every moment He had to wait for it painful and tedious to Him, though there was not one of them that was not full of infinite merit for us. This desire agitated Him continually, and yet we, for whom He endured this anguish, allow ourselves to be carried away by quite contrary desires, although we know how much they displease Him, and that it was for the purpose of plucking them out of our hearts that He was pleased to suffer death. I would even go so far as to say that if the majority of people took stock of their past lives they would scarcely find, let the years be never so numerous, one single day in which they laboured for their eternal salvation with the same application as they have done every day for what occasions the loss of their souls.

How foolish are those persons who put off all attention to their eternal destiny until the last moment of their lives, and who imagine that, in the midst of the terrors of God's judgment, before which they must appear, in sight of the punishments of Hell, into which they are immediately liable to fall, and distracted by the pains inseparable from the parting of soul and body, they will be able to concentrate as they ought on the matter of their salvation! How shall they at their death love Him with all their heart, whom they have not loved during their lifetime, and without the love of whom they cannot be saved? Christ, the faithful friend of our souls, did not act in this manner. He had appointed an hour in which He was to die for us; He thought of it every moment and He died daily because that hour did not come sooner. We are no less obliged to Him for the good will He had to die for us, than for His death itself.
We ought to consider the desires, with which His heart was oppressed, as so many deaths suffered for us, for He continually renewed in Himself the remembrance and desire of that bloody bath in which He was to be plunged for the salvation of mankind.

That love of the Cross caused Him also another pain which arose from the natural fear and continual sense He had of those sufferings which He was to undergo. The same love which made Him choose those sufferings rendered them always present to His mind and, despite the horror nature had of them, He earnestly desired them.

Men of courage, though they appreciate the danger, may on occasion volunteer for dangerous missions in order to show their valour, and men may fight bravely and victoriously when once they have overcome the natural fear with which they are often seized when the battle is joined. But their period of fear is short-lived, whereas our Saviour’s sacred humanity experienced it always, for He was all His life torn, as one might say, between the terror of torments which He foresaw down to the smallest detail, and the desire of accomplishing the work of our redemption by the death of the Cross. Which made Him say, after having complained of the delay in that bloody baptism, *I came not to send peace, but the sword* (*Matt. x, 34*), to cut off everything that might soften His suffering, and to fight among the pains and ignominies of a cruel death. Or, again (*Luke xii, 49*), *I came to send fire on the earth, and what will I but that it be kindled?* and that it may increase in the hearts of men by the endeavour they shall make to resist everything that can deprive them of the true blessings. Thus they would follow the ways He had shown them, and
XXVI

In the Garden of Olives

Our Saviour’s Passion began, as did His life, with an overpowering sense of the cruel death He was to suffer and of the sins of the world which He was to expiate. Thus when He beheld the moment approaching in which He had resolved to die, He was pleased to suffer death in such a manner that He might satisfy the justice of God to the full extent and at the same time excite our hearts to love Him and our minds to know Him, for in this consisted the whole fruit which He designed to gather from His labours.

He waited not therefore until His executioners came to shed His blood, but being unable to suffer delay, He abandoned Himself to a sorrow whose profundity it would have been beyond the efforts of His enemies to awaken in Him, because the hatred they bore Him could not equal the love He had for us. From the beginning of His Passion He was pleased to make us understand that it was due rather to the effect of His choice and His love than to the violence of the Jews. For this reason He retired to a place where He was wont to pray, that His enemies might find Him more easily, and there, before they appeared, having deprived His sacred humanity of the support it received from the Divinity, and disclosed to it at the same time everything it would have to suffer, He reduced it to a cruel agony.

For, having washed His disciples’ feet, instituted in
an abundant sweat of blood that, after soaking His garments, it also moistened the ground whereon He prayed.

Then an angel descended from Heaven to comfort Him, not that He wanted the necessary power to oppose the weakness of nature, but in order to teach all those who suffer that their consolation and strength must come from Heaven. So the angel, who knew the identity of that afflicted person, did not waste time in proposing different themes of consolation to Him, but only besought Him, in the name of Heaven and earth, and of all sinners, to apply to their evils, out of His infinite love, that sovereign remedy which they could receive but from Him alone, and to prefer, to the reproaches and torments of one day, the eternal glory which He was to obtain thereby: for, as the Apostle says, having joy set before him, he endured the cross, despising shame.—(Heb. xii, 2.)

The sinner, for the love of whom our Saviour vouchsafed to undergo this great agony, ought here to beg of Him the interior spirit, and the divine disposition, which made Him then suffer by a voluntary submission, without any human comfort, what seemed so terrible to nature. What this was no words can express nor any understanding comprehend without a particular gift of the spirit of God.

Thus it was that He who supports others in affliction abandoned Himself thereto; that the comforter of all men fell into desolation; that the joy of Heaven and earth was overwhelmed with grief; and that the Son of God, in order to gain our hearts, was pleased to take our infirmities upon Himself.

Two things occasioned Him this mortal sorrow. The first thing was the greatness and infinite multitude of the sins of the world, which were all in detail present to His mind, with a clear view of the divine majesty offended by so many crimes, and of the ruin of souls destined to eternal punishment. The second was the great number of those to whom His death would be unprofitable. As, on the one hand, He was comforted by the certainty of the advantages He was to reap from His Passion, He was, on the other, afflicted by the thought of how few men would receive the benefit of that remedy which His love had prepared for all. In this He could find no consolation but in submitting to the immutable decrees of His Father, who would have Him suffer for those very persons who would not profit by His sufferings.

His conflict and prayer continued for about three hours, during which time that good Shepherd, who in His greatest sufferings did not forget His flock, visited His disciples thrice. Having found them asleep the first and second times, He exhorted them to watch and pray, and the third time, perceiving that he who was to betray Him was not far off, He said to them, Sleep ye now and take your rest; and a little later: Rise, let us go: behold he is at hand that will betray me.—(Matt. xxvi, 45, 46.) By these words He taught us, according to the interpretation of St. Hilary, that we ought not to wait until the enemy is at hand before we watch and pray, but that we must be upon our guard when he is at a distance, lest we be surprised by him; that the apprehension of danger does not permit us to take any rest, but that the hour being come when the enemy assaults us, we ought to be without fear and to depend upon the valour and experience of our
In short, that ineffable love increased to such an extent that it could not be satisfied until it had reduced Christ to a state of interior desolation which was without parallel, thereby showing us that we should find in Him alone the remedy for all our fears and weaknesses. Indeed this mystery is full of admirable instruction for us. Our Saviour was pleased to feel that extreme pain in order that we might not think all is lost when nature avoids what is contrary to it, and to teach us that we shall not be judged according to the infirmity of our flesh but according to the disposition of our will. He truly suffered a mortal grief, but it was in proportion to His power, in order to persuade us that God, who dispenses the miseries of this life as He pleases, will not suffer us to be tempted above that which we are able; but will make us escape in temptation, that we may be able to bear it. — (I Cor. x, 13.)

He clearly showed us in Himself two seemingly opposite inclinations: the one corporeal, which abhorred suffering, and the other rational, which remained subject to God. He did this that the Christian may not think himself an enemy of God because the flesh resists the spirit, but that he may endeavour to subdue the flesh, and understand that the carnal man does not hurt the interior man while the interior man adheres to the law of God.

There descended an angel from Heaven to comfort Christ in order to show all those who suffer that God forgets them not in tribulation, that their labours are known in Heaven, and that it is from thence that they ought to expect their consolation.

Finally, the Son of God asked that He might be dispensed from what lay before Him, although He well knew that this could not be granted to Him, but He did it to teach us this paramount truth that the divine help consists not in delivering us from the afflictions which God sends us, but in making us support them in humble submission to, and in entire conformity with His designs and in remaining always united to Him by love.

CONTEMPLATION

Thy love, O divine Jesus! can bear no delay; it urges Thee continually; and to wait only two or three hours for the beginning of Thy sufferings is a great suffering to Thee. Thou waitest not till the soldiers load Thee with chains; till the Jews and Gentiles overwhelm Thee with reproaches; till the inhuman executioners tear Thy innocent flesh and fasten it to the cross; Thou abandonest Thyself to such bitter grief that Thou art obliged to complain, and to seek some comfort amongst uncultivated men, incapable of compassionating Thy pain.

It is not enough for Thy love to wait for those floods of sorrows which are ready to overflow Thee, the injuries, reproaches, and torments which are preparing for Thee. Thou tormentest Thyself beforehand by representing them to Thyself in as lively a manner as if Thou didst already suffer them, and permittest Thy sacred humanity, struggling at the same time with the desire and fear of suffering, to shed a sweat of blood.

Is it thus then, O divine fortitude! that Thou
allowest Thyself to be weakened, when Thou must combat such enemies as none but Thyself can overcome? What has become of that desire of suffering which Thou so impatiently desirest to accomplish? The hour approaches, and Thou tremblest and art sorrowful, O Thou joy of my soul! Is that the courage and vigour of mind which all afflicted persons ought to find and imitate in Thee?

May Thy infinite love be praised, glorified, and adored eternally, O my God! Thou hast reduced Thyself to this extremity only to become like me in all things; to show me that nothing could oblige Thee to suffer but Thy love, and to be my consolation and model in the miseries of this life. For if Thou didst appear intrepid and courageous in suffering, would there be any reason to wonder thereat, O my Saviour! since Thou art the power of God? That constancy is proper to Thee: and we shall see in the time of Thy passion that nothing is capable of dejecting Thee. But to hide that divine strength for the love of me, to feel weakness, to fear torments before they happen, as I am wont to do, I who am but misery and infirmity, and to be willing that sorrow should begin in Thee as it does in me, by fear and sadness, this, O divine Jesus! is what can only proceed from Thy love: it is Thy love that is Thy executioner, a thousand times more cruel than the Jews and Gentiles, who prepare to torment Thee. There as yet appear neither rods, nails, nor enemies; and Thou art already covered with a bloody sweat which covers the ground where Thou prayest. What occasions this blood to flow from Thy veins, but the love Thou hast for me?

Thus it is that Thou art pleased to assure me by

Thy example that though I find myself weak and timid, I ought not to be without hope; that I am not abandoned by Thee when I am overwhelmed with sorrow; and that though I be sensible of the evils that befall me, I cease not to be Thine, since Thou Thyself, O my God! most strong and invincible as Thou art, wast not free from these weaknesses.

Thou knowest, O divine wisdom! how grievous it is for a soul, which desires to be wholly Thine, to find itself oppressed with interior sorrow, and assaulted with such violent temptations that it no longer knows to whom to have recourse, and that Heaven itself seems to be shut against it. Then it thinks itself deprived of all help both divine and human; it is neither sensible of faith, hope, nor charity; it does not even presume to lift up its eyes to Thee, it finds itself at so great a distance from Thee; and it cannot receive any consolation from creatures. It imagines that grace is withdrawn from it, that nature remains abandoned to its own corruption. It sees nothing in itself but fear, sadness, dejection, inconstancy, importunate thoughts, irregular sentiments, disgust, contradiction, and bitterness. O divine love! faithful love, who never art nearer Thy servants than when they are in tribulation, Thou seemest to have abandoned Thyself thereto without measure. Thou was pleased to suffer all these miseries, so unworthy of Thee, that we might cast our eyes continually upon Thee, as upon our model; that we might expect from Thee, as from our strength, the victory over our enemies: and that we might have an entire confidence in Thee, as in our only remedy.

How blind and foolish am I, when I seek my consolation away from Thee, O Thou only joy of my soul!
How ungrateful am I, when I forget the love I owe Thee,
and spend my life in sin, which occasions Thee so great
sorrow! Why am I not ashamed of myself! How can
I suffer myself! Why do I not desire the earth to swal-
low me up, when I behold Thee weeping with tears of
blood, for the evils I have committed, and expiating
with so bitter sorrow, the criminal pleasures to which
I have abandoned myself! Have mercy on me, O infinite
mercy! I beseech Thee, by the sorrow Thou sufferedst,
by the blood Thou sheddest, and by the love Thou
bearest me.

But since the sight of those who are to perish still
redoubles Thy sorrow, O divine love! permit me not
to perish. Thy sorrow is great enough, without being
augmented by the foresight of my ruin. Open my ears
that I may hear Thy voice; open my eyes, that I may
behold Thy example; open my lips, that I may sing
forth Thy mercies; soften my heart, that it may become
sensible of Thy sorrow, and that I may be afraid of
everything that can renew it.

O most holy Mother of God! who, being shut up in
your chamber, felt during that cruel night, all the
torments that were prepared for your well-beloved Son;
impair to me the sentiments of your heart, that I may
detest in myself the cause of His sorrows. AMEN.

XXVII

The Treachery of Judas

While Christ, after His last supper, was teaching His
disciples a most heavenly doctrine, and was giving them
a discourse full of love and tenderness, while He prayed
in the garden, and was there bathed in a sweat of blood,
Judas, that false friend, thought of nothing but how to
put into execution the resolution He had taken to betray
Him. Our Saviour was pleased to suffer this bad treat-
ment from a man to whom He had given so many marks
of friendship and, as He could not subject Himself to
all the pains to which we are exposed, because many
of them would be inconsistent with the dignity of His
person, He made choice of those which are felt in the
most lively way, such as treason and false friendship. As
there is no sweeter pleasure than that which proceeds
from a sincere friendship, so to use it against a friend is
to wound him in the most sensible part. Holy Scripture
reckons among the greatest blessings in life is the hap-
iness of having found a faithful friend. A faithful friend
is a strong defence: and he that hath found him hath
found a treasure. Nothing can be compared to a faithful
friend: and no weight of gold and silver is able to
countervail the goodness of his fidelity.—(Ecclus vi,
14, 15.)

Holy Writ also represents betrayed friendship as a
very great calamity especially when it brings upon a
friend—as it but too commonly does—public reproach
and considerable prejudice resulting from the disclosure
of his secret. If my friend, who is another me, from
whom I have hidden nothing and to whom I communicate, without reserve, whatever befalls me, whether troublesome or agreeable, happens to join my enemies, and if he discloses to them what he knows of me and makes use of my confidence in him for destroying me, can I, without an extraordinary help of divine grace, cloak such black perfidy? Human nature is so sensitive to such treachery that he who suffers it without complaining, and sincerely pardons it, ought to pass for a miracle of patience.

Some great doctors think that it was of this trial that St. Paul speaks, when he says, *There was given me a sting of my flesh, an angel of Satan, to buffet me (II Cor. xii, 7)* and that he thereby referred to his false brethren, whom the Devil raised up to torment him, to oppose his doctrine, and to weaken his authority. This persecution affected him so sensibly that he begged God at several times to be delivered from it: he could not obtain the ending of his affliction but he obtained the grace to bear it patiently.

What Christ suffered in this way is without example. I say nothing here of the falsehood of the Pharisees who, by inviting Him to eat, praising Him, and treating Him with all the exterior marks of respect and veneration, endeavoured to trap Him in His words and to lay snares for His destruction, although He had never done anything but good to them. But what ought to be particularly considered is that, among the disciples whom He had chosen to be the pillars of His Church, on whom He had heaped His favours, and whom He regarded as His intimate friends and most faithful confidants, there should be found one who betrayed Him, sold Him, and delivered Him up to His enemies.

Some days before, seeing Magdalen pour a precious ointment on our Saviour's head, Judas had murmured openly because, he said, it might have been sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor; not because he cared for the poor, as the Evangelist adds, but because he was a thief, and having the purse, carried the things that were put therein.—(John xii, 5, 6.) And thus, to make up the loss he had sustained thereby, he resolved to sell Christ to the Jews, who sought to apprehend Him and, without caring whether our Saviour should perish at their hands or escape therefrom by a miracle, that miserable wretch thought of nothing but how to satisfy his avarice.

It is even probable that, in order to justify so black an action before the Jews, he spoke a great deal of ill of his master to them, such as, that in preaching about the contempt of the world and riches, He ate with the rich and worldlings, that He used precious perfumes, that He was often with sinners, and such other slanders as his malice suggested to him and which fell in with the sentiments of those to whom he spoke. Afterwards he offered to deliver Him without any noise into their hands. The Jews accepted the offer, praised his zeal for the public good, and promised him thirty pieces of silver. This was in accordance with the words of the prophet Jeremias: *And they took thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was prized, whom they prized of the children of Israel.*—(Matt. xxvii, 9.)

After this base treaty, Judas advised them to be in readiness, but not to stir until he returned to them. He acquainted them with the time and place where the Lord was accustomed to retire alone to pray. Afterwards he went and sat down at table with Him, and our Lord
having said that He should be betrayed that night by one of His disciples, Judas, though he knew himself to be the guilty one, ceased not to ask with the rest whom the traitor might be. He permitted our Saviour to wash his feet and listened to His heavenly doctrine. In that state he received, with the sacerdotal dignity, the Body and Blood of his Master, and that meek Lamb did not differentiate him from the others when communicating so many blessings. But seeing that the obstinacy of his heart was not softened by all these marks of tenderness, and suffering pain besides by the delay of His Passion, He said to him: *That which thou dost, do quickly.* — *(John xiii, 27.)* The other disciples imagined that Christ had sent him on some errand, and Judas departed immediately, and went to accomplish his perfidy.

David, being persecuted and betrayed my his son Absolom, expresses, in a very affecting way, how actually our Lord felt the treachery of His Apostle, when he says, *for if my enemy had reviled me, I would verily have borne with it. And if he that hated me had spoken great things against me, I would perhaps have hidden myself from him. But thou a man of one mind, my guide, and my familiar. Who didst take sweet meats together with me: in the house of God we walked with consent.* — *(Ps. liv, 13, 14, 15.)* In short, it is sufficient to mention here, in order to show how great Christ’s affliction was on this occasion, that He who suffered such great torments afterwards without complaint, complained of this to His disciples, and to Judas himself.

Our Saviour’s Passion began with this infidelity, which pierced Him to the heart, but which He used to give us wonderful examples of patience and meekness. Would to God that Judas had been the only person to betray his Master, but, alas, that perfidious Apostle has had an infinite number of followers. We still sell Christ daily, and throw away His grace and friendship for the pleasures of a moment and for a bauble of worldly glory. Though He is not now so sensible of this unworthy preference, yet it is certain that He was most sensible of it *then*, and that, when Judas betrayed Him, His divine wisdom foresaw all those false brethren and prevaricating Christians who were to rise up against Him in His Church, and for whom, nevertheless, He was going to suffer death. His friendship changes not in respect of us while our infidelity towards Him increases daily.

Now if we think that we have no such perfidy with which to reproach ourselves, let each one of us at least enter into himself to see whether we have as much zeal for the glory of God as passion for worldly honours, whether the divine love has given us a disgust of human undertakings, and whether we renounce our own will so that we may be faithful to Christ. If we knew the depth of our corruption we should find ourselves much fuller of the spirit of Judas than we imagine, and perhaps should have no less reason to hate ourselves than to abhor him.

If we consider how often we have entered into our Lord’s temple, loaded with a thousand sins we have committed against Him, how many times we have bowed the knee before Him, calling Him our father, king, friend, though our hearts were very far from Him, how long we have remained in His house while maintaining with His enemies the Devil, the world and the flesh a correspondence against Him and His law, on how many occasions we have broken our words after swearing to Him an inviolable fidelity—we cannot doubt
but that He may justly look upon us as false friends and real traitors.

But it was not only for our instruction and for expiating our infidelities that our Saviour was pleased to suffer the infidelity of His Apostle; He was pleased also to do it for the comfort of His faithful servants who have frequently, when they are desirous of serving God sincerely, to suffer similar persecutions from their false friends. For they are then thought to be quixotic and fanciful; they are accused of hypocrisy and singularity; their smallest faults are exaggerated and their most innocent actions misrepresented; their zeal is treated as passion and imprudence; their fear of offending God as scrupulosity and meanness of spirit; and their avoidance of company as incivility and unsociableness. In short, everything they do is turned into poison and their own virtues made use of to persecute them.

Only God knows how acute this kind of pain is to His servants and the need they then have for His assistance. For they find themselves forsaken by their friends and have no longer any human consolation. This is because their conduct is sincere, and they neither seek protection for their own defence nor artifice for foiling the evils that may be done them, but endeavour, with sincere charity, to win over those who are contriving their ruin, choosing always rather to lament in silence and to suffer injustice than to repel it.

It was then Christ saw His friends, and showed them at the same time by His example how they ought to overcome evil by good and, raising themselves above human friendships, fix their whole affection on Him by whom friends are loved with purity, enemies with charity, and false friends are suffered with patience and forbearance. A person who is so happy as to appreciate these truths, and receive all such afflictions as from the hand of God, finds in Him his peace and comfort.

CONTEMPLATION

Thou hast then been pleased to experience, O love of my heart! how severe a cross an unfaithful friend is. Thou received Judas at Thy table, heaped Thy favours upon him, and, as a sincere friend, communicated Thy most private thoughts to him, even when he had his heart full of gall, and had conceived the design of delivering Thee up to Thy enemies. O divine wisdom! who knowest the soul of that perfidious wretch, how couldst Thou look favourably upon him, in the midst of Thy other disciples, who loved Thee sincerely?

Behold how Thou behavest, O divine Jesus! Behold what the constancy of Thy friendship is! Thou seest our treacheries, and still seest us, drawing us by the chains of Thy charity, gaining us by Thy benefits, and endeavouring to mollify the obduracy of our hearts by the unction of Thy grace.

Though Thou alone deservest to be loved, O my glory and sovereign good! Thou wouldst testify Thy love to me by suffering so sensible a pain as that which proceeds from false friendship so that if ever I should happen to be in the like circumstance, I might find in Thee a solid consolation. That Thou wouldst still endure this contradiction, I am not surprised, O Lord! it is an effect of Thy infinite charity. What astonishes me is that a heart, which has conversed with Thee, heard Thy word, tasted Thy sweetness, and is replenished with Thy blessings, can want fidelity to Thee.

Support me by Thy omnipotent hand, O infinite good-
ness! If the Devil persuaded one of Thy apostles, in Thy presence, to commit so great an excess, what security can I promise myself? If St. Peter renounced Thee, for having had too much confidence in himself, what shall become of me, if Thou strengthen not my weakness? Humble me, O Lord! and keep me near Thee, for alas! without Thee I shall remain such as I am, always capable of abandoning and losing Thee. I am never more ready to betray Thee, and to be faithless to Thy love and grace, than when I think myself in safety.

I look upon the perfidious Judas with astonishment and indignation, who thought so little of losing Thee, that he betrayed Thee without shame, by a testimony of affection, and preferred a base interest to Thee, O my Saviour! But I do not consider myself. How many times have I concealed a corrupt heart under the appearance of piety? How many times have I abused Thy benefits to satisfy my passions? How many times have I thrown away Thy graces for earthly pleasures? How many times have I preferred the favour of men to Thy divine entertainments? How many times have I sold Thee for things of no value, without hearkening to Thy inspirations, having regard to Thy law, or being touched by Thy bounties? Pardon me, O infinite mercy! my past infidelities, and the little confusion I have for them at present, and never permit me to fall therein again. Hast Thou not too many like Judas, O my God! without my being also the companion of his perfidy?

I cast myself at Thy feet, O my Saviour and master! I acknowledge before Thee, how unfaithful I have been to Thee. Satisfy Thyself, O Father, justly provoked! punish this perfidious wretch as Thou pleasest; but permit me not to lose Thy love, as Judas did, since I return to Thee. Remember, O Lord! what Thou didst for softening the hardened heart of Thy Apostle; how Thou laboured, though all in vain, to bring him back again; and how greatly Thou wast concerned at his loss. Have the same love for me as Thou expressed for him, since Thou hast the same for all sinners, and make my heart sensible of it this very moment, in which I confess my infidelities before Thee, and submit to all the satisfactions Thou shalt require of me.

But why, O King of glory! didst Thou permit Judas to sell Thee as a slave? Why didst Thou give him power to treat Thee with such indignity? O goodness! O love! Thus it is Thou dearest, O sweet Jesus! Thou givest Thyself without reserve, and when Thou hast once given Thyself to a soul, it treats Thee as it pleases. Unhappy is the man who thus abuses Thy love! Happy is he, on the contrary, who embraces Thee, possesses Thee, and regards Thee as his treasure.

What does he desire for whom Thou art not sufficient, O Thou life of my soul! Is it possible for him to find anything that can satisfy him! The soul that delights not in Thee, and that seeks other than Thee to satisfy itself, is either very sick, or already dead. With Thee I am rich, without Thee I am poor; with Thee I am replenished with everything that is good, without Thee I am in want of everything. Come into my heart, O divine Jesus! that I may love Thee, possess Thee, and never forsake Thee more. Reign Thou in me, and may I live in Thee, O my happiness, my love, my joy, and my beatitude!

Thou knowest, O faithful friend of my soul! how the too great attachment we have for our friends weakens our love for Thee, stops Thy communications and most
secret inspirations, and because Thou art desirous of being the only friend of our souls, Thou permittest them when they return to Thee to experience immediately the inconstancy and infidelity of human friendships. Thou knowest how sensible this pain is, and art not ignorant of the pleasure we enjoy in the confidence of a faithful friend. Thou commandest me therefore to be faithful in respect of all, but to be fixed to none but Thee; and to place in Thee alone my hope, my comfort, and all the pleasure of my life. I desire it, O my God! with all my heart! but since thou hast suffered for my love the treachery of a perfidious friend, give me strength to bear patiently whatever befalls me of the like; and grant that I may never allow myself to be either too much delighted with the affection of men, or dejected by their infidelity.

If it be Thy will that they should hate and persecute me, let thy will be done: grant only that I may also have the same will. Possess my heart, show me Thy countenance, and fill me with Thy love. Teach me not to complain, nor take revenge; but to do good for evil, to treat even those as friends who are unfaithful to me—in a word, to be like Thee, and to wish for nothing more. How dare I complain of my friends? How can I desire, O my God! that everyone should love me, and that none should fail in the strictest duties of friendship towards me, when I behold Thee receiving him at Thy table who betrayed Thee, and calling him Thy friend, even when he delivers Thee up to Thy enemies?

O Queen of angels, faithful handmaid, sincere lover of our Saviour, mother and refuge of sinners! obtain for me the love of your well-beloved Son, and destroy in me all other love. Amen.

XXVIII

He is Seized

The first effect of Judas’s treachery was the seizing of our Saviour in the Garden of Olives. That traitor, having now lost all shame, appeared at the head of the soldiers as the chief of the undertaking. We should not wonder that an Apostle, who had forsaken God, had fallen in so short a time into such great excess, since experience teaches us that there are no persons more wicked than those who, having been enlightened, have abandoned the purity of the Faith and the perfection of an evangelical life. When they have once despised the house of God, and shaken off the Lord’s yoke, they no longer observe any limits. Disgusted with the fountain of living water, they go to drink with an insatiable thirst in the poisoned rivers of the flesh and the world, and we should rather be much more surprised at the crimes they do not commit than at those they do.

Thus it was that Judas, after having shut his eyes to the divine light, his ears against the words of eternal life, and after having extinguished the love of God in his heart, delivered himself up to the Devil, and, from being an Apostle of Christ, became in a few hours the leader of those who sought to put Him to death. He even advised them to exercise great precautions in leading Him away lest He should escape from them.

As he knew that our Saviour was accustomed to retire in the evenings into the Garden of Gethsemani, and there to spend the night alone in prayer, he judged that the time and place were proper for the execution of his
not prevail against Him of itself, that He was faster bound by the chains of His charity than by those of His enemies, and that His Passion was the effect of His love rather than the violence of men.

So, to render those inexcusable who had come to apprehend Him, to force them to own the weakness of their efforts, to induce them to acknowledge the crime they committed and to repent of it, when they had said that they sought Jesus of Nazareth He answered:  

I am he. And these words were so powerful that Judas, the Pharisees, the soldiers and the officers of justice were overcome by them as if they had been struck down by a thunderbolt.

Christ might then very well have retired, if He had so pleased, or have still worked some other miracle but, being content with having made them feel His power, He permitted them to rise again; and, after having a second time asked, Whom seek ye? and answered, I am he, He forbade them to touch any of His Apostles, for that divine Shepherd, even in the midst of His own danger, did not abandon the care of His flock. So that indeed the Apostles received no ill treatment. They were not so much as threatened with seizure, which ought to appear extraordinary on such an occasion, but none can hurt those whom our Lord preserves.

Neither did Christ permit them to load Him with chains so soon. He would first speak, with His customary meekness, to the chief of the Pharisees and the priests, whom He saw mixed among the soldiers, in an action so unworthy of their office. He asked them why they had come to take Him in the night time with swords and clubs, as though He were a thief, since He had been daily in the temple teaching publicly. They knew not
what answer to make to our Saviour, neither dared they
to lay hands upon Him. When Malchus, a domestic of
the High Priest, advanced with more boldness than the
rest, Peter asked Christ’s permission to make use of the
sword and, without waiting for an answer, struck
Malchus and cut off his right ear; but our Saviour
immediately restored it to him and forbade Peter to use
violence.

The chalice which my Father hath given me, shall I
not drink it? (John xviii, 11). How then shall the script-
ures be fulfilled? (Matt. xxvi, 54), and what shall become
of mankind if I redeem them not by My death? Put up
again thy sword into its place and remember that all
that take the sword shall perish with the sword.—(Matt.
xxvi, 52.) If I were willing to employ any outside power
for My defence, Thinkest thou that I cannot ask my
Father, and He will give me presently more than twelve
legions of angels?—(Matt. xxvi, 53.) Then Peter retired,
and all the other disciples fled. This flight was not
merely due to their weakness but was also a disposition
of the eternal Will which had decreed that Christ should
suffer alone.

Then turning towards the Pharisees He permitted
them to do what they would, saying to them, this is
your hour, and the power of darkness.—(Luke xxii, 53.)
And immediately Judas coming to Jesus, he said: Hail,
Rabbi. And he kissed him.—(Matt. xxvi, 49.) Thus it
was that friends were accustomed to salute one another
in Palestine, and our Saviour, having received this
traitor into the number of His disciples, spurned him
not but said to him with His usual goodness: Friend,
whereto art thou come? (Matt. xxvi, 50.) Judas, dost
thou betray the Son of man with a kiss? (Luke xxii,
48) and make use of this testimony of friendship for
delivering Him up to His enemies?

It is difficult to say here which should give us the
greater cause for wonder—whether the obduracy of the
human heart, when it has once forsaken God and be-
come obstinate in sin, or the mildness and tenderness of
our Lord, even towards those to whom He foresees it
will be unprofitable. In any event, we have here a great
subject for fear and humiliation since, as we are all
descended from the same mass of corruption, so we are
all capable of the same infidelity.

Judas did not relent at these words so full of sweet-
ness, and the Jewish ministers, who only waited for that
signal, flew furiously upon that innocent Lamb, beat
Him unmercifully, trampled Him under foot, and tied
His hands close behind His back, accusing Him of a
thousand vile things, calling Him impostor, magician,
one possessed with a devil, a seducer of the people, and
making Him suffer many other indignities which their
rage suggested to them and which it is easy to imagine.

They dragged Him afterwards in a most violent
manner to the house of the High Priest, discharging
against Him, without any moderation, all the hatred
they had preserved so long in their hearts, though He
made no resistance against them. For that divine Lamb,
amidst all this ill treatment, opened not His mouth to
complain and, while He was harried and baited in the
midst of these wolves thirsting for His blood, His heart
was in Heaven. By continual groans He begged mercy
of His Father for sinners and offered to Him on their
behalf all the affronts He endured. He who trembled
before the engagement, and was sorrowful unto death,
drew new strength from the wounds He received in
fighting, being more strongly moved than ever with the desire to accomplish His sacrifice.

Well-intentioned persons may find here, as in the other mysteries of our Saviour’s Passion, ample matter for contemplation, not only in considering His exterior suffering, but more still, by entering into His interior feelings. And even those who consider only the outward appearance of these mysteries reap notwithstanding great advantage from it, because their souls always find therein most solid nourishment. But he who can enter into the holes of the rock, and discover the infinite riches of that loving Heart, is so surprised, changed and transported, that he no longer knows himself, and he finds with ineffable sweetness that those divine hands, which he beholds so closely tied with cords, distil myrrh abundantly.

But if we do not as yet comprehend the treasures which are contained in Christ’s captivity, let us at least compare our life with His, and His innocence with our sins. Let us consider what He suffered and what we have deserved and we shall find that, though in order to pardon us so many crimes, He should require us to undergo the like punishment, we would still have reason to bless His mercies for ever. What then ought to be our gratitude and love when we see the Son of God drawing upon Himself all the fury of His enemies to preserve His disciples from it, being unwilling to allow the least of His servants to be ill treated, and taking upon Himself all our chains in order to secure for us entire freedom!

Are we not very miserable if, instead of keeping our senses and hearts subject to His law, instead of loving our bonds, and relishing the happiness of such a sweet captivity, we break the yoke He puts upon us without considering that by following the dictates of our own desires, and abandoning ourselves to a criminal liberty, we load Christ with chains, beyond comparison heavier than those with which the Jews fettered Him, and bind ourselves into eternal slavery.

CONTEMPLATION

Who is the man who presumes to seize Thee? Who can bind Thy infinite power, O King of glory? Is it possible that there should be any hearts so barbarous as to treat a Divine Person with so much indignity? Thy meekness, O my God! converts souls, Thy modesty gains hearts; Thy presence charms the eyes and minds of those who behold Thee; and Thy benefits fill the whole earth. How then can there be found any men so ungrateful, cruel, and bold, as to lay hands upon the Lord’s anointed, to oppress Him with injuries, affronts, and chains, as a thief and malefactor!

Be Thou blessed and glorified eternally, O my Hope and Salvation! After having prayed to Thy Father to remove that bitter cup from Thee, obedience is so dear to Thee, that Thou willest nothing but what He wills. In spite of the reluctance of nature, Thou art wholly ready to suffer torments, the mere thought of which occasions Thee mortal fear, and Thou still hidest Thy majesty that nothing may stop the fury of Thine enemies.

Discover to my soul those interior chains, which keep Thee so closely bound to the will of Thy Father, and to the love Thou hast for man. Without these invisible bonds, who could seize Thee, or ill-treat Thee, O my love! By these bonds it is that Thou art fettered,
dragged, thrown on the ground, and exposed to so many affronts.

I adore you, O divine hands! which are bound only to fetter my enemies. I adore you, O precious chains! which draw down upon me such great blessings. Alas! were it not much better for me to be loaded with chains than to be sinfully free, as I am? O my God! who beholdest my misery, I beseech Thee by Thy chains to deliver me from those who keep me at a distance from Thee.

Unhappy time! unfortunate hours! wherein I seemed free only for doing ill, wherein I was always a slave to myself and never to Thee, O my only Deliverer! Will that never change? Wilt Thou still suffer long this subversion of order? When shall I behold myself free from my passions, and a captive to Thy love? When wilt Thou break the bonds which keep me bound to myself, and separated from Thee?

O that I had never given my heart to anything but to Thee alone. But alas! not content with departing from Thee, and joining myself to creatures, by my disorderly affections, I have bound Thy sacred hands with cords much coarser than those with which the Jews pinioned Thee. Those are the fettered hands, O my Jesus! which hold the devil a captive, break the chains of my vices, subjeft my enemies to me, and are always open to do me good. Thou continually offerest me Thy graces, and I refuse them, and prefer the false pleasures of the world to Thy eternal riches. Thus I shut up those liberal hands, and constrain them to remain so. Thou art most sensibly affected therewith, O my God! out of the affection Thou hast for me, and I find myself destitute of all good, by my ingratitude.

I have sinned but too long: I have done hitherto whatsoever I would. It is time, O my God! that Thou shouldst begin to do with me whatsoever Thou wilt. O that I had never escaped out of Thy hands! but those divine hands have formed me, and they will not reject me. Remember, O my God! that those divine hands have taken me from dust, to make me a living man, capable of knowing and loving Thee. By them it is that I am what I am; and if there be any good in me, it is from them alone that I have it.

Those pure souls, who, by favour of Thy light, contemplate Thee in this state, find in the beauty of Thy chains the mitigation of their slavery, and the hope of their liberty. It is true that I have rendered myself unworthy of these divine communications; but after all I am no less Thine, when I have sinned, than if I had never done so. Acknowledge then, O my God! the work of Thy hands: suffer me not to spoil it; deliver me from myself; and fix me forever to Thy law and service, by the chains of Thy love.

How easily dost Thou subdue a heart, O divine love! when Thou becomest sensible to it! How sweetly dost Thou charm it, when Thou discoverest to it a ray of Thy divine beauty! The faithful soul, in this place of banishment, where it only perceives Thee through the obscurities of faith, elevates itself notwithstanding above itself, and above all the ties of the flesh and the world, by the secret sweetness which Thou communicatest to it.

Thou bindest it sometimes so closely by the bonds of Thy charity, that the whole man, even to his corporeal senses, finds himself as it were, transformed into Thee; because Thou employest everything to draw the soul to Thee. If it sleeps, Thou awakes it; if it rests,
Thou employs it; if it eats, Thou deprives it of the relish for corporeal food; if it converses with men, Thou makes it retire within itself; Thou keeps it wholly captive, deprives it of everything, and forbids it everything out of a holy jealousy; and as Thou givest Thyself wholly to it, so Thou wouldest have it be wholly Thine. It esteems itself happy in its dependence, and free in its captivity, because it lives in Thee and by Thee.

But what dost Thou in those souls whom Thou holdest captive, O divine love! Let him who experiences it, declare it, if he can! What I feel is that my soul, when Thou touchest it, wishes for that happy state, wherein Thou showest, in so loving a manner, the power of Thy grace in the weakness of our nature. When, after having made Thyself master of the faculties of the soul, Thou happenest to hide Thyself, and to withdraw the sweetness of Thy presence, without ceasing however to keep them bound, then can they neither go against Thee, nor desire any comfort besides Thee, because their only consolation is to suffer, and to remain thus bound to Thee.

How divine is this operation, O Thou life and love of my soul! Those whom Thou deprivest thus of all interior consolation, are afraid of exterior consolations: they shun their friends, presume not to think of any creatures, nor even to ask Thee to comfort them; and they are capable of nothing but a willingness to drink Thy cup as Thou didst drink it.

Those whom Thou hast interiorly bound, are truly free, because they will not possess Thee but in such a manner as Thou art pleased to give Thyself to them. As they find their repose only in Thy good pleasure, so they seek Thee according to Thy will, and not according to their own will: and desiring above all things to see Thee reign in them with an absolute power, they give themselves to Thee without any condition or reserve. They desire to be free, only that they may be always in readiness to love and suffer, to enjoy Thee and to part with Thee, to possess Thee and to be deprived of Thee, according to Thy eternal designs: being men according to nature, but more than men in the works of Thy grace and love. Amiable bonds! happy slavery! O that I were chained in that manner!

Most pure Virgin, you who have always been a captive to the love of Jesus, and always free in Him, obtain for me the grace of bearing His chains constantly, and of being eternally a slave to His love. AMEN.
XXIX

Before the Tribunals

Our Lord, being in the hands of His enemies, was pleased at that time to suffer all the pains of which He was capable, and that of seeing Himself ignominiously dragged before the several tribunals of His unjust and incensed judges was not the least of these. For, apart from being dragged from one tribunal to another and abandoned to all the hatred and injustice of His declared enemies, was it not also a very great indignity that the Sovereign Judge of the living and the dead, should appear before criminal men, and that the master of the universe should be subject to the judgment of His creatures?

Can we behold without astonishment the only Son of God, the sun of justice and holiness itself, before whom all nature trembles, at whose voice the graves give up their dead, the devils depart from the possessed, the raging seas become calm, whom leprosy and all diseases, and Heaven, earth and Hell obey without resistance, in whom everything commands respect, whose modesty, gravity and wonderful sweetness shine even in the midst of chains—can we, I say, behold this Man-God, after giving so many proofs of His divinity, with His hands bound, a rope about His neck, led as a criminal before His judges, dragged from one to another, in order that some one of them may be found to condemn Him, and not admire the depth of the divine counsels?

He appeared before all these tribunals with an unchangeable patience and tranquillity of mind. He did not seek to withdraw Himself from justice or rather—to put it more correctly—from the ill-will of His accusers and judges who treated Him with so much contempt that He was not considered worthy of having any form of judicial procedure observed against Him. *And we have seen him,* says Isaías (lii, 2-3) . . . *despised and the most abject of men . . . and his look was as it were hidden and despised*, so much was He covered with contumely. They were intent on doing anything other than doing Him justice. Those judges of iniquity thought of nothing but satisfying the hatred with which they were animated against Him, and He received nothing but affronts on every side.

He was led before four judges—Annas, Caiphas, Pilate and Herod. The first two were Jews, the others Gentiles. Some Fathers affirm that, in going from the Garden of Olives to Jerusalem, He was dragged along so roughly that He fell into the torrent of Cedron, over which He had to pass, and on this occasion they apply to Him those words of David, *He shall drink of the torrent in the way: therefore shall he lift up the head.*—(Ps. cix, 7.) However that may be, it is certain that He was treated with a violence that was in proportion to the malice of the Jews.

It was about midnight when they entered into the city, disturbing its repose, and when the day appeared it was filled with the noise of the event. Some were surprised that they had apprehended a man powerful in works and words, who did good to everyone; others openly blamed His conduct; and all awaited impatiently the outcome.

By order of Caiphas, who would pay that deference to his father-in-law, they went first to the house of Annas, who first interrogated Christ concerning His
disciples. He asked Him, in a scornful manner, why they had left Him thus alone, being accustomed to follow Him in a crowd, and he added that the world would presently see what opinion one ought to have both of the master and the disciples. But Jesus held his peace (Matt. xxvi, 63), and interiorly resigned His justification to the eternal Father who was to make known to the world, in proper time, the innocence of His Son.

Afterwards they questioned Him adroitly concerning His doctrine, but He answered that it was in vain to interrogate Him about this as He had spoken publicly in the temple and that those who had heard Him could give testimony of His doctrine. Behold what is the security of a good conscience! As it is plain and sincere in its words and actions, so it does not believe that it has any grounds for fear, or to speak much in its own defence, because the truth, and its own conduct, speak for it.

Those who defend themselves with much trouble are frequently not found so just before God as they are desirous of appearing to be before men, and everything they make use of for justifying themselves often serves but to make people believe they are guilty. As good actions and pure intentions alone are capable of justifying us before God, so when they are wanting, God permits human eloquence to become unprofitable to us, even before men, and allows them to judge us according to their own views and not according to those with which we would inspire them. Thus our surest defence is to put our confidence in God and to expect our justification from Him alone.

One of the attendants, having heard the answer of Jesus, struck Him, saying, Answerest thou the high priest so? Unmoved by this, Jesus said to the man, If I have spoken evil, give testimony of the evil; but if well, why strikest thou me?—(John xviii, 22, 23.) Behold how they dispensed justice to our Saviour! He was not permitted to speak the truth, and a scoundrel presumed to strike Him, in the presence of the judge who, instead of rebuking him, approved of an action that would not have been tolerated among the most uncivilised nations.

Jesus was sent from Annas to Caiphas, where the leaders of the Jews, the Pharisees and the priests, were assembled. As He had received a blow in the house of the first judge, so He was charged with false accusations in the house of the second, treated as a blasphemer, declared worthy of death, shut up in prison until He was brought before Pilate, taken from Pilate to Herod from whom, after being exhibited and looked upon as a fool, He was led back again to Pilate.

Pilate, though he had judged our Saviour to be innocent, caused Him nevertheless to be most cruelly scourged, crowned with thorns, and at last crucified between two thieves. What a procedure, what justice! Jesus suffered all this without complaining; indeed He spoke but very few words and those were not in His own defence; and He suffered Himself to be thus accused, judged and ill-treated, so far as to lose His honour and His life, without answering anything.

His ordeal was greatly increased for Him by the offences which He saw committed against His Father, and by the inflexible obstinacy of His persecutors which He felt most keenly as He loved them tenderly. For He looked upon what they did against Him as their unhappiness, rather than His own, and the height of His sorrow was to foresee that what He endured for their
salvation would serve only to render them more guilty and more unhappy.

He knew that, in His character of supreme judge of the living and the dead, He should one day be obliged to pronounce a terrible sentence against His own judges, and to condemn those to eternal death whom He would have saved with His own blood. He saw them, in extreme obstinacy, shut their eyes against the light and their ears against all the truths He taught them. None but those who know the heart of Jesus and the perfection of His love, can comprehend how much easier it was for Him to suffer their injustice than to see Himself obliged to condemn them one day for the crimes they were then committing, and which they were not to expiate by penance.

But our Saviour, who knows how to bring good out of evil, turned these corrupt tribunals to advantage for the confirming of those sacred truths which He had taught us. For, as those judges, by the bad disposition of their hearts, easily believed the lies, calumnies and false testimonies with which they endeavoured to blacken the innocence of Christ, so the wickedness of His enemies served but to give greater lustre to the purity of His doctrine and the sanctity of His works.

Malice at this time was seen to break loose, envy to spread its poison, and hatred to feed itself with injuries, affronts, exclamations and murmurings: nevertheless Jesus suffered all with unvarying meekness and the rage of these impious people was the proof of His innocence. Thus the truth appeared without His speaking, and His silence alone confounded perfidy, because darkness cannot prevail against the light, malice against perfect sanctity, nor falsehood against the eternal truth. But the Son of God was pleased to appear before all these tribunals, and to be judged with the utmost severity, in order to show the whole world that there was nothing in Him but what was pure, holy and perfect, and to use His very enemies to confirm us in the truth and purity of His doctrine.

Here is a matter for the instruction of those who, on account of the position they hold in the world, or of the good opinion they have of their own merit, or for some other human reason, cannot bear that He, whom they think inferior to themselves, should undertake to judge them. It is of those persons that our Lord said: For every one that doth evil hateth the light, and cometh not to the light, that his works may not be reproved.—(John iii, 20.) Indeed, he who will not be judged by his inferiors gives room for imagining that He confides more in the dignity of his person than in the goodness of his works. If you be not just, acknowledge it before God, and seek not to appear so before men, because you have a judge that searcheth the hearts, and sees with how little justice you pass for a virtuous person. Now if you be just, take it not amiss that you are judged. If you deserve any reproach, do not think of exculpating yourself for your own satisfaction, and if you deserve no reproach, wait with patience until the truth manifests itself.

Though your judges should be corrupt to the point where they give you a just reason for suspecting their judgment, consider what advantage it is for a Christian to resemble Christ, and to suffer injustice with Him. We may assure ourselves that, if we refer our problems to Him, He will either disclose our innocence by ways that are unknown to us or, if He permits the malice of our
enemies to prevail, it is a sign that He reserves the punishment for this to Himself, that He designs to sanctify us by patience, and that He will one day, in His universal judgment, in the sight of all men, restore to us the honour of which, in the presence of a few persons, we were unjustly deprived.

Christ teaches us by that silence of His which all admire, few understand, and scarcely any imitate, to so resign ourselves to God as, for the love of Him, to desire, when we are accused, no other justification than silence. He who sincerely seeks peace of heart, hatred of himself, and the pure love of God can alone understand how badly employed are those hours which are spent in the care of his honour; he alone can appreciate what treasures are found in his own confusion, what is gained by the loss of his reputation before men, and what is lost by gaining their esteem. I know that the law of God does not oblige us to follow this counsel of perfection, but I also know very well how happy is that man who sincerely tries to imitate Christ in that which he sees most perfect in Him.

The prophet Isaiah (liii 3, 8), contemplating the profound humiliation of our Saviour before His judges, says that He was despised and the most abject of men... Whereupon they esteemed him not. And then he adds these words, Who shall declare his generation? If the silence of Christ, therefore, has produced so many saints, so many hermits, and so many peaceful souls, and if it has been for Christians so abundant a source of interior graces, can we practise it, with a sincere desire to imitate that divine Saviour, without drawing from it excellent fruits of sanctity? O that God would disclose this truth to all men! If He would make us feel the peace and riches of the soul that enters sincerely into the way of this perfect mortification, we should find a paradise on earth. But let the person who has not yet discovered this light, and who looks upon silence in persecution as something impossible to maintain, endeavour at least to be calm and moderate in speaking in his own defence and to put more confidence in God than in the justice of his own case.

CONTEMPLATION

Is that Thy place, O Jesus! Thou goest then no longer through the villages of Judea to teach Thy doctrine, and work miracles in them! But would it not at least be more convenient for Thee to come into our hearts, there to be loved, acknowledged and adored, than to go before those impious tribunals, where Thou receivest nothing but affronts? May Heaven and earth praise Thee, O my God! may all creatures bless Thee, and may all hearts love Thee, for having humbled Thyself so far for me. It is I who am guilty, and Thou who art accused, judged and condemned! I adore the excess of Thy love; I am to be judged by Thee alone, and Thou submittest Thyself for my sake, to all the unjust judgments of the world; and most innocent as Thou art, Thou art willing to suffer what I deserve.

It was I, O my God! and not Thee, who ought to have appeared before those judges. There is nothing they can justly reprehend in Thy infinite sanctity; but they might discharge all their hatred upon me without injustice. They should find in me what they seek for in Thee; and they might execute against me, without any crime, what they undertake so unjustly against Thee. They might pull out my eyes, to punish the freedom of
my looks; cut out my tongue, which has spoken so much ill; tear into pieces this body loaded with sins; pierce this heart, which has not loved Thee; condemn my actions ever contrary to Thy law; and take from me a life, which I have not employed in Thy service.

If they seek a sacrilegious person, who has abused everything that is most holy; a malefactor, from whom the world ought to be freed, I am that wretch. But Thou, O infinite mercy! Who loveth me, however unworthy I am of Thy love, and Who sincerely desirest my salvation, Thou bearest with me, and reservest me for Thy paternal judgment; whilst Thou deliverest Thyself up to the hatred of those impious judges, who have resolved Thy destruction; and Thou wilt be condemned, that I may be absolved.

Cruel and unjust judges. If ye knew Him, whom ye have in your hands, ye would immediately change places with Him. Ye yourselves would look upon Him as your judge, and, prostrate at His feet, ye would implore His mercy. But there is no justice for Thee, O my God! On Thy account alone all laws are violated, and all judges are corrupted. Teach me, O Lord! this divine wisdom, so unknown to the world, that, in imitation of Thee, I may overcome by silence, triumph by meekness, and thus be justified before Thee, when I am judged unjustly by men.

But I am so guilty, O my Saviour! that everything which I behold Thee suffer condemns me. I am worse than Thy judges; for they knew Thee not, adored Thee not; and I, who know Thee, adore Thee, believe Thy doctrine, and praise and admire Thy works, I resist Thy will, condemn Thy law, and subject Thee to the judgment of as many wicked judges as I have disorderly affections.

May the vain presumption I have of myself, come now to an end, O my God, my Saviour, and my Master! I confess my ingratitude and pride in Thy presence; I desire with Thy grace to imitate Thy presence, and to suffer in silence all manner of pains; there are none but what Thou sendest, or permittest; and I ought to adore everything in Thee, even Thy permissions. I consent, from this moment, that all creatures should rise up against me, to revenge the crimes I have committed against Thee.

I know very well that if Thou hadst not restrained them, O my God! they should have been already armed to destroy a perfidious and ungrateful wretch, such as I am. But since Thou art pleased to defend me, permit me no longer to be Thy enemy. Begin this day to convert me, and to transform me into Thee, O sovereign perfection! Make me love those that ill-treat me, condemn me, and tear me in pieces; since therein consists the divine wisdom which Thou teachest.

How rich is he, who for Thy love, O my Jesus! beholds himself loaded with chains, despised by the world, dishonoured in all places, condemned by all men; and who, amidst all these reproaches, finds himself supported by Thy example, calm, meek, and content by the union of Thy spirit, united to Thee by a pure charity; how rich is he, I say, how happy is he! When is it that my whole interior shall sincerely say unto Thee, O my God, my sovereign good, my abundance and plenitude! come into my heart, come to this miserable sinner, who earnestly desires Thee to establish Thy abode in it?

Is it not time for Thee to leave the houses of those judges so enraged against Thee? If Thou delightest to be with the wicked, I am more wicked than they. If
Thou seekest humiliation Thou wilt find enough of it with me. If Thou goest voluntarily where there are sinners to be converted, and faults to be corrected, Thou shalt have in me sufficient on which to exercise Thy zeal. If Thou hast a design to bestow any grace upon me, come, O Lord! come Thyself, Thou alone art sufficient for me. Enter into my heart, O pure light! there it is I shall know Thee, adore Thee, love Thee, and embrace Thee.

How well am I in Thy hands, O my Saviour! and how ill art Thou in the hands of Thy enemies! Seeing Thyself before them loaded with chains, Thou saidst nothing in Thy defence; and though they violated all the rules of justice on Thy account, Thou resigned Thyself to their judgment, as if Thou hadst expected Thy safety from thence. And as for me, I dare not resign myself to Thee, O judge full of goodness! I can always speak to Thee, complain to Thee, be heard, and obtain mercy. My cause even becomes better when it is in Thy hands, and yet I am so blind as to fly from Thee, and to prefer the judgments of the world to Thine.

All men seek to injure me; there is only Thou, O my judge and father both! who seekest to do me good, and givest me everything that is necessary for meriting a favourable sentence upon myself.

O most pure Mother of God! our divine Saviour has always reigned in you, and found no perfect repose here below, but in you alone. You are the advocate of sinners, assist him who presents himself before you; open your maternal heart to me, and obtain for me of your Son the grace to comprehend those divine truths, which He teaches me so well, that for the future they may be the rule of my conduct. AMEN.

XXX

The false witnesses

Our Lord was treated no better in the house of Caiphas than He had been in that of Annas. The new tribunal subjected Him to many injustices by the false accusations that were laid against Him, an experience of such acute pain as only the upright and innocent of heart can understand. The Jews were assembled in the High Priest’s house where they impatiently awaited news from those whom they had sent to seize our Saviour, and were in a continual fear lest He should escape from their hands. But when they learned of the success of their enterprise they were overjoyed, and their joy was increased by the sight of the prisoner who was brought before them, and they expressed it by loud acclamations.

They interrogated Him at first concerning His life and doctrine, but both the one and the other were so holy and irreproachable that all the malice of His enemies could find nothing reprehensible therein. So they raised up false witnesses against Him, in order that they might, by falsehood, give some colour of justice to the sentence of death which they had resolved to pronounce against Him.

They laid many false charges against Him, such as of having blasphemed against the temple of God by saying that He could destroy it and rebuild it in three days, though He only spoke of the temple of His body —(John ii, 21.) That they themselves had so understood Him appeared afterwards when they demanded soldiers
from Pilate to guard the sepulchre of Christ because He had promised to rise again the third day.

Others accused Him of having forbidden tribute to be paid to Cæsar although He had on the contrary clearly decided that they ought to render therefore to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar’s (Matt. xxii, 21), and had made St. Peter find, in a fish’s belly, the money that they had need of to satisfy that obligation. Some accused Him of having made Himself a king, although everyone knew that He had hidden Himself when five thousand men, whom He had miraculously fed in the desert, would have given Him that rank.

They also imputed to Him many other such crimes, without any appearance of truth. And the less guilty they found Him, the more desirous they were to destroy Him, and being unable to discover any spot in so pure a light, or the least irregularity in such holy actions, they endeavoured, by interrogating Him, to trap Him in His words. Answerest thou nothing, said Caiphas to Him, to the things which these witness against thee? But Jesus held His peace.—(Matt. xxvi, 62-63.) He knew how unprofitable it would have been for Him to speak, and He would not say or do anything which could hinder the accomplishment of the sacrifice He so earnestly desired. He would also teach us by His example that we ought to despise the malice of men when the purity of our conscience puts Him on our side, who is the invincible defence and sure refuge of His servants.

Caiphas, seeing that he could not force our Saviour to break silence, made use of the most efficacious of all means for making Him speak, which was the name of God. I adjure thee by the living God, he said to Him, that thou tell us if thou be the Christ, the Son of God.—(Matt. xxvi, 63.) This demand was such as might give reasonable grounds for expecting that an answer would change the High Priest’s hatred into adoration and that, far from condemning Christ, he would condemn himself to weep all his life for what he had already committed against Him. But when the human heart is once determined on evil, it turns into poison everything that might be capable of healing it. God was pleased, nevertheless, by a wise disposition of His eternal counsel, to make use of an instrument so unworthy as the High Priest for the giving of an opportunity to Christ to declare more clearly than He had so far done, and in the presence of His bitterest enemies, the divinity of His person, and to leave us, before His death, so necessary a certainty of who He was.

At these words of the High Priest, our Saviour, having more regard for the name of God, whereby He was adjured to speak, and to the advantage of His Church, which He was pleased to instruct, than to all the evils which His answer might draw upon Himself, replied clearly: Thou hast said it. Nevertheless I say to you, hereafter you shall see the son of man sitting on the right hand of the power of God, and coming in the clouds of heaven.—(Matt. xxvi, 64. For though these impious persons were not destined to see the divine essence for ever, yet they should all one day see the humanity of Christ sitting at the right hand of God, encompassed with glory and majesty, coming to judge His own judges, with as much confusion to them as joy to the good.

Caiphas, who had not interrogated our Saviour in order to believe in Him, but to have an occasion for
condemning Him, having heard this answer, rent his garments, according to the custom of the Jews who thereby showed their great indignation, and cried out: He hath blasphemed: what further need have we of witnesses? Behold now you have heard the blasphemy. What think you? But they answering, said: He is guilty of death (Matt. xxvi, 65-66); to which they had long before resolved to condemn Him.

But they were not satisfied that they had as yet sufficient cause for crucifying Him, as they had designed to do, for the law did not permit them to put anyone to death; for this they needed the authority of Pontius Pilate who, being a Gentile and an idolater, would not have much respect for the law and the religion of the Jews. Thus, seeing that they could not obtain what they wanted except by fictitious crimes, and as the crime of His having blasphemed, by calling Himself the Son of God, would make no great impression on the mind of Pilate, they resolved to add to it two other crimes, both of which were manifestly capital ones. The one was that He had forbidden the payment of tribute to Caesar, and the other that He had raised a sedition among the people by designing to make Himself king. These two false accusations they aggravated before the Roman governor by loud exclamations, while Christ said not so much as one single word in His own defence, according to the prophecy of Isaiah: He shall be led as a sheep to the slaughter and shall be dumb as a lamb before his shearer, and he shall not open his mouth.—(lxxv, 7.)

Let anyone judge for himself how acutely painful this must have been for Christ and what must have been His patience. For we often see that he who has with invincible constancy undergone great labours and sufferings raises up against him false witnesses. It is rare to see a person suffer them without complaint, and there are very few virtues that are proof against great calumnies. When a servant of God goes so far as to suffer them in silence it is because he acknowledges the infinite obligations he has to Christ and, finding in himself a great number of sins, he suffers false ones to be laid to his charge in order to expiate those that are true. But our Saviour, having no sin in Himself and having no obligation to those from whom He suffered, could not have borne these false accusations in silence except out of the pure love He had for us.

This trial is so severe that persons fearing God, and unwilling to harbour the least desire for revenge, have not the strength to restrain their complaints when any evil which they have not done is imputed to them. We sometimes see persons, otherwise of mortified lives and who find no difficulty in accepting all the reasons there are for suffering other crosses, defend themselves against this so far as to think themselves obliged in conscience, for the glory of God, the honour of virtue, the hindrance of scandal and the preservation of their authority, to undeceive the world, and even to engage, under the pretence of zeal, the powers of the world in their justification.

I know very well that Christ does not forbid us to justify ourselves nor oblige us to practise such great perfection, although He practised it first, but he who professes to follow Him ought to be persuaded that this divine Saviour has given us no example of virtue, in what affects morality, that is not capable of imitation however perfect and heroic it may appear to us.
And let none say that there are strong reasons which prove the opposite for, in addition to such reasons always appearing weak in comparison with those which the Holy Ghost interiorly suggests to pure souls, this truth is confirmed by the actions of apostolic persons and the lives of the most illustrious saints. Let those, therefore, who do not yet relish so sublime a doctrine, humble themselves before God whose goodness, by refraining from obliging them to practise such purity of virtue, has compassion on their weakness; but let them esteem this in others, and desire it for themselves with all the more earnestness as they find themselves the more remote from it.

Let us learn from this divine Master that the best way in which to preserve our honour is to lead a life so holy that no cause of scandal can be given to our neighbour. According to St. Augustine (Ep. 204 ad Donat) he is human who, being content with the testimony of his own conscience, neglects his reputation. That holy Doctor would not have us seek after a reputation eagerly nor lose it with pain, but would have us preserve it carefully by the example of a good life. Exterior modesty, an interior communication with God, meekness, silence, patience in adversity, observance of the divine law, application to the duties of one’s state, an inclination to do good and an aversion to evil, and other virtues—this is what gains the esteem of men, without its being sought for, and confounds slander and detraction.

Thus it was that the malice of the Jews was confounded without our Saviour saying one single word in His own justification; and he who follows this way will always walk securely.

I admit that to suffer calumny without answering it, and to defend ourselves by silence only, is to do something that is difficult to understand and the secret of which is known to few. It is, in truth, a great perfection and the feeble heart of man cannot attain to so sublime a state without a special grace; but it must be owned also that this happy state is full of celestial blessings and established in a region of divine peace which surpasseth all understanding.—(Phil. iv, 7.) No one can describe it but one who has had the experience of it. It is sufficient to say here, by way of conclusion, that Christ suffered this pain, which was perhaps the greatest of His life, with a virtue so much the more admirable as it is the less known, and that He has promised to all those who shall imitate Him in this heroic silence a throne of glory upon which they shall judge their enemies.

CONTEMPLATION

O Jesus, the Glory of the just, their Way, Truth and Life! there is no injustice but what Thou hast endured for my sake. Thou hast even permitted false witnesses to rise up against Thee, O Eternal Truth! I adore Thee, O sovereign Purity! I adore Thee, only Son of the Eternal Father! O my God, my King, and my Lord! Has the world found any fault in Thee? Could it say anything against Thee without falsehood and blasphemy? And yet Thy enemies will have it that Thy doctrine is erroneous, and Thy actions unlawful. How contrary is this kind of injury to what Thou art, O divine Word! But how admirable is Thy patience! Ought not what I see Thee
suffer make me love Thy humiliations and give me joy when I am so happy as to be treated like Thee?

How different I find myself from Thee, O my Saviour! how sensible am I of everything that is said against my honour, and how soon do I lose the consideration of Thee whenever I am accused of any fault which I have not committed, and which can hurt my reputation!

Thou knowest, O my God! who penetrates the bottom of hearts, that if the world beheld, as Thou dost, the abominations of my thoughts and desires, I should be to it an object of horror and contempt. In whatever manner it behaves in respect of me, whatever false crime it lays to my charge, it treats me always mildly, in comparison to what it would do if it knew all the hidden crimes which I confess before Thee, all Thy bounties, and all my ingratitude. Although Thou hidest my shame from it, which Thou might discover to it, my pride is so great that I still esteem myself, always seek to justify myself before men, cannot bear the least reflection on my reputation, blush to be like Thee, and think myself humbled when I endure without complaining some little contempt, after having seen Thee loaded with reproaches.

Destroy in me, O Lord! all the esteem I have of myself, and of the sentiments of the world. Am I not very blind and miserable, to esteem in this life what Thou hast despised? I sometimes imagine I labour for Thy glory, when I am seeking my own; and I flatter myself that Thou wouldst be offended if I should suffer a calumny without justifying myself. Where then is my reason? where is my wisdom? If Thine be true, O Lord! as I cannot doubt it, and if I adore it in Thee, why am

I not willing to imitate it? and if it be clear, how comes it that I walk in darkness? Why am I not persuaded, that by keeping silence, by suffering for Thy sake, by resigning to Thy providence the care of my reputation, I shall acquire more glory, virtue will be honoured more, and truth better known, than if I were to make a great deal of noise for defending it?

When shall I endeavour to become like Thee, what evil shall befall me thereby? What is this world? what obligations have I to it? What good can it do me? and why shall I be ashamed of imitating Thee, out of a desire to please it? The world judges blindly; it approves and condemns without reason; it looks upon Thy servants as its enemies; it makes promises and keeps them not; it flatters us only to destroy us; and gives us nothing but the vain smoke of honour, which is dissipated in an instant: but the glory Thou givest, O my God! is eternal like Thyself.

Thou promisest and art always faithful to Thy promises; Thou art incorruptible in Thy judgments, and liberal in Thy rewards. Thou heapest blessings on those who suffer for Thee, and makest those who are desirous of walking after Thee, sensible of the ineffable sweetness of Thy spirit, and nevertheless I fly from Thee in order to follow the world. I prefer its glory to Thine, and choose rather to subject myself to the vanity of human opinions, than to the truth of Thy words.

But behold, O Lord! the resolution I make this day. I resolve, with the help of Thy grace, to bear for the future all false witnesses, all calumnies, and all injuries which shall be laid upon me. I pardon all those, with all my heart, who have offended me, or shall ever offend
me: I dispense them, for Thy sake, from restoring to me the honour which they have deprived me of, and desire to have no other than that of serving Thee. Permit not, O my God! any person to be punished, for having abused me. Render to my persecutors good for the evil they have done me, and give them Thy love for the hatred they have borne me.

But what do Thy enemies say against Thee, O infinite Purity? Grant, O Lord! that whilst those impious persons judge ill of Thee, I may acknowledge and adore Thee for what Thou art. They say Thou madest Thyself Son of God, and accuse Thee of a sacrilegious usurpa-
tion. They are deceived, O my Sovereign Good! it is not falsely that Thou takest upon Thyself the quality of the Son of God, for Thou art truly God of God, begotten from all eternity in the bosom of the Father. For my part, O Lord, prostrate before Thy divine majesty, hidden under that sacred humanity, wherewith Thou vouch-
safedst to be clothed for my salvation, I adore Thee with all the faith and all the love I am capable of, as the true Son of God, as the Eternal and Almighty God, infinitely wise, infinitely good, and infinitely great, equal in all things to God Thy Father.

Thou art judged worthy of death, because Thou madest Thyself king! Alas, O Lord! Thou never hadst any mark of royalty on earth, and Thou always concealed Thyself, lest Thou mightest appear what Thou wast. But when the sea became firm under Thy feet, and calm at the least sign of Thy will, when death and the graves obeyed Thy voice, when the devils departed by Thy command from the bodies of the possessed, when diseases gave way to Thy power, did not all creatures, though insensible, acknowledge Thee for their king? I acknowledge Thee also for mine, O divine Jesus! and adore Thee as my sovereign Lord and Redeemer.

They still accuse Thee of having forbidden the pay-
ment of tribute to Caesar. What a falsehood! Who was ever more exempt than Thou, O my God! from this obligation? And yet Thou hast always submitted thereto. Thou wast pleased to be carried to Bethlehem, even before Thou wast born, in obedience to Caesar’s command, and to pay him at Thy coming into the world the tribute he required of his subjects. Thou didst command Peter to pay the tribute for Thee and himself; and Thou publicly taught that we must render to Caesar what belongs to Caesar. Thus Thou art loaded with false accusations, O my Jesus! and answerest nothing.

How couldst Thou detain the goods of another, Thou Who art the Author and Dispenser of all goods? What need hast Thou of the tributes that are paid to the kings of the earth, Thou from whom they themselves hold all they possess, and who hast despised all their grandeur for my sake. It is true that Thou exactest a tribute from me; but it is the tribute of my love; and that Thou forbiddest me under severe penalties to pay to any other besides Thyself. If that be Thy crime, O my Lord and my King! the Jews cannot be accused of falsehood; but that tribute is entirely due to Thee, O Thou God of my heart! since Thou hast acquired it by the price of Thy blood. It is not enough to give Thee the fruits thereof, I offer Thee my whole heart; permit no creature, O Lord! ever to share it with Thee.

These sacrilegious people say that Thou art a seditious person and a disturber of the public peace—Thou, O sweet Jesus! Who art the Lamb of God, and the Prince of Peace; Thou Who reconcil est us to Thy Father,
teachest us so holy a doctrine, purifiest our faith, retrenchest the false interpretations which the corruption of men had added to the law of God, bringest us a law full of sweetness, and unitest all our hearts in the unity of Thy love. Those who hear and follow Thee enjoy a solid peace, and those who abandon Thee, fall into troubles.

O most sacred Mother of God! you, who share with your well-beloved Son the affronts which He suffers, who pass for the mother of an impostor, and a seditious person, and who so sensibly feel the false testimonies wherewith they blacken His innocence, obtain for me an ardent and sincere desire to resemble Him, and that all my joy may be to suffer for Him, and all my glory to live with Him in abjection and contempt. AMEN.

XXXI

His Night-time Ordeal

The crimes with which the Pharisees and leaders of the Jews accused our Saviour were so manifestly false, and His innocence so well known, that they rightly feared that they would not obtain His condemnation either from the people or from Pilate, and that they should be looked upon afterwards as wicked persons and calumniators. For whereas truth and virtue fear nothing, because they carry their own defence along with them, malice, on the contrary, is afraid of itself, especially when, in order to hide its poison, it covers itself with the appearance of zeal. It is as apprehensive of the light as innocence is desirous of it. It is always uncertain, and never thinks itself secure, even under the cloak of virtue. Thus it is never at rest. As it fears everything, it seeks new artifices every moment for its defence; it heaps crime upon crime, until it comes at last to a horrible excess of evil. Nothing is more true than these words from the Book of Wisdom: a troubled conscience always forecasteth grievous things.—(xvii, 10.)

Therefore the Pharisees and chief priests applied themselves so diligently to destroy the reputation of Christ, and to establish their own, that they everywhere defamed His person, life, doctrine and miracles, and resolved finally, in diabolical malice, to render Him contemptible to the people. They knew how inconstant the populace are in their judgments, that they never penetrate to the bottom of things, and that they always allow themselves to be carried away
not knowing anything of Christ other than what he learned from His malicious accusers, had, even on the evidence of their accusations, judged Him innocent. Yet Pilate, not having the courage to resist the rage of the people and the conspiracy of their leaders, was prevailed upon by them so far as to pass an unjust sentence upon Him.

Our Saviour had already received a blow on the face in the house of Annas, but after He had been judged guilty of blasphemy in the house of Caiphas all strove who should ill-treat Him most. They tied His hands behind His back, put a rope about His neck and held Him fast so that He might not turn away His face when they struck Him. That precaution was needless for, after having told us that to him that striketh thee on one cheek, offer also the other (Luke vi, 29), He was resolved to confirm by His own example the doctrine He had taught us. If He complained when He received a blow in the house of Annas it was because He had a regard for our weakness and would comfort us in the extreme repugnance we feel in suffering affronts.

He taught us, therefore, by His conduct that, although we feel very acute pain when we are ill-treated, yet we ought to avoid impatience and anger, which always scandalise our neighbour, and to show forth, by our words and by our whole exterior behaviour, a Christian moderation. For that patience pleases God even though it be not yet perfect, and if we are faithful in practising it on all occasions our sorrow will soon be turned into joy, and our confusion into glory, and we shall at last esteem ourselves but too happy in being accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus.—(Acts v, 41.)
with the baseness of those who treated Him so must be lost in admiration beyond the power of words to express, especially if he considers the patience with which this King of Glory suffered such great ignominies and the compassion He had even for those who made Him suffer them.

But what ought to astonish us altogether is that so many people still consider that the height of dishonour and infamy lies in those things which Christ suffered. A blow is so atrocious an injury to them that they do not think they can wash off the stain of it except in the blood of Him from whom they received it, and they would expose themselves to the loss of their own souls in order to revenge themselves on an enemy. Yet the faith which they profess, and the experience of the saints, teach them that it is to the advantage of a Christian to suffer what Christ suffered; that the hope of heavenly blessings is fortified by injuries and contempt, and that charity is inflamed and purified by the sight of our Saviour suffering and dying.

But, alas, they are blinded by their own pride and the vanity of worldly opinions to such an extent that they are not touched by the example of Christ nor by the purity of His doctrine. They offer as an excuse their ignorance, weakness and circumstances over which they have no control, but as they acknowledge that the error they are in upon this point is manifestly contrary to evangelical truth, to the law of God, and to the example of our Saviour, which together form an infallible rule for us, they try in vain to excuse themselves on the score of their ignorance. Neither does weakness nor passion justify them, since reason ought not to give way to these; and even occasions, however unfore-
those divine truths which He has taught us, will accept our desires and make operative in us those miracles of patience which He is accustomed to operate in His saints.

CONTEMPLATION

Permit me, O my Jesus! to consider the beauty of Thy countenance, before it be disfigured by the cruel hands of these impious persons. I adore Thee, O heavenly beauty! which the angels always behold, and which they always desire to behold; who art the joy of Heaven, the glory of those who love Thee, and the delight of those who seek Thee. Is it possible that abandoned ruffians shall dare to lay their profane hands upon Thy sacred face? Hast Thou not already suffered affronts enough, O Lord! without still adding this to them?

O inhuman executioners! O hearts harder than rocks! If ye knew who He is whom ye have in your hands; if ye beheld the beauty which ye affront, ye would soon change your contempt into respect, and your cruelty into love. But I must be very obdurate myself, O my Saviour, to see Thee thus treated, and not to die, and not to feel my heart burst with grief, at the sight of so horrible an indignity.

Is it not sufficient for Thy love that they should stretch Thee on a cross, dislocate Thy arms, pierce Thy hands and feet, and that no part of Thy body should be free from suffering? Why dost Thou not at least be free from suffering? Why dost Thou not at least spare Thy countenance? Why wilt Thou suffer it to be bruised and disfigured, at the beginning of Thy Passion?

Here it is, O light of my soul! that I clearly see how
far I am from Thy humility. Sometimes I say in general,
when my heart is touched by Thy humiliations, that
there are none but what I am resolved to bear for Thy
sake, but when I come to examine myself, and would
speak sincerely, I acknowledge my weakness before
Thee, O my God! Whence comes this, O Lord? It is
because I am only humble in words, and at the bottom
am quite full of pride.

But Thou, O divine Lamb! because Thou art meek
and humble of heart, and Thy humility is true, sincere,
and interior, Thou sufferest in silence; Thou lovest those
who abuse Thee, and yieldest up that sacred face to all
the confusion with which they cover it, in order to
deliver me from the eternal confusion which I have
deserved. And yet I, always proud in spirit and heart,
after such an example, have not the courage, nor even
the desire, to present the other cheek to him who would
give me a blow. When wilt Thou destroy my pride, O
my God! When shall I be, like Thee, truly meek, and
humble of heart?

The laws of the world offer me reasons for revenging
myself on him who shall give me a blow; and they would
have me make a greater account of chimerical honour
than of my neighbour’s good. There are none but slaves,
the world tells me, who do not revenge themselves for
the blows they receive. How contrary are Thy maxims
to those of the world, O my God! Though I continually
affront Thee, Thou always esteemest my life and salva-
tion more than Thy own glory. Thou sufferest them
without complaint to bruise Thy face; art Thou then
my slave, O my sovereign Lord! will it not be said,
that Thy love is blind? For who art Thou, and who
am I?

I am ashamed of myself, O Lord! when I consider
that those, who treat Thee so unworthily, are not savage
beasts, but men of the same nature as myself. I am a
child of Adam, like them, inclined to the same disorders
as they, capable as well as they of hating that divine
beauty, of bruising that adorable face, and of veiling it
in order to affront it with greater liberty.

I have not only, O my Saviour! deserved by my
crimes all the evils I see Thee suffer; I am not only the
cause of Thy suffering them, but also they are my
equals, who make Thee suffer them. It is my flesh that
abuses Thee, and yet I hate it not, nor have any abhor-
rence of myself. On the contrary, I still flatter this
criminal flesh, and love myself more than Thee, or Thy
law.

The hatred they bear Thee, O my Saviour! is so
great, that they will not admit of anything that can miti-
gate the fury with which they are animated. They cover
the beauty of Thy face, lest they should be moved to
compassion thereby.

Pardon me, O Lord! all the sins I have committed
against Thee. For, alas! how many times have I veiled
Thy face, that I might sin with more freedom? How
many times have I wished Thou might not see me, that
I might follow, without any restraint, my disorderly
appetites? Illuminate me, O divine light! and make me
discover, in the cruelty of Thy executioners, the dis-
orders of my life.

When I read Thy holy Scriptures, when I hear Thy
word, when I consider what Thou hast done for me; or
else, when Thou fillest me interiorly with the blessings
of Thy sweetness, and I discover what Thou art, what I
owe Thee, and what Thou requirest of me—dost Thou
not then discover the beauty of Thy countenance to me, that I may observe Thy law, and allow myself to be gained by Thy love? And when I am unwilling to hear Thy voice; when I reject Thy doctrine, and forget Thy mercies, to follow the corruption of my own desires, do not I throw a veil over Thy face, whose splendour would be capable of dispelling all my darkness?

O Divine Mercy! couldst Thou bear with me, if Thou wert not infinite? Forget, O Lord! my past miseries, and grant that for the future I may never lose the sight of Thee; that I may always walk in Thy presence; that I may apply myself as diligently to seek Thee, as I have done to fly from Thee; and that my blindness may this moment be at an end.

Be Thou content, O my Jesus! with what Thou hast already suffered. Make Thy executioners cease, and disclose to me that adorable countenance, that I may be moved to compassion by seeing it, and that my soul, in the excess of its grief, may melt with love for Thee. The Jews were afraid to see Moses' face, when he came down from the mount, because they could not bear the splendour of it, which proceeded from the conversation he had with our Lord. They desired that Moses might speak to them and not God. But souls who love Thee, O my Saviour! being charmed with Thy immense charity, desire nothing so much as to hear Thy voice, and to behold Thee openly. They hate everything that hinders so sweet an intercourse; they cannot suffer any medium between Thee and them, nor any veil that might hide Thy beauty.

Remember, O Lord! that Thy eyes, over which they cast a veil, were not shut in regard to St. Peter, who had denied Thee at that time; that Thou didst look upon him, and that one single look of Thine pierced his heart, and made him know and weep for his sin. Thou art the same as Thou wast then, O Thou God of my soul! Look upon me with the same eyes; penetrate my heart with the rays, which flew from Thy countenance so that, discovering the miserable state I am in, I may deplore all my life, as the Apostle did, the misfortune of having offended Thee.

O most sacred Mother of God! you who were equally sensible of the charms of the most beautiful of the children of men, and of the affronts which He suffered, be mindful of a miserable sinner, and obtain for me the grace to love everything, for the sake of this divine Saviour, that He loved for me. Amen.
XXXII

They spit in His face

When Christ had suffered all the brutal ill-treatment with which rage inspired His persecutors, they uncovered His face—but it was only to cover it with spittle. Spitting, which is the basest and lowest form in which contempt and hatred can manifest itself, appeared so great an ignominy to our Saviour that He had clearly foretold it through the mouth of Isaias (I, 6): I have not turned away my face from them that rebuked me and spit upon me. He Himself listed so monstrous an affront among the number of the chief sufferings of His Passion when He declared to His Apostles that the Son of Man shall be delivered to the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and scourged, and spit upon.—(Luke xviii, 32).

The other torments which He endured are common among men, but this is not common, and though it neither wounds nor kills, it is notwithstanding very intolerable, because it is extremely nauseating and shows in him who does it a great deal of blackguardism and brutality and an excessive contempt for him on whom it is inflicted.

Spitting in the presence or house of another is looked upon as bad manners and an incivility even among barbarous peoples, but His persecutors judged no object more proper for the filth which came from their mouths than that sacred face which is the subject of the eternal veneration and contemplation of the blessed.

While subjecting Him to this contemptuous treatment they assailed Him with a volley of opprobrious names, calling Him a cursed impostor, blasphemer, disturber of the public peace, an enemy of God's law, hypocrite, magician, Samaritan, possessed of the devil, minister of Beelzebub, and many other like names, in order to justify the indignity with which they treated Him.

Behold what their occupation was during a great part of the night. They desisted only when they were weary of tormenting our Saviour, who was not wearied with suffering for them because He knew the need they had of His suffering. Therefore He turned not away His face to shun their blows; He neither complained nor reproached them, and He endured all these affronts with as much meekness and goodness, and with as serene a countenance, as if He had been receiving sinners to penance: which was the only thing in the world that could give Him the greatest joy.

There is reason here for astonishment that the Son of God should have been pleased to suffer things which appear to human eyes so unworthy of His majesty, but our astonishment will cease if we elevate our thoughts to the eternal designs of God, and consider with attention and respect the reasons for that conduct.

The first is that God, being most perfect in His divine nature, it was fitting that He should be so also, as far as was possible, in His human nature. It was requisite that the works of His humility should correspond in some manner to those of His power, and that the profoundness of His humiliations should equal, as much as possible, the greatness of His majesty. Thence it is that to elevate our faith, our hope and our charity, and to dissipate our errors and enlighten our blindness—He had to make us conscious of His divinity even in His infirmity.
For that reason also it is that He invites all those who labour and are burdened to come to Him, that He may comfort them by disclosing to them the fountain of all good, and He particularly exhorts them to imitate His meekness and humility because there are infinite treasures hidden in the practice of these two virtues. And that none might be excused from practising these, He has been pleased to walk before us, humbling Himself even to excess so that He was able to say with the prophet (Ps. xxi, 7): But I am a worm and no man: the reproach of men, and the outcast of the people. Reproach and outcast are terms which denote the lowest degree of humiliation, for reproach is that which with reason, no matter how insensitive to shame he may be, makes a man blush, and outcast is what deserves to be despised, forgotten, thrown down, and trampled under foot by the vilest populace.

Behold the state to which the Son of God was reduced! He was not content even with being trodden under foot by the worst of men and by the slaves of the Devil, as a worm of the earth, but He was pleased also that they should spit in His face and cover it, as it were, with a veil, making it an object of horror and unworthy to be looked upon.

The second reason for so stupendous a humiliation is that our Saviour was pleased to satisfy, in the most perfect manner, the Divine Majesty, offended by the sins of men. And the third reason is that He was pleased to teach us how we ought to humble ourselves before God in order to appease His wrath and draw down His mercy. For though Christ had no reason for humiliation in Himself, He was pleased to show sinful man to what degree he ought to humble himself.

Wholly innocent as He was, having voluntarily taken our iniquities upon Himself, He bore the punishment for them as if He had really committed them, and for that reason it was that He suffered chains, stripes, nails, the cross and death itself.

But in order also to make every sinner understand what he ought to think of his sins, and the judgment God passes on them, Christ suffered them to spit in His face, teaching us thereby that he, who does not abhor his crimes and is not prostrated by them in the sight of God, deserves the horror, contempt and execration of all creatures.

From all that has been said, it is easy to judge what spirit it was that animated so many holy persons who earnestly sought reproaches and received them joyfully. There have even been many of them who were unwilling to shun, when they might have done, a cruel and shameful death with which they were threatened, because, being enlightened by God, they knew themselves perfectly well, and saw what was due to a nature always inclined to evil and capable of the greatest misdemeanours. Holding this view they offered themselves to everything that could humble them. They esteemed themselves unworthy to have the earth support them, the sun to give them light or any creature to bear with them, and when they came to consider that Christ had been maltreated for their sins, there was no humiliation that did not appear to them to be infinitely below what they deserved.

Such were the feelings of those truly Christian persons whom our Saviour filled with His spirit. Though they were far lesser sinners than are we, yet they were much greater penitents.
What then ought they to think of themselves who are given up to all manner of evils and refuse nothing to their irregular appetites? Let them at least sometimes make this reflection that the same Lord, who has done and suffered so much for them, and who reduced Himself, for love of them, to such an excess of contempt and abjection, will one day despise them in His wrath, and condemn them to an eternal reproach with so much the more severity as He has expressed the more tenderness for them. They will then clearly see, but too late, how much He detests sin, to which they were so much addicted since, in order to punish it, He condemns to eternal punishment souls whom He loved to such an extent as to sacrifice His honour and life for their salvation.

Briefly, our Lord was pleased to endure all those ignominies for the consolation of His servants, whom the world commonly treats with so much contempt. He has prepared for them, as one might say, in that countenance covered with reproaches, a secure asylum whither they may retire when, as worms of the earth, they shall be trodden under foot by worldlings. It is of those good people that David (Ps. xxx, 21) speaks when he says: *Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy face from the disturbance of men. Thou shalt protect them in thy tabernacle from the contradiction of tongues.* Since there is nothing more open in man than his countenance, how comes the prophet to affirm that our Lord will hide His servants in the secret of His face? It is because faithful and enlightened souls discover, behind that bruised and affronted face, a most divine beauty and, when they have once known it, they retire thither and repose therein, and no longer fear the persecutions of the world.

For Christ, wholly disfigured by bruises and spittle, is not so hidden but that He makes faithful souls aware of the charms of His beauty. St. Peter, after having protested with rash confidence, that he would die sooner than renounce his master, being interrogated in the house of Annas as to his knowledge of Christ, replied that he knew Him not. He gave the same answer twice in the house of Caiphas at the very time when our Saviour was suffering all the affronts we have been considering.

Then the Apostle, illuminated by a divine light and filled with a grace, without which he would have persevered in his sin until death, began to enter again into himself, was penetrated with sorrow and confusion, quitted the occasion which had made him fall into his sin, wept bitterly, and humbly begged pardon. His penance was the first fruit of the ignominies which our Saviour endured, to teach us all, in the person of him who was to be the visible head of Christ’s Church, that if we do not resist the light which proceeds from the eyes of Jesus suffering and dying, we shall soon appreciate that all our happiness proceeds from His sufferings and ignominies; and that He has left a treasure of grace and peace in abjection, which the world does not find therein, and which is reserved only for those who are meek and humble of heart.

**CONTEMPLATION**

O my Saviour! who knowest my evils, and who alone art capable of healing them; infinite thanks be given to
Thee for having applied so efficacious a remedy to them. I look upon my sins as small evils, because I have never well comprehended either the injury they do me, the Majesty they offend, or the remedy of which they stand in need. Thou seest, O eternal Wisdom! the greatness of my evil and therefore Thou offerest me violent remedies, and wilt have me make use of sorrow, humiliation, and contempt of myself, to tear from my heart that self-love, which is deeply rooted therein, and the esteem of those things which separate me from Thee. But because Thou hast taken upon Thyself the expiation of my sins, Thou hast suffered them to work in Thee what they ought to do in me.

I have disfigured Thy image in myself, O Thou Life of my soul! I have defiled myself with a thousand crimes and, in order to wash me from them, something was requisite, that was still viler and more shameful than everything I had loved contrary to Thy law. But Thou, O my God! who art the sovereign purity, what need hadst Thou of being purified, that Thou shouldst suffer such horrible humiliations? Why wouldst Thou have that adorable face covered with spittle, as if it were the thing in the world the most worthy of contempt, and why wouldst Thou be treated as the last of all men?

Thy enemies can put no affront upon me that I have not deserved, since I have forsaken, like the prodigal child, the abundance and delights of Thy house to run after the food of swine; have preferred vain amusements to Thy conversation, and mean and perishable pleasures to Thy friendship, embraces, and all the blessings Thou givest me, and which Thou promisest me. It is I, O Lord! who deserve that all men should spit in my face, and that all creatures should treat me as an abominable sinner and unworthy of any regard. And nevertheless, O merciful Father! Thou presentest Thy sacred face to receive the affronts which are due to me, and abasest Thy majesty to the humiliations which I have deserved.

Let me suffer those ignominies, O Thou God of my soul! or, if Thou art resolved to suffer them for me, give me strength at least to do interiorly what Thou endurest exteriorly; and to have as much contempt and horror of everything that can separate me from Thee, as Thy executioners express for Thee. Inspire me with a general disgust of the world and its pleasures; teach me to hate myself, as much as I deserve to be hated, after having so basely abandoned Thee, O Source of eternal good!

I make this prayer to Thee, O my God! because I feel the weight of my corruption, and because my heart, earthly of its own nature, and yet more earthly by the sins it has committed, loves only those things which resemble it. But since Thou hast created it for other goods, make it love them and produce in it the fruit of Thy ignominies.

Thou hadst good reason to say, by the mouth of Thy prophet (Ps. xxi, 7): I am a worm and no man. For Thou hast not only reduced Thyself to the state of a worm of the earth, which everyone tramples upon, which is equally despised by great and small, good and bad, men and beasts, but Thou hast also been pleased that Thy sacred face should be covered with filth and ignominy. O King of glory! O only Son of the Eternal Father! couldst thou compare Thyself to anything more contemptible than a worm of the earth? Yes, O Lord! Thou needest but to compare Thyself to me, Thou
shouldst have found nothing so mean, nor so worthy of contempt in all nature for I am but a dunghill, and a heap of corruption, within and without.

What shall I render to Thee, O Lord! for all the things Thou hast rendered to me? (Ps. cxv, 3.) Methinks I have nothing to give Thee, and yet I know very well what Thou requirest of me. It is myself Thou wouldst have, O Lord! Why dost Thou not then this moment take possession of my soul? But perhaps Thou dost not take me, O my God! because Thou hast created me free, and wilt not do me violence. O unhappy freedom! which I make use of only for destroying myself! Thou waitest till I give myself to Thee: behold me here, O Thou God of my heart! behold me here, O my life! behold me here, O my Jesus! send me all the affronts which Thou shalt judge profitable for my salvation. Govern me according to Thy will, since I abuse my own in offending Thee.

Teach me, O Lord! one thing which I desire to know of Thee: instruct my ignorance, since Thou art my master, and wilt not have me to hear any other but Thee. Thy design was that I, seeing Thee despised by men, might love Thy humiliations, after having lost through my fault the relish for Thy greatness. Thus it is, O my God! that Thou always accommodatest Thyself to the necessities and weakness of my soul.

Thou art come to me, because I could not go to Thee. Thou hast taken upon Thee all my debts, because I was incapable of satisfying them of myself: and Thou art become my food in a thousand different ways so that in some of them I might relish Thee. How can I behold all those admirable inventions of Thy love, and not burn with love for Thee, nor be charmed with Thy humiliations? Pure souls find therein an ineffable sweetness, and a solid nourishment, which are not to be met with in things that are possessed divorced from Thee.

That mysterious bread which gave the prophet Elias sufficient strength for walking forty days, and for arriving at the top of Mount Horeb, where he saw the Lord, was a cake baked under the ashes. Thus it is, O my God! that Thy beauty is hidden under reproaches, Thy power under infirmity, and Thy glory under ignominy; and that Thy faithful servants find under those ashes their nourishment and strength. All the reproaches wherewith Thou art covered, cannot entirely conceal Thee; I discover Thee therein, totally blind as I am; I adore Thee therein as my Lord and my God, as my King, as the most beautiful and amiable of the children of men, and as the most delicious food of my soul.

O Queen of angels! O humble handmaid of our Lord! you, who know by your own experience, the happiness of being humbled for His love. He chose you for His Mother, when He was pleased to become a worm of the earth, and the reproach of men, because you were the most humble of all creatures. The great favours bestowed upon you did not puff up your heart, nor diminish anything in you of the low opinion you had of yourself. You did not receive all those treasures of graces for yourself alone; be mindful of this miserable sinner. O Mother of mercy! Assist me to get out of the abyss wherein my sins have plunged me.

Amen.
XXXIII

In Prison

The leaders of the people, the priests, the doctors of the law and the Pharisees, wearied with tormenting our Saviour in innumerable ways, retired to their own homes in order to meet again the next day, commanding the soldiers to keep a strict guard over Him during the night.

We might believe with reason that the hatred which animated them did not permit their taking much rest that night for, being wholly possessed with the design of destroying Christ, they thought only on what they might do or say against Him in the assembly. As malice never yields, nor submits itself to the unknown truth, so it is only satisfied when it sees all the evil which it has desired. A heart determined on wickedness, and deprived of God’s grace, is, according to Scripture, obstinate, inflexible and hard as hell. It torments perpetually and can never say it has enough.

Those bloodthirsty judges had lost all sense of human compassion. What had taken place, so favourable to their design, far from mitigating their hatred, had but augmented in them the desire to see it entirely accomplished. Thus the remaining part of the night seemed long to them, though it was then almost spent. The cock had crowed thrice and St. Peter, penetrated with sorrow, had retired to weep for his sins, leaving his Master in the hands of the soldiers.

But because Christ had been accused of magic, on account of the wonderful works He had performed before their eyes, they were not content with setting guards over Him and binding Him closely: they also shut Him up in a secure place, continually fearing lest He should escape from them. It was then the time of the year when the sun rises at six, and that hour was called by the Jews the first hour of the day because they began to reckon their hours from the sun’s rising. Although the day was near approaching, yet the short part of the night which remained brought no rest for, besides having nothing in prison on which to lay His head, the Son of God was extremely weakened by the bloody sweat He had expended in the Garden, by the length of the way they had made Him walk, roughly dragging Him through the streets of Jerusalem, by the chains with which they had loaded Him, and by the cuffs, blows and other ill-treatment which He had received. In addition, the soldiers, instigated by the Devil and incited by the reward which the priests had promised them, allowed our Saviour no moment’s respite but relieved one another in tormenting Him.

When the masters had retired their domestics, who were then free from duty, ran to see the novel spectacle, being eager to behold that man who was so much spoken of, joined themselves to those who ill-treated Him, renewed the affronts He had already suffered and also invented new ones. At least we know from the prophets that there was none who had compassion on Him, and that, instead of those comforting words, which are commonly said to those who suffer, He heard nothing but threats and blasphemies.

There are many holy persons who look upon that cruel night as one of the greatest sufferings of our Saviour’s Passion. They affirm that if the Evangelists did
not give a detailed account of all that He then suffered. It was because, through consideration and love, the Faithful could easily conjecture a part of what took place, and that we shall also discover in Christ, on the day of General Judgment, an infinite treasure of hitherto unknown mercies. For, from an immense ocean of divine love, nothing could flow but floods of sufferings. He Himself compares them, through the mouth of David (Ps. lxxviii. 3) to a dreadful tempest, which swallowed Him up without drowning Him: I am come into the depth of the sea: and a tempest hath overwhelmed me.

Among all these affronts our Saviour was silent. He suffered them patiently and prepared Himself to suffer still greater ones, because His love became stronger from the hatred of His enemies. He loved men, and even His persecutors, with an infinite love, and while they left nothing undone to destroy Him, that love was nourished with the desire of suffering still more for them. As nothing upset the serenity of mind in Him, so His body and senses suffered pain to the fullest extent. Thus, with tranquillity and perfection at one and the same time, He accomplished the work of the redemption of mankind in the sight of God His Father, joining to the most fervent prayers an entire resignation to everything that was requisite to be suffered by Him for sinners.

This is, perhaps, what has induced the servants of God to consider those hours which precede the sun’s rising as the most proper time for prayer, that they might then unite themselves to Jesus suffering and praying. For in the midst of His greatest pains, and in the silence of the night, He still shed, for the souls whom He redeemed, tears of love, the cause of which, those who saw them flow, knew not. But because we all have a share in that superabundant redemption, so we all ought to have recourse to Christ, as to a good that belongs to us, in order to give thanks to God in the pains we suffer, in the love He inspires us with, and in the blessings with which He sustains us. And we find in Christ a heart so full of goodness that, although He Himself found no one to comfort Him in His sufferings, or who was touched with any feeling of compassion, yet that compassion which we now feel in meditating upon them is no less agreeable to Him than if we had felt it at the very time when He suffered.

Our divine Saviour, by the interior recollection and fervent prayer with which He accompanied all His sufferings, teaches the children of Adam, whose lives are full of miseries, where they ought to seek their true and only consolation—and that is in God alone, by means of prayer.

There are two things which render the trials of life insupportable. The first is not to discern in them the hand of God who always dispenses them in weight and measure with a view to our advantage. The second is not to have recourse immediately to Him Who alone can deliver us from them or give us the grace to make good use of them. Almost our whole life is spent in shunning labour and seeking ease, but as we are on earth in a place of banishment, we have so many enemies around us, and so much weakness within us, that we can neither avoid the evils which pursue us nor find the repose for which we seek.

Men, who, for the most part, live in a forgetfulness of God, and have no interior converse with Him, do not lift up their eyes to Heaven in times of tribulation, but seek around themselves for the cause of the pains which
they endure. Sometimes they attribute them to chance and their own misfortune, sometimes to men’s malice, or else they apply remedies which are worse than the evil itself. In the end they allow themselves to be overwhelmed with miseries, and thus falling from one evil into another, they spend their lives without joy and, at the same time, without merit.

For the remedies to which they have recourse are almost always equally unprofitable both for time and eternity, because they seek them among the false pleasures of the world where there is nothing solid or that can serve any purpose but to render death more bitter and dangerous to us. On the other hand, those who converse interiorly with God, drawing pure waters from the fountains of our Saviour’s goodness, and taking from meditation on His life the rules for their conduct, are established on a firm rock. They believe with a firm faith that the evils which befall them on earth are presents from the hand of God, whereby they may merit Heaven.

Thus in all their afflictions, from whatever side they come, in spite of the resistance of nature, they acknowledge, adore and kiss, with love and respect, that paternal hand which strikes them, and always carry their thoughts beyond the instruments which God makes use of for chastising His children. They know that no one can hurt them except in so far as God permits him, and that this permission does not extend beyond the body, for God has reserved to Himself alone the power to chastise the soul, which is to be for ever happy or miserable.

In this view of faith, the spiritual person offers himself to God, adheres to Him with a pure love and humble submission, abandons himself entirely to His providence, receives from His hand every affliction that befalls him, regards the Cross as the way which leads to life and, rigorously divesting himself of everything that retards him, or makes him turn aside, he thinks of nothing but how to become like Jesus suffering, in Whom alone he finds his true consolation. For, properly speaking, only those who, disgusted with this life, sigh after the other and are possessed solely with the desire of pleasing God, can know on earth that joy which may be called the beginning of a happy eternity.

Holy Scripture and the doctrine and examples of the saints clearly prove this truth and I will content myself with saying here, in a few words, what experience teaches us. Let two men be compared, one of whom lives in forgetfulness of God and in absorption in his own affairs, the other, forgetful of himself, passes his life in loving resignation to the will of God. Let us afterwards judge, in the vicissitudes of this world, which of the two is the more equable, calm and content. It cannot be doubted but that it is the last, for he has found the way to true repose.

CONTEMPLATION

Where have they put Thee, O Thou God of my soul! Why art Thou in the place of this sinner? How comes it that they load Thee with chains, and leave me at liberty? What means that? Art Thou not, O my Jesus! the Lord strong and powerful in Whom David gloried, that Lord Who looeth the fettered? Art not Thou He whom the Jews so often attempted to seize and to stone, without being able to do either the one or the other?
Art Thou then become weak, O divine strength! Is Thy strength in Thy hair, as Samson’s was? How could they imprison Thee? Nothing but love, O my Saviour! was capable of seizing Thee, of binding Thee, and of confining Thee. I adore that incomprehensible love, which cannot be satiated with sufferings, nor fully satisfied, till it has accomplished the work of my salvation.

Is not the day sufficient for Thee, O my God! for accomplishing the work of our redemption, without employing the night also therein? Thieves deprive themselves of rest in the night in order to obtain what they desire; and Thou, O Lord! art intent day and night on seeking an entrance into my heart. Lose not Thy rest on that account. Behold this heart which Thou desirest; snatch it from those things which possess it; carry it away with Thee; establish Thy abode in it; and take Thy rest therein, after so many labours. Hearken to the voice of its misery and desires. Be more attentive to the faith and love which Thou inspirest me with, than to the blasphemies which those impious people vomit out against Thee.

Forget, O Lord! the weight of Thy chains, since they deliver me from the weight of my sins. Forget the obduracy of those hearts, which love Thee not, and are not touched with Thy torments; and cast Thy eyes upon this heart wholly defiled, and miserable as it is, Thou hast enlightened it with the lights of faith; it would gladly be able to comfort Thee, to share Thy reproaches with Thee, and to receive Thee within itself. I own that this abode is unworthy of Thee, but Thou art expected there, O Lord! Thou art desired there: repose therein, at least, during the time of Thy captivity. Thou shalt be less ill-treated there than Thou art among those blind people, for such as I am, I acknowledge Thee for my true, only, and sovereign good. Thou canst, in the short time Thou hast yet to remain in that prison, fill me with Thy love, and lead me afterwards with Thee into the other places where Thou art to suffer.

I neither doubt the love Thou hast for me, O Thou Salvation of my soul! nor the goodness with which Thou art willing to pardon me, and to receive me into Thy friendship. But I am deficient of myself, and of the inclination which induces me to evil: I am always afraid lest it should separate me from Thee, and render me unworthy of Thy grace.

Pardon me, O Lord! the share I have in Thy bonds and prison. I know I am the cause thereof, and that the captivity Thou sufferest is the effect of my criminal liberty. Pardon me the too free thoughts to which I have let my mind give way. Pardon me the liberty of my tongue, which has made so many wounds in my soul. Pardon me the liberty of my senses, which has so often separated me from Thee. Pardon me the lukewarmness with which I have loved Thee, the negligence with which I have served Thee, and the licentiousness of a heart always divided by a thousand affections contrary to Thy law.

I condemn before Thee, O my God! all the disorders of my life, and I confess, in the sight of Heaven and earth, that I have abused, in offending Thee, the free will which Thou gave me, in order to serve Thee.

But since the bad use I have made of my liberty has occasioned Thee such great pains, suffer me at least to bear a part of them. I return my liberty into Thy hands; it is Thine, since Thou gavest it to me; and it is reasonable I should be deprived of it, since I have abused it
so long. I restore it therefore to Thee, O Lord! receive it through Thy mercy; give it not to me again, even though I should beg Thee for it; and confide no longer in a perfidious person who has so often betrayed Thee. I cast myself at Thy feet like Magdalen; I embrace them with all my heart; I lovingly salute those chains with which Thou art loaded, and I adore the affronts which Thou endurest for my salvation.

O that Thou wouldst chain me, and wouldst draw me after Thee, by the bonds of Thy charity! O that in the midst of the profound silence which Thou observest, Thou wouldst make me hear the sweetness of Thy voice! O that Thou wouldst say to my soul: *many sins are forgiven thee, because thou hast loved much.*—(Luke vii, 47.)

It is true all Thy actions are instructive, O my Saviour! Thy humiliations are persuasive, and everything speaks in Thee, even Thy silence. But I cannot be satisfied, unless Thou Thyself speakest to me. Why am I still free? Why do I commit, with so much freedom, what evil I will? What hinders those chains from binding me? Draw me, O Lord! with those chains of love, bind me fast, and fix me to Thee in such a manner that I may never separate myself from Thee. Grant that I may feel Thy pains, imitate Thy patience, and that Thou mayst not suffer unprofitably for me. I beg this favour of Thee by the chains with which Thou art loaded, and by the love with which Thou bearest them.

O that I were so happy as to see what passes in Thee! O that I could know what the occupation of Thy heart is during so unworthy a treatment! Those barbarians think of nothing but tormenting Thee, and Thou thinkest of nothing but suffering for them. Whilst their minds are studying new means of affronting Thee, Thine is labouring for their reconciliation; and it is in that profound contemplation that Thou receivest strength, for accomplishing the remainder of Thy sacrifice. How great a truth didst Thou proclaim, O my Lord and my God! when Thou affirmest that *Thou wouldst refresh* all those who came to Thee. I never repented of having come to Thee, and I was never satisfied when I departed from Thee, because there is nothing good without Thee. When my mind is far from Thee, the least pain overwhelms it, and when it is near Thee, the greatest labours do not terrify it. How can I be strong without Thee, O Thou support and strength of my soul!

I am so weak, so sad, and so dejected in the evils which befall me because I seek the remedy without Thee, or because I only begin to have recourse to Thee when I find myself oppressed. With Thee, O my God! the bitterest things become sweet, and the heaviest burden weighs light, because Thy presence dissipates our darkness, and enriches our poverty. Teach me to have recourse to Thee in all my necessities, to resign myself to Thee in all my uncertainties, and to suffer with Thee all my pains.

O most holy Virgin! the refuge and protection of those who invoke you, represent my poverty to the Lord, who wrought such great things in you; and since the liberty of my heart is the source of all my evils, I beg by your means, obtain for me those bonds of love that I may remain fastened to Christ all my life. Amen.
XXXIV

He is dragged through the streets of Jerusalem

Friday, the happiest day that ever came to the world, having dawned, found men in very different moods. Christ could not behold a more sorrowful day for Him nor, at the same time, one more desired since it was the day on which His love, restrained out of obedience for so many years, was at last to satisfy itself by the consummation of its sacrifice.

He had ardently looked forward to that day all His life and He saw it come with joy, because He was just on the point of triumphing over Hell, of uniting together Heaven and earth, of making the hearts of His elect submissive to His will, of redeeming sinners, and of opening to all men the treasures of His infinite mercy. But the world looked upon that day indifferently because it was ignorant of the immense good it was to bring forth. And our Saviour’s enemies, blinded by their own malice, abandoned by God, and having become at the same time the ministers of Satan and the executors of an eternal design which they knew not, imagined that they ought to lose no moment of a day in which they were to satisfy their hatred, though it was to be to them a source of miseries, and to Christ of immortal glory.

Thus, without its being necessary to send for them, they came to the house of Caiphas at the dawning of the day. They agreed together about those points on which they should condemn our Saviour. They resolved to insist on these, whatever might be said in His favour, to oppress Him by their clamour and numbers, if He undertook to defend Himself, and to bring Pilate to their way of thinking either willingly or by force. They were so afraid lest their plan should not succeed that they imparted it to no one. They would lead Him away themselves, being persuaded that since they were masters of the people, priests of the temple, doctors of the law, and having with them the Pharisees, who made profession of a holy life, nothing could be capable of resisting their authority.

Before Pilate who, being governor of the province, was engaged in other affairs, and the people, who a few days before had received Christ with such great acclamations, could have time to raise any commotion for saving Him, they ordered Him to be dragged ignominiously through the streets of the city in order to render Him odious and contemptible to the people who judge of things only by appearances, and pass so easily from love to hatred. They took Him therefore out of the prison, calling Him a thousand opprobrious names. They no longer called Him by His holy name, which they were unworthy to pronounce, and they were completely untouched by all He had gone through during the night.

Some asked Him in a spirit of cruel raillery whether He would not work some miracle. Others blessed God for having discovered such a dangerous imposture. They pulled Him to one side, pushed Him to another, and continually pressed Him to walk on, though He was overwhelmed with weariness after a night in which He had suffered so much. If he happened to stumble or fall, they loaded Him with strokes and kicks as the most contemptible of all men. The more He deserved veneration for His modesty and sanctity, the more unworthily was He treated.
HE IS DRAGGED THROUGH THE STREETS

At the noise made by those who led Him along the whole city turned out and could not sufficiently wonder to see, dragged through the streets with so much infamy, a man whom they had received as the Messiah a few days previously. His silence, His chains, the presence of the magistrates and priests, made the people judge that He was guilty and that everything they had admired in Him had been nothing but imposture and hypocrisy. And so most of His friends declared against Him; those on whom He had heaped favours, became His persecutors, and His miracles served but to increase His ignominies.

Among all these persecutions, they obliged Him to make four journeys that morning. He went from Caiphas to Pilate; from Pilate to Herod; from Herod He returned to Pilate’s house, and from there He was led to Calvary, carrying upon His shoulders the cross to which He was to be fastened. These were in addition to the two journeys He had taken in the night, from the Garden of Olives to the house of Annas, and from the house of Annas to that of Caiphas.

Those souls who love their Saviour may accompany Him in spirit in all these stations, having compassion on His sufferings, observing His behaviour, imitating the virtues He practised, kissing the ground on which He walked, and gathering the treasures of grace which He abundantly distributes. Those who have not attained this standard of recollection will not fail to draw great advantages also from this exercise if they compare the ways in which they go astray with those which Christ followed in order to save them, and if they humbly implore His mercy that they may return by His merits into the way of salvation, if they have left it, and may persevere if they already walk in it.

For our Lord has left us, in these six journeys, wonderful examples of all kinds of virtues, but especially of patience and humility. In the first He allows Himself to be seized as a malefactor, out of obedience to His Father’s will. In the second, though He is the sovereign judge of the living and the dead, He voluntarily submits Himself to the judgment of His enemies. In the third, He loses that great reputation which He had acquired by His miracles and by the sanctity of His life. In the fourth, He appears before Herod as if He was the meanest of his subjects, though He is the master and creator of the universe. In the fifth, He permits His eternal wisdom to pass for folly. And in the sixth He is placed between two thieves. If the Son of God had not followed them, who would ever have thought that these ways were the straightest and surest for arriving at glory?

Is it not of those ways that David spoke (Ps. 4, 5, 6) when he said: Show, O Lord, thy ways to me, and teach me thy paths. Direct me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art God my Saviour, and on thee have I waited all the day long. Remember, O Lord, thy bowels of compassion: and thy mercies that are from the beginning of the world.

That holy king saw himself elevated by the hand of God to the throne of Judah, delivered from the persecution of Saul in order to be victorious afterwards over his enemies, become from a shepherd general of an army, and from the last of an obscure family, the head of God’s people, equal to the greatest princes of his time, and from whom the Messiah was to descend according
to the flesh. He saw himself, in short, chosen by God to be the patriarch, prophet, example and model of the just; but notwithstanding that elevation he never forgot his first condition, but remembered, with humble acknowledgment, the meanness from which God had raised him. He too inwardly considered himself a most contemptible man, and every time he foretold our Saviour’s humiliations, he spoke in his own person, applied them to himself, as if he had desired to be clothed with them beforehand, and as if he had envied those who were to love under the law of grace and to have the happiness of having before their eyes a humble God, and of being able to imitate upon earth the sovereign majesty annihilated and crucified.

That thought made him despise his own greatness, and inspired him with an ardent desire to know those secret ways, so full of mercy, which were then entirely unknown. He beheld them only from afar, but he sighed after them, and approached as near to them as he possibly could. Hence it is that, although he was one of the most powerful princes of his time, he suffered the chastisements of God, and the ingratitude of men, with as perfect a submission as if he had had before his eyes the example of a humbled God. With how much more reason ought we, in the evils and adversities of life, to be subject to God—we to whom He has so clearly disclosed those divine ways, consecrated by the footsteps of His Son. Ought we not to implore Him, without intermission, to conduct us by the same ways and to enlighten our blindness?

If David had seen our Saviour in that state, how earnestly would he have wished to be taken in His stead—to be dragged through the streets of Jerusalem, to pass for a fool, and to suffer reproaches for the name of Jesus Christ, as many saints have done since! But we, who are very far from that perfection, and whom Christ, in consideration for our weakness, does not require to suffer for Him everything that He suffered for us—how shall we justify the little care we take to please Him, and to shun at least the ways of sin, which lead us to death? With what excuse shall we cover our refusal to become His disciples and to imitate His meekness and patience in the evils of this life? What contempt should we not have for ourselves, if we could truly know the state to which sin has reduced us in the sight of God!

If those who are in high stations in this world have not strength enough to quit them, in order to become like Jesus Christ, they ought at least to humble themselves interiorly in His presence, to apply themselves to destroying human pride in themselves, and to walk in the ways of the Lord which are patience, meekness, contempt of one’s self and resignation to the divine will in sufferings. They ought to implore His help continually, that He may not abandon them on such a difficult road, and they ought to allow themselves to be penetrated with a salutary appreciation of their own state, seeing how far they are from their Saviour, and that they choose rather to walk in those ways which He has condemned than in those which He followed.

But if, in the midst of a moderate plenty, which is necessary for the preservation of their exterior state, and which the law of God does not reprove, they inwardly preserve Christian humility, and sincere contempt for themselves, Christ, who regards the sentiments of the heart and not the outward appearance, will fill them with glory when He comes, in the day of His judgment, to
Suffer me, O Lord! here to confess my miseries, and at the same time to publish Thy mercies. I have abandoned Thy law, been deaf to Thy voice, rejected Thy caresses, and departed from Thee, in order to follow by-paths, which would have led me to eternal death if Thy hand had not stopped me on the brink of the precipice. And Thou, O my God! hast created me to Thine own image, hast washed me in Thy blood, hast taught me the ways of life, hast infused into my soul faith, hope, and charity, and hast brought me into the Catholic church, to which Thou hast left Thy doctrine, the keys of the kingdom of Heaven, and the assurance of eternal happiness.

When I was of age to know Thee, I found an infinite number of helps ready for me, and all the ways open for coming to Thee. If I had faithfully followed them at that time, as I had promised in my baptism, how near should I have been to Thee at present, O my God! how enlightened would my spirit have been, and how pure my heart.

I see, O Lord! in my life, by means of Thy light, a long train of sins, which cover me with confusion, and break my heart with sorrow. I distinguish those to which I am most subject, which have occasioned me the greatest wanderings, and which still hinder in me the effect of Thy mercies. Confound me not, O Lord! in the day of Thy wrath, but deliver me, by the humiliations which Thou sufferest, from the eternal confusion which I have deserved.

Behold what I am, O my God! behold this miserable sinner for whom Thou hast suffered so much. Behold the ways in which I have walked, after having seen those which Thou hast followed. Behold what has been the
vanity of my thoughts, the baseness of my actions, and the negligence of my life.

How different are Thy ways, O my Saviour! from mine, how many times have I despised and abandoned Thee? How many graces hast Thou granted and promised me? and notwithstanding, I desire to be honoured and considered, whilst Thou art dishonoured and abused. It is I who have been a thousand times unfaithful to Thee, and it is Thou who hast been treated as a perfidious person. I have run as a madman after vanities, and it is Thou, O eternal Wisdom! who art accused of folly. I have robbed Thee of the glory and love which were due to Thee; and it is Thou who art crucified between two thieves. I am guilty, and Thou are punished.

It is I, O Lord! who have deserved that treatment which Thou sufferest. All creatures ought to have risen up against me, and led me through the universe with ignominy, as an ungrateful person, a traitor, and a rebel. And, after all, Thou not only pardonest me, O Thou life of my soul! but wilt also undergo the punishment I deserve. I adore that infinite goodness; I adore that ineffable love. I conjure Thee, O my God! by that same love, to change my heart, and to lead me into that straight way which Thou hast taught me.

Instruct me therefore interiorly, O divine Light! in the secret of Thy ways. Didst Thou not come upon earth to open Heaven to us, to overcome our enemies, to make us know Thy Father, to kindle in our hearts the fire of Thy love, to disengage us from the earth, and to draw us to Thee by the charms of Thy beauty; to heal our evils, and to crown us with all the blessings of grace and glory? Who would ever have thought, O Lord! that the way which Thou followest should lead to the great things for which Thou art come? O impenetrable counsels of the divine wisdom! happy is he who, being united to Thee, O my God! contemplates Thy designs and Thy works continually.

It is by these ways that Thou confoundest the proud, exaltest the humble, melttest the ice of our hearts, dissipatest the darkness of our minds, takest souls out of the abyss of sin, triumphest over Thy enemies, and glorifiest Thy Father. It is thereby that Thou instructest, enlightenest, warmest, and enrichest.

In those moments wherein I suffer anything for Thy love, and wherein Thou darkest into my heart, a ray of Thy light, life becomes wearisome to me and the world unattractive. I then clearly find the need I have of Thee, I desire Thee, sigh after Thee, and would always be with Thee, and never be separated from Thee. But when the flesh is once satisfied, all these sentiments are lost, and all those lights vanish away. Since it is therefore true that I cannot walk in safety but in Thy ways, grant, O Lord! that I may love them, seek them, find them and follow them.

O most pure Mother of God! you who, always full of faith, of love, and of conformity to the divine will, have faithfully followed the ways of our Lord, obtain for me grace to follow them for the future, and to leave those which I have followed so long. AMEN.
XXXV

He is treated as a fool at Herod's court

The priests and the leaders of the Jews led Christ to Pilate with such commotion as might induce that judge to believe that our Saviour had committed some very extraordinary crime. And in order—by the authority of their persons and the zeal for religion—to give greater probability to that opinion, they themselves became His accusers. They would not, however, enter into Pilate's palace, which they looked upon as a profane place because it was the house of a Gentile, and they were afraid of defiling themselves on a day so holy on which they were to celebrate the Pasch.

The human heart is so blind, when it is in the grip of any passion, that in making a scruple of violating the smallest observance it often abandons itself, without any reserve, to the commission of the greatest crimes.

From the mortal hatred which the Jews bore to Christ, who had been promised to them for so long, and whom God had sent to them at last, came the false testimonies, the contempt for the laws, the oppression of innocence, blasphemies and ingratitude: and yet they were afraid that their entering into Pilate's house would render them unworthy to eat the paschal lamb and the unleavened bread.

Pilate, who considered them as the leaders of the people, came out to listen to them, but when he heard them speak of Galilee, where Christ, as they assured him, had taught false doctrine, and of Nazareth, which was said to be His country, he sent Him to Herod, who was then in Jerusalem and within whose jurisdiction these places lay. Herod and Pilate had been at variance but this deference of Pilate gained over Herod; from being enemies, they became friends, and Christ was the bond of their reconciliation. So our Saviour delivered them at least from the hatred they had borne one another, and gave them peace, so necessary between those who are charged with the welfare of others. If He had found their hearts better prepared and more receptive to the blessings which He was desirous of bestowing on them, what would He not have wrought in them? For the love of Jesus cannot remain without action, and when the hardness of our hearts resists Him, He nourishes Himself with patience and awaits a better disposition.

With great heat the Jews laid before Herod all they had to say against Christ, but they got a bad hearing for, in addition to that prince having wished for a long time to see this extraordinary man, whose doctrine, sanctity and miracles had been much commended to him, he easily perceived that these tumultuous accusations were the sole effect of envy and hatred. So he made small account of them and thought only of satisfying his curiosity by the sight of some prodigy.

But our Saviour, whose life was a model of perfection for all men and all states, was pleased on this occasion to teach apostolic men, who are sometimes obliged to treat with great personages, what their views and expectations ought to be. It was an extremely necessary example, for the eyes and office of rulers have but too much power to shake the constancy of the best intentioned persons, who may be invincible in every other way. There are few whose virtue is proof against the
favour of the great, and the desire of pleasing them is always a most dangerous temptation for the servants of God. For that reason Christ, appearing at Herod's court, was pleased to give them the following important instructions:

First, He did not go thither Himself, but was dragged there by force, to teach them that they ought to go to such places only out of necessity and not from inclination.

Secondly, our Saviour paid no attention to the desire which that prince expressed to see some miracle, because He knew that at that stage a miracle would procure no glory to God and would serve only to satisfy the curiosity of a man. He who in a holy profession does not in high places propose to himself the glory of God as his principal end, and who seeks only to please those in power, is extremely blameworthy, for besides his hopes being often deceived he loses interior peace, which is the happiness of his state, and the fruit of true virtue.

Thirdly, Christ would not employ Herod's power to deliver Himself from that of the Jews, nor to defend His own reputation, though He might very easily have done so, for one single miracle would have had more influence over the mind of that prince than all the accusations of the priests and Pharisees. But He would teach men to support the good opinion others have of them by the purity of their virtues, the testimony of their own conscience, and interior communication with God, which are such powerful arms for resisting the evils of this life and acquiring the goods of Heaven; whereas the favour of the powerful cannot secure us from human miseries and serves commonly for nothing other than filling our hearts with vanity.

In short, our Saviour has shown us by His example to expect nothing from high places but what He found there Himself, which was a great deal of contempt because He would not satisfy Herod's vain curiosity. For a thing so precious as the hope of man's heart, by which eternal goods can be obtained, ought never to be separated from its solid foundation, which is God, to be supported by the arm of the flesh, which is incapable of sustaining it for long.

Herod, who had been informed that Christ was a great prophet, asked Him several questions concerning His doctrine, and concerning what was to come, from a desire to see or learn something extraordinary. But, in addition to our Saviour being unwilling to do or say anything that might hinder or delay the death which He had resolved to endure for us, He saw likewise that whatever He should then do could serve only to satisfy the curiosity of a prince who had no inclination to follow the truth, and that He would achieve nothing either for His Father's glory or the salvation of men. Therefore He remained in deep silence and answered nothing either to Herod's questions or the accusations of the Jews. The latter did not fail to take advantage of His silence by saying that He stood convicted and had nothing to answer to the crimes of which He was accused.

There were at court various opinions concerning our Saviour. Some spoke with admiration of His works, of which they had been witnesses; others affirmed that there was imposture and magic in them; still others maintained that magic could not restore life to the dead nor
sight to the blind. In short, many regarded Him as a man sent from God, everyone judging of the doctrine and miracles of Christ according to his own disposition. Christ knew all these different judgments, without taking any notice of them. And although His patience and modesty ought to have procured Him the veneration of those who were present, yet He was treated as one who was stupid and knew not how to profit by an occasion which might have been so advantageous to Him.

There are none so easily deceived in what affects themselves as the powerful. As they are surrounded by flatterers and commonly full of a good opinion of themselves, they are persuaded that everyone ought to seek their protection and esteem themselves happy in pleasing them. Thus Herod did not doubt that Christ was a weak man and without any spirit, because He neglected so excellent an occasion for freeing Himself from the hands of His enemies. He judged that His great reputation resulted from the ignorance of the people who admire everything, and, in order that He might not impose on anyone in future, he thought it necessary to have him led through the city bearing a public mark of folly. He caused Him, therefore, to be clothed with a white garment, and in that condition sent him back to Pilate, to show the latter how he ought to judge Him.

It would be impossible to describe how much this new garment redoubled the cries and mockeries of the soldiers who led our Saviour from Herod’s palace to that of Pilate, nor what crowds of people assembled from all parts of the city to see Him and to assail Him with all the afronts that an insolent populace is wont to do to those who pass for public fools. He then lost the reputation which He had acquired by His sanctity and miracles, but He suffered all these indignities with invincible patience.

He whom we regard as the eternal Wisdom of God the Father, as the only Son of the living God, as the supreme and infinite goodness, and as the spotless mirror of the divine Majesty, vouchsafed to pass upon earth for a fool. O secrets of the conduct of God, how little are you known unto men! The world fears a doctrine so pure and so contrary to its desires; for that reason it endeavours to render it ridiculous, so that it may weaken the authority of it, and it employs for its destruction kings, courtiers, priests, doctors and all the people. But this eternal and omnipotent Truth shall subsist in spite of all their efforts, and the means which they have invented for obscuring it, serve only to make it shine with greater splendour.

Christ would consecrate in Himself the admirable truth, which He afterwards taught us through His Apostles (I Cor. iii, 18): Let no man deceive himself: if any man among you seem to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. He would accomplish the designs of His eternal wisdom, overcome the world, establish the Church and people Heaven by His humiliations, without troubling Himself about the judgments of the world, in order to make us comprehend that a heart capable of the glory of Heaven ought never to think itself either cast down by the contempt of the world or exalted by its honours.

This also made St. Paul say (I Cor. iii, 19) the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God and that (Rom. viii, 6) the wisdom of the flesh is death, because all the wisdom of the world, with all its conventions concerning honour, cannot exalt man to the eternal glory for
which he was created. Thus it is really folly, the views of which see nothing beyond the acquisition of riches, pleasures, favours, reputation and other such goods, which finish the death of the body, and often cause the death of the soul. On the contrary, Christian wisdom despises the world, abhors its vanities, shuns its honours, neglects its favours, embraces humiliations, turns all its thoughts towards Heaven and, being content with the interior goods which it possesses, it never esteems itself more glorious than when the world has the greatest contempt for it.

But because the world is unacquainted with these divine goods, it regards those as fools who are truly wise in Christ, though the Apostle (Heb. xi, 38) affirms that of them the world was not worthy, and loudly declares (Gal. vi, 14) that the world is crucified to me, and I to the world. This is as though he had said: The world takes me for an accursed person, and despises Christ crucified, whom I preach to it; but I also treat the world in the same manner, and in my turn regard it as an object of malediction and horror. Whatever hope it may flatter me with, whatever advantage it may promise me, it shall not deceive me, because I consider all its grandeur as dirt, that I may acquire that divine wisdom which is unknown to it. Let it therefore glory in its pride as much as it pleases; let the wise boast of their knowledge as much as they will; they must at last, if they would be eternally happy, have recourse to humility, and to the folly of the Cross: for they will find nothing in the wisdom of the world but deceit and perdition.

CONTEMPLATION

O Jesus! eternal Wisdom, the Light and love of my soul, my Lord, my Master, and my Sovereign Good! who can say that Thou sufferest not freely? Who can doubt but that the injury which Thou sufferest, comes rather from Thy love than from the malice of Thy enemies? Thou appearest before a king, who had long desired to know Thee, to hear Thy doctrine, to be witness of Thy miracles, and who felt a secret joy at Thy arrival, in the hope of seeing for himself the wonders which they had spoken so much of to him. Has Thy wisdom abandoned Thee? hast Thou lost that infinite power? canst Thou not by some prodigy, in order to confound the Jews, gain the admiration of the prince, disclose the most secret thoughts of those present, engage the hearts of courtiers by the charms of Thy doctrine, and thus manifest Thy greatness and divinity?

Yet Thou art silent, and concealst Thy wisdom, Thy power, and Thy majesty, and sufferest a king, with all those who surround him, to despise Thee, to regard Thee as a fool, to make Thee be led, with a robe of ignominy, through the streets of Jerusalem, as a seducer of the people.

O eternal Truth! how little the world knows Thee! how hidden are Thy ways from the proud and wise of the world! Grant that I may know Thee, and permit me not to go astray in the ways of carnal prudence. I adore Thee, O sovereign Truth! I adore Thee, O Wisdom of the Father! I adore Thee, O Light of souls! to whom Thou showest so clearly in Thy divine person, that pure doctrine which Thou hast taught both by Thyself and by Thy apostles: that we must become fools, simple, and ignorant, if we would be wise.
When wilt Thou engrave in my soul, O Lord! those divine truths? I know them, I adore them, but, alas! how far do I find myself from them! I desire to be seen, heard, and praised; I tremble at the very thoughts of contempt. Whence comes this, O Lord! Where then is that secret pride concealed, which rules over me? And how can it subsist in the sight of Thy humility?

O Jesus despised! it is by Thy humility that Thou comest to us; it is thereby that Thou instructest and charmest the souls that are faithful to Thee. When Thy perfect imitators forget themselves, that they may only remember Thee, when they place their glory in Thy ignominies, when they are interiorly intent on Thee, they abandon the care of human things, pass for unprofitable, slothful and stupid people but they do not change their nature. Whence comes it then, that the world no longer esteems them but as men buried alive, annihilated, good for nothing, and incapable of any undertaking? Who has rendered them so retired, indifferent and unsocial, but Thou, O divine love! who art more piercing than a two-edged sword; stronger than death; and more jealous than hell.

It is Thou, O my Jesus! Who workest all those changes in souls. Thou possessest them interiorly; teachest them in secret a wisdom which the world knows not, and discoverest to them a beauty which eyes do not behold. Thou illuminatest them with a light, which flesh does not perceive, and givest them a discernment which shows them that what appears outwardly is so low, so poor and so contemptible, that they can no longer depart from what occupies them within.

When shall I be transformed into Thee, O divine spouse of my soul! When I behold in Thee all those wonders, and Thy servants experience them in themselves, what am I thinking on still to esteem the favours of the world, and to afflict myself with the contumely of Thy humiliations?

Convert me, O Lord! and I shall be converted; change me, and I shall be changed; instruct me interiorly, and then, though I be a fool in the eyes of the world, I shall be wise before Thee. Happy is he who is despised for Thee, who desires neither to be seen nor esteemed by any but Thee, O my sovereign happiness!

O eternal Word! O wisdom of God! O light of those who live in interior darkness, and in the shadow of mortal ignorance! teach me how Thy conduct agrees with Thy words, for Thou hast said, that a good name is better than great riches.—(Prov. xxiii.) Is it to have a good reputation to be esteemed a fool, stupid, and an impostor? It is having a bad reputation to pass for a covetous, proud, impious, revengeful and envious person, but it is having a good one, to be esteemed holy, just, pious, prudent and learned. Thou art branded as wicked, a seducer, and a fool. Where then is that good reputation which Thou wouldst have preferred to all riches?

Elucidate for me this mystery, O Lord! and enlighten the darkness of my soul. I have hitherto believed that a good reputation consisted in pleasing men; in being praised, approved and considered by them; and to attain thereto, I have given myself a thousand troubles, have sacrificed my goods, health, and repose, and when my hopes were deceived, I have fallen into sadness and trouble. Then instead of having recourse to Thee, O my God! I have forgotten Thee, and my heart has launched out, in vain complaints and foolish words.

I speak not of those unhappy moments wherein I
have taken pleasure in offending Thee; have placed my
glory in things which Thou hastest; and have been will-
ing to make my vices pass for virtues. I only mention
here the blindness I have been in concerning the purity
of Thy doctrine. I have imagined that Thy law obliged
me to preserve the reputation of a good man, even to
the prejudice of my repose. O vanity! O folly! O blind-
ness! Thou, O Lord! who art the glory of the just, make
me comprehend how advantageous it is to pass for an
ignorant and foolish person in the eyes of the world.
Teach me to be silent, for Thy love, when I am des-
pised, to forget everything, to lose all things for Thee,
to be unconcerned about human judgments, and to
regard Thee only as my judge, my wisdom, my treasure,
my glory, and my happiness.

How can I desire life but to imitate Thee in Thy re-
proaches, O humbled Majesty! Can I desire to be more
wise and enlightened than Thou art, O eternal Wisdom!
Take me out of this world, O Lord! if Thou foresee
that I am ever to love or esteem anything to the preju-
dice of those holy truths which Thou teachest me. To
what purpose is wisdom and understanding without
Thee, O divine light!

Here it is that my darkness must be dissipated, and
that I must begin to undeceive myself concerning that
false glory of the word. Embrace me, O humbled Jesus!
and receive me as a companion of Thy humiliations. In
this moment I renounce all esteem, all glory, all reputa-
tion among men. Let others be esteemed, and me
despised; let them be in honour, and me in oblivion; let
no creature think of me, and let none but Thee, O my
God! hear me, love me, and regard me.

How far distant have my views been from Thine, O
my Saviour! and how many faults shall the fire, which
Thou hast brought upon earth, find in me to be con-
sumed. Therein Thy love shall find a heart to be trans-
formed, Thy light shall find darkness to be dispelled, and
Thy wisdom an ignorance to be instructed. Inflame me,
O Lord! Consume me, instruct me, and humble me in
the eyes of the world; and exalt me in Thy sight.

O sad and miserable life! how long and dangerous
art thou at the same time! Put an end to it this moment,
O Lord! if I am ever to forget Thy humiliations, or, at
least, put an end to the attachment I have to its vanities,
that I may be only occupied with Thee; that I may
remember Thee at all times, in all places, in action and
rest, in health and sickness, in life and death.

O most holy Virgin! you who so faithfully practised
those truths, and gained by humility the only Son of
the eternal Father into your possession; He esteemed
you, and you despised yourself; the angel called you
full of grace, O Mother of God! and you regarded your-
self as his handmaid, because you beheld not in yourself
the perfections which the angel beheld in you. You car-
ried in your womb the expectation of nations; but you
hid your treasure, and the world esteemed you not,
though you were full of grace. How remote am I from
that way, O sacred Virgin! The Son of God passes for
a fool; you who are Mother of the Son of God, and the
Queen of angels, remain unknown in the world; and I,
faithless servant, what shall I say to excuse the pride
of my life? Take pity on me, O Mother of mercy! Give
me a share of the dispositions of your heart, and obtain
for me the love of humility, wherein you know, by your
own experience, true wisdom consists. AMEN.
XXXVI

The coldness of His friends and the triumph of His enemies

Great sufferings seldom come singly but are frequently succeeded by many others, which are sometimes as painful as the first. This is what Christ experienced all His life, but particularly in His Passion, every circumstance of which was alone sufficient to torment Him.

Thus among the torments which He endured when He was dragged with so much ignominy through the streets of Jerusalem we may consider, as circumstances which gave Him particular pain though few persons reflect thereon, were, on the one hand, the loss of reputation in the minds of His friends, whose esteem He had acquired by the greatness of His miracles, the purity of His doctrine and the holiness of His life, and, on the other hand, the triumph of His enemies who enjoyed the fruit of their malice.

We must not doubt but that those who had followed Christ so long, who had been the witnesses of His wonders and had seen people in crowds run after Him, even into the desert, were extremely shaken at the sight of so prodigious a change. They had admired Christ when the winds, the seas, the sick, the dead and the devils obeyed Him, but when they saw Him clothed with that robe of ignominy, His hands bound behind Him, a rope about His neck, and led by the soldiers and executioners, their reason was disturbed. Even those whom He had healed began to doubt whether their cure had come from Him, and whether it would continue.

These people, whose minds were in suspense between the miracles which our Saviour had worked, and the affronts which He endured, knew not what side to take. At one moment they felt that so many miracles could come only from a man of God; at another, that if that man were innocent He would not be treated with so much contumely. Thus they wavered in their own minds, and their ignorance of the divine mystery, joined to the natural inclination men have to diffidence, increased their uncertainty.

Christ clearly saw their little faith, and, out of the zeal He had for their salvation, He was acutely touched by it. This was a pain peculiar to Himself, and one which the martyrs were unable to feel, because they knew not the bottom of men's hearts. Even His most intimate friends, such as the Apostles, Magdalen, Martha, Lazarus, and some others, with whom He had lived more familiarly and whom He had instructed with more care, while they had no doubt about His innocence, because they were aware of His sanctity and of the hatred of the Jews, nevertheless were shaken in their faith in His divine person, seeing that He neither did nor said anything in His own defence. The sincerity of their love, and the weakness of their faith, caused in them that interior conflict which was so much the more painful in Christ as He was more concerned at their infidelity than at His own sufferings.

On the other hand, He beheld His enemies triumphing and applauding themselves on the success of their injustice, levelling against Him a thousand blasphemies, calling Him impostor, seditious, magician, and thus
turning the glory of His works, the excellence of His doctrine and the greatness of His power, to His own confusion.

He saw them insulting His friends and disciples when they met them, and drawing the same advantage from His silence as if He had been convicted of all the crimes of which they accused Him. He saw them treating His miracles as magic, His truths as lies, and His holiness as folly. He saw that what was most divine in Him drew upon Him the greatest reproaches, that the malice, hatred, envy and blasphemies of His enemies passed for zeal for religion, sincere love of country and the effect of prudence. Only those who have experienced this kind of injustice can form any idea of what Christ then suffered or comprehend that the most consummate virtue can do no more than support itself in such circumstances.

But because our Saviour would suffer in His humanity more than all the martyrs and saints have suffered, He chose among His sufferers, not alone those wherein the whole perfection of virtue is practised, but also those which may serve as an example for all sorts of afflicted persons.

The perfection which our Saviour teaches His servants is so pure and sublime that, as the greatest happiness that can happen to us in this life, we may beseech Him with David (Ps. lxvi, 2-3) to bless us: *may he cause the light of his countenance to shine upon us; and may he have mercy on us. That we may know thy way upon earth: thy salvation in all nations.* For these examples are so lofty and divine that all nature is astonished at them, and cannot attain to them without a particular grace.

In the first place, we see in the degradations of Christ that humiliation joined to a good conscience is a surer way for gaining Heaven than all the esteem of the world, however just and good it may appear. Christ knew how important it was, for the sanctification of men, that He should be acknowledged and adored, and yet He judged that that great design would be better accomplished by ignominy than by praises, though our divine Redeemer could never be sufficiently praised nor praised falsely. How much surer then is that very way for us, who may always justly believe ourselves unworthy of all praise in the sight of God? For the honours which one man pays to another are commonly false or insincere, serve only to blind the receiver to his own failings, give him more esteem for himself than he ought to have, introduce pride into his soul, destroy virtue therein and weaken in it the desire of pleasing God, who alone knows truly what we are and what we deserve.

But he who is under little or no concern about the opinion of men, who on the contrary is afraid of their praises and desires only to please God, possesses in the midst of disgraces an interior peace and consolation which the world cannot comprehend. He is content to be known by God alone, his true judge, is full of confidence in the dangers and miseries of this life, and is happier a thousand times amid the humiliations he endures for Christ than worldlings are in the highest splendour of their glory.

O that persons, aspiring to angelical perfection, did but fully comprehend this truth! If they had the humbled, annihilated Jesus continually before their
eyes, how content would they live, how full of consolation, of peace, and of light would they be! Many praise and esteem the humiliations of our Saviour, but there are very few who love them. And yet experience teaches us that God conducts by that way such souls as He designs to raise in His Church to eminent sanctity and makes them find inestimable treasures in the most profound humiliations.

In the second place, Christ teaches us how perfect our faith ought to be and how pure our charity, that is to say, how elevated above the esteem and affection of the world. He knew that the love and faith of His disciples would be shaken by His humiliations, because their faith was founded upon His miracles and their love upon His favours, but He judged it better to put their faith and love to so severe a trial, and to put them in danger of losing both, than to be but imperfectly known and loved by them. He foresaw that, being humbled by their own weaknesses, they would be better disposed to receive His spirit, which rests only on the humble, and which was one day to confirm their faith and purify their charity.

Indeed it happened that those who had been disturbed by the humiliations of our Saviour afterwards placed their whole glory in being like Him, so far as to triumph with joy that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus. (Acts v, 41).

Many love Christ while nothing happens to them contrary to their desires, but there are very few who, finding themselves deprived of sensible graces and persecuted by the world at the same time, persevere in the purity of love. Though God commonly fills souls with the blessings of His sweetness in order to draw them to

Him, yet He will be loved for Himself and not for His gifts. Hence it is that He hides them so often, and deprives us of the feeling of His presence, to try whether we love Him purely and disinterestedly. For if the soul runs after the heavenly bridegroom only when it gets the odour of His perfumes, if it thinks itself abandoned when it finds them no longer, if it then goes to seek comfort among creatures, it is manifest that it loves the gift more than the giver, and the consolations of God more than the God of consolations. To love Jesus crucified, despised and afflicted, and to find Him no less beautiful in His humiliations than in His sweet communications, is the proof of pure love.

This is a language very foreign to him who has not relished Christ, and does not make it his chief occupation to know and love Him. Notwithstanding, it is in this that the end for which we were created consists.

Although God bears with an unfaithful soul in this imperfect state, and though His goodness forsakes it not, yet it is at least certain that it shall spend its life in great poverty of interior benefits and not be conscious of what it loses. On the contrary, a soul that gives itself up entirely to the love of Christ, and to the desire of imitating Him, shall find Him so jealous that it shall no longer have the freedom to love anything but Him, not even His gifts. Those are great favours, but who can express what God communicates to those who love Him purely? What we know in this matter is that faith assures us that God is infinitely good, infinitely amiable, and infinitely liberal, and that pure love obliges us to love what He is and not what He gives. When love is such, it is always constant, whatever trouble befalls us, either within or without, because it considers nothing
They ought then to have their eyes continually fixed on Christ, who was treated as a convicted criminal, to pray to Him for their persecutors, to judge themselves unworthy of the happiness there is in suffering for the glory of God and the salvation of their neighbour and to remember, on the contrary, that God often makes use of His own enemies for punishing His unfaithful servants.

Let them, therefore, abandon the care of their reputation to Him, and esteem themselves but too happy in having some share in the humiliations of Christ, for then, if God requires any other thing of them for His glory, He will furnish them with the means and give them the strength to put it into execution. But because persecution, suffered for justice, is not always as easy to distinguish as it is difficult to bear, Christ was pleased to suffer in silence the dereliction of His friends, and the triumph of His enemies, in order to teach us that on such occasions we ought to be silent, to leave to God the care of our justification, and to begin by overcoming the world in ourselves until we can overcome it in the world.

CONTEMPLATION

What then is that extreme abjection wherein I behold Thee, O my Jesus! Why dost Thou suffer Thy friends to abandon Thee, and even Thy miracles and virtues to become a subject of humiliation to Thee, and of triumph to Thy enemies? In everything Thou hast done, suffered, and taught, Thou hadst in view the salvation of souls;
why then dost Thou expose those dearest to Thee to the danger of losing the faith? Why dost Thou allow Thyself to be despised to such a degree that those who have heard, followed, and loved Thee, seem ashamed of Thee? And how should they not be shaken, when they see Thy enemies triumph, Thy Apostles taking flight, and Thy whole flock dispersed, and when they behold Thyself oppressed, humbled, and abandoned? Thus Thou sufferest the loss of Thy reputation, and exposest Thy friends to danger; and all for me?

How will Thou be loved purely, O my God! That faith which is limited to what is seen, is not agreeable to Thee; and Thou art not content with a soul that loves Thee more for Thy gifts than for Thyself. Thy disciples who had loved Thee, amidst the acclamations that were given Thee, and the benefits they received from Thee, could not but still love Thee in abjection. Thou wouldst try their faith and love by Thy reproaches, in order to draw them from the number of those who loved Thee only out of interest, and to elevate their thoughts above what appears in Thee.

For that reason it was necessary that Thou shouldst send them the Holy Ghost, and give us admirable examples of the love which Thou requirest of us. For as Thou art infinitely pure, infinitely sincere, and infinitely perfect, Thou art not content with seeing in our souls an ordinary purity of love: Thou requirest of us an entire separation from every creature. Thou desirest to be loved alone, O God of love! and Thou wilt be loved alone, not for what we expect from Thee, but purely for what Thou art.

Thou wilt have us banish from our hearts everything that is not Thyself, however great, holy, or excellent it be so that Thou alone mayst find place in a soul which Thou lovest so purely.

If my friends are discontented with my conduct, if they happen to lose the esteem they had for me, or if they do not reciprocate that which I have for them, I fall into trouble: I would have them praise my actions, guess my intentions, and approve of both.

Permit me not, O my God! any longer to follow these corrupt desires: Thy patience suffers them; but Thy sanctity condemns them; may Thy goodness root them out of my heart.

Can it be surprising to see me renounce all things, for testifying my love to Thee, after what Thou hast done for testifying Thine to me? Though I had been Thy last end and supreme happiness, as Thou art mine, what couldst Thou have done more than to despise for my sake honours, friends, and a reputation so justly acquired? Thou wast pleased to lose all these advantages, O Lord! in order to teach me how pure Thy love is, and what the purity of mine ought to be. And I, who am but a worm of the earth, think I do a great deal when I renounce base pleasures and vain honours for Thee.

O divine Jesus! in this moment, and for ever, I renounce all creatures. I renounce my parents, friends, pleasures, liberty, reputation, and everything that is capable of possessing my heart. Supply, O Lord! by Thy mercy, the defect Thou seest in this resolution, that it may be such as Thou desirest it. Wash my soul, O divine Purity! that it may be Thy abode, and purify it, that its whole weight may carry it towards Thee.

If for loving Thee purely and only, O my sovereign
THE COLDNESS OF HIS FRIENDS

Good! if be necessary that I should lose the friendship, favour, protection and esteem even of the holiest men, I heartily consent thereto. Let all things be wanting to me, provided I possess Thee; let all creatures abandon me, provided Thou be with me. Let people treat me as they please, provided I may live for Thee, and die in Thee.

Here I confess my infirmity and misery before Thy mercy, O my God! that Thou mayst heal me, and give me what Thou requirest of me. The good I am able to do comes from Thee, and not from myself. But this day Thou teachest me in Thyself, O eternal Truth! how pure and disengaged my heart ought to be, in the good works which I do so that, if they are deemed bad, if they are defamed, if they are made use of for persecuting me—not as a saint, which would be sweet—but as a wicked person, a profligate, a hypocrite, I may suffer everything, that shall be said against me, with a peaceful heart, and a sincere desire of imitating, loving and possessing Thee.

When I consider these truths, I love them; when Thou inspirest me with them, I desire the practice of them; when Thou showest me them in Thyself, I absolutely desire to become like Thee. But, alas! how weak am I, when any occasion of practising them presents itself. I confess it, O Lord! my flesh sinks under the weight of that Cross, my mind goes astray, my faith is shaken, patience escapes me; and I have then an extreme need of Thy assistance.

Fortify me, O Lord! and separate this heart from the earth, that it may no longer resist Thy will. Remember, that in the Garden of Olives, the sight of the torments which were prepared for Thee drew from Thy veins a sweat of blood. What then shall I do, I, who am weakness itself? I will cry towards Thee; I will invoke Thee as my Lord and my God, who alone can work in me what I cannot expect from myself.

I know my iniquity, O Lord! and I consent to be treated by Thee in this life as a criminal. I consent that my enemies should triumph over me, provided I do what I ought; that I should not esteem myself better than others; that I should not flatter myself; and that I should suffer persecution for justice’ sake; and that I should rather persuade myself that I suffer much less than I have deserved. I beg also of Thee the grace of loving my enemies, as if they were my true friends, and to regard them with a sincere respect, as the ministers of Thy providence and of Thy will.

Test the strength of my spirit by making me, from the unworthy servant that I am, as faithful in Thy service, and as subject to Thy will, as Thou desirest me to be. Grant that I may never distinguish him who persecutes me; not consider whether he be good or wicked; not mind the stone that hits me, but always to love the hand that throws it at me; not complain of the injury that is done me; nor seek to justify myself; but that all my defence and consolation may be in imitating Thee.

O most holy Mother of God! you who are the support of the weak, and the refuge of sinners, obtain for me this favour. You know that my soul was created to love God above all things: and that it cannot find its felicity without Him: let me then desire Him, seek Him, follow Him with all my heart, esteem only what can conduct me to Him, and fear only what may separate me from Him. Amen.
XXXVII

Barabbas is preferred to Him.

It showed great contempt for Christ to compare Him with Barabbas, and to judge Him worthy of the same punishment that was due to a thief, a seditious person, a murderer and a disturber of the public peace, but the malice of the Jews overlooked nothing that might confound the Son of God with malefactors and endeavoured to gain by their obstinacy, outcries and threats that which they could not obtain by the way of justice.

Early on the morning of the day of the Pasch, the most solemn day of the year, having led our Saviour to Pilate, and that magistrate having asked them of what He was accused, they took it amiss that He should not be believed guilty just because they, the leaders of the nation, had brought Him and they answered haughtily (John xviii, 30): If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up to thee. Pilate, offended by this answer, said to them (John xviii, 31): Take him you, and judge him according to your law, not thinking that they could, either according to the Roman law, or the rules of natural equity, judge Him without knowledge of the matter.

But because they had decided that Christ should be crucified, and because it was not permitted them to condemn anyone to the death of the cross, they accused Him of several crimes which were commonly punished in this way—having caused an insurrection, planned to make himself a king, and forbidden tribute to be paid to Cæsar.

Though all these accusations seemed incredible and, from the very manner in which they were brought forward, were suspected by Pilate, yet the latter thought it politic to dissemble and immediately referred the judgment to Herod. But when that prince sent Christ back to him, and the Jewish leaders continued to press vigorously, but without any proof, for the condemnation of our Saviour, Pilate decided that he himself would interrogate Him in secret concerning His kingdom and origin. Our Saviour did not deny that He was a king, affirming only that His kingdom was not of this world since, if it had been so, His subjects would have fought to prevent their king falling into the hands of the Jews.

This answer deserves to be considered attentively because the sense of it has hidden depths. What! if our Lord has been an earthly king, would His earthly subjects have defended Him against His enemies, but because He is the king of Heaven; His heavenly subjects defend Him not? Are these then less faithful or less affectionate than those of the earth?

But we must recognise that these two sorts of subjects have very different views. Those of the earth maintain the cause of their king without knowing whether it be just or unjust, profitable or hurtful; but those of Heaven, always illuminated with the divine light, discover the nothingness of earthly goods and know that they gain more in losing than in possessing them. And so they do not defend the honour and life of their king, for, besides their king's not desiring it, they see that His death and ignominies are to fill Heaven with saints.

It is for that reason also that they do not deliver their friends, living on earth, from the evils of this life, for fear of withdrawing them from the way of Heaven, by
withdrawing them from the Cross. And as things are seen much more clearly in Heaven than on earth, they are governed there also by rules infinitely more just and certain.

But when Pilate asked our Saviour (John xixii, 37): 

\textit{Art thou a king then?} he gave Him the opportunity to reveal a great mystery for Jesus replied: \textit{Thou sayest, that I am a king. For this was I born, and for this came I into the world; that I should give testimony to the truth. Every one that is of the truth, heareth my voice. Pilate saith to him: What is truth?—(John xviii, 37-38.)}

And after having put this question, Pilate departed to speak to the Jews, without waiting for an answer. How full of instruction are these words for all those who desire to follow the doctrine of our Saviour, for, by comparing their affections and conduct with that doctrine, they will easily know whether they walk according to the truth or whether they suffer themselves to be seduced by the false gods which it rejects.

What is involved here is nothing less than the loss or salvation of the soul, and so it is of the utmost importance for everyone to behave in the matter of truth with such caution and vigilance as will ensure that they fall not into the misfortune of being rejected by Jesus Christ. But, alas! how much is it to be feared that many imitate Pilate’s negligence in asking slightlyingly, What is truth? and not bothering to wait for an answer.

Pilate gave himself no opportunity, therefore, to hear what our Saviour had begun to say of His heavenly kingdom and of the truth. After having carefully interrogated Him, however, he could find nothing in Him that clashed with Cæsar’s interests, and seeing that Herod had sent Him back without condemning Him,

he judged that if the man were guilty, it could only be for having spoken against the customs or religion of the Jews. As a way out, he resolved to have Him scourged, in order to appease the commotions raised among the people on His account, and afterwards to let Him go.

But the leaders of the Jews were not satisfied with this punishment, which seemed to them inadequate. They were even afraid lest Christ, who had preserved so strict a silence in public, might not have satisfied Pilate in private, and lest He had disclosed to him their hatred and injustice. Thus, seeing all their measures in danger of being frustrated, they redoubled their outcries, and Pilate, in order to save Christ, or rather to deliver himself from their importuning, proposed an expedient to them.

He knew that the governor of Judea was accustomed at that time every year to grant the Jews the life and liberty of a criminal, whom they themselves should choose, because their forefathers had been delivered on that same day from their captivity in Egypt. He offered, therefore, two prisoners to them, Jesus and Barabbas, never doubting but that they would abandon Barabbas, just convicted of sedition and murder, and that they would demand the deliverance of Christ, from whom they had received a thousand favours, and whose modesty, patience, meekness and equanimity amidst so many injuries, clearly showed His innocence. But the contrary happened. Spurred on by their leaders, the people demanded with one voice the life of Barabbas and the death of Christ: and obtained both. Behold the recompense which our Saviour received for so many benefits! As it would be impossible to express in words
what pain that unworthy preference occasioned Him, we will leave it as a subject for pious meditation.

The Son of God clearly showed in His person at this time that which He had previously taught His Apostles in order to encourage them to suffer the hardships which the world was preparing for them. *If the world hate you, know ye, that it hath hated me before you. If you had been of the world, the world would love its own: but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.*—(John xv, 18, 19.) For the world loves that which belongs to it: it protects thieves, absolves murderers, delivers the seditious, favours malefactors; and it condemns the Author of life, puts to death the Prince of Heaven, and prefers the guilty to the innocent.

It will be very profitable for those who, disgusted with the world, sincerely love and follow Christ, to consider here two things. Firstly, in what manner the world treats the Son of God by preferring to His divine Majesty a murderer and a public thief. Secondly, that though the world loves the wicked, that love is terminated in their eternal ruin and confusion; whereas Christ loves the good, in order to crown them with glory, and the wicked, in order to justify and save them.

It must be admitted, however, that he who has come to know Christ’s infinite love for sinners will judge that it would be doing an injustice to that divine Saviour to reckon among His sufferings the preference that was given over Him to murderers and malefactors. On the contrary, the purity of His love made Him find the preference delightful, and it is true to say that it is to this that the lives of those were saved whom He had come to deliver by His death.

For though nothing can be imagined more unjust than the choice of that ungrateful people, who judged their benefactor unworthy of life, and preferred to Him a convicted malefactor, yet it may be believed that Christ would have suffered much greater pain if, in order to preserve a life which He had designed to give for all, they had put the murderer to death, however wicked he might be. Though in the Jews the making of such a comparison was due to nothing else than blindness and sin, for Christ it was a disposition of the eternal Counsel, who was pleased to teach sinners thereby that in their necessities they may offer the life and blood of their Lord for themselves.

We ought, therefore, to understand that Christ, seeing that the Jews required the life of Barabbas, consented to this with all His heart and that He offered Himself to the eternal Father for Barabbas and all men. We ought further to understand that He obtained the favour that that exchange should be extended to all sinners who would be saved, that none might fall into despair, but that everyone might be persuaded that He, who continually sought sinners during His life-time and who, at His death, was accompanied by a thief from the cross into Heaven, will not refuse His glory to those sinners who shall have recourse to Him.

Christ will not fail us because He really gave Himself for us, but it is different with us who exchange Him every day for those very things which separate us from Him. We become like those Jews every time we abandon God by sin, to adhere to the creature. Indeed, the exchange we then make is still more unreasonable than that which the Jews made. Barabbas was a man for whom our Lord was pleased to die, but to prefer to
Christ mean things and shameful sins which He hated so much as to die for their destruction, and vanities which He so strongly rejected, is to act in a way which ought to cover us with confusion and make us afraid to even lift up our eyes to Heaven. For to sin mortally is nothing less than to banish our Saviour from a demesne which He has acquired by His blood and to receive into His place that which makes Hell a place of horror and confusion. Man nevertheless not only suffers that enemy in his soul, but he also sleeps, eats and lives peaceably with him.

Are we not as guilty as the Jews? They acted from passion and were carried away by envy and hatred of Christ, whom they knew not to be the Son of God. We adore Him, acknowledge Him for what He is, expect from Him our eternal salvation and all the goods of grace and glory, and yet, free from the prejudice of hatred, we offend Him so thoughtlessly that we esteem as a trifle the misfortune of losing Him, and of exchanging Him for the vain pleasures of this world. Behold how we behave in respect of Him, and behold—what we cannot be sufficiently grateful for—how He is always patient in bearing with us, and loves us no less tenderly than He loved us on the very day that He died for us.

CONTEMPLATION

How shall I acknowledge, O Jesus, Son of the living God! the excess of Thy love? Thou art not content with having taken the flesh of sinners, remaining with them, receiving them with goodness, and expiating their crimes but, being incapable of becoming truly a sinner,

Thou wast pleased to be put in the number of public malefactors, such as murderers and robbers, to be even judged more wicked than they, and less worthy of life; and to be at last crucified in the midst of them, as more guilty than they.

Pardon me, O Lord! all the time I have employed in the service of this world, which has not known Thee, and was so insensible of Thy benefits. What! Barabbas, a thief, a public enemy, and a murderer, is deemed more worthy of life than Thou, O life of my soul! Why have I loved this unjust world so much? Why did I not always hate it? Ought I to have lost Thee for pleasing it? But what else could so corrupt a world do but condemn Thee, O infinite purity, and protect those who belonged to it?

Thou didst not offend any person. None came from Thee without help and consolation. Thou didst not desire the riches of this world, Thou soughtest neither its honours nor pleasures, and yet when it could have delivered Thee from death, with which Thy enemies threatened Thee, it set free a thief, and crucified Thee. Behold the world that I have loved and served, to which I have sacrificed my cares and life! I am still afraid of losing it, am desirous of gaining it, and I lose myself with it. Give me, O Lord! all the contempt and hatred that I ought to have for it, that I may esteem nothing but Thee alone, love nothing but Thee alone, and desire and seek nothing but Thee alone.

When shall I be in Thy company, persecuted with Thee, and despoiled by the world like Thee, O Thou love of my soul! What good can the world do me, or what ought I to expect from it, when it treats Thee so, O my God! Thou who art my sovereign good? Let
the world despise me, that I may resemble Thee; let it hate me, that I may love Thee; let it reject me, that Thou mayst receive me; and let it treat me in such a manner, that if I am so miserable as to resist Thy love, the persecution of the world may at least constrain me to seek Thee.

But since the world rejects Thee so shamefully, O Jesus, Thou life and hope of my soul, come to me; I will receive Thee, I will embrace Thee, I will die for Thee, and I will acknowledge Thee, in life and death, for my Lord and my God. Let the world say of Thee what it pleases, let it treat Thee with as much indignity as Thou deservest respect, I adore Thee, O my first principle and last end! I adore Thee, O sovereign Truth! I adore Thee, O treasure of heavenly blessings! I adore Thee, O companion and remedy of sinners! I acknowledge Thee for my God in the midst of sinners: and whilst a murderer is preferred to Thee, I confess that Thou art the author of eternal life, and the Father of the world to come.

How many miseries shalt Thou find in me to be destroyed, O infinite mercy! When I consider on the one hand what I am, and on the other, what Thou hast suffered for me, I feel myself so penetrated with confusion, that I wish I were able to hide myself within the bowels of the earth. I have deserved to be swallowed up therein, and much more, yet the Jews, who preferred Barabbas to Thee, are less guilty than I am.

They exchanged Thee for a man whom Thou wouldst save, and for whom Thou wast going to die; they did it out of the envy and hatred, with which they were animated against Thee; and as for me, O Lord! I have often exchanged Thee for the meanest things in the world, without any heat of passion, but only for the pleasure I found therein; not from any particular hatred, but by the disorderly inclination of my heart. I have abandoned Thee, O Thou God of my soul! for vanity, for things, which Thy holy law forbade me, and for shameful and abominable sins.

How many times, O my God! have I despised Thee in order to seek the most contemptible things in the world? How many times have I stifled Thy divine spirit to do what the spirit of darkness suggested to me? Thou desirest to live and reign in my heart, O my sovereign good! and I was desirous that sin should reign in it. Why do not my eyes melt in tears? Why do I presume to appear before Thee? How can I lift up my eyes to Thee after having despised Thee thus? Pardon me, O merciful Father! such great indignities. When I cast my eyes upon Thee, O my God! and upon the infinite goodness Thou hast for me, I feel an extreme desire to see my heart consumed with the flame of pure love. But what were the sentiments of Thine, when Thou didst hear that they spared the life of a murderer, and demanded Thy death? How agreeable was that moment to Thee, and how conformable was it to Thy desires? For, when Thou preacheat the kingdom of God to the Jews, Thou didst eat and converse with sinners, and there was more reason than the people imagined for calling Thee the friend of sinners, because Thou didst defend them, and loudly declared that Thou camest for them. At present they would have Thee suffer death in the midst of some, and be substituted in the place of others. What joy was it to Thee, O Lord! to see those associated with Thee, or exchanged for Thee, whom Thou camest to seek.
Before I was born, before I knew Thee, and could ask anything of Thee, Thy love obliged Thee to give me Thy life, Thy blood, Thy honour and Thy divinity—in a word, all that Thou hast, and all that Thou art. At present, when by Thy mercy, I acknowledge Thee for my sovereign good, desire Thee, and invoke Thee with all my heart, how canst Thou refuse me what I ask Thee? I ask Thee nothing in respect of the body or human life. I ask Thee, O my Jesus! for Thyself. Give Thyself entirely to my soul. This request cannot displease Thee, for whatever desire I have of possessing Thee, Thou hast still a greater to give Thyself to me.

Behold Thou art already offered for sinners: they are resolved that Thou shalt die instead of Barabbas: Thou art confounded with such as I am, and I know the joy Thou hast on that account. Come then, O Lord! into this house of sin: for, as such, it is Thine; and Thou, in quality of the Saviour of sinners, art mine.

Thou seest how desolate Thy abode is, and how incapable this barren earth is of bearing the fruits which Thy hand had planted therein. Make good therein, O my Saviour! the name Thou bearest: save this soul, purify it, enlighten it, re-establish it, embrace it, and consume it, in order to renew it entirely. What I beg of Thee after that, O my God! is, that I may receive nothing therein but Thee alone, and that Thou mayst not, from henceforth, suffer anything in it but what is agreeable to Thy eyes. Amen.

XXXVIII

He is scourged

Pilate, knowing the innocence of Christ and the malice of His accusers, urged Him to defend Himself, and then, surprised at a silence and tranquillity so rare in an accused person, desired Him at least to say something in His own justification. But our Saviour spoke so much the less as His innocence spoke the more clearly for Him. And whatever Pilate said to the Jews they answered only in a babel of voices demanding that Jesus should be crucified.

It must be admitted that there is nothing more dangerous to eternal salvation than the state of those who, bent on evil by passion, obstinacy, or the pleasure which they find in it, no longer hearken either to reason, justice or truth, and who have no other law than that of their corrupt desires. Such is the disposition of the damned, and such also was that of the Jews. They were so fixed in the resolution they had taken to put our Saviour to death that the Devil himself, who had inspired them with it, could not shift them from it.

For that angel of darkness, beholding in Christ an innocence and meekness more than human, was more afraid than ever lest that death should cause the destruction of his empire, and lest the man whom they planned to crucify should be the Son of God who had been promised by the prophets. For that reason he tormented Pilate’s wife by nocturnal fears in order that she might dissuade her husband from consenting to the death of Christ. She sent therefore to tell her husband that he
should have nothing to do with that just man; for I
have suffered many things this day in a dream because
of him.—(Matt. xxvii, 19.) But the obstinacy of the
Jews prevailed over all the efforts of the Devil and
Pilate. So true it is that man has no more dreadful
enemy of his salvation than his own liberty.

Seeing that the desire he expressed to save Christ
served only to increase still more the fury of the Jews,
Pilate resolved, in order to appease them, to have Him
publicly scourged for those things which they falsely
imputed to Him, and afterwards to deliver Christ from
death. What strange justice! That the life of a person
known to be innocent may be saved, He is condemned
to a cruel and shameful punishment for no other reason
than to satisfy the hatred of His accusers. The latter
seemed to consent to the expedient, because it gave
them an opportunity to consult together upon the means
to be used to obtain from Pilate a sentence of death.

Jesus was taken, therefore, into the praetorium and
there stripped of all His clothes, without His saying a
single word or showing the least resistance. He then
offered to His eternal Father that innocent flesh which
was going to be torn, and that precious blood which
was going to be shed, for us. He was fastened to a pillar
and, without regard to the law which prescribed the
number of strokes, the executioners followed nothing but
their own fury. They struck Him incessantly, and tore
Him so cruelly that His whole body was but one wound
and seemed rather to have been flayed than scourged.
The number of strokes that He received is not known
with certainty, but some saints affirm that our Saviour
received more than five thousand.

Who could describe what humiliation and pain He
then suffered? Some holy souls to whom our Saviour, for
satisfying their love, was pleased to disclose the state to
which He was reduced by His scourging, were so deeply
affected by that melancholy spectacle that they spent the
rest of their lives in continual sorrow and in a most
lively feeling of love for their Saviour.

As the bee builds in her hive a great number of little
cells, not only for containing her honey therein, but also
for bringing up little ones, so, in like manner it would
seem, Christ was pleased that His body from scourging
should be quite full of wounds and openings into which
His children might enter and there find most delicious
nourishment. Thus those whom our Saviour, by a par-
ticular grace, makes aware of His sorrow, and who apply
themselves to the contemplation of this mystery, do not
content themselves with considering it in general but
examine all the circumstances, pass from one wound to
another, reflect upon them in particular, and draw from
every one an ineffable love and a divine sweetness which
nourishes their souls.

Our Lord in that cruel torment was meek, equable
and calm, and did not so much as open His mouth to
complain or turn away to avoid the strokes they gave
Him, but received them all as peaceably as if He had
not felt them. He was as a lamb before its shearer, ready
to suffer everything without murmuring or resisting, as
if He had been convicted of all the crimes of which they
accused Him.

What He suffered in His body He offered up to His
Father for the redemption of men, and His Father
accepted it joyfully, as a most agreeable sacrifice for our
sins. Thus Jesus at the one time satisfied both the excess
of His own love and the justice of His Father.
It is from this model that all the saints have learned in what way they ought to treat their bodies and subject them to the spirit. For while we are in this life our soul has no greater enemy than our flesh, which is always rebellious, which will suffer neither bridle nor yoke, which follows its earthly inclinations, which its senses also favour, without reserve, which pursues the objects which it desires with so much violence that the soul is often dejected thereby, and which alone gives it more trouble than all its other enemies joined together.

This made St. Paul, after all the favours he had received from God, say (Rom. vii, 22, 23, 24): 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. Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

As the saints desire nothing so much as to see themselves perfectly subject to the law of God, and to His holy will, so nothing is more troublesome to them than to feel in themselves the revolt of the flesh. Hence it was that St. Paul, though he had received the first fruits of the Spirit, and had been confirmed in grace, nevertheless chastised his body lest perhaps (I Cor. ix, 27) when I have preached to others, I myself should become a castaway. And if the saints have persecuted the flesh in this manner, to hinder it from being the cause of their ruin, what will become of those who spare it and flatter it in all things?

David, who was a man after God’s own heart, for having permitted his eyes to look upon the wife of another, fell into adultery and murder. Solomon, whom God had rendered wiser and happier than all the kings who had preceded him, by giving too great freedom to the senses, went so far at last as to adore the gods of his idolatrous wives. If all the sanctity of David, and all the wisdom of Solomon, could not hinder their fall, when they allowed themselves to follow the pleasure of their senses, what shall be the fate of those whose lives are spent in seeking what may satisfy their bodies? It was to expiate and put a stop to this evil, so common among men, that our Saviour was pleased that His innocent flesh should be so cruelly torn.

From this scourging have come those great austerities practised by Christians since the coming of Christ and unknown before that time, and all designed to mortify the senses lest they should hear, see, say or taste anything that might defile the purity of their hearts, so that the flesh, being subject to the spirit, might no longer be an obstacle to divine communications.

It is a holy precaution, recommended by Christ and authorised by His example, not to delay watching over ourselves until the time of temptation and the danger of falling arrives, but, by mortification of the body, to prevent sin, which reigns in us and in which we were conceived; so that, by vigilance and mortification this body may no longer rise up against the soul or the law of God, or if it attempts to do so, that it may immediately be brought down by being deprived of lawful things.

In a word, the true Christian ought almost to treat his body as those who are slaves to the body treat the soul—they neglect it, take no care of it, give it not even what is necessary for it, and let it want for everything in its own house, while they abundantly furnish the
flesh, which is born a slave, with all the pleasures it desires.

But he who has not the courage to imitate the penance of the saints may, in order to overcome the flesh, make use of another most sweet, and at the same time most efficacious, method, by which purity of soul and union with God may be procured. This is through frequent use of the sacraments and the practice of mental prayer. Faithfully practised, these means subdue the flesh at last; for prayer by degrees puts a stop to the liberty of the senses, the distractions of the mind, and the irregular motions of the heart, and it renders the soul more watchful over itself and more careful about its duties.

St. Cyprian observes that one is not pleased with a lazy and unprofitable servant, however meek and agreeable he may be, but would have him laborious and indefatigable in his master’s service. So we ought not to esteem our body except when, renouncing idleness and pleasure, it employs itself with all its strength in the service of Christ, and the more it labours in this place of banishment, the better it acquits itself of its duty.

CONTEMPLATION

Now is the hour, O my Jesus! in which Thy so pure and innocent flesh is to be torn, Thy veins are to be opened, and Thy precious blood to be shed for my cure. What heart can behold without trembling so cruel a sentence put in execution against Thee, O my only and true God! Let it rather be put in execution against me, since it is I who have sinned. No form of justice is observed on Thy account, O my God! Pilate finds Thee innocent, and tells the Jews that he will correct and punish Thee. What can he correct in Thee, O infinite purity! for what can he punish Thee, O innocent Lamb! he knows Thy innocence, though Thou sayst nothing to maintain it; and he will chastise Thee only to satisfy the hatred of Thy enemies. All laws are violated in respect of Thee alone, who hast observed the whole law, and fulfilled all justice.

But all this happens not by chance: Thou Thyself ordained it so, O my God! Thou hast desired, during Thy whole life, to see Thyself covered with blood, and laden with humiliations. Pilate is deceived in his judgment; Thou sufferest a cruel injustice but satisfiest Thy love. That sacred fire, which burns in Thy heart, is insatiable, and the measure of its activity is to observe no measure, because it desires to consume everything, and even to consume Thyself, wholly in my service. That fire does not concern itself whether they proceed against Thee according to the order of justice, because it is resolved not to spare Thee, and to sacrifice Thee without mercy, for the salvation of sinners.

O divine Love! is it possible Thou shouldst have so great power over Thyself, and so little over me? I love Thee, O my Jesus! and my greatest desire is to be consumed with Thy love. Burn not alone with that divine fire, grant that I may burn with Thee; Thou requirest it, and canst do it, O Lord! do what Thou canst, and suffer me not to resist what Thou wilt.

Thy love could not bear Thee to be treated with any sort of humanity. They strip Thee of Thy clothes without respect, tie Thee to a pillar, scourge Thee cruelly, are wearied with scourging Thee, relieve one
another, and have no pity on Him who had pity on all the miserable. Instead of forty stripes, ordained by the law, they gave Thee above five thousand, and made but one wound of Thy whole body.

There it is Thou educatest, with so much care, the souls Thou lovest; it is in the hollows of that rock they find the celestial honey with which Thou nourishest them. As a most affectionate mother, Thou here warmest Thy children with Thy love; as their true Father, Thou heapest all sorts of blessings upon them, and conductest them to the perfection of the interior life. There they live in Thee, become like Thee, and sigh only after Thee.

O Jesus! Thou life of my soul, and the sovereign remedy of all my wounds; why art Thou so cruel to Thyself, and so merciful to me? Was it not I, O innocent Lamb! who ought to have been scourged, since it is I who have sinned? I have offended Thee by my whole body, and all my senses; I have subjected them to the disorder of my heart, to the world, and the devil; and thou knowest, O infinite Wisdom! that though penance should cover my whole body with wounds, it would be but a small matter for the satisfaction I owe Thee, and for the cure of the mortal wounds which I have given my soul. Thou knowest how deep and shameful they are, and yet Thou seest me, receivest me, bearest with me, nourishest me with Thy blessings and showest Thyself to me all torn with stripes. O love! that always burnest, and art never consumed, change my life, my body and soul, and consume me entirely with Thy divine flames.

Thou knowest, O Lord! that labour is the portion of slaves; and that the most laborious are the most estimable. It is just therefore that the body should labour continually in the service of the soul, whose slave it is born, till it becomes in Heaven the companion of its glory. But, alas! I have done quite the contrary. I have always flattered my body, served it, and subjected my soul to it, and in order to satisfy it, I have lost Thee, O my sovereign Good! As a faithless, slothful, and disobedient servant, I have wasted the talents which Thou hadst given me.

I offer myself to Thee, O my Jesus! suffer me to be fastened to that pillar, instead of Thee; or at least, let me share with Thee the stripes which Thou receivest. Thou art meek, charitable, and indulgent, in respect of me; and hast for Thyself nothing but rigour and severity. Thou abandonest Thy body to all the cruelty of Thy enemies, who tear it unmercifully and without measure: but when Thou chastisest me, O merciful Father! all Thy strokes are numbered, Thy chastisements measured, and always proportioned to my weaknesses; Thou even accompanyest them with grace, that I may suffer them with merit, and the tenderness of Thy heart makes Thee also compassionate me in all the evils with which Thou afflicttest me. What grounds have I then for complaint, O my Lord and my God!

I adore Thee, O most pure and holy blood! I will not depart from Thee, O Lord! and I will remain fixed to Thy feet till Thou hast washed me with that precious blood; may it flow upon me abundantly, may it purify and heal me: for from it alone it is that I expect the cure of my wounds.

Ah, Lord! behold my head, my hands, my desires, my will, my understanding, my works, my thoughts, my affections, and my senses, interior and exterior; wash
them all, for all are defiled: purify all, for all are corrupt; heal all, for all are sick. Change me by the virtue of Thy precious blood, that I may be united to Thee, O infinite Purity! and follow Thee everywhere, O most innocent Lamb! for Thou art, at the same time, my shepherd, my guide, and my nourishment.

O most pure Mother of God! you who conceived that sacred body in your chaste womb, that it might be torn for me; you who in forming and nourishing it gave the purest blood in your heart, that that blood might be shed for my remedy: and you who have participated more in its infinite virtue than all other creatures, take pity on this sinner, obtain for me the grace of having a lively appreciation of the pains of your only Son, of following His example, of hating my sins, which have reduced Him to that state wherein I behold Him, and of consecrating the remainder of my life to His service; that so many sufferings endured for me, may not be unprofitable to me. Amen.

XXXIX

He is crowned with thorns

The executioners, weary with scourging our Saviour, and seeing no sound spot in Him which might be torn, released Him from the pillar, completely bathed in blood. He went immediately to seek His clothes, which the soldiers had thrown here and there. He was obliged to go through the whole court and, as He passed along, to bear the railleries and affronts of those miserable wretches who added insults to their cruelty. He suffered these as He had suffered their stripes, with invincible meekness, modesty and patience and, having found His clothes at last, He put them on again.

Though He was in a condition capable of touching the hardest hearts with compassion, and of disarming the cruellest hatred, these inhuman wolves were not softened by it. The blood of that innocent Lamb, which they had shed, served only to increase their thirst, and they invented, for tormenting Him further, a form of punishment which had been unknown until then.

Behold the effect which sin naturally produces in the soul that commits it brazenly and with pleasure. One sin committed leaves behind it the desire to commit others. Even when one is weary of the crime, one is not satisfied, and the will to sin is retained though the power to do it be lost.

One of the greatest delusions of sinners is to imagine that they will free themselves from the temptation by satisfying it. The experience of sin does but increase in
us the inclination which induced us to commit it, because, according to St. Gergory, the sin that is not destroyed by penance draws us by its own weight into another sin. The soul that loses the grace of God by sinning, loses also the force of resisting the occasions of sin, and the body is less capable of being restrained in its appetites when it has once tasted the pleasure of following them.

Thus it was that these executioners, having abandoned themselves to complete licence in their tormenting of Christ, lost at last all human feelings. They wearied themselves without being able to be satisfied, and they imitated at the same time the malice of devils and the cruelty of the most savage beasts.

The Jews had accused Christ of having planned to make Himself a king. Pilate treated that accusation with contempt because it was easy for him, by having Christ scourged as a slave, to render Him so infamous that, very far from being able to make pretensions to royalty, He would even become incapable of the meanest employments in the state. However, that accusation, however ridiculous it might appear, gave occasion to the soldiers to make our Lord suffer still new afflictions and reproaches by exposing Him as a mock king to the laughter of the populace.

They stripped Him once more of His clothes, therefore, covered Him with an old piece of worn-out purple, made Him a crown of long thorns twisted together, which they put on His head and, lest it should fall off, they beat it down with their sticks. The thorns penetrated on every side: some entered His forehead and temples and came out at His eyes; others cut the nerves and pierced the veins, whence the blood gushed out in abundance. The whole thing caused Him agonising pains such as He could never have endured without dying had He not been supported by the divine power, which reserved Him for the death of the Cross; but these pains remained with our Saviour until He expired.

Let those, who have at any time felt violent headaches, stop for a moment to consider how agonising that pain was to our Saviour, among so many others which He endured. The very thought of such pain makes one shudder, and yet what is the thought in comparison with the pain itself!

Christ joined His tears to the blood He shed for us, and was still more sensible of our sins than of His thorns. That crown, however painful it was, afflicted Him less than our ambition and the inordinate affections which we have for the honours of this world with which we crown ourselves with so much pride. Those divine tears, mingled with blood, composed a balm, most efficacious for the cure of our interior wounds.

What appears most incomprehensible to human understanding in this mystery is that the infinite tenderness of the eternal Father could let His well-beloved Son endure so dreadful a torment: but as the same love, which induced the Son to be our victim, moved the Father to sacrifice Him, that Father of mercies had much greater regard for our sins, which needed so great a remedy, than to the pains and ignominies which He beheld that innocent Lamb endure. Much less indeed would have been sufficient to save us, but what was sufficient for our salvation was not sufficient for Christ’s love.

What then must our obduracy be if all that our Saviour has suffered is not sufficient to make us love
Him with all our hearts and to induce us to renounce sin, which cost Him so much blood and so many tears.

Those cruel executioners were not yet satisfied: they put a reed into His right hand, to serve Him as a sceptre and to show the vanity and weakness of His royal claims, and they made Him suffer a great number of other affronts.

The holy fathers bring forward several weighty reasons why Christ was pleased to suffer a torture so cruel and so new. They say first that because, according to the expression in Genesis (vi, 12) all flesh had corrupted its way, and because there was no part of our bodies which had not contributed to sin, our Saviour resolved to satisfy for us in every part of His body. Thus His flesh having been torn by scourging, His nerves stretched out and His bones dislocated upon the Cross, it was requisite also that the head, where all the senses are united, which is the seat of reason, judgment, consent and resolution, should endure a punishment capable of torturing all His senses at the one time, in order to expiate the evil which men do by their senses.

They say, in the second place, that our Saviour intended to teach us thereby that the thoughts, designs and intentions, which are contrary to His law and doctrine, are the punishment of man, and that our mind finds in itself the thorns which torment it. This is the misfortune with which God threatens the sinner through His prophet: *behold I will hedge up thy way with thorns and I will stop it up with a wall: and thou shalt not find thy paths.*—(Osee ii, 6.)

These thorns are nothing other than the troubles and afflictions which our corrupt inclination scatters over the paths which we follow. They render the way of salvation so difficult and unpleasant to us that we quit it every moment or else, making us look continually behind us, prevent us arriving at the termination of our pilgrimage.

For by abandoning the sweet conduct of the divine law, in which everything leads us to the peace of the soul, to the freedom of mind, and to the love of our neighbour, we necessarily fall into trouble of conscience, hardness of heart, danger of ruining ourselves, and into many other evils which, not being corrected by that infallible rule, hurry us on from one sin to another, from abyss to abyss, and cause at last the eternal unhappiness of our souls.

These are the thorns which are produced by the human mind when it is separated from God, and which caused Christ such agonising pains.

St. Cyprian, in his exposition of the Creed, shows another cause of this torment. He says that our Lord, out of His infinite love, was pleased that they should make Him a crown of that which had been the punishment of the sin of our first father: the sin of Adam was disobedience, and thorns were his punishment. For he was not only banished from the earthly paradise, the delights of which, by obeying his Creator, he could have tasted without labour, but he was also compelled, with his whole posterity, to eat his bread by the sweat of his brow, and to cultivate the earth which, instead of fruit, should yield him everywhere thorns and briars.

We also find thorns daily on earth and among temporal possessions, which are out of all proportion to the care and labour we expend. Much more still do we find thorns in the warfare which is waged within us through
the revolt of the flesh against the spirit and in the continual assaults of our enemies which permit us not to enjoy the fruits of the Holy Ghost which are peace, meekness, joy and so forth.

Our Saviour was pleased, therefore, in order to render these thorns profitable to us, to be crowned with thorns Himself, so that they might draw from His sacred head a most divine fruitfulness and, being continually a punishment for sin, might be a source of merit for us. For it is true that Christ has sanctified our pains by His, and that what was formerly our shame and punishment, has now become our glory and happiness. The revolts of the flesh against the spirit, which so often make the servants of God lament, are, by virtue of our Saviour's sufferings, the occasion of their combats and the matter of their triumphs.

But if the combat is waged against the occasions of sin, then it is the more just and the victory the more honourable, for here the soul, refusing its consent from the beginning, spares itself the task of fighting against the sin but also, in order to preserve the love of God and to be faithful in the observation of His law, voluntarily deprives itself of the pleasure it would have had in committing it. God esteems such fidelity so highly that He recompenses it with no less than eternal glory, which He would not do if the labours and temptations of this life were nothing but mere chastisements, for a guilty person, by suffering the punishment due to him, does not in justice merit any sort of recompense. But the Son of God, being willing to make of this banishment, to which we were condemned on account of Adam, a glorious career for us, has taken from it the name of punishment and given it that of combat. He has also ennobled it Himself by His example and by the dignity of His person, so that he who suffers the most and with the most heroism, gains the highest crown.

Had it not been for that, God, who is holy and just in all His works, when washing us by baptism from the stain of sin, would also have remitted us the punishment due to it. It would not have been consistent with His justice to punish us for a fault already pardoned, and Christ, Who was born without sin, ought to have lived without sufferings. Yet we know that He endured very great ones in order that, by virtue of His, our sufferings might become the price and merit of the heavenly kingdom. Therefore, the greatest happiness we can have in our poverty is to heap up great treasures of sufferings for purchasing that crown of glory to which our Saviour has given us a right to lay claim by His crown of thorns.

And we ought to be ashamed, as St. Bernard says, to be pampered members under a Head crowned with thorns. Christ, before He wore that crown, had His whole body torn by a cruel scourging, because members better treated did not belong to a head so oppressed with pain. Our Saviour is our Head, and we are His members, and it is not reasonable that we should live effeminately while He led a life of austerity and suffering. If we are ashamed of imitating our Head, He will also be ashamed of owning us for His members.

Can the human mind be persuaded that Christ who, with His eyes bathed in blood and tears, His cheeks bruised and livid, His face disfigured, His head crowned with thorns, desires to be acknowledged by these marks as our Father, will at the same time consider him as one of His children whose whole life is spent in search of
pleasures, possessions and honours, in a profound forgetfulness of his salvation and of God's benefits? Can anyone believe that this vigilant Shepherd of our souls gives permission to His sheep to live in licentiousness and luxury, and consents to see us crowned with roses when He is crowned with thorns? He has taught us Himself that the servant ought not to be better treated than his master. Let him who would walk securely, therefore, and not fall into the snares of Satan, regulate his conduct according to the examples and doctrine of the eternal Wisdom.

CONTemplation

I adore Thee, O divine Jesus! as my true king; I acknowledge Thee for my sovereign Lord, through all those wounds which Thou hast received for healing me. I adore Thee amidst those humiliations, with which Thou wast pleased to be covered, only that I might be clothed with glory. Was not the precious blood which flowed from Thy whole body sufficient, O my Saviour! without also shedding that of Thy sacred head? Could not that communicate its divine influence to me without being tormented so cruelly? Thou wilt have it be wholly pierced with thorns, that it may feel the sharpest pains, and shed as many rivers of blood as the thorns give it wounds. Thou wilt have that countenance, after which the angels sigh, disfigured, and all the veins of Thy body opened, for healing the wounds of my soul.

I adore Thee, O God of my heart! I adore the ineffable love, which reduced Thee to that state. I give Thee infinite thanks for so many mercies. Accomplish Thy work, pierce this heart with Thy thorns, O my

Jesus! let them come from Thy sacred head all bathed in Thy blood, and wholly burning with Thy love, as flaming arrows, in order to pierce me with their points and inflame me with their fire.

May I acknowledge at last, O Thou love of my soul! that whatever is not done for Thee is lost. When will the moment come wherein I shall love Thee with my whole heart, O my sovereign good! wherein I shall respond to Thy love with entire fidelity by giving myself to Thee without reserve, and by consuming myself in Thy service? Of what good to me is this life, this soul, and all that is within me if they burn not with love for Thee, who alone art worthy of my love?

Thou art like Thyself in all things, always amiable, always liberal, always merciful, and always full of tenderness towards me, so far as to sacrifice Thyself for my salvation. And as for me, I am also ever like myself, that is, always miserable, poor, tepid, obdurate, full of love for myself, and of indifference for Thee.

The head is the seat of the senses, and the face, by which men are known, the mirror of the soul. Wherein appear joy and sorrow, boldness and fear, health and sickness, and all its sentiments, that part, O Lord! which Thou suffered to be pierced with thorns and stained with blood. Thou wouldst make me comprehend by those signs what passes in Thy heart, the love with which it burns, and the zeal it has for my salvation and perfection. Thou wilt have me acknowledge that Thy greatest desire is to gain me to Thyself by Thy benefits and by the works of Thy divine charity.

O how much more deeply does that blood which flows upon Thy face, that head pierced with thorns, wound the hearts of those who are touched with Thy
love, than if it was crowned with precious stones. The riches and crowns of the earth can give nothing but what they have, that is, earthly advantages: but Thy pains and thorns fill the soul with heavenly sweetness, load it with spiritual riches, and fix it to Thee by the bonds of a love which is above all imagination.

They seek on earth for rich metals and precious stones for making the crowns of kings, and Thou, O King of glory! hast chosen only thorns for Thy crown, because Thou wouldst enrich us all by crowning us with objects so common on earth, and by rendering those very thorns so precious, with the touch of Thy sacred head, which had served in the punishment of the first man.

Wretched that I am! is not all this yet sufficient for making me love the Cross, injuries, humiliations, and whatever renders me like Thee, O Thou God of my soul! I am terrified by sufferings, when they come, am dejected whilst they continue, am glad when they terminate, and esteem myself happy when I am entirely delivered from them. Wilt Thou never destroy, O my God! the weakness of my flesh by the force of Thy love?

When shall I hate myself, O my God! as much as I am hateful? When shall I be ashamed of myself before Thee? Thou art crowned with thorns, and I fly from everything that upsets me. Thou wearest a diadem of pain and ignominy, and I still love the vanities and pleasures of this world.

How can I, in the midst of vanity and delights, be a member of that Head crowned with thorns? Turn away my eyes, O Lord! that they may not see vanity; and that they may be fixed only on Thee. Teach me to consider the state Thou art in, and to be ashamed of the state in which I am. Thou seest the bottom of this miserable heart, root everything out of it, by Thy mercy, that displeases Thee in it. Permit me not to love what separates me from Thee. Teach me to know myself, and to judge myself according to what I see in Thee; to condemn and punish myself as I deserve. Crown me with Thy thorns, O my amiable Jesus! grant that my glory and crown may be to suffer with Thee: for I cannot be united to Thee, unless I be like Thee.

I here confess my misery before Thee, O my Saviour! I propose every day to imitate Thee; to desire to see in myself what I adore in Thee; to say that I abandon myself entirely into Thy hands; and yet when an occasion offers of being faithful to Thee, I want courage, draw back, and retire from Thy conduct, in order to follow my own desires. O Jesus, my only hope! Who knowest the disorder and vanity of my heart, receive the desire which Thou inspirest me with at this moment of being wholly thine: grant that I may love Thee, and hate myself; that I may imitate Thee, and renounce myself.

O most sacred Mother of God! O refuge of sinners! obtain for me the light I have need of for knowing the infinite love of Jesus, for following His example, and for hating myself, and everything that is capable of separating me from Him. Obtain for me the will and strength to suffer all the pains with which He shall please to afflict me: for I know that one cannot be without crosses and thorns, and that you will not acknowledge me for one of your servants, unless I wear the livery of your only Son. Amen.
Mocked by the soldiers and exposed to the laughter of the people

The Jews, while Christ was in their hands, made Him suffer all the affronts of which they could think. And the soldiers, after making a mock king of Him by crowning Him with thorns, clothing Him in an old purple cloak, putting a reed in His hand instead of a sceptre, placed Him in their midst. That crown was cruel and that purple ignominious. They would show, by those bound hands, His weakness, and by that reed, the vagnolary and emptiness of His royal claims. But the Holy Ghost, whose wisdom directed all that great mystery, had many other views, and He designed, through this ignoble spectacle, to disclose to us the pure light of His divine truths.

For that thread-bare and torn purple garment teaches us that there is nothing in Christ, however vile and contemptible it may appear to the eyes of men, with which we may not cover ourselves and find defence against the corruptions of the world and the rigour of God’s justice. If only the touch of the hem of His garment could cure a woman of a disease which she had had for twelve years, what must be the power of His purple for those who, with faith and love, cover themselves with it? That crown of thorns, however frightful and dreadful it be, did it not gain for Him an infinite number of illustrious subjects, who were faithful to their king in the most severe trials? And were not those fettered hands the support and defence of His soldiers in the most dangerous combats? If He is shown to us as the king of sinners and of criminals, it is to give us hope that, being ourselves of that number, we shall one day be His courtiers and servants in Heaven.

In short, there is no need for any other sceptre than a reed for Him of whom Isaías (xlili, 3) had foretold that the bruised reed He shall not break. For though we are more weak, uncertain and hollow than reeds, He by His goodness will supply all that we want, provided that He holds us in His hand and that we remain under His control. Behold what we are here taught by the faith which our Saviour has established in His Church, and which was confirmed by all the affronts which the Jews employed in vain for destroying His royalty.

While our Saviour was in this position the soldiers appointed to guard Him, lest He should be taken away, formed a great circle about Him and, coming up one after another, bowed their knees before Him and cried out mockingly: Hail, king of the Jews! They afterwards took the reed which He had in His hand, struck Him over the head and face with it, and thus renewed the pains caused by the thorns.

We can never comprehend the awfulness of this scene—the insulting words, the immoderate laughter and the indecent gestures of that vile mob who treated the King of Heaven as the most foolish and least of men. His tormentors were many and each one endeavoured to exceed his fellow in cruelty. The insults, the stabs of the thorns, the strokes on the head, the blows and the spittings followed one another so closely that there is reason to doubt whether this torturing session was not the greatest of all in His Passion, since
what they made Him suffer then renewed all His preceding pains.

What most surprises us is that all the sources of natural and human compassion were so dried up in those obdurate hearts that the piteous state to which they had reduced our Saviour could excite them only to greater cruelty. But that Lamb of God was pleased to draw upon Himself alone the whole rage of Satan, which we had deserved by our sins, and to reserve for us all the mercy of which we had rendered ourselves unworthy.

Thus it was that they despised the royalty of the Son of God, that His divine person was trampled underfoot, that they considered as a mock king Him who by His power supports Heaven and earth, and who concealed His majesty only that He might be able to suffer for us. Love was greater in Christ than was hatred in His enemies. Hatred urged them to find out new means of torturing Him, and love inflamed our Saviour with the desire of suffering in order to merit eternal blessings for us by His suffering. But at last hatred was dashed to pieces against that rock and love prevailed: the royalty of Christ, which the Jews held to be false, triumphed over all their efforts, and will be regarded for all eternity.

Let those impious wretches do what they will, let them mock Him as much as they please, they speak the truth against their own wills when they call Him the King of the Jews. However wicked was the intention of Caiphas, faith considers as a divine truth the sentence he pronounced when he said that (John xi, 50) it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. The Holy

Ghost inspired him with these words for our instruction, but Caiphas pronounced them to destroy Christ. Thus it is that faith receives with submission and respect that which the Jews said only out of contempt and, while they made a jest of Christ, we say to Him with David (Ps. xliii, 5), in love and veneration: Thou art thyself my king and my God, who commandest the saving of Jacob. Who commandest, that is, the salvation of Thy servants, for the divine truth ceases not to be such, even when it is pronounced by an impious mouth.

It is a great advantage to have God for our judge, for he whom God approves, cannot be condemned; whereas human approbation is a very weak help when one is condemned by the secret judgment of God. If His servants, when they are despised by the world, apply themselves seriously to imitating the silence and meekness of that divine humbled King; if, content with pleasing Him, they resign to God the judgment of their cause, He is so just and so faithful that He will draw their grandeur out of their abjection and will make what dishonours them become the source of their glory. Let them but cast themselves into His arms without prescribing to Him either the time or measure of their resignation, being indifferent whether they be justified in this life or the next, allowing themselves to be conducted in all things by His providence, confiding in His goodness, assuring themselves that He will come to their assistance when it shall be profitable for Him to succour them, and that in the meantime they shall not lack the necessary graces for supporting meritoriously the afflictions of this life. Let them, therefore, be always mistrustful of themselves, but never of God.
CONTemplation

There is then no longer amongst men any feeling of compassion for Thee, O my Saviour! What creature, even deprived of reason, could see a man in Thy condition without being seized with horror and pity? It seems that human hearts are hardened only against Thee alone: they are not afraid to cover Thy adorable face with spittle and blows, to treat Thee as a fool and an imaginary king; to put a reed in Thy hand instead of a sceptre; and an old tattered garment about Thy shoulders, instead of a royal robe; to adore Thee out of mockery by kneeling before Thee; to insult Thee by abusive words and actions; and to pluck the reed from Thy hand which they had put therein, in order to strike Thy head crowned with thorns with it.

I adore Thee, O divine Jesus! I praise Thee, bless Thee, and give Thee a thousand thanks for the love Thou expressed for me, and for all the torments Thou sufferest. Let those miserable wretches say and do whatever they will, Thou wilt be no less the true King of heaven and earth; and in order to adore Thee, I will make use of the same words which they employed to insult Thee: Hail, King of the Jews! hail, O King of heaven and earth! hail, O King of souls! Thou art my God, my Lord, and my King! there is properly none but Thee to whom the name of king belongs; since Thou alone govern us by pure laws, converting souls. Thou alone govern us with a most divine peace, love, and wisdom.

But it is no less the effect of Thy mercy, O my Lord and my King! to receive those who come to Thee with a penitent heart, than it is of Thy justice to punish sinners who confess not their sins. I acknowledge mine, O my God! and prostrate at Thy feet, I confess, in imploring Thy clemency, that Thou hast not a servant more worthy of chastisement, and more unworthy of pardon. I have a thousand times abandoned Thee; I have withdrawn myself from Thy service. I have said: I will not obey; I have basely engaged myself in the service of unworthy masters, such as pride, vanity, self-love, and sensual pleasures; and I have subjected myself to as many kings, or rather to as many tyrants, as I have committed sins; I have followed their law, and despised Thine. I have turned my back on Thee, O my Jesus! to run after them.

Hitherto they have possessed my heart, and have established themselves therein in such a manner by long habit as if they intend to reign always in it. They keep me at a distance from Thee, who art my true life; they make Thy law seem to me hard, heavy, and insupportable; though I know, by my own experience, that it becomes sweet, light, and even delightful, by the union of Thy grace. They have reduced me to that state of poverty wherein Thou seest me. They have weakened, dejected, and blinded me, and stripped me of all my goods; and what gives me the greatest pain, O my God! is the habitual state of obedience to them in which I am.

For though I see that they seek my destruction, I find in myself so great an inclination to follow them, that I can scarcely bring myself to forsake them; they have so deeply possessed my senses and powers, that I must maintain a constant warfare in order to overcome them, and I very often yield thereto. They put a veil before my eyes, that I may not be able to see the purity of Thy law. They freeze my heart, to extinguish therein
the fervour of Thy love. They inspire me with a thousand disgusts, in order to make me find Thy yoke heavy, and Thy conversation wearisome. Take compassion on my misery, O Thou only King of my heart! and banish all those tyrants. Take possession again of Thy inheritance, and repair all its ruins. Show Thy light to those who go astray, and do not return to Thee. Give me Thy law, O Lord! and the grace of observing it.

When shall I find myself possessed by Thee, Who alone art my true King and my liege Lord? When wilt Thou come to reign in this soul, there to be obeyed without resistance? When shall I hate all those who have reigned in it in Thy stead? I beg of Thee, by all the ignominies and pains which Thou endured, that Thou wouldst reign alone in me for the future, that Thou alone wouldst possess me, that Thou mayst be served as the sovereign Master of my soul. For what king is like Thee? Thou art a king whose majesty attracts instead of repelling. Thy sceptre inspires more love than fear; and the reed which the Jews gave Thee for a sceptre, agrees better with Thee than they imagine since it is written that Thou wouldst not break the bruised reed.

He whom Thou honourest with Thy favour, and with Thy secret communications, becomes humble, poor in spirit, meek, penitent, full of holy desires, and radiant with love for Thee; and in proportion as his love increases, his favour with Thee is augmented. In Thy house there is neither distinction of qualities, nor respect of persons. One is not noble, great, considered, cherished, nor agreeable in Thy sight, but according to the love he bears Thee, and it is the love alone that one has for Thee which regulates the places in Thy kingdom.

When we begin to be united to Thee by love, we become great, powerful, and we obtain whatever we desire, because after having bestowed Thy favours on some, Thou hast as many remaining for others. O that I loved Thee with my whole heart! O that I sought Thee with all my strength! O that I resigned myself to Thee without reserve! But come rather to me Thyself, O divine love! inflame me, and transform me into Thee.

I praise and adore Thy empire, O my God! I submit thereto, and desire it. I offer Thee all that I am, and all that I can do; dispose of me according to Thy will. I rather choose to be slighted in Thy hands, than to be caressed by the world; receive me, O Lord! through Thy mercy, conduct me, defend me, chastise me, comfort me, enrich me, impoverish me, and do with me what Thou pleasest; but never permit me to cease from loving Thee.

O Queen of angels! You who are full of the grace of our Lord, bestow a little of that plenitude upon this miserable sinner. I come to you, O Mother of mercy! that you may present me to your Son, that He may receive me by your hands into the number of His servants, and that He may never suffer me to abandon His service. Amen.
they often condemn themselves either as the result of some interior feeling given to them by God, or of a pious lesson, or an affecting sermon, or the advice of their friends, or the example of good people, or their own reasoning, or sometimes considerations of horror and interest, nevertheless the love of sin, and the enchantment of a wicked habit, gains upon them by degrees so absolute an empire that they proceed so far at least as to commit sin without remorse, and even to think it lawful.

The malice of the Jews teaches us, therefore, what we are capable of, what the corruption of our nature is, and how much we ought to fear ourselves and to have recourse to the remedy which we procure from the example of Christ.

Pilate, being unable to bear any longer the cruelty and importunity of the Jews, said to them: Take him you, and crucify him: for I find no cause in him—(John xix, 6.) And they answered him: We have a law; and according to the law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God—(Ibid. 7.) Though Pilate was convinced, on the one hand, of our Saviour’s innocence and, on the other, admired His silence, moderation and patience amidst such cruel tortures, yet he had not the power to take Him out of the hands of so many unjust accusers. When he heard the words Son of God pronounced, however, he looked at Him more closely. He reflected upon His meekness and constancy, began to wonder whether there might not be something, perhaps more than human, in this man of whom he had heard so many wonders, and to be afraid lest he had sinned against Heaven in condemning Him to be scourged. He
it were given thee from above. Therefore, he that hath delivered me to thee, hath the greater sin. If Pilate had had more light, he would have understood by that answer that there was something supernatural in the person of Christ, who declared to him in a positive manner that what was happening not only depended on a divine providence and eternal counsel but that He also clearly knew the degree of malice that was in every sin. Pilate had here an excellent opportunity to acquire a greater knowledge of the truth if he had said to our Saviour: I shall never do anything against Thee in the future, and I am very sorry for what I have already done in exposing Thee to be scourged.

We must here observe that Christ did not mean to say by His answer that, because it was by the divine will and permission that He was condemned to death by Pilate, the sin of that judge was less than that of the Jews. For the divine permission neither increases nor diminishes the sin, the whole evil of which proceeds from the will of him who sins, though God knows how to draw from evil already accomplished very great good for His own glory and the salvation of His servants. If Pilate's malice was less than that of the Jews it was because he abandoned our Saviour to them only in order to deliver himself from their importunity, whereas they demanded His death out of the hatred and envy with which they were animated against Him. The sin was great on both sides, but there was more weakness than malice in Pilate, and in the Jews more malice than weakness.

These words of Christ, Thou shouldst not have any power against me, unless it were given thee from above, contain matter of great consolation for the just in their
sufferings because, being persuaded by the light of faith that nothing happens to them in this world except through the loving providence of God, they pay no attention to the tormenting malice of men or of devils, but regard only the divine love which afflicts them for their good. They receive with love God’s chastisements and trials too and humble themselves with entire acquiescence under His omnipotent hand.

Pilate, after that answer which he had misunderstood, seeing that Christ, amidst so many sufferings, had His mind in Heaven and referred all to the divine providence, judged that if He was not the Son of God He was at least innocent of the crimes that were laid to His charge, and consequently that it was his duty to save His life. But when the Jews perceived that Pilate heard with complete indifference their charge that Christ had called Himself the Son of God, they had recourse to their first accusation. They cried out that He had planned to make Himself a king and threatened Pilate with the emperor’s displeasure. If thou release this man, thou art not Caesar’s friend they shouted.

Behold the stroke that sank Pilate’s courage—and it is still the common rock on which all those split who are slaves to the favour of rulers and authorities. They cannot bear that one should so much as hint to them the danger of a disgrace, and God often permits them to be destroyed by the same arm of flesh in which they trusted. For Pilate, by abandoning justice in order to preserve Caesar’s favour, lost both at last.

Showing Christ to the Jews from a balcony, Pilate said to them mockingly: Behold your king. But they cried out immediately: Away with him; away with him; crucify him. And Pilate, continuing his raillery, exclaimed: Shall I crucify your king? To which the answer came: We have no king but Caesar.

Seeing that he could not prevail upon them and that the tumult of the people but increased, Pilate called for water and washed his hands, protesting that he would have no share in the shedding of that innocent blood, and that he threw the whole crime of this upon them. And these blind people answered all with one voice: His blood be upon us, and upon our children.

There are two reflections upon ourselves that we can make here. The first is that, for justifying ourselves in the eyes of men, we often bring forward as frivolous an excuse as that of Pilate who thought, by washing his hands, he could exculpate himself from the unjust sentence he had pronounced against Christ. How many times have we not thrown upon the Devil, the weakness of the flesh or the pressure of an occasion, the blame for a sin we committed by the free motion of our own will? But God, who knows the nature of our freedom and the helps He has given us, will deliver a true judgment.

The second reflection is that, as the sin appears lighter and of smaller consequence to us when we are drawn to it by pleasure or passion, so much the greater will it appear to us when we must expiate it by penance. So true it is that we have no enemies more dangerous, nor judges more unjust, than ourselves in what affects the accomplishment of our desires, since in order to follow them we often involve ourselves in misfortunes out of which all the power of man is not able to bring us. Thus the Jews, blinded by their hatred, thought it a small matter to take the blood of the Son of God upon themselves and upon their children. They bear the consequences of it to this day, in the blindness and obduracy
of their hearts, and they will feel it hereafter in a much more terrible way by eternal damnation.

Pilate, having freed Barabbas at the desire of the Jews, abandoned our Saviour to their will and, according to the custom, a herald proclaimed that, by the Emperor’s orders and in conformity with the Roman law, for having attempted to make Himself king of the Jews, Jesus of Nazareth was condemned to die on a cross between two thieves, adjudged, for their thefts, to the same punishment. The enemies of our Saviour received that sentence with joy while among His friends it caused consternation. That innocent Lamb Himself, despite the repugnance of nature, and all the pain which so great an injustice caused Him, offered His condemnation to the eternal Father for the salvation of men and accepted death with a loving obedience.

Because He distinguished and felt them all, the process of His condemnation was accompanied by as many different pains for Christ as it contained circumstances. He felt keenly the extreme ingratitude of that people who had subjected themselves to a foreign yoke, and to perpetual banishment, by refusing to acknowledge Him as their king, although He had come to secure to them eternal liberty. He felt keenly the blindness of those who agreed so readily that the very blood which He shed for their salvation should become the source of their ruin and that of their children. He felt keenly the sorrow of His friends, of His disciples, and of His holy Mother, who beheld Him so unjustly condemned to death. And He suffered this condemnation to show us by it that we are dearer to Him than His own life.

We must not here forget that we cannot sufficiently acknowledge that this death of the cross was not chosen by the judge but demanded by the people, for the confused outcry of a whole populace, who called for the death of Christ, represent the voice of our sins, which ascended to the tribunal of God in order to demand of Him the death of our Saviour, who had taken upon Himself the sins of the world. This makes St. Paul say that those who sin demand again the death of the Son of God, crucifying again to themselves the Son of God, because they renew the cause of His death.

Therefore, since He died for all men, our Lord was pleased that His death should be demanded by all the people, speaking in the name of all sinners, so that we might all acknowledge the share we have in it, might be ashamed of having treated Him so unworthily, might return to Him with love, and might consecrate all the strength of our body and soul to His service. As that death was to be the source of our life, and the remission of our sins, Christ was further pleased that the nature of it should be of our choosing in order to assure us that as we have found Him ready to die for us in such manner as we desired, so He will also be ready to make us live with Him when we shall desire it.

Behold in this transaction the works of His infinite love and the certain assurance that He will always grant us what we ask of Him for our salvation, for He who, for the cure of our evils, vouchsafed to suffer a death of our choosing, would never send us either death, or the trials of this life, if they did not contain the seed and merit of eternal life.

CONTEMPLATION

Who can hear without horror that cruel sentence of death pronounced against Thee, O Thou true life of our
souls! O the only hope of sinners. Can the human heart comprehend how men, seeing Thee thus covered with wounds and humiliations, instead of being touched with compassion, should demand Thy death, and cry out all with one voice, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Take Him away then, Pilate, take Him from those savage breasts, who cannot bear his presence, and give Him to me; I will receive Him in my arms, will dress His wounds, and will adore and serve Him.

But pardon me, O my God! for I am more wicked than that people. They are unwilling to see Thee, because they know Thee not, nor believe in Thee; and I, who believe in Thee, adore Thee and acknowledge Thee for what Thou art; how many times have I turned away my eyes, when Thou presented Thyself to me, to look upon what separated me from Thee? Remedy this disorder, O Lord! that I may never lose sight of Thee, that Thou mayst always be the object of my looks, desires and love.

O eternal fire, always burning, and never consumed, how admirable are the inventions of Thy love! Even those for whom Thou didst choose the kind of death by which they make Thee die. My sins were then present to the eternal Father, their cries were joined to the clamours of the Jews, and demanded justice against Thee, because Thou hadst taken my debts upon Thee, and I could not make satisfaction for them but by Thee. Thou didst so subject Thyself to my will, and sacrifice Thyself to my necessities, O immense charity! that Thou hast left me the choice of my remedy. Thou hast suffered the death of the Cross, because we required it; and Thou wouldst have submitted Thyself to another kind of punishment if we had desired it.

Thou hast already more than made satisfaction for me,
who demanded Thy death, and to whom it was also much more necessary than they imagined.

But, alas, O Lord! what is Pilate's weakness? Against his conscience, against his own knowledge, and against the advice of his wife, who had been tormented in the night on Thy account, he judged that their petition should be granted. And he released to them him, who because of murder and sedition, had been committed to prison, for whom they asked and he delivered Jesus up to their will!

There is no greater misfortune in the world than when all depends on the will of a single man, and when that will happens to be vicious. Thine alone, O my God! is capable of maintaining that absolute empire without injustice, because it is always holy, wise, full of reason and equity.

What ought my confusion here to be? and what can I say before thee, O Lord! in beholding that Thou art delivered up for me to the unjust and cruel will of Thy enemies, and that I refuse to resign myself to Thine? Thy will is the rule of all righteousness, and I make a difficulty of submitting myself thereto. O blindness of mind, O hardness of heart!

For what canst Thou ordain concerning me, O Lord! but what is for Thy glory and my good? Thou convertest into eternal sweetness the crosses I here endure for Thee, and all my labours into a repose which nothing can disturb. The injuries that are done to me serve only, through Thy mercy, to augment my justice. My evils are changed into goodness; my temptations and desolations tend to a most sweet relationship with Thee; death itself is no longer anything to me but a passage to a happy life: yet I complain, I fly from Thee, and am not content with that admirable order which Thou hast established with so much wisdom and goodness, whatever advantage I find therein. O earthly heart! O extreme ingratitude.

Change, O my God! this moment this disposition of my heart, so pernicious to me, and so unworthy of Thee. I resign myself entirely to Thy will and, in order to comfort myself in all the troubles that befall me, I desire no other reason than to know that Thou hast ordained it. There it is that I fix and crucify myself, that Thy will may be done, and not mine, now and for ever, in life and death, in time and eternity. Amen.
XLII

He carries His cross

After the sentence of death had been pronounced against our Saviour, the Jews had no other thought than to have it put into speedy execution before Pilate should have time to reflect upon it and perhaps revoke it. In this, these children of darkness imitated the conduct of their father, the Devil, who knows, from his own experience, what it is to offend God, and who recognises that men would fly more quickly from sin than from death if they knew the deformity of the former. So he conceals from them the frightfulness of sin, showing them only the false sweetness that may be found therein, and stupifies their reason by the tumult and confusion of worldly affairs lest they should pay close attention to the miseries in which they involve themselves. Thus it was that the Jews, after having brought Pilate around to their opinion by their outcries and menaces, gave him no time in which to discover his fault and repent of it.

They had already prepared the cross, and had it brought immediately to Pilate’s palace, that our Saviour might have the additional pain and humiliation of carrying it upon His shoulders to the place of punishment. They had soldiers stationed in different places in order to prevent the people from attempting a rescue, and they forgot nothing that might accelerate or secure the execution of their design, while Christ accomplished the prediction of Isaias (liii, 7), allowed Himself to be led as a sheep to the slaughter, and did not open his mouth to complain.

That He might not be taken for someone else, but might be known by all, they stripped Him of the old purple cloak with which they had covered Him, and clothed Him again in His own garment. As it was without seam and therefore had no side opening, they were obliged to put it on over His head. This could not be done without difficulty because it got entangled in the thorns. The crown of these was then roughly moved, the pain of its sharp points renewed, and the blood began to trickle down afresh.

Christ wished, no less than did the Jews, that He might be seen burdened with His cross, and He desired, as much as they did, that He might be known in that state. After having declared to us that, if we would be His disciples, we must take up our cross and follow Him, He wished that none might be mistaken in what that meant nor excuse themselves on the score of their ignorance, after having seen Our Saviour Himself, in the sight of all the people, carrying His cross through the most public streets of Jerusalem from Pilate’s house to Calvary. He was not ashamed of the humiliations because His love rendered them precious to Him, and He was pleased to suffer before all men what He suffered for all men.

When all things were in readiness, our Saviour came out of Pilate’s house in the midst of a double rank of soldiers, who kept off the crowd, and when He came out He found the cross which had been allotted to Him. The cross was the most infamous of all punishments. To be condemned to this punishment it was necessary that one should be a slave or convicted of some most
shameful crime, and he who was fastened to a cross was looked upon as an object of public execration. But the Son of God, who was soon to consecrate the cross by carrying it on His sacred shoulders and sprinkling it with His blood, began at that moment to render it an object of veneration, and to acquire for it that glory which it now has on earth, and will eternally have in Heaven, which has since become the abode and true country of crucified men.

As Christ earnestly desired to unite at last under that standard all His elect, who were to attain to glory only by the cross, He viewed it with joy, embraced it with tenderness, and was not frightened by its bulk of some fifteen feet. Nor did He excuse Himself on account of His feeble strength exhausted by the precious blood He had so abundantly shed.

He looked upon His cross as a well-beloved spouse, as the refuge of His friends, as the star which was to guide His elect amidst the rocks of this world, as the trophy of His glory, and as the eternal monument of His infinite love. He united Himself to it, and they both became, as one might say, one and the same thing, not by the union of the flesh, as Adam and Eve, for begetting children of wrath, but by a most spiritual union, for begetting children of grace. He fastened Himself to it then, never to be separated from it but by death; He honoured and sanctified it in such a way that it has become, by the dignity to which our Saviour exalted it, the source of our hope and the object of our veneration.

It was with these feelings of esteem and love for the cross that He suffered it to be laid upon His shoulders, and that He thus walked before us as the head and model of the elect. And because there was no person, either in

Heaven or on earth, of a more exalted dignity or of greater merit, to whom He designed more good or who had done more for Him, than the blessed Virgin, His Mother, so He gave her the first rank under that standard. She followed Him through the streets of Jerusalem, and while He carried that heavy cross upon His shoulders, she carried one in her heart more painful than all those which the just have borne since the creation of the world in order to teach all men:

First, that it is a privilege and a distinction to carry the Cross after Christ; secondly, how far removed from those two models of perfection he ought to think himself who is without crosses; thirdly, how blind is that person who neither desires nor even comprehends the happiness of carrying the Cross.

These thoughts deserve close and leisurely examination and consideration because they are, as it were, so many rich veins from which the faithful soul draws those infinite treasures of light, consolation, love, fortitude and constancy which our Saviour acquired for us by His blood, and which are open to everyone.

But all the glory which He communicated to the cross did not lessen the pain nor the ignominy which He suffered in carrying it. He was oppressed by its actual physical weight but He was still more oppressed by the weight of our sins; for He was at the same time charged with our necessities, obligations and reconciliations, about which He inwardly conversed with His Father.

In that condition He walked towards Mount Calvary, preceded by a herald, and the two thieves who were to be crucified with Him, surrounded by soldiers, who continually ill-treated Him, and attended by the priests, the doctors of the law, the Pharisees, and the leaders of the
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Jews, who led Him themselves and who never quitted Him until they had seen Him expire.

Christ collected the little strength He had remaining that He might be able to carry to the place of punishment the burden with which He was loaded. He sweated, He lost breath, and all His wounds burst open again by the great efforts He made, so that, when He had gone out of the city, His strength failed, and He fell under the cross with His face on the ground. The soldiers, who conducted Him, loaded Him with strokes and assailed Him with foul language in an effort to get Him to His feet, but the Jews, seeing that His strength was almost spent and fearing lest He should die before He was crucified, forced a man from Cyrene, called Simon, who was returning from the country, to help Him to carry His cross to Calvary.

There are some pious persons who, when meditating on this mystery, envy Simon of Cyrene the happiness he had in carrying our Saviour’s cross. One does not blame this feeling, but it must be said that they would render themselves much more agreeable to our Lord by carrying their own cross with love, and a sincere desire to imitate Him, than by wishing to have carried His. That Simon was but an imperfect figure of those who carry their cross after Christ, and if that loving Master vouchsafed afterwards to receive Simon’s sons, Alexander and Rufus, into the number of His disciples, to reward their father for the labour he had been put to against his will, what will He not do for those who shall receive the cross with submission, embrace it with love and carry it with perseverance?

There were also some devout women who, touched with compassion at seeing Him suffer, and with sorrow at seeing themselves deprived of His divine instructions, followed Him quite bathed in tears. And having at last made their way to Him, that they might hear His last words, He turned towards them and said, for their comfort: Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not over me; but weep for yourselves, and for your children.—(Luke xxiii, 28.)

He thereby foretold to them the misfortunes which so unjust and so cruel a death was to bring upon the Jews, and added (Luke xxiii, 29, 30, 31): For behold, the days shall come, wherein they will say: Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that have not borne, and the paps that have not given suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains: Fall upon us; and to the hills: Cover us. For if in the green wood they do these things, what shall be done in the dry? What shall become of the Jews who, far from profiting by the blood which He is shedding for their salvation, demand that the vengeance for it shall fall upon them and upon their children?

Our Saviour then thought with extreme sorrow of all those who, obstinate in sin, neglect to profit by His sufferings. And for that reason He exhorts these women to weep rather for themselves, and for their children, than for Him, that they might obtain by their tears the grace of profiting by His death.

Who else, in so agonising a condition, could have thought of things other than His own sufferings. Yet our Saviour is more taken up with our evils than His own torments and seems to forget these in order to think of our remedy.

Thus it was that, on the very day of His triumph, when He was going to Jerusalem, amidst the applause
of the whole people, He wept so bitterly over that unhappy city, foreseeing the miseries which the blindness of its inhabitants, who were ignorant of the time of their visitation and of the grace that was offered to them, were to draw upon it. We were also present to His mind, and our necessities took up His thoughts and love to such an extent that as He clearly saw the gravity of our wounds, so His pains were nothing to Him in comparison with our miseries.

One might here very properly speak of the Cross, and of the happiness of those who bear it, but our Saviour's example instructs us much better than any words could do. I shall therefore say only that the greatest grace which God grants to a Christian in this life is to give him the love for, and the wisdom of, the Cross, and to make him live and die upon it.

I know this is a sublime truth which cannot be fully comprehended without the special aid of the divine light, but the way to obtain that light is to consider with a lively faith that Christ made choice of that kind of death; that He himself carried His cross upon His shoulders, which was till then unheard of; that He embraced it with love; that falling under its weight, He mustered up what strength He had remaining in order to support it to the last; that if He permitted another to help Him, it was that He might breathe a moment and not die before He was fastened to it; that being asked to come down from it, He chose to expire upon it; and that He left it at last to His elect as a precious inheritance.

Hence it is that crucified persons, who are the most lively images of Jesus dying on the Cross, are also the most agreeable to God. He whose heart is not animated by this pure truth, who is not inwardly persuaded that the greatest benefit which a soul can receive from the hand of God is to be judged worthy of the reproaches of the Cross and who does not recognise that this favour is preferable to all the extraordinary gifts of the saints and contemplative persons, ought to look upon himself as blind and to beg God continually for light. And if he is so happy as to obtain it, let him humbly acknowledge it all his life, consider it as an inestimable treasure, and embrace the tribulation as the most secure pledge of eternal blessings.

CONTEMPLATION

Is it possible, O Lord! that Thou shouldst not save Thyself from carrying so heavy a cross, exhausted as Thou art by the blood, which Thou hast already lost, by the torments Thou hast suffered, and by the wounds Thou hast sustained? Thou knowest that this load is beyond Thy human strength, and Thou submittest thereto without resistance, O God of goodness! Nothing seems impossible to Thy love.

Whilst Thou walked on earth, Thy gaze penetrated the Heavens. Thou softened by the motions of Thy heart that of the eternal Father, in favour of poor sinners, and opened for them a way to glory, which had been unknown in the world till then. Thou keepest a strict silence, but that silence is understood and invites all men to follow Thee. Now it chiefly is that Thou appearest the head and leader of all the just, and declarest war against the Devil, the world, the flesh, and sin. Now it is Thou discoverest the secrets of Thy love, and confirmest, by Thy example, what Thou hast so
often taught us by Thy words that he who takes not up his cross, and follows Thee, is not worthy of Thee.

Thou tookest Thy clothes again, gavest back the white garment, which Herod had given Thy, and the purple cloak with which they had covered Thee in Pilate's house, that all might know Thee under the cross, which Thou carriest. Thereby Thou destroyed all the vain excuses of flesh and blood; thereby Thou sanctified the tears, labours, and all the sufferings of Thy servants.

O Jesus! my Lord and my King, my hope, my wisdom, my true life, and my sovereign good! permit me not to be excluded from that society, where Thy Blessed Mother, next to Thee, holds the first rank, and wherein all Thy faithful friends have been received. For, alas! what shall become of me, if I enter not therein? And whither will the road I follow lead me, if I follow not that of the Cross? Lead me along with thee, O Lord! or draw me after Thee, that I may never lose sight either of Thee or of Thy Cross. I desire to follow and imitate Thee; and I choose rather to be crucified with Thee than to enjoy all the pleasures of the world without Thee.

The Cross has at all times been the portion of Thy elect: those that have loved Thee most, have been the most afflicted. How then, wretched that I am, can I please Thee, and be of the number of Thy servants, if I follow not the Cross, which is the standard about which Thou assemblest all those who are Thine.

If after having loved Thee with my whole heart for millions of years, and having spent so long a life in Thy service, I should see Thee come to labour only one hour with me, in order to comfort me, should I not be too well recompensed by that favour for all that I might have suffered? Now therefore, O my God! that I see Thee oppressed with pains, covered with blood and wounds, laden with a heavy cross, to become my head and guide, to invite me to follow Thee, by a much pleasanter way, than that in which Thou walkest, why am I not inflamed with the desire of suffering for Thee? How can I find anything so severe? Why do not I reckon all moments as lost which I spend without suffering for Thee?

Thou knowest, O Thou only remedy of my evils! how much more safely I walk, how much nearer I am to Thee, more innocent, and more faithful to Thee, when the Cross oppresses me than when it forsakes me. Thus, though the flesh complains, have no regard to its complaints, O Lord! and spare it not. Afflict me, crucify me, only support my weakness, that I may be able to bear the crosses, with which Thy paternal hand shall load me, and that I may never wish to be delivered from thence.

What shall I say, O my Jesus! I cast myself at Thy feet. Thou seest the depth of my misery, and to what lengths I am capable of running, when I am not restrained by the bridle of tribulation and the Cross. What I then do, is exactly what puts Thee into the condition wherein I see Thee. This is what Thou now expiates; this is what afflicts and oppresseth Thee. How is it possible, O God of my soul! that I can live peaceably with sin which deprives Thee of life? Take away my life, O Lord! this moment, that I may offend Thee no more, or lay Thy Cross upon me, as a sovereign preservative against sin. If Thou layest Thy Cross upon me, Thou wilt give me strength and courage to bear it; Thou wilt enlighten my mind, warm my heart, and make
in my soul those happy changes, which are the wonderful effects of Thy grace.

I therefore this day renounce all human consolation, and I consent, if Thy glory requires it, that all things be turned into bitterness on my account; that my friends, parents, and everything in which I took pleasure in the world, may become my cross; in order that I may have no other friend, no other father, and no other consolation save Thee.

Whither goest Thou, O life of my soul, dost Thou not hear the voice of him who cries after Thee, and cannot follow Thee but at a distance? Wilt Thou ascend without me unto Calvary? Give me Thy cross to carry. Since Thou vouchsafest to pass for the chief of malefactors, I am a proper person to augment their number and to enlarge Thy retinue. Thou shalt have three instead of two, and shalt save two instead of one. If they will not put me to death with Thee, I will remain fastened to Thy cross; and if I die not there by the cruelty of the Jews, I shall die there by the violence of my love.

Happy Cyrenian, who art judged worthy of carrying our Saviour’s cross, and of relieving Him in a labour which oppresses Him! Thou obtainest, without begging it, what I cannot obtain by my tears. Ah! didst thou but know who He is, whom thou relievest, and what the burden is which thou carriest, thou couldst not suffer it to be taken from thee, and wouldst wish to be fastened to it, instead of Jesus.

Is it possible, O Lord! that Thou hast found no person, who, from a sentiment of compassion, would carry Thy cross? There is none but Thee, O Son of the living God! O faithful friend of our souls! who willingly bearest the Cross for others. All that Thou meritest by Thy cross, Thou meritest for us; and Thou desirest no other recompense for it than our profit. All those who serve Thee are Thy hirelings, and however disinterested they be on their part, they always receive from Thee the salary which Thou promisest them. But why do I say, disinterested? the most generous of Thy servants is he who seeks only to please Thee, and to do Thy will and what greater interest can one have in Heaven or on earth?

O God! the God of love, how rich and happy are those who follow Thee in carrying their cross! The Cyrenian did not precede Thee, he followed Thee; because Thou wilt always go first, that those, who are crucified, seeing Thee before them, may be directed, enlightened, and animated by Thy example.

O blessed Mother of God! you, who have had so great a share in the Cross and love of your Son, obtain for me of Him the grace of loving Him, and of suffering for Him all my life. Amen.
XLIII

His crucifixion

When our Saviour had arrived at the top of Mount Calvary, where He was to consummate His sacrifice and give us the most glorious mark of His love, they did not so much as allow Him to recover His breath, but with great haste prepared everything that was necessary for fixing Him to the cross. First they took off His chains, then roughly pulled off His garment which was already stuck to His wounds, thereby renewing all His pains. He always obeyed with meekness and readiness because He considered His tormentors as the executors of His eternal Father’s orders, and in order to teach us to be submissive and to preserve interior peace in the most painful and troublesome happenings of life.

That most pure Lamb, being thus stripped, appeared so covered with blood that His whole body seemed to be but one single wound. And while they busied themselves preparing the cross, seeking the nails and other instruments of punishment, His mind was not at rest. With His heart and eyes lifted up to heaven, and shedding most bitter tears, He offered Himself again to the eternal Father to be our victim, and as the Apostle says (Heb. v, 7) was heard for His reverence, and for his prayers and supplications. For it is a sure way to please God, and to obtain the light and strength we have need of in our undertakings, to begin them by addressing ourselves inwardly to Him in order to offer them to Him, because, whatever way things turn out, when they are done in God, and with God, they cannot fail to bring happiness.

At this point, while the executioners make ready to crucify our Saviour, it is very proper for exciting lively sentiments of piety in the soul, that one should cast oneself in spirit at His feet, bathe them in tears, and there receive that precious dew of blood which falls on every side. What grace, what light, what consolation would the soul not find by this!

When the executioners had everything in readiness they came to Christ and offered Him, at the instigation of the Jews, wine mingled with gall and myrrh instead of another liquor which they were accustomed to make criminals drink in order to deaden in them the sense of pain and the fear of death. To these others they gave a drink for comforting them and to our Saviour one for tormenting Him.

It might here be asked whether one should be more surprised at the diligence which the Jews employed in thinking of everything which could cause our Saviour any new pain or at the care which He took to arrange it so that no part of Him might be free from torment. In any event, it is obvious that His love still surpassed their hatred and forgot nothing that could contribute to the perfection of His sacrifice. So it was that His palate, which had been until then the only sense which had not suffered, was now tortured by gall, vinegar and myrrh, the bitterness of which spread throughout His whole bodily system.

Afterwards they ordered Him to lay Himself upon the cross. He obeyed without resistance, extending Himself upon that bed of pain, without any other pillow
than the thorns which crowned His head. He immediately lifted up His eyes to Heaven, to open for us the gates thereof, which had been closed to us until then, and because He was at the one time the priest who reconciled us, and the victim of our reconciliation, He offered Himself for us upon the altar of the cross with the earnest desire of saving all sinners. His arms were stretched out to invite them, to embrace them, and to present them to His eternal Father.

It was on the cross, indeed, that He brought sinners to God, united Heaven and earth, and made them both of one family and of one society, of which God is the Father and sovereign Master. There never was, nor ever will be, a Priest more acceptable to God, an Altar more sacred, an Oration more perfect, nor a Victim more holy, since He is the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world.

While Christ held communion thus with His Father about the reconciliation of sinners, His executioners were not idle. It is said that they first took His left hand and pierced it with a large nail through the midst of the nerves, that it might the better support the weight of His body, but that, as a result of the violence of the pain, the nerves contracted so much that the right hand could not extend itself to the hole which they had made in the other arm of the cross and that it had to be drawn to it by ropes. The same thing happened with His feet and thus our Saviour's whole body was dislocated. Nevertheless, He was silent, and did not let the least complaint slip past His lips, showing an invincible and more than human constancy in the midst of such cruel tortures; and on His countenance, where grief was painted, were to be seen only His patience, resignation, love and the other heroic dispositions of His soul.

By that silence and constancy He teaches us the way in which we ought to carry our cross so that it may become for us a subject of merit and a source of glory:

First, let him who perceives any cross approaching, receive it, with entire submission, as coming from the hand of God.

Secondly, let him refrain from all kinds of murmuring, and neither complain of the weight of his cross nor of the injustice of those who crucify him, for such complaints are the voice of self-love which always flies from suffering.

Thirdly, let him not waste his time in inquiring whether what he is obliged to suffer is just or unjust, but let him concentrate his attention on being subject to God, confiding in His goodness and adoring His providence. Let him make an altar of his cross, on which to immolate himself, and let him offer himself as a victim willing to endure everything for as long, and in such a manner, as God may please.

But because nature always looks with aversion upon him who torments it, the crucified person has a continual fight to wage within himself to prevent his heart from being embittered by hatred or cast down by sorrow. He ought at such a time to cling to God, to receive in a spirit of submission and resignation everything which befalls him, to expand his heart by faith and the sure confidence that, in the words of St. Paul, God will not suffer him to be tempted above that which he is able.

It will also be very profitable to us to have our inward gaze often fixed on Heaven, the thought of
which will alleviate what we suffer on earth for, according to the testimony of St. Paul (II Cor. iv, 17, 18), that which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation, worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory. While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen, are temporal; but the things which are not seen, are eternal.

But when they began to drag the cross, to which our Saviour had been nailed, to the hole in which it was to be set up; when they raised it up by ropes; when they let it drop suddenly into that hole; and when they drove down with heavy mallets the wedges round about it—who can comprehend what agonising pains all this handling of the cross must have caused a body, the nerves of which were so stretched, and joints so dislocated, that He cried out through His prophet (Ps. xxi, 17, 18): They have dug my hands and feet. They have numbered all my bones.

Then it was that His enemies were satisfied and expressed their joy by loud acclamations, while our Saviour, thus elevated between Heaven and earth, laboured, as a powerful and loving mediator, to reconcile us to His Father, and had His hands stretched out to receive us. He then began to accomplish that promise He had made to us when He said (John xii, 32): And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself. For He drew to Himself Heaven, to give us possession of it; God, to reconcile Him to the world; the just, to inflame them with His love; and sinners, to save them by penance.

Amidst all these torments, as if He had forgotten His own pains, that He might think only of our miseries, which He would remedy, He was not satisfied with addressing His Father by interior prayers and motions of His soul, but breaking the silence He had so long kept, and raising His voice, He begged mercy of Him with love and tears, not only for the executioners who had crucified Him, but also for all those who by their sins were the cause of His death. Father, He cried, forgive them, for they know not what they do.—(Luke xxiii, 34.) He thus excuses the voluntary blindness of sinners, though it be no less punishable than other sins. What love! What mercy! for the enormity of our sins is clearly known to Him, and He knows that they cannot be expiated except by His death. But according to St. Basil, He considers our sins both as injuries against Himself and as evils afflicting us: the first consideration provokes His wrath, the second excites His compassion, and the latter always prevails over the first.

It is true that our sins crucified Christ, overwhelmed Him with grief and suffering, and offended His eternal Father; but because by debasing us, they made us miserable, He has more pity for us than for Himself, and without saying anything for us, He is completely taken up with begging pardon for us, as for ignorant and blind wretches.

Two thieves were crucified with Christ, and He was placed between them as though He had been the most guilty of the three. He had not been ashamed during His life to converse and eat with sinners, and He was not ashamed at His death to have them for companions. That good Shepherd, who had come to seek strayed sheep and to give His life to save them, would make us understand that sinners have a greater share in His Cross than the just, and that, though our first father, being
just and innocent, had found death in the tree of life, we should find, though we were sinners, true life in that tree of death to which He was fastened.

Thus it was not without a particular design of the spirit of God that there was affixed on the top of the cross over Christ's head the title of His royalty, given in the three languages wherein had been written all the secrets of divine and human wisdom. That inscription greatly displeased the Jews, but Pilate would not permit them to make any change in what he had written. So it was that, amidst so many ignominies, all the world might discover that He who suffered them was truly the king of the Jews; might discover that all should find in Him, as in a most powerful and amiable ruler, protection, life, riches and all good things; and that when He had remitted sins, defended sinners, healed the sick and raised up the dead, He had done so through the infinite power which He possessed in His character of sovereign master of all creatures.

CONTEMPLATION

Consider, O my soul! with what eagerness the Jews prepare everything that is necessary for crucifying our Saviour; hearken to their shouts; see with what haste they pull off His garment already cleaving to His wounds; observe that sacred body all bleeding and torn; enter into His heart, thou wilt find it wholly taken up with thy miseries, and fixed on Heaven, there pleading for thy reconciliation. Approach Him and, prostrate at His feet, embrace them and say: permit me, O Jesus, my Saviour, and my love! to embrace Thy sacred feet.

I will fix my heart to them, before they are nailed to the cross; and be consumed with Thy love, before death takes Thee out of my sight. Embrace with those divine hands, before they are pierced with nails, this sinful soul, for which Thou endurest such dreadful torments; destroy its malice; warm its tepidity; and unite it interiorly to Thee in such a manner that it may never be separated from Thee henceforth.

O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world! receive the weak testimonies of my love and that it may be agreeable to Thee, purify it from all worldly affection. Wash away with Thy precious blood everything that can offend Thy infinite purity, that from henceforth there may be nothing in me that can separate me from Thee. How happy would he be, that should find himself under the shadow of Thy wings, sheltered from the dangers of this world; that should be sure of pleasing Thee, and of being loved by Thee! Could he be esteemed poor, though he even wanted everything else? Ought he to pass for a miserable wretch, though he should be oppressed with all the evils of this life?

O my Saviour and only hope! Without whom I am nothing but poverty and misery! Is it possible that I should see the ardour and eagerness of those who crucify Thee, and still remain as slothful and negligent as I was before? Ah, Lord! before they elevate Thy cross, and take Thee out of my arms, heal Thou the wounds of my soul; they are still greater than those of Thy body. Thou art my physician and my remedy. I cannot find in any but Thee alone the helps that are necessary for me; and since my sins have put Thee in that condition, Thou knowest them much better than I do myself. For,
Thou camest naked into the world, and will go out of it in the same manner. Thou waitest not, as other men do, till death strips Thee for Thou forestalls him by forsaking all things; partest with everything before he comes; and restorrest to the earth what belongs to it, that Thou mayst die in that perfect disengagement which Thou hadst taught us.

Teach me, O heavenly master! to possess all things by forsaking all things. And because I cannot penetrate this truth without Thy help, wash my eyes with Thy blood, that I may clearly see the sublimity of Thy wisdom, and the perfection of Thy love. Thou art so rich, O Son of the living God! that Thou canst satisfy all the desires of my soul. Thou art so great that Thou canst fill its whole capaciousness; so sweet that Thou canst charm all its powers; so pure that Thou canst wash away all its stains; so loving, that Thou canst gain all its affections; so ardent and so full of love that Thou canst consume and transform it into Thyself. Ought we to wonder, after all this, if Thou wouldst reign alone therein, if Thou wouldst have it void of all creatures, and if Thou canst not suffer in it the mixture of any other love? Seeing Thou alone art capable of filling it, how can it, in possessing Thee, receive anything else with Thee?

When shall I see myself separated, by Thy love, from everything the world loves, O sweet Saviour of my soul! When wilt Thou grant me the grace to receive me into the number of Thy faithful servants, and to possess me entirely? What shall I lose, O Lord, in forsaking all creatures, though they were even all united against me? Provided I be Thine, and Thou mine, shall I not be rich enough? Separate my heart from everything that is
without Thee, and make not this separation according to my views and desires, but according to Thy wisdom and will. How rich is he who thus possesses Thee, O my God! How happy is he who loves Thee so! When I see Thee stripped of all things for my sake, I find myself full of the desire of quitting all for Thee, and of living at least in a perfect unattachment of heart.

Behold, O my Saviour! what the works of Thy love are. O denuding love! O transforming love! thou art rich and poor at the same time; thou art weak and powerful; hidden and manifested; free and chained; overcome and triumphant.

But can there be no exchange made? Could I not be crucified in Thy stead, O my God! and save Thy life by my death? This question is, perhaps, too bold; but it is Thy love which inspires me therewith. If that cannot be done, go then, O my Jesus! to the cross, which Thou hast so long desired; but fasten, at least, my heart thereto with Thee; separate me from everything else; and consume me with Thy love: for Thou art my glory, my hope, my treasure and repose.

O most holy Virgin! you who love our Saviour more purely than any other creature has ever done; obtain for me a share of what you experience in yourself, concerning the purity of love. Amen.

XLIV

The time He remained on the cross

The pains which our Saviour endured on the cross, whether in number or in magnitude, are beyond comprehending, but one of the chief of them was the slowness of His death. Spent of blood and strength by all the preceding tortures, He could never have lived so long on the cross if He had not miraculously prolonged His life so that He might not die until He had suffered everything He had resolved to suffer.

As He had been given no opiate, any delay in His death meant to Him an increase in pain. If He leaned His head back against the cross the thorns with which He was crowned were pressed still further into His head; if He endeavoured to keep it upright, that occasioned Him new pain; if He inclined it forward He beheld nothing but the tears of His Mother, the dejection of His friends, and the joy and triumph of His enemies. If He tried to support Himself upon His feet or hands, His flesh and nerves were still further torn and His wounds opened wider. If He sought to ease His weight off these supports and to hold His body together—or suspended, as one might say—He dislocated His bones and did violence to Himself which served only to increase His pain and weakness.

How much power should not this long succession of pains, endured without intermission or consolation, have of arousing the compassion of anyone who meditates silently upon them! They began in the evening when
not appreciate that the pain alone of the scourging and crowning with thorns would have been capable of killing the strongest man. Thus our Saviour was so weakened, when He went from Pilate’s house, that the time He lived afterwards was much more the effect of divine power than of human strength.

The pain and ignominy of the punishment which the Son of God, the king of Heaven and earth, underwent was still further increased by the base condition of those into whose hands He was delivered. His executioners must indeed have been most abject creatures since they looked upon our Saviour’s poor clothes as rich booty, and cast lots for His coat, because they could not divide it, as it was without any seam, nor agree among themselves as to whom it should belong, because they were all desirous of having it.

Behold what class of men they were to whom our Saviour was delivered up, by whose hands He was led, bound, dragged along, scourged, and crucified with all the cruelty and indignity that could be expected from such debased creatures, more like beasts than men. Far from having any feeling of compassion for our Saviour in His final agony, they sought to add to it by insults and abusive language.

Nothing was left undone that could contribute to the perfection of so great a sacrifice. Our Saviour suffered in every part of His body, and in all the powers of His soul: even the senses themselves, which are free from pain in common criminals, were particularly punished in Him. His eyes were tormented by the sight of His blessed Mother, His friends, and His enemies; His ears by the mockeries and blasphemies which were shouted around Him; His smell by the stench of the place where
the bones of the dead were thrown; His palate by the
gall and vinegar; His whole humanity by a complete
depression of help and comfort.

Is it possible that so many torments endured for us
should be unprofitable to us? Shall it be said of us that
Christ died for obtaining our love and that we died
without possessing His? Were we His supreme happi-
ness and last end, as He is ours, could He have done
anything more for us? He is our God, our first principle,
the author and restorer of our being, our eternal happi-
ness, and perhaps the thing in the world we most forget
is the love we owe Him.

He saw our ingratitude when He expired on the cross,
and that sight was more painful to Him than all His
torments. He is still to this day the same as He was
then. In spite of all our failings, He changes not towards
us, and it may also be said that we are always the same
towards Him. The difference between His conduct and
ours is that He is always a merciful father and a faithful
friend, while we are always ungrateful children and un-
profitable servants. He dies because of the love He bears
us and we live without loving Him.

In spite of the extreme pains it cost Him, He punct-
ually executed everything He had come to perform.

Firstly, He accomplished the promise He had made
to us of drawing all things to Himself when He should
be elevated above the earth, not only by opening to us
the gates of Heaven, expiating our sins, making one
flock of those in Heaven and earth collected together in
the unity of the same love, destroying the power of our
enemies, and acquiring for us infinite treasures of merit,
but also by winning hearts by the attractions of His
divine sweetness and inducing them to seek in Him alone
their repose and happiness.

He shows us the Cross, without terrifying us; lays it
upon us, without overwhelming us; and invites us to
follow Him, but He smooths the way for us. The points
of the nails and thorns with which He is pierced are,
so to speak, blunted in Him; sufferings in Him lose all
their severity, and when they pass from Him to us they
are mingled with a secret unction which renders them
sweet, comfortable and even delightful to us. Indeed we
frequently perceive that when the love of the world and
of ourselves withdraws us from the Cross, interior com-
mination with Christ becomes bitter to us, and we no
longer find anything but weariness and disgust in imitat-
ing Him. We ought then to return to Him without
delay, to acknowledge our strayings, to bind ourselves
again in the bonds of His love, to desire to suffer with
Him, and to persuade ourselves that He has reserved the
bitterness of the cup for Himself in order to let us have
all the sweetness of it.

But we know also by the experience of the saints, to
whom God has granted the grace of loving and desiring
sufferings, that they are so bound to their cross, by the
grace of that crucified Lamb, that they cannot find any
consolation away from it but find, in the midst of the
most severe trials, a confidence and repose which
creatures cannot bestow, which makes them acknowledge
at last that the Cross is the true source of the fortitude,
consolation and tranquility of the soul.

Secondly, our Saviour most perfectly accomplished
the great work of our redemption for, being upon the
cross, as in the fittest place and posture for reconciling
us to His Father, He did not cease to beg pardon for
us with bitter tears, offering His blood and life to merit it. This offering and prayer were so powerful that He obtained all that He desired in abundance, so much so that, after having fully satisfied the divine justice in respect of sinners and gained them complete remission, there still remained for them infinite treasures of merit and an inexhaustible source of strength and light on which to draw for overcoming the enemies of their salvation, for penetrating the most profound secrets of God, for attaining on earth to heroic sanctity, and for possessing in Heaven a most sublime degree of glory.

But because the sentence pronounced against us, after the sin of our first father, had subjected us to the Devil and to death, by a law written on our flesh, Christ revoked that sentence by nailing to the cross the flesh He had received from Adam; and with His blood He reversed the decree of our condemnation in order to write that of our pardon in its place. He brought us into His new covenant by virtue of a new testament whereby, as (Rom. viii, 29) the firstborn amongst many brethren, He calls us to participation in His heavenly inheritance. But as a testament does not become operative until after the death of the testator, He showed His last will by His very death, in virtue of which we became the lawful heirs to eternal glory.

Hence it is that the evangelical law is called the New Testament, which was confirmed by our Saviour’s death, and that His blood is called (Heb. xiii, 20) the blood of the everlasting testament because, after the testator’s death, nothing can be changed in the testament. By the price of our Saviour’s blood, we were delivered from the slavery of the Devil, restored to the liberty of the children of God, and to the right of possessing the goods which we had lost by sin.

Our Saviour, who knew how supremely important it was for us to follow His doctrine, if we would not lose again the goods He had won for us, and how much we ought to fear the enemies whom He had overcome in such a way as to leave them still the power to test our virtue, did not fail, in the midst of His torments, to show us the truth of His doctrine and the artifices of our enemies, in order that no one might plead ignorance of the conditions necessary for obtaining the heavenly inheritance.

Elevated upon the cross, in the sight of Heaven and earth, He publicly condemned by His example sinful pleasures, the vanity of worldly possessions, and all manner of disobedience to the law of God, and at the same time taught us the perfection of all virtues which we ought to practise. By teaching us the virtues He heightened the value of them, sanctified them in His person, and gave new merit to hatred of sin, purity of heart, the pains of life, abnegation of self-will and our own judgment, deprivation of worldly pleasures, patience in adversity, meekness and humility, poverty of spirit, love of enemies, fidelity in temptations and, above all, He gave new merit to pure love of God and of our neighbour. And because everything cannot be fully described in word or deed, He presented Himself to us as a mirror wherein we might clearly behold the evangelical truths without any danger of distortion or novelty, for nothing, in the judgment of God, shall find approval but that which found approval on the Cross.
CONTEMPLATION

Thou art wholly mine, O my Saviour! Thou art all for me, wholly sacrificed for my necessities and salvation. What Thou hast taken from me was the cause of Thy labours, and the source of my happiness. Thou art poor by what Thou hast from me, and I am rich by what I have from Thee. But the goods which I possess in Thee are so great that I cannot esteem myself poor.

Thou hadst no need of me when Thou wast clothed with my flesh: Thou took it only to give it to me, to suffer for me, and to make Thyself be loved by me. Thou art not content with delivering it up entirely for the price of our redemption, Thou wast pleased there should be no part of it but suffered and was to me a proof of Thy love. Thou givest to me Thy divinity, which communicates an infinite virtue to everything Thou dost, and to all Thou sufferest for me. Thou givest me Thy humanity drowned in a sea of sufferings: Thou givest me that head crowned with thorns; that hand bloody and torn out; those cheeks livid and bruised; those eyes swollen up and bathed with tears; that mouth moistened with gall and vinegar; those feet and hands pierced with nails; that flesh torn; those nerves stretched; and those bones dislocated; Thou givest me thy thoughts, Thy desires, Thy honour, and Thy life.

Thou leavest me, also, in dying, Thy Blessed Mother, and requirest her to be mine. Thou reconcillest me to Thy eternal Father, communicateth Thy merits to me, offerest me Thy mercy, and satisfieth Thy justice for me. Thou diest that I may live, sheddest the very last drop of Thy blood to purify me, and workest all those prodigies through the extreme love Thou hast for me.

O infinite Goodness! how much better Thou observest towards me the precept of love, which Thou hast given to me, who am a sinner, than I observe it, towards Thee, though Thou art my Lord and my God! Thou lovest me with Thy whole heart, with Thy whole soul, with all Thy power, with all Thy strength, with Thy whole body, with all Thou hast, and with all Thou art; and Thou givest me all these things so liberally in order to make up for me an immense treasure of eternal blessings.

Hitherto, O my Saviour! I have made very bad use of Thy gifts. Thou hast bestowed them abundantly upon me, that I might employ them in Thy service, and in meriting Thy grace and glory; and I have employed them in offending Thee, and in meriting Thy wrath, and my own condemnation. But I return to Thee, O my God! with the whole extent of my heart, and abandon myself entirely to all the pains, whether interior or exterior, which Thou shalt please to inflict upon me for my sins, or for Thy service.

I conjure Thee, by the love which Thou testifiest to me, to receive the offering I make Thee. Enter, O Lord! into my soul, see by my eyes, hear by my ears, speak by my mouth, and become the principle of all my motions. Inflame my heart with Thy love, support me with Thy hand, make me walk in Thy footsteps, pardon me the evil I have committed, amend in me what displeasest Thee, crucify me with Thee, for Thee, and in Thee, O my love, and only hope.

What wonder, O Lord! the cross, and the hours Thou remainest thereon, are severe only to Thee, and that sinners find their comfort, their ease and remedy therein. Every hour is to Thee a cruel agony, by the decaying of Thy strength, and the weight of Thy body,
which augments Thy pains by enlarging Thy wounds. The insults and abuses of thy enemies are renewed every moment; the severity of the cross is not mollified; the eternal Father abates nothing of His rigour; the sun refuses Thee its light; everything contributes to torment Thee, and we alone find our advantage in Thy torments. Thou reservest to Thyself alone, O divine and innocent Lamb! all the pain and bitterness of the cross, and vouchsafest that it be to me a source of ineffable sweetness. May Thy love be blessed and praised in all ages.

It is in Thy cross that I enjoy a solid repose and a real consolation. Though I weep under the cross, yet I am content to do so; and the tears I shed there are a thousand times sweeter than all worldly joys. On every occasion, at every time, in every place, and in every state, Thou art, O my crucified Jesus! my hope and security. Thou art the sincere friend, the faithful companion, the prudent master, and the charitable father of my soul.

When I consider Thy hands and feet pierced with nails, Thy head crowned with thorns, Thy whole body covered with blood and wounds, and when I approach Thee, I perceive my heart inflamed with love. Though Thou art nailed to the cross, weakened, dejected, languishing and dying, yet Thou receivest me when I come to Thee. All livid, all bloody, and wholly despised as Thou art, Thou seemest beautiful, loving, charming, and adorable to me.

O holy Cross! the faithful companion of my Saviour; thou hast possessed Him for a long time; let Him descend and give Him to me, that I may receive Him in my soul—or rather enter thou with Him into my soul, that I may remain fastened to Him and thee, and that I may never be either without Him or thee. Here it is that my miseries must end, that the old Adam must be renewed, and that I must begin to live in the newness of the spirit of Jesus.

O divine Cross! though Jesus be not wearied with suffering, be thou wearied in tormenting Him. Thou alone hast deserved to bear the victim and sacrifice of the world, the source of grace, and the price of glory. Bow down thy branches, O tree of life! Soften thy hardness, and treat that innocent body with less rigour.

And thou, O Lord! come at last, after so many torments, to repose in my soul that desires Thee so earnestly, to which Thy presence is so sweet and so necessary. Fill it, possess it, since Thou hast created it, and accomplish in it the work which Thou hast begun on the cross.

O most Blessed Mother of God! inseparable companion of our Saviour's Cross, you see with how much labour He has sought me: prevail by your intercession that He may not have laboured in vain; and obtain for me the grace to live for the future only in Him and by Him. Amen.
The contempt shown for His person and teaching

During the whole course of His Passion our Saviour suffered the mental pain of listening to foul-mouthed abuse and mockery being levelled against Himself and His doctrine, but during the time that He hung on the cross this verbal torture was particularly violent. Those who passed by, those who beheld Him, those who were crucified with Him, priests, magistrates and people—all, in short, made fun of Him and loaded Him with curses.

That meek Lamb heard all these things with invincible patience, but not without extreme pain. The night before He had suffered two great affronts. The first took place in the house of Caiphas where, after having been blindfolded and struck in the face, He was called upon, as a false prophet, to divine who had struck Him.

The Jews had learned that He saw to the bottom of hearts, that their most secret thoughts were known to Him, and furthermore, they had had the experience of having had to withdraw in confusion after vain endeavours to trap Him by artifices. When they saw Him in their hands, therefore, they resolved to be revenged on Him by insulting His divine wisdom, and in a spirit of mockery they gave Him the name of prophet 'in order to discredit His predictions and doctrine in the most offensive manner. Being the descendants of those who, in their day, could not endure the splendour which shone from the face of Moses when he had been speaking to God, they veiled our Saviour’s eyes, which enlightened their darkness, and so they remained in their blindness. But that veil hurt none save themselves, for it did not hinder Christ from seeing to the bottom of their souls, and it deprived them of His sight, whose countenance was to have rendered them happy.

The second affront he suffered in the house of Pilate where the soldiers, after having clothed Him with purple and crowned Him with thorns, as a mock king, struck Him again with the reed which they had put into His hand instead of a sceptre. On that occasion, as though He had been convicted of imposture, our Saviour observed a profound silence, although it would have been easy for Him, by arming the elements and all creatures in His defence, to have shown that He was the king of Heaven and earth. But He would never permit anything to be done that would lessen the pains or the affronts, under which latter head must be included the unjust accusations, the false testimonies given against Him before the judges, the dastardly ill-treatment He received from those who held Him, the ignominious manner in which He was dragged through the streets of Jerusalem, and everything else that was done with the sole aim of destroying in the minds of the people the reputation He had acquired, the truth of His miracles and the purity of His doctrine.

But when He was nailed to the cross, the insults and mockeries which He had to bear have been considered by many saints as constituting the greatest torment of His Passion, because it is those things which affect one most keenly which torment one the most. And our Saviour had particular reason for feeling most acutely these affronts. His physical pains had arrived at such a stage that, as one might say, nothing more could be
added to them, yet they were at least of such a nature that one might be permitted to desire to suffer them for the love of God. It is very different with blasphemies against God, derision of eternal truths and contempt of the Divinity. Though these things may sometimes have to be borne, for just reasons, yet they can never be sought after nor desired, because they are always the objects of lawful hatred and detestation.

Christ, therefore, who was inwardly devoured by zeal for the divine honour, for which He gave His life, was much less tormented by the physical pains He endured than by the injuries done to God. For His love rendered the former sweet to Him, whereas He found nothing in the latter but what was abominable. A soul that has felt how pure God is, and has been penetrated by zeal for His glory, may dimly comprehend something of our Saviour’s interior bitterness at that time.

Justice and one’s conscience assist one in bearing pain when one is guilty. When one is not so, one finds consolation in one’s innocence. But the more love one has for God, and zeal for His glory, the more sensible one is of derision of His truth, and that sensibility is sometimes so great that heroic virtue is necessary to support it. Our Saviour supported it with as much silence and moderation as if He had felt nothing, and yet it is certain that this pain exceeded those which He suffered in His flesh, as His love for His Father exceeded that of His body.

As Jesus, crucified between two thieves, was exposed to the insults of the lowest persons, so there were none who did not take advantage of His position. The Evangelist (Matt. xxvii, 39, 40) tells us: And they that passed by, blasphemed him, wagging their heads, and saying Vah, thou that destroyest the temple of God, and in three days dost rebuild it; save thy own self: if thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Thus they discredited His miracles, and attributed to the temple of Jerusalem what He had said of the temple of His body.

St. Matthew (xxvii, 41, 42, 43) continues: In like manner also the chief priests, with the scribes and ancients, mocking, said: He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the king of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him now deliver him if he will have him for he said: I am the Son of God. And the people cried out (Luke xxiii, 35): He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the elect of God.

St. Luke (xxiii, 36, 37) records: And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, and saying: If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself. Even the thieves who were crucified with Him reproached Him, and one of them spoke to Him in such an insolent manner that the other, who had begun to feel the effect of grace, could not refrain from reproving him.

All these people, who appeared so united in a common design of abusing our Saviour, nevertheless acted from different motives. The bad thief insulted Him out of temper and the bitterness he had of dying on the cross; the people out of unbridled passion, a quality common in all mobs; the priests out of hatred, pride and the secret joy with which the success of the enterprise inspired them; and those who passed by shook their heads in acknowledgment that a fraud had been discovered, the truth vindicated, and the world undeceived.
Though the Evangelists have described this part of our Saviour’s Passion in few words, it may be legitimately presumed, from the violent hatred which animated His persecutors, that many charges were laid against Him which those inspired writers deemed unworthy of relating. The Pharisees did not fail then to repeat that He was a possessed person, a Samaritan, and an impostor who worked miracles only by the help of devils. Some cast at Him the solitary and abandoned state in which He found Himself after having been followed by multitudes of people. Others called on Him to preach to them from the cross the heavenly truths which they were ready to hear. And the mass of people highly commended the prudence and justice of the magistrates and showered on them a thousand blessings. Almost all, in short, condemned our Saviour who, seeing at the same time to the bottom of their hearts, and knowing the purity of His doctrine, was sensibly affected by their blindness.

This is a type of suffering with which Christ often tries His most faithful servants, when He designs to purify them entirely from the love of themselves and of the world, that He may afterwards bestow His gifts in abundance upon them. As a wise captain, He puts His bravest soldiers upon the most difficult missions and exposes them in the most dangerous posts that they may acquire the more glory.

The suffering or trial we speak of is so much the more severe as one has often to fight, not only against what is repugnant to nature, but also against the zeal of virtue. In such circumstances it does not suffice the servant of God to resist his own inclinations and the corrupt world; he then finds himself opposed by those who pass for good people—and who are so in reality—and who think that they do well in persecuting him. Knowing the error of those who persecute him, he then has extreme need of divine light and strength to resist the temptation to which he is exposed.

It is highly instructive for a virtuous person to observe that the priests and magistrates employed against Christ, not reason and justice, but artifice and the authority of office; that, in order to obscure the truth, they perverted the ignorance of the people and the brutality of the soldiers; that the people approved of their conduct, not because they were revered, but because they were powerful; that the oppression of the innocent resulted from the prudence of self-interest; that those who most opposed our Saviour’s doctrine were those who were most possessed by ambition, envy and self-love, because it condemned their passions and desires; that the common people abused Him out of the natural inclination they have to please and imitate the powerful; and, finally, that the thieves, crucified with Him, abused Him because, reckoning all their happiness to consist in being delivered from temporal evils, they could not believe that He, who did not deliver Himself from such evils, could be the Son of God.

We see, in short, that all those who persecuted our Saviour were actuated by hatred, interest or malice; that the Holy of Holies passed for a malefactor because He suffered the punishment meted out to such; and that His hope in God was regarded as a vain hope because God did not deliver Him from the punishment of the cross. Such are the judgments of those who persecute the saints under the pretence of zeal and justice.

On the other hand we see that the Son of God
embraced His cross in such a way that death alone was capable of freeing Him from it; that He did not say one single word to justify Himself; that He concealed His power until the consummation of His sacrifice; that the eternal Father, very far from defending Him, abandoned Him to the insults of sinners; that one of the thieves crucified with Him was no sooner illumined with a ray of heavenly light than he changed his language and outlook, acknowledged the divinity of our Saviour, and desired no more to be delivered from the punishment of the cross but only to be received into the kingdom of Christ. We see that it is by the humiliations of the cross that the Son of God works so many wonders, reigns in the hearts of His chosen, is acknowledged by all nations, saves sinners and confounds His enemies, and that those who make profession of following Him, take Him as their model, and desire to triumph only as He triumphed.

If we but consider attentively the manner in which Christ governs His Church we shall easily perceive how necessary it is that those, who are members of it, should resemble their Head. For that divine Shepherd often permits His sheep to be pursued and torn by wolves. He gives up the head of His Precursor to the revenge of an adulterous woman, the lives of His Apostles to the enemies of His name, and the goods, repose and reputation of His servants to the malice of the wicked, because He knows that His Church is never more flourishing than when it is adorned with the examples, merits and constancy of the saints.

We must not be surprised then if the world knows them not, and if it persecutes them everywhere, for it perfects their virtue by desiring to destroy them. As

Heaven is the kingdom and country of the crucified, God permits them to be known on earth only so far as is necessary for their merit. He leaves them in obscurity and contempt in order that they may sigh continually after a better life, that they may look to God alone for their happiness and glory, and that the world may not boast of having honoured the children of God.

As they are obliged to live among the wicked, however, it is of vital importance, in order that the ardour of their zeal may not lead them astray, that they be guided by two great truths:

The first is that God is never more glorified, nor His divine power more resplendently manifest, than when His servants conform their behaviour to that of Jesus crucified. For by calmly suffering contempt and oppression, without being concerned about their own glory, they show forth the glory of God, and the world, blind as it is, discovers that glory at last in the constancy and purity of their virtue.

The second is that they ought above all to be afraid of employing violence and deception for overcoming their persecutors. In addition to such conduct being directly contrary to the meekness of Christ, and losing them thereby infinite treasures of merit, it is certain that the wicked must always prevail over good people who resort to such means. Those who seek to gain their own ends at the expense of virtue, and have not the fear of God before their eyes, are naturally much better instructed in the arts of deception, of which they have made a close study all their lives, than others who have not done so.

We are invincible when we fight against such enemies
with arms of our choosing with which they are unacquainted. These arms are a patience which is proof against all ill-treatment, a pure faith, a firm hope in God, a disinterested charity towards our neighbour, meekness, silence, and prayer for our persecutors. For in these arms there is a divine virtue which enables us to be always victorious, since Christ, our Head, made use of them for overcoming the world, Hell and sin.

CONTEMPLATION

Let heaven and earth, the just and sinners, the angels and saints, adore Thee, O Thou God of my soul! Let me adore Thee, and praise Thee, and bless Thee with them and let me render Thee immortal thanks for having vouchsafed to suffer on the cross the contempt of divine truths. It is true, O Lord! that Thou wast covered with humiliations, plunged in a sea of sorrows, and overwhelmed with the waves of temptation. They were not content with making Thy most sacred body endure the most cruel torments, they even attacked Thy divinity: and because it was inaccessible to pain, they presumed to assault it by sacrilegious raileries, to which the zeal for God's glory, consuming Thee interiorly, rendered Thee infinitely sensitive.

The wounds of Thy body, the false testimonies, blows, and the other sufferings of Thy passion, were indeed very severe pains to Thee; but they were mitigated by the pleasure Thy love took in saving sinners and obeying Thy Father. But to see and hear them abuse the sovereign truth, and the divine Nature, which dwells in Thee; to suffer Thyself to be treated as an impostor,

Thou, who inspired the prophets, searchest the bottom of hearts, and from whom all truth proceeds, is a torment of which no created mind can comprehend the greatness. And yet, among all these blasphemies, which rend Thy heart, Thou keepest a deep silence, allowing Thy enemies to triumph, and though Thou art Thyself the divine truth, Thou dost not confound falsehood and calumny.

Whence comes this insatiable patience, O divine Love! Wilt Thou then endure all manner of torments in the highest degree? And why must there be nothing in Thee, but what is tormented? Whips, thorns, the cross, and a thousand other punishments are insufficient for Thee, Thou must also behold Thy holy doctrine and divine truths become the subject of the mockery and blasphemies of the people.

When I think I am able to suffer something for Thy love, my soul conceives a joy thereon. When I imagine Thy enemies are coming to fall upon me, in order to make me abandon Thy service, I find myself full of strength and resolved to resist them unto death. Even when Thy servants persecute me, though that persecution be much more painful to me, yet I suffer it also, being persuaded that Thou permittest it for the punishment of my faults. But when I find myself obliged to suffer for having loved the truth, and been faithful in obeying Thee, though I be convinced Thou hast given me an example thereof, and though I desire to imitate Thee, yet that degree of perfection frightens me, and the very truth for which I suffer, which ought to be my consolation, redoubles my pain.

I acknowledge that I ought to love Thee without measure, and suffer without distinction whatever Thou
ordainest: that after seeing Thee endure, with invincible patience, the derision of Thy eternal truths, the resolution I ought to take, if I am persecuted for virtue, is that of meekness and silence and, without seeking here below, with vain anxiety, the causes of what afflicts me, my whole occupation ought to be to discover Thy hand and adore what it permits.

O divine Lamb, O Sovereign Wisdom! whence is it that, after having taught me such pure maxims, and expressed for me so great an excess of love, Thou dost not accomplish Thy work in me? Why dost Thou let me lead a tepid and languishing life? Why dost Thou not conform me entirely into Thy love and imitation? Thou hadst, O Lord! very just reasons not to suffer those blasphemies; and yet, that nothing might be wanting in the perfection of Thy sacrifice, Thou suffered them in silence: and as for me, when I desire to enter into myself, I find that my little patience, and extreme effeminacy, proceed not only from the infirmity of nature, but from a secret pride, which has already taken too deep root in me. If Thy example be incapable of remedying that disorder, there is nothing but Thy love that can heal it.

I here confess, O Lord! before Thy majesty, my extreme blindness. It is true that by Thy mercy I do not blaspheme against Thee, as the Jews did, who imagined that, if God were Thy Father, He would so make it clear by delivering Thee from their hands; and that if Thy miracles and doctrine were true, Thou wouldst convince the world thereof, by descending from the cross. I do not insult Thee as the bad thief did, who believed Thee without power, because Thou did not save Thyself and him. But though I have very opposite sentiments, and though I acknowledge Thy sovereign power, yet I find my heart full of diffidence and uncertainty in occasions of trial.

When Thou assistest me in my necessities, and satisfiest my desires, then I bless Thee, O my God! sing Thy mercies, and publish Thy goodness in remembering me; but if Thou beginnest to try me by tribulation, if I am in want of anything, if Thou withdrawest Thy sweetness, and if Thou leavest me in dryness, I become sad, dumb, and languishing; and my voice, which echoed before in praises and blessings, sends forth nothing but sighs. So true it is that I am always like myself—that is, slothful, blind, miserable, naked, and destitute of all good. Illuminate me, therefore, O divine light! dissipate in me all these false opinions; teach me to praise Thee, love Thee, and acknowledge Thee equally in labour and rest, in prosperity and adversity, on Calvary and Thabor; for Thou art everywhere the same, always a loving Father, a faithful friend, and a liberal benefactor.

O heavenly fire! that piercest the clouds with which they endeavour to darken Thy splendour, and that burnest in the hearts of the saints under the ashes of tribulation, O divine Jesus! how well does pure love acknowledge Thee for the true son of God, upon the cross, whereon Thou art nailed, and through the humiliations with which Thou art covered! It not only believes and confesses Thee, but it also inspires a faithful heart with the desire of being crucified with Thee.

Who can express, O my God! the wonders which Thy cross operates in a soul that is empty and disengaged from the creature? What light does it diffuse therein? what secrets does it communicate to it? with what riches
does it fill it? Thou re-established in three days, according to Thy promise, the temple of Thy most sacred body, destroyed by the punishment of the cross; and in one moment Thou raised up the hearts of Thy servants oppressed by the cross, in order to make them the living temples of Thy glory. Thou savest them by crucifying them, comfortest them by tormenting them, and purifiest them by distressing them, and what in appearance ought to destroy them, changes them, renews them, and enriches them.

O most pure Virgin! obtain for me that affliction of love wherewith your heart is wounded. Far from weakening your virtue, it supports your life, and makes you remain with such great constancy at the foot of your Son’s cross. Amen.

XLVI

The impenitence of Judas and the bad thief

Hatred, fear, sorrow and joy arise from love, for we hate everything which is opposed to the object we love, we fear to lose that object, are sorry for having lost it and are joyful in the possession of it. He who knows how much Christ loves sinners, what He did to testify His love for them, and what He suffered to save them, may easily understand how much that loving Shepherd was conscious of fear for being the occasion of the spiritual ruin of many, of joy for the salvation of others, and of sorrow for the loss of theirs.

It cannot be doubted that one of the greatest torments of His Passion was the sight of those children of Adam who were to perish by their own fault in not making use of the salutary remedies which had been prepared for them with so much labour and at so great a cost. But He was particularly conscious of the loss of those who were the ministers of His death, for whom, and in whose sight, He shed His precious blood, for He could not, without the most lively sorrow, see that those unhappy people should damn themselves by the very things which He suffered in order to save them.

But if Christ was so deeply concerned at the loss of all the damned, how much more grieved was He by the damnation of those whom He had tenderly loved, and to whom He had offered such favourable opportunities for saving themselves! Such persons were the traitor Judas and the bad thief. One sat at our Saviour’s table; the other was His companion on Calvary.
It cannot be denied but that Judas, in common with the other Apostles, received most abundant graces of salvation, not only for himself, but also for many others whom he ought to have saved with himself. For Christ had withdrawn him from the world to place him among His chosen disciples, to whom He entrusted His most secret thoughts, whom He instructed with particular care, who were His inseparable companions in labour and in rest. How many excellent examples of the most heroic virtues did not that perfidious Apostle behold in the conduct of his divine Master! How many words of eternal life did He not hear from His sacred mouth! How many times did He not taste, in a most holy familiarity, such kindnesses as were capable of converting devils? He received from Him the power to work miracles, and even worked many. He often freed the possessed in the name of Jesus Christ, and yet all these special graces, and these extraordinary proofs of our Saviour’s power, did not extinguish in that unhappy wretch the spirit of avarice, which induced him to sell his Master.

That loving Master did not in that moment abandon His perfidious follower. He made use of the most powerful graces in order to withdraw him from such black treachery. He gave him, at His last supper, His sacred body to eat and His precious blood to drink. According to the testimony of St. Augustine and St. Leo, He communicated to him the power to remit sins and of sacrificing the spotless Lamb. He washed his feet, and to these outward marks of goodness, He added many interior ones. But seeing that nothing softened the hardness of that impenitent heart, He at last declared to His Apostles that one of them was to betray Him,

and that it would have been better for him who was to betray Him that he had never been born.

The miserable wretch was not moved, either by the caresses or the threats of our Saviour, who was pleased to receive a kiss from him in the Garden of Olives and, for the last time, upbraided him with his perfidy in words capable of softening the most savage heart. 

**Friend,** He said to him *(Matt. xxvi, 50)*, *whereto art thou come?* And again *(Luke xxii, 48)*: *Judas, dost thou betray the Son of man with a kiss?*

But when Judas saw that Jesus was condemned, and that the Jews would not take back the money they had paid him for his treason, instead of having recourse to the clemency of Him whom he had betrayed, he hanged himself in despair. Thus it was that this divine Master, who forces not the wills He has created free, had the sorrow of seeing perish a disciple upon whom He had showered a thousand favours and who had never wanted the necessary helps for saving himself.

As if to repair that personal loss, when one of the thieves who was crucified with Him implored His mercy, Christ promised him paradise immediately, and testified thereby how much joy the sincere repentance of a sinner gives Him. It is with difficulty that He condemns sinners when He sees them determined on their own ruin, and He always pardons with pleasure those who have recourse to His goodness. The very inclination that He has to pardon is a certain proof of the sorrow He feels when He is obliged to punish.

It cannot be doubted that our Saviour was most keenly grieved by the obduracy of the thief crucified on His left side, who had the same opportunity as the other for obtaining pardon for his sins and of being
washed by that blood which was shed for all sinners. That miserable man had heard Christ beg with a loud voice mercy for sinners of His eternal Father. He had seen in Him a patience that was more than human, a silence and a meekness that was proof against all kinds of insults and blasphemies. He had seen the eclipse of the sun, the earthquake, and the repentance of his companion, who openly confessed his sin, accepted with humble submission to the divine justice the punishment of the cross and acknowledged the innocence and kingship of Christ by saying to Him (Luke xxiii, 42): Lord, remember me when thou shalt come into thy kingdom. Finally, he was a witness to the promise our Saviour made to the penitent thief that he should possess Paradise that very day, and yet, untouched by that example, he died in his sin.

The Son of God, as a just judge, condemned him then, but in His character of the Redeemer, of father, faithful friend, and loving shepherd He could not behold without extreme sorrow that unhappy sheep perish through his own obstinacy at the very fountain of salvation. Thus our Saviour's torments, though great and agonising, were immeasurably increased by the interior anguish which His love for sinners caused Him.

We learn here a most important truth which is of infinite consolation to us. That truth is that Christ desires our salvation more earnestly, and is more deeply conscious of our damnation than we can either have a desire for the one or have an understanding of the other; that He has, at all times and in every hour, His arms open to receive repentant sinners; and that He offers the treasures of His graces to all those who are willing to receive them. We see this clearly in His conduct towards the good thief whom He was pleased to save the first of all men, as a result of a confession of true faith and a feeling of sincere love. Through him, the Son of God has given us a certain assurance that the road by which the converted thief entered first is open to all sinners.

On the other hand, while this assurance is so certain on the part of God, the examples of Judas and the bad thief show how it can be ignored by creatures. If there be any places at all in which salvation would seem secure it should be in Heaven, among the angels, on earth, among the Apostles, and in death suffered at Christ's side. Yet the angels were not sure of their salvation in Heaven, from which they were ejected; nor Judas in the apostolic state, wherein he was lost; nor the bad thief in the company of Jesus crucified, in which he found his condemnation. No grace of Christ can save a free creature unless that creature co-operates freely and uses the means of salvation which Christ offers, and he who abandons himself to his passions may be assured of his ruin: the graces he receives from God will but serve to render him the more guilty.

Christ gave us in the Gospel the story of the servant who is required, under pain of being condemned to exterior darkness, to improve the talents entrusted to him, in order to teach us that he who does not make good use of God's graces ought not to hope for any share in His kingdom. The humble servant who takes care of his soul, lives in the fear of God, is faithful to His grace and, always taken up with the thought and desire of pleasing Him, unites himself to Him by love, is he alone who secures his eternal salvation.
CONTEMPLATION

How admirable is Thy goodness, O divine Jesus! What charms has Thy meekness for sinners! Thy looks convert souls, Thy words soften their obduracy, Thy conversation reclaims them from error, and Thy company unites them to Thee by the bonds of delightful captivity. Thou art always amiable, always faithful, and always generous.

Thou didst eat with sinners, sought them with earnestness, received them with mercy, defended them with goodness, and enriched them with magnificence. Thou justified the publican, and pardoned the thief. Thou has left no sinner without a remedy, and all those who perish ought to attribute their ruin only to the obstinacy of their own will. Thou hast taken more care of their salvation than of Thy own honour and life. Thou delivered Thyself up for them, wept for their evils, expiated their sins, suffered the punishments which they had deserved, and showed on all occasions how aware Thy heart was of the miseries they brought on themselves.

Since all those who are lost occasion Thee so lively a sorrow, what sorrow must Thou have felt at seeing Judas perish in Thy company and the thief at Thy side? None but he who loves Thee, O my God! can comprehend what the bitterness of Thy soul was then, because he alone knows the extent of Thy love. Those two sinners were near Thee, under Thy hand, and, as it were, under Thy nets. Thou was entirely ready to take them from the Devil; but they ruined themselves, and their obstinacy and ruin was more sensible to Thee than Thy cross. Was it still necessary to add that pain to all those Thou suffered?

May Thy divine love, which can forget nothing for the salvation of sinners, be eternally blessed, O my God and Redeemer! Even when Judas was selling Thee, Thou didst consecrate him; Thou made him a priest of the Sacrifice of which Thou art the victim; gave him Thy body to eat and Thy blood to drink; washed his feet; spoke to his heart; suffered him to embrace Thee; treated him as a friend when he was a traitor; made use of everything, of love, fear, sweetness, severity, caresses, and threats to win him; and didst go to suffer for him with a heart full of tenderness, though Thou knewest Thy sufferings would be unprofitable for him. Thus that unhappy disciple was lost, because he would be so, and by ruining himself he left Thee with Thy soul pierced with grief.

Thy love began to feel comfort when Thou beheld a penitent thief at Thy right hand, and Thou immediately promised him the possession of Thy kingdom; but the obstinacy of the other immediately renewed Thy sorrow. O divine love! that art never blind, though Thou art prejudiced in favour of sinners; dost thou then thus forget Thy own torments that Thou mayst only be sensible of our loss?

O King of glory! O master of heaven! O shepherd of my soul! behold here another thief whom I present to Thee, to comfort Thee for the loss Thou hast lately had. I am this thief, O my God! Thou knowest I am no less guilty than he whom Thou seest perish at Thy left hand, nor less worthy than he of the punishment he endures. I have squandered away the talents of nature and grace which Thou hadst entrusted me with; and
instead of improving them in Thy service, I have abused them in offending Thee. I have a thousand times stolen Thy glory by my pride and vanity, in attributing to my labour, care, and merit, what I owed to Thy grace and mercy. I have frequently sinned against justice, by preferring the illusions of the world and the flesh to Thy holy truths, and allowing myself to be corrupted by the solicitations of my self-love. Alas! my life has scarce been anything else but a series of actions worthy of death. I acknowledge, with the good thief, that Thou art the King and Lord of Heaven, that Thou canst give me Heaven this day if Thou wilt; and that Thou never refusest it to those who return to Thee with a sincere sorrow for having offended Thee. Upon the same cross, where I behold Thee covered with blood and wounds, I acknowledge Thee for my God, my Saviour, and the only Son of the eternal Father. I am persuaded that whatever Thou ordainest me to suffer for my sins, is far less than what they deserve. But Thou, O innocent Lamb! sufferest unjustly, for Thou never didst any evil, and Thou art the source of all good.

Remember me, O my Saviour! when Thou shalt be in thy kingdom, and give me at present the place which the bad thief possesses, that having been a companion of Thy cross, I may enter one day with Thee into Thy glory. For I dare not ask Thee, O Lord! to grant me that favour this day, as Thou didst to the good thief; I know too well how unworthy I am thereof; I only beg of Thee to nail me this day to the cross, and leave me thereon as long as Thou pleasest. It is true nothing is nearer Heaven than the Cross, that it is the surest pledge of glory, the channel of Thy mercies, and the throne of Thy love: but after all, it is the way I ought to follow, and the end I ought to aspire to; and it would not be reasonable to desire to attain the end, without walking in the way which leads thereto.

I beg of Thee therefore, O Lord! not the recompense which I have not deserved, but the labour which is necessary for my deserving it, in a word, the Cross and Thy grace.

O Mother of God! refuge and advocate of sinners, you who have comprehended better than anyone how many tears the loss of souls cost your divine Son, because you loved Him more than any creature ever did: you see that His love towards men is not diminished; that it is, and always will be the same, refuse not your protection to this sinner invoking you; obtain for me the place of that obdurate sinner, and the grace of persevering therein, with a loving submission till my last breath. AMEN.
XLVII

His sorrow for His afflicted Mother

Words could not adequately express the sorrow of the Blessed Virgin at seeing her Son, whom she loved much more than her own life, engulfed in a sea of torments and ignominies, nor could they describe how deeply conscious was our Saviour of that sword of sorrow with which He saw the heart of His Mother pierced as she stood at the foot of the cross. As she had always perfectly imitated that well-beloved Son’s heroic virtues, so she would resemble Him in His suffering; but the interior conflict was most severe, waged, as it was, between her natural love for her only Son and her submission to the will of God and desire for the salvation of men. Her love for sinners, whose advocate she already was, made her desire that they should have a remedy capable of healing their evils, while the motherly love she bore for her Son, to whom that remedy was to cost so dear, made it impossible for her to think of it without horror. Her heart thus torn asunder, found no relief but in complete resignation to the will of God.

The saints, who have made Christ’s sufferings the special subject of their meditation, have thought, either through pious conjecture or by a supernatural light, that our divine Saviour, seeing the time of His Passion approaching and in order to satisfy His love for and obedience to His blessed Mother, went to take leave of her, desired her consent for accomplishing the work of our redemption and declared to her that it was the will of the eternal Father that she should remain at the foot of the cross, see her Son expire on it in the midst of torments, and receive that crucified body in her arms; and that when it was taken down from the cross she should bury it with her own hands. He told her afterwards what she should do and where she should remain until He rose again, and finally He recommended to her His disciples and the rest of the faithful. He had, of course, told her before what He was to suffer for our salvation, but on this occasion He disclosed to her the whole sequence of His Passion that she might accompany Him in spirit at all stages of His sufferings.

It is probable that at this interview the eyes and heart said more than did words, but that no weakness, which could lessen the perfection of their obedience and conformity to the divine Will, was allowed to insinuate itself into the feelings of tenderness they expressed for each other. For Christ, as man, was naturally touched by the plight of His blessed Mother, but because He was God He inspired her with all the fortitude she stood in need of in so great an affliction.

While our Saviour was going to death, the Blessed Virgin followed Him in spirit, plunged in a sea of sorrows and suffering agonising grief, yet always submissive to the divine Will. Thus it was that she entered into Her Son’s agony of spirit in the Garden of Olives, and thus she persevered in sorrowful prayer until the time that she was informed that Her Son was in the hands of sinners. For when His enemies, leaving Him shut up in prison, had gone home to take a little rest, St. John came to give the Blessed Virgin an account of what had happened, telling her that our Saviour had already been condemned to death by the Jews and that
He was to be led to Pilate in the morning so that the Roman governor might confirm their sentence.

It is easier to meditate silently upon what must have been the conversation between the Blessed Virgin and the beloved disciple than to express it in words. One thing is certain, however, and that is that she did not give way to those hysterical outbursts so common among afflicted women, but that, though her heart was breaking, she remained submissive and recollected.

She departed from her house at dawn to go in search of her Son, and to follow Him to the cross. She went silently through the streets of Jerusalem, sprinkling the way with her tears and filling the air with her sighs. Some pious women, followers of Christ, joined her. After walking some time, they met up with our Saviour, whom the Jews were leading to Herod, but the crowd was so great that they could not see Him. They could hear, however, the voices of those who abused Him and assailed Him with a thousand blasphemies.

On His part that divine Lamb, finding Himself in the midst of wolves, would have been glad to have seen His Mother, for it is when they are in affliction that persons who love most keenly miss their friends, and desire to see them, though the sight of them must only increase their pain. But the Blessed Virgin could not see her Son until He was shown to the people by Pilate, and then she beheld Him wounded, bleeding, and entirely disfigured, having a crown of thorns on His head and a reed in His hand. Jesus knew she was present at this sight, saw to the bottom of that afflicted heart, and felt His Mother's pain no less than that caused by the points of the thorns.

That afflicted Mother was not only tormented by a sight that was enough to kill her, but she also had to listen to the false testimonies with which they sought to destroy her Son's reputation, the curses they flung at Him, and the clamour of those who demanded that a thief and a murderer be preferred to that innocent Lamb, and that the Author of life be crucified. She heard the herald's voice proclaiming the sentence of death which Pilate had pronounced. Afterwards she beheld the lifting up of that great cross which our Saviour was to carry Himself to the place of execution. When He began to walk, she joined those following Him, shedding as many tears as He shed drops of blood, and inwardly oppressed by a cross of grief which was no less heavy than the one she beheld on her Son's shoulders.

But when, with the pious women who had followed our Saviour, she arrived at the top of Mount Calvary; when she had got a closer view of the whole apparatus of the cruel and shameful punishment of crucifixion; when she heard the strokes of the hammers driving the nails through the feet and hands of her only Son; and when He appeared raised up on the cross and, with the acute sensitivity of motherly love, the excess of pain He suffered was borne fully in upon her—then, already weakened by the night of sorrow she had spent, the little or no nourishment she had taken, the tears she had shed, her motherly and womanly senses could support the greatness of her pain no longer, and she fainted away in the arms of those who accompanied her.

When she came to, she remained some time pale and trembling, but afterwards, coming to herself, not by any human assistance but by a secret power which her divine Son communicated to her, that she might suffer still more, and recovering all her strength, she arose, forced
her way through the crowd with St. John and the women who had followed her, and got to the cross. There, standing and fixing her eyes upon our Saviour, she performed the office of our advocate, offering interiorly to the eternal Father the pains and blood of the common Son, with a burning desire for the salvation of all men. She was afraid to see Him die, and yet she suffered in seeing Him live in torments which only death could end. She wished that the eternal Father might be less severe, and yet she was willing that the divine Will should be accomplished to its full extent.

That divine Lamb, and that innocent Sheep, beheld and understood each other perfectly. Each was tormented by the pains of the other, and those pains were such that we must say that the more we think of them the less can we comprehend them. None but the two hearts of the Mother and Son can conceive the whole of their sufferings because, the measure of their pain being that of their love, to know what they suffered we must know how much they loved; and we are very far from that knowledge because we are very far from their love. Let each of us, therefore, according to the degree of our enlightenment and charity, endeavour rather to enter into their feelings than to try to express them in words.

Though it would seem that nothing could be added to the Blessed Virgin’s afflicted state, yet her sorrowful heart still received from time to time fresh wounds resulting from different circumstances of her Son’s Passion. Such circumstances were when she heard Him cry out: *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* when she saw Him offered gall and vinegar to quench the burning thirst of which He complained; when He sent forth that loud cry with which He expired; when she received Him dead in her arms after He had been taken down from the cross; when He was buried; and when she saw herself deprived of the presence of her loved One whose resurrection she desired so ardently that those three days seemed to her like three years.

In those who most perfectly imitate Christ we see the effect of that pure charity which makes them love and take pleasure in their own sufferings, while the sufferings of their neighbour give them so much sorrow that they would rather bear them themselves. Our Saviour gave us in the whole course of His life, but particularly at the time of His Passion, most outstanding proofs of His disinterested love. The torments He had to endure through the treachery of Judas caused Him less pain than did the damnation of that ungrateful and perfidious Apostle. He declared to the daughters of Jerusalem, who wept bitterly when they saw Him led to Calvary, that He was more afflicted by the miseries which threatened them, than He was by His own sufferings. When He was raised up on the cross, His first care, as though He had forgotten His own torments, was to ask pardon for those who crucified Him. Such examples clearly show that His love gave Him a deeper appreciation of the miseries of His creatures than it did of His own.

Therefore it must not be doubted but that the pains of His holy Mother, whom He beheld at the foot of the cross, were more severe to Him than the pains He suffered on the cross itself. For that most pure Virgin was worthier of His love than all the angels of Heaven, and all the creatures on earth, and consequently was loved more. No mother had ever loved a child more ardently or more tenderly, she had been the faithful companion
of His labours, was holy and innocent, deserved not to suffer any pain because she had never been defiled by sin, and yet of all mothers who had gone before her, and were to come after her, she was the most afflicted. Let us imagine, if we can, what pain it must have been for such a mother to see such a Son expire in the midst of so many torments and insults. So severe a cross was reserved for her alone because she alone was capable of bearing it. It is true that our Saviour, out of the respect He had for His Mother, did not allow the executioners to ill-treat her, but the love she bore Her Son caused her more torments than anything the executioners might have done to her.

Our Saviour beheld from the cross that His pains pierced the heart of His Mother, He then knew all that she suffered and all that she was to suffer afterwards in order that the designs of the eternal Father might be accomplished. This knowledge was a fresh torture to His tender heart, but His Father had so ordered it for completing the sufferings of the Sacred Humanity and to the end that nothing could be added to the magnitude of that sacrifice. From the foregoing several holy persons have thought that this was the reason why Christ, when speaking to the Blessed Virgin from the cross, did not call her mother, for fear that so dear a name might bring them both some comfort in their sufferings, but contented Himself by saying only, Woman, behold thy Son. On the one hand, it was necessary that His Mother should suffer without consolation and, like Himself, should drink of that bitter chalice, on the other hand, He would not abandon her, and so towards her He preserved an attitude between tenderness and firmness.

He took care of her, spoke to her, gave her for a son the disciple He loved, and said to that disciple, Behold thy mother. As St. John here represented all men, our Saviour commanded us all in His person to honour and serve the Blessed Virgin as our Mother.

It was, nevertheless, a great consolation to that afflicted Mother still to hear the voice of her only Son. She knew that by adopting a second son she ceased not to be the mother of the first, whom she regarded as her Creator and her God. Jesus and Mary understood one another perfectly; between these two most pure hearts there was a secret communication which enabled them to divine the wishes and comprehend the feelings of each other, and thus the holy Virgin accepted St. John as her son in the same way as she accepted, at the same time, all the human race as her children. She accepted this trust because she clearly saw that it was the will of Christ, and that men, after having treated Him so badly, would never presume to return to Him if He did not give them His own Mother to act as a mediatrix.

She entered fully into her Son's intentions, assumed the heart of a mother for all sinners, and looked upon them as the children of sorrow whom she had brought forth at the foot of the cross. Thus that sea of sufferings into which Jesus and Mary were plunged has become for sinners a river of peace and a fountain of blessings. Let us, therefore, have our eyes continually fixed on these models of perfection, let us consecrate to their service the remainder of our lives, let us endeavour to tread in their footsteps, and let us realise that in order to be agreeable to God we must become like Jesus and Mary.
CONTEMPLATION

Sweet Jesus! innocent Lamb! Thy torments are without measure. Thou not only feel Thy own, but also those of Thy blessed Mother. O pure hearts! hearts full of grace, hearts inflamed with love, hearts so united and afflicted, associate me in the participation of your sufferings, and make me feel those of the Son and of the Mother. You deeply felt, O most blessed Virgin! the immense pains of your only Son, because you are the tenderest of all mothers. Thou hadst a lively feeling, O divine Jesus! of the interior torments of Thy holy Mother, because Thou art the most grateful and generous of all sons.

Is it not thou, O abominable sinner! that art become by thy crimes the executioner of these two most pure and innocent hearts? O hearts full of justice and goodness! I can no longer bear the reproach of having reduced you into this state: either pardon me, or take revenge on me. Since all creatures obey Thee, O Jesus! command them to punish me. Send me Thy pains, and those of Thy blessed Mother; it is reasonable I should suffer them all, since I have been the cause of them all; but at least let me help Thee to suffer them, and take a share in them with Thee.

Whence comes it, O blessed Virgin! that your joys are turned into sorrows? You had joy in being the Mother of God, and full of God; in bringing forth your only Son, in holding Him in your arms, in nourishing Him, and in seeing Him adored by shepherds, kings, and angels; and acknowledged by Simeon and Anna for the Saviour of mankind. During the thirty years you lived with Him, all your pleasures were interior, divine, and spiritual; and your most pure soul, amidst the transports and raptures which the love of Jesus, your Son and your God, occasioned you, was always elevated and transformed into Him. Was there anything in this happiness that deserved to be changed into bitterness? Ought you to have had any share in our miseries, which are the inheritance of the unhappy children of Adam—you who had no share in his sin; and ought this land which we inhabit to have been to you a valley of tears?

Blind and foolish sinner, thou seest the Queen of Angels drowned in a sea of sorrows, and thinkest thou on nothing but procuring thyself delights? Blush at thy self-indulgence in the presence of Jesus and Mary; weep for the time thou hast lost in pleasures, and for the bad use thou hast made of thy sufferings. Jesus, the only Son of God, dies in torments; Mary, His most blessed Mother, has her heart pierced with a sword of sorrow; and thou, O sinner! who hast deserved Hell, seekest pleasures and consolations on earth.

Whilst you lived with your Son, O most pure Virgin! you always expected that sorrowful sword, of which the holy old man Simeon had foretold you in the temple; you now see the prediction accomplished; and your pains are extreme, because they are proportionate to the greatness of your love. Your well-beloved Son, finding that His hour approached, and that He was going to be delivered up to sinners, comes to bid you adieu, and to declare to you at the same time that it is the divine will that you should see Him suffer and die on the cross. St. John acquaints you that Jesus is apprehended, and that they are dragging Him before the judges: you immediately go out of your house, run through the streets of Jerusalem, watering them with your tears, and find the Lamb of God in the midst of those hungry wolves.
You see Him afterwards, no longer adored by angels and kings, but exposed to the laughter of the people as a mock king, loaded with insults and curses, and at last condemned to the cross. He carries it upon His shoulders, and you follow Him to Calvary. There you behold the apparatus of His punishment; you hear the strokes of the hammer, which drives the large nails into His feet and hands, and pierces your heart at the same time. You behold Him elevated on the cross, and that sight tears your heart and freezes the blood in your veins. You remain standing at the foot of the cross, and there spend the cruel moments, till your Son expires. You receive Him into your arms when they take Him from the cross, you wrap Him in a winding-sheet, perform the same duties towards Him after His death as you performed at His birth, and perform them towards Him with the same love—but with very different feelings: for you then swam in joys, and now you are drowned in sorrows.

When your faithful servants and true friends consider your pains, O Queen of heaven! they melt in tears; and there is nothing they would not suffer if their sufferings were capable of comforting you. What then are the sentiments of your only Son, Who always loved you so tenderly? What does He not suffer in seeing the anguish of your heart, and the deep silence you observe? You are by Him, and speak not to Him. But what still increases His pain is that He cannot dispense Himself from suffering what afflicts you, and that you cannot see Him afflicted without suffering.

O Son of the living God! O divine light of my soul! I conjure Thee by the love with which Thou lovest me, to imprint those sublime truths on my heart, to banish from thence the desire of human consolations, to confirm me in Thy love, and to fortify the will I have to suffer in order to testify my love to Thee.

How can I see Thee die on the cross for me, and still be in love with life, unless it be to spend it with Thee, as Thy blessed Mother did? Ought not the light, which comes from the cross, dispel all my darkness, and undeceive me forever concerning the false maxims I have followed!

What shall I render to Thee, O God of my heart! for all the benefits Thou has granted me! How shall I acknowledge the admirable inventions of Thy love? Thou turnest everything to my advantage. Even the grief Thou hast in seeing Thy blessed Mother upon the point of losing her Son, becomes for me a source of blessings. Thou givest me this holy Virgin for a Mother, substitutest me in Thy place, and requirest me to be the Son of Thy Mother, that she may assist me, protect me, and compassionate me in my miseries, as she had compassion on Thee in Thy pains. Couldst Thou not comfort that afflicted Mother except by giving her children of wrath? How can we make up the loss she has sustained in losing Thee? Ah, Lord! how exalted are Thy views above ours, but how full of goodness are they for us! It is because Mary is the Mother of our Saviour, that she is to be that of sinners. If we were not miserable children, how should she be a mother of mercy!

O most Holy Mother of God! remember, that though you brought forth your only Son without pain in the stable of Bethlehem, you have brought forth children at the foot of the Cross, with incredible pains. Assist me, protect me, since I have cost you so dear; have always in respect of me the heart of a mother, and let not your unworthy son perish. Amen.
XLVIII

He is forsaken by God His Father

It is a great consolation to an afflicted person to have faithful and loving friends who have compassion for one in what one suffers and who try to divert one from thinking too much upon it; but to be overwhelmed by misfortunes, to see nothing around one but what increases the sense of these, and to find oneself without support, within or without, is what may with good reason be called the height of misery. Almost all the faithful servants of God undergo this trial, because nothing is more capable of purifying them, but as it is an extremely severe one God, who always spares our weakness, commonly leads them to it by degrees. Thus, when He has resolved to try a soul in this way and to dispose it thereby for the great favours He designs to communicate to it, He at first makes it feel the importunity of temptations, that it may begin to lose the relish for worldly things and to exercise itself in the imitation of Jesus Christ.

Afterwards, when it has become subject to God, when it discovers and adores in its crosses the Hand that sends them, God deprives it of the consolation which proceeds from creatures, that it may no longer seek any consolation save in Him alone, and that creatures, by their insubstantial comforts, may not gain any part of the love which is entirely due to God.

Finally, when the soul, being separated from creatures, has renounced everything which it could expect from them in order to resign itself entirely to God, and when it desires to taste no longer any consolation save that which comes from Him, then God begins to hide His favours and communicates Himself to the soul in unknown ways only. The soul then feels no longer the presence of its well-beloved, and it falls into a general desolation, because it receives comfort from neither God nor creatures. And all this happens in order that it may purify its love, learn to seek God, not for His sweetness but for Himself and have less regard for what He gives than for what He is and what He deserves.

Here it is that the soul, subject to God without any regard for itself, sets no bounds to its resignation, and, being indifferent to all things and as content in suffering as in joy, it no longer wills anything but what God wills. This is what is known as the state of pure love, which is so little known, is desired still less, and to which few attain. Those who seek God with their whole heart, though they may not attain the fullness of this happy state, have at least the consolation of advancing far along the way, according to the measure of grace which God gives to them. But souls who have attained to perfect resignation and remain faithful to it, know by experience that there is no pain equal to it, and that it is much easier to suffer martyrdom of the body than that of the spirit.

Those chosen souls also comprehend much better than others how much indebted we are to our Saviour who was pleased, among so many other pains, to bear also this sense of excessive dereliction without any consolation. For He so designed it that those things in His Passion which seemed to be only secondary were more painful to Him than the principal tortures to which they subjected Him. The sensual man regards as an evil only
those things which afflict the body, because he scarcely
knows any other, but the spiritual man knows that the
mind has its pains which are as far above corporal pains
as the spirit is above the body.

Such was the sense of abandonment of Christ on the
cross. So far from receiving any comfort from creatures,
it would seem that they had all conspired to torment
Him. His friends, His disciples, His Apostles had taken
flight; one of them had betrayed Him; another had
denied Him; and he who had followed Him to Calvary
afflicted rather than comforted Him by his presence.
The Blessed Virgin and the other devout women who
were with her redoubled our Saviour’s sufferings by
their tears, and could not afford Him any relief. Of the
many persons whom He had instructed, healed and
delivered, or whom He had miraculously fed in the
desert, there was not one who endeavoured to do Him
any service or who appeared to take any share in His
sufferings. His enemies and executioners, not satisfied
with carrying out rigorously so cruel a sentence, added
new torments to it by offering Him gall and vinegar;
they pierced Him with a spear after His death and cast
lots for His garments at the foot of the cross. In prac-
tising all these cruelties they showed as much pleasure
as if they were delivering the people from a public
evemy. There appeared in their conduct neither reason,
justice, gratitude nor compassion, and this excess of
obduracy also caused our Saviour, who loved them and
died for them, infinite pain.

He was not only forsaken by men, but also by angels,
and none of those blessed spirits who had descended
from Heaven to adore Him in the manger endeavoured
to comfort Him on the cross. Nor did He, whom the
winds and the sea had obeyed, find in the elements or
inanimate creation any comfort. He was deprived of the
sun’s light, stripped of all His clothes, buried in a wind-
ing-sheet that did not belong to Him, and He could not
procure a cup of water to quench His burning thirst.
Harder still, the heavenly Father, who is the true refuge
of the afflicted, and the Holy Ghost, who is also called
the Comforter, forsook Him as well in this extremity and
would not dispense Him from the very least of the pains
which He had to suffer for our sins. Thus the Father of
mercies delivered up His well-beloved Son to the rage
of the executioners and to the powers of darkness that
they might in concert, freely and without hindrance,
expend their whole fury and malice upon Him.

His soul itself, though it was happy, communicated
to the body only the life and strength which was requisite
to it for suffering and dying. As God always proportions
the sufferings of His servants to the grace which He
gives them, so He measured the desolation of our Saviour
according to the plenitude of grace that was in Him.
Therefore this sense of abandonment was so overwhe-
ling that, although He had undergone the other torments
of His passion in heroic silence, He could not hide His
feeling but lovingly complained of it to His Father,
saying My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?
These words were not produced by either displeasure or
impatience; they were rather the language of a filial con-
fidence which urged Christ to disclose to His eternal
Father the excess of His pain, as one friend sometimes
relates to another what he suffers for him, even though
he suffers it willingly and is ready, if necessary, to suffer
still more.

This dereliction of our Saviour had been foretold
many ages before when David had cried (Ps. xxi, 1): O God, my God, look upon me: Why hast thou forsaken me? And immediately he gives the reason for it: Far from my salvation are the words of my sins, that is, the sins He had taken upon Himself. In the continuation of the same Psalm David relates how He was delivered up to His enemies and how they made a jest of the confidence He had in God. And in Psalm lxxxviii, 39-47, after having spoken of the greatness of the Son of God made man, David is astonished to see Him thus forsaken and, speaking to the eternal Father, says: But thou hast rejected and despised: thou hast been angry with thy anointed. Thou hast overthrown the covenant of Thy servant: thou hast profaned his sanctuary on the earth. Thou hast broken down all his hedges: thou hast made his strength fear. All that pass by the way have robbed him: he is become a reproach to his neighbours. Thou hast set up the right hand of them that oppress him: thou hast made all his enemies to rejoice. Thou hast turned away the help of his sword: and hast not assisted him in battle. Thou hast made his purification to cease: and thou hast cast his throne down to the ground. Thou hast shortened the days of his time: thou hast covered him with confusion. How long, O Lord, turnest thou away unto the end? Shall thy anger burn like fire?

In the end, David, beholding in spirit the blessings which our Saviour’s humiliations were to produce, breaks out into thanksgiving (Ibid. 53): Blessed be the Lord for evermore. So be it. So be it. From this we ought to conclude that since the Holy Ghost has caused the dereliction of Christ to be described so fully, and with such great care, it is in order that we may never forget it nor be ignorant of the infinite obligations to Him under which we lie.

While everything that is necessary for instructing and comforting souls in desolation may be drawn from the example of Jesus forsaken on the cross, I shall content myself with three observations:

The first is that, though our Saviour had recourse to His Father in the extreme pain in which He found Himself, He did not desire either to be delivered from it nor to be comforted in it, and He refused to give Himself, which He might have done, the relief of one ray of beatific joy, which as God He possessed to the full. He preferred to accomplish His work, and to persevere till death in this state of abandonment, in order to teach His afflicted servants two things. Firstly He would have them to learn that theyought not to think that all is lost, nor to despair of their spiritual advancement, when they find nature weighed down by a sense of desolation, because that sense can be to them a source of merit. Secondly He would have them to learn that the most efficacious remedy in this trial is to turn to God, not for the purpose of asking Him to take away or lessen it, but to receive it with humble submission to His will, begging for no other help from Him than the grace of fidelity and perseverance. All they need add to this is frequentation of the sacraments and the advice of a wise confessor.

For as true as it is that God is the author of our afflictions and that He sends them, or permits them to befall us, always for our good, so we cannot doubt but that recourse to Him with a heart submissive to His orders is the surest means, not only of bearing them uncomplainingly, but also of finding solid peace in them.
There is no sacrifice more agreeable to God than thus to resign ourselves entirely to His providence, by renouncing all consolation, except that which He vouchsafes to give us at such time and in such manner as He shall please.

The second thing which souls in desolation ought to guard against is to allow themselves to be overcome by temptation, which commonly accompanies this state, and which induces them to believe that God has withdrawn His hand and has entirely forgotten them. This thought is equally false and dangerous, for faith teaches us that the eternal Father could neither forget nor abandon His only Son, though He left Him for a time in extreme desolation. On the contrary, He thereby accomplished in an admirable manner what He had promised Him when a heavenly voice, heard by many, pronounced these words respecting the name of God (John xii, 28): 

I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again. Indeed it was by the way of suffering that God the Father led His Son to victory and triumph, and it was by that way that He made Him known and adored by all nations, gained for Him an infinite number of souls and subjected all His enemies to Him.

If it is true, therefore, that God was pleased to glorify His Son by the torments and humiliations of the cross, can it be doubted but that He prepares a crown of glory for those who endeavour to imitate our Saviour by their patience in afflictions? Anything else would be unworthy of the goodness of God who Himself assured us (Ps. xxxiii, 19) that the Lord is nigh unto them that are of a contrite heart: and he will save the humble of spirit.

The third advice that must be given to souls in desolation is that Christ, according to the observation of St. Cyprian, endured this pain, not only to serve as a model for those who suffer it, but much more to merit for us the courage to persevere in it and to obtain the consolation which follows such perseverance. Hence it is that, however forsaken a servant of God may be, he will never be forsaken to the extent that Christ was. This divine Saviour treats us much more mildly than His Father treated Him. He is always with us in tribulation, according to His promise, and though His assistance may not be apparent to us, though it may not be even known to us, yet we cannot so much as doubt but that it is real and true, and that we are always supported though we may not see the hand that supports us.

CONTEMPLATION

O true Comforter of afflicted hearts! only Hope of dejected minds! faithful Lover of disconsolate souls! O Jesus, the strength of the weak, and refuge of the forsaken! what abyss of sorrows is that in which I see Thee plunged? How dost Thou break that admirable silence which Thou hast so constantly kept? What has become of that patience which was proof against all things? Does it begin to escape Thee, O my Saviour! and break out into complaints and sighs?

O divine Lamb! that hast been till now so mild, so patient, and so calm; hast concealed all Thy pains in Thy heart; and hast suffered without complaint and contradiction everything they made Thee suffer; Thou beginnest to speak, expressest Thy pain, breakest out in sighs, and complainest to Thy Father in terms capable of softening the very rocks. Whence can this
change come, O Lord! but from Thy having come into the depth of the sea of anguish and desolation, and a tempest having overwhelmed Thee, finding not help, Thy humanity is unable any longer to bear so universal a desertion? O Jesus, Thou love and life of my soul! why cannot I comfort Thee? Why cannot I share with Thee in the pain Thou endurest? But Thou wouldst accomplish what Thou foretold by the prophet Isaiah (lxiii, 3): I have trodden the wine-press alone: and there is not a man with me.

What shall I render Thee for all the blessings Thou grantest me, O my divine Comforter! How shall I respond to the love Thou bearest me for it is neither by chance nor necessity that Thou art reduced to this prodigious desertion. It is a pure effect of Thy choice and love. If Thou couldst not have Thyself prevented it, the angels would have come to Thy help, the stars would have fallen from heaven, the elements would have been confounded, and all creatures would have joined to defend and deliver Thee: but love, which had become master of Thy heart, and all Thy actions, ordained it otherwise. It reduced Thee to that excess of affliction, and made Thee more sensible of my necessities, than of Thy own pains. Thou hast reserved for Thyself alone that pain so little known but so terrible, and Thou hast been pleased to suffer it without being comforted, that we might be comforted in ours. For Thou dost not abandon Thy servants in time of tribulation, and Thou art never nearer to them than when they think themselves most forsaken. I adore that will ever willing to help us; and I adore that love always ready to comfort us.

What would become of me, O my God! if Thou didst deal otherwise with me? But what am I, and what art Thou? Ought Thou to prefer my necessities to Thy own repose? Is it just that the Son of the living God should endure so dreadful a torment for the consolation of a slave? Thou knowest, O divine Jesus! Thy own greatness, and my lowness; but that infinite inequality which is between Thee and me does not hinder Thee from sacrificing Thyself for me: not that Thou seest anything in me which deserves it, but because Thou findest in Thy love the reasons for doing me good.

Thou accepted with submission and love the dereliction to which Thy Father reduced Thee; Thou supported Thy sacred humanity in that severe combat; but Thou suspended all the sweetness Thou couldst have communicated to it that it might suffer without any consolation. Thou wast not pleased that an angel should come from Heaven to comfort Thee; Thou broughtest Thy holy Mother to the foot of the cross, that her pain might redouble Thine; permitted the flight of Thy Apostles, that they might neither assist nor defend Thee; concealed Thy infinite power, that Thy enemies, seeing nothing but weakness in Thee, might oppress Thee with impunity; was pleased to be nailed to the cross as a thief, impostor, seducer, and a disturber of the public peace and as the wickedest of all men, naked, covered with wounds, suffering in every part of Thy body, deprived at midday of the light of the sun, forsaken by everyone, and even by Thy Father.

It is true that all those pains came through Thy own choice; but they are no less painful, since they oblige Thee to have recourse to Thy Father, with such affecting words, and such deep sighs.

I desire with all my heart never to depart from Thy
cross, O my Saviour! and to depart always from myself, because I am sensible of the necessity I am under of keeping near Thee, and know that Thy dereliction is a continual example and reproach to me.

When Thou comfortest me, I am mighty in promises, offer myself to suffer in Thy service, resign myself entirely to Thy will, and even beg for the Cross out of a desire of being like Thee; but if Thou hidest Thy countenance from me, if Thou givest me not what I begged of Thee in my abundance, I fall into dejection, think I have lost Thy fervour and exhausted Thy mercies.

How am I confounded, O Infinite Mercy! when I think on another much greater misery, wherein I have lived so long! How many years have I spent without loving and desiring Thee, without suffering for Thee, and without so much as comprehending what interior affliction is? Occupied and drunk with the false pleasures of the world, which separate me from Thee, I was neither sensible of the misfortune of losing Thee, nor of the happiness of possessing Thee. Why did I thus forget Thee, O my Jesus! How could I fly from Thee, O Beauty always ancient and always new! Ah! it is because I have forsaken Thee that Thou art thus forsaken by Thy Father. Thou expiatest the forgetfulness of God wherein I have lived, by the dereliction in which Thou diest.

O disconsolate Jesus! and at the same time the refuge of disconsolate souls! Thy love teaches me that it is from Thy being forsaken I ought to receive all the strength I have need of for bearing mine. I am persuaded that the most terrible dereliction I can fall into would be that of having no share in Thine; but as Thou

hast given me life by Thy death, and hast delivered me by Thy pains from those which were due to me, so Thou hast merited by Thy dereliction that the heavenly Father should not abandon me; and that He might never be nearer to me with His mercy than when I am humbled most by desolation.

O most holy Mother of God! you who have seen and felt the extreme desolation of your well-beloved Son, assist me in the time of mine. AMEN.
XLIX

His thirst

Because of His affection for sinners, Christ keeps them near His heart, nourishes them with the milk of His doctrine and graces, gives His blood in order to spare theirs and, while He fills them with the blessings of His sweetness, He drank, for their cure, the bitter cup which His Father presented to Him. Adam disobeyed God by tasting the forbidden fruit, and Christ, in order to repair that fault, was pleased to taste gall and vinegar, and to become (Phil. ii., 8) obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross.

He drank, not the vinegar mixed with gall, but both separately, for before He was crucified He took gall mixed with wine and myrrh, His cruel executioners presenting that liquor to Him instead of the opiate usually given to condemned persons. Our Saviour did not drink it, but satisfied Himself with tasting it, without complaining or expressing any disgust. He then accomplished the first part of David’s prophecy (Ps. lxxviii., 22) And they gave me gall for my food, and on the cross, at the last hour of His life when, after having lost almost all His blood, He felt a burning thirst, He accomplished the second part: and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.

Jesus knew that there would be none to give Him a glass of water, and that they would bring Him only vinegar, but because He was pleased to execute, down to the smallest detail, everything that His Father had ordained, He expressed what He suffered by saying: I thirst. His Blessed Mother and the few friends who had followed Him to Calvary were extremely grieved that they could not give Him even that small relief. The executioners, who could inflict no other torments on Him, applied to His mouth a sponge soaked in vinegar, which they had fastened to the end of a reed, and He did not refuse it although He knew the additional pain it would give Him.

Jesus seeing, therefore, that nothing more remained for Him to accomplish, either of what the prophets had foretold concerning Him, or of what His Father had ordained, or of what His heart desired, said: It is consummated. Even as a traveller who, after having walked a long distance under the noon-day sun, finds a spring, drinks greedily, and expresses with a deep sigh how much he is refreshed, so our Saviour, as if He had forgotten all His past labours and was content at seeing them so happily finished, said, with a deep sigh: It is consummated.

If anyone had asked Him then what the work was, the accomplishment of which seemed to give Him joy, and what profit He reaped from it, He could not have answered that His joy proceeded from His having been given vinegar to quench His thirst, since this served but to increase His sufferings, nor that it proceeded from His seeing Himself at the end of His torments, because He still had death and His last agony to suffer. Whence sprang that motion of joy, therefore, which made Him say, as after a complete victory: It is consummated? Without doubt it sprang from His having abandoned His humanity to the power of love. Love had no more to require of it, after so abundant a satisfaction, the fruits of which He was going to reap. It was as though
Christ had said: I have made satisfaction for the sins of the whole world, have reconciled men to God, and acquired for them the graces of salvation and sanctity, so—*It is consummated*. Having quenched His burning thirst for our salvation, all His desires were accomplished.

It must be admitted, however, that Christ's thirst was not entirely satisfied for, after having prepared our remedy, He desires also that we should use it. If it is natural for men to wish earnestly to see the fruits of their labours, how much more so does our Saviour not wish to see the fruit of His, which he undertook and consummated with so much labour and perfection? The thought of our salvation gave Him infinitely more relief in His torments than the drink He desired could have done. Because the interior thirst of Christ could not be fully quenched except by the voluntary use we make of the remedy He has prepared for us, so He died in the heat of thirst, that is, with an ardent desire to see all men reap profit for their salvation from His Passion and death. Therefore, those who refuse to make use of a remedy so precious and so efficacious and, by their sins, oblige that loving physician to become to them a terrible judge, present to Him something more bitter than gall and vinegar.

When, in the silence of prayer, we meditate on the state our Saviour was in, natural and Christian compassion make us wish we might then have been present in order to have offered Him water and to have prevented vinegar being presented to Him. We ought to consider, however, that we are more cruel than the Jews if, beholding Him die in His burning thirst for our salvation, we refuse Him the refreshment He asks of us, that is, if we will not forsake our sins, which caused His death, follow the example of His holy life, and love Him with all our hearts.

If we consider the circumstances in which our Saviour declared His thirst, we shall find therein an admirable example of the purity of love with which God deserves to be followed. For in that extreme desolation, in which He might have had reason, it would seem, to expect some comfort from His Father, He not only desired none, but by saying, *I thirst*, He gave His executioners an opportunity to make Him suffer a new torment.

How well do we discover here how different are the feelings of nature and grace in times of adversity! Nature, because it is weak, is dejected, fearful, and complains, but the will, supported by divine grace, is elevated, dilated and offers itself, if God so orders it, to suffer still more. Though the soul is presented with actions to be done which seem impossible to it, nevertheless it undertakes them with courage, being persuaded that mostly the feeling of impossibility arises from its fear rather than from its weakness. In the end it discovers that, by the help of God and the confidence it has had in Him, what seemed calculated to deject it has served but to fortify it. The weakness of nature does not hinder the servant of God from advancing in the way of virtue nor diminish the merit of his sacrifice. On the contrary, he devotes himself to all the labours of an austere life, without listening to call of flesh and blood, and thus offers himself to God as a living host, which is the greatest proof that can be given of the desire one has to please Him. But he who is discouraged, and draws back in adversity, clearly shows the small progress he has made in virtue.
We must not forget the irreconcilable conflict which is found between Christ and the world. Christ always opposed the world. He despised its riches, rejected its pleasures and condemned its precepts, and in order to free our hearts from these things, and to carry them upwards, He rendered the conquest of Heaven so easy as to promise it to us for a cup of cold water.

He likewise took such great care to possess nothing of this world that He died naked, stripped, deprived of all help, and left at the foot of the cross the poor clothes with which the world had furnished Him. On the other hand, the world, which had resolved to be revenged upon our Saviour for His contempt of it, was not content until it saw that innocent Lamb expire on the cross, and it refused Him, in that last hour, the cup of water He desired and gave Him gall and vinegar. But at His death Christ received this last token of the hatred of the world with the same indifference as He had shown contempt in His lifetime for everything that the world loves. Thus He died, as He had lived, an enemy of the world, to teach us that we cannot make peace with the world at any time without becoming an enemy of His.

But that divine Saviour taught us also by His example that, as He was devoured all His life with zeal for God's house, and died in the actual thirst for our salvation, so those who would be saved must rate their hopes of salvation in proportion to the care and desire they have of it.

How can we have a genuine desire to be saved and at the same time employ all our care, labour and thoughts on those things which must work to our ruin? Such behaviour proceeds, no doubt, from people either not desiring their salvation, or else desiring it so weakly, that they do not look upon it as the principal work of their lives and the end of all their actions.

Those who desire to be saved, therefore, ought not to hope to see that desire ever accomplished unless it becomes in them the force regulating all their conduct. Christ redeemed us by devoting all the actions of His life, and all the sufferings of His death, to our salvation. And do we think that we can be saved in a general forgetfulness of our most essential duties? What blindness! what stupid folly!

CONTEMPLATION

Thou sufferest another thirst, O my Saviour! than that which appears to the eyes of men, and that thirst is not yet quenched. Thou broughtest it from heaven, was born, lived, died, didst rise again, and ascended into Heaven with it: Thou feellest it still, and will to the consummation of ages: for it is the thirst after the salvation of men, which will not be satisfied till, after having heaped Thy blessings upon them, Thou seest them reign eternally with thee. O divine Love! how dost Thou love to communicate Thyself?

But what signifies it to Thee whether I be saved or lost? Can I give Thee anything Thou hast not? What delight dost Thou find in remaining with the children of men, in possessing their souls, and in transforming them into Thee?

O divine Love! Thou requirest nothing from those who are thine, but their love. He who loves Thee not, knows Thee not; and he who loves Thee need not ask Thee for anything else. Thou art a consuming fire, O my
God! that seeketh only to extend and communicate Thyself, and it being impossible to make us gods by nature, Thou makest us such by Thy benefits. The tongue cannot express, the ear hear, nor the mind conceive, and nothing but love alone can experience, what Thou hast prepared for those who love Thee purely. Thy thirst, which is a thirst of love, cannot be quenched except by our love; and it will never be fully satisfied till we possess the same happiness whereby Thou art happy.

How many times, O my Saviour! have I offered Thee gall and vinegar instead of the love I owed Thee? But why do not I love Thee? Why do not I love Thee with all my heart? What do I find outside of Thee comparable to Thee? Thou hast created my soul capable of possessing Thee, and I seek away from Thee such things as may amuse it, but cannot satisfy it. As Thou hast given it, in creating it, a hunger and thirst after the supreme good, it cannot be satiated with the possession of perishable goods: they do but provoke its hunger and thirst, because Thou alone, O my God! canst satisfy both.

Wretched that I am! I experience it daily, and do not yet comprehend it. Thou refusest the gall and vinegar that were presented to Thee, and wouldst likewise have refused any other liquor, because Thy thirst cannot be quenched but by my salvation. Permit me to say it, O Lord! I experience some such thing: I taste unprofitably of the refreshments which creatures present to me, find nothing but bitterness therein, and my thirst is not quenched, because it cannot be quenched but by Thee alone.

As the heart panteth after the fountains of water, so my soul, disgusted by the world and itself, panteth after thee, O God! who alone can quench the thirst with which it burns. When shall I come and appear before the face of God? When shall I behold the beauty of Thy countenance? I seek Thee on every side, and till I find Thee, I support myself only with tears. They have been my bread day and night, since my spirit began to sigh after Thee, O Thou life of my soul! O my treasure and beatitude! in a desert land, and where there is no way and no water my soul seeks Thee, with an earnest desire to see thy power and thy glory. (Ps. xli, lxii.)

Delay not to grant me this happiness, O divine Love! be not revenged for the gall and vinegar I presented to Thee in Thy thirst, by letting me suffer long that thirst which I have of possessing Thee. Punish me not for my past ingratitude, by hiding Thy countenance from me, the sight of which alone can render me happy. I am unworthy thereof, I own, but if I do not deserve that Thou shouldst satisfy my desires, satisfy Thy own. O Lord! inflame me with Thy love and transform me entirely into Thee.

Thou knowest I cannot give Thee my whole heart, nor quench the thirst Thou burnest with, if Thou Thyself dost not give me that living water, which alone can quench Thy thirst. Thou hast promised it, O Lord! to all those who ask Thee for it with faith and love, but Thou must give me that faith also and love, that I may be indebted to Thee for everything.

I love Thee, O my God! I believe Thou canst give me all the goods I desire. My heart begs them of Thee, and invokes Thee with all its strength. Let all my desires tend towards Thee, and my love seek nothing but Thee. When will the time come, wherein I shall live only for
Thee, O my true life! When shall I leave all things to possess Thee. O treasure of eternal goods! When shall I attain to the happiness of seeing Thee, O my sovereign happiness!

O most pure Mother of God! I conjure you, by the pain you felt in seeing the gall and vinegar presented to your well-beloved Son, to obtain for me a thirst after justice, and those living waters which alone are capable of quenching my thirst. Amen.

His last agony and death

Christ lived on earth thirty-three years and three months, reckoning from His birth, and thirty-four years, reckoning from His conception; and He lived all that time in continual sufferings. He spent the time of His infancy in a foreign land, far from His native country and relations, in order to avoid Herod’s persecution. From His infancy to the age of thirty years His most ordinary occupation was to pray to His Father for the salvation of sinners, to obey Joseph and Mary, and to practise the most excellent virtues in obscurity and retirement. He employed the last three years of His life, in preaching the evangelical faith, in working miracles, and in heaping benefits on men.

These three parts of our Saviour’s life, like three great rivers, after having carried rich cargoes and fertility everywhere, ended at last in His Passion, as in an immense ocean of all blessings. His life was short, if we count it in years, since He died in the flower of His age; but we may say that it was very long if we consider everything that He did. He fully accomplished the work for which He had come on earth, made satisfaction for all the sins of the world, reconciled men to God, left us perfect examples of all virtues, acquired for us infinite merits, and obtained from His Father all that He had desired.

He never spared His body nor His life, and became like a sinner in all things with the exception of sin. For that purpose He concealed the glory of His divine soul and the majesty of His divine person. He abandoned
Himself to the fury of His enemies and suffered all the torments that they inflicted on Him. He sacrificed for our salvation everything He had received from our nature, that is, His flesh, His blood, His strength, all His actions and all His thoughts. Nothing remained to Him but life—a life which, humanly speaking, ought not to have ended that we might have had Him, who had given us such resplendent marks of His infinite love, living among us always.

It is true that, as St. Paul (Heb. ix, 27) says, it is appointed unto men once to die, but ought that decree to have extended to Him who is the true life? Yet He chose rather to suffer death than to set bounds to His love, and not to give, for the salvation of men, the thing in the world which men hold most dear.

He could not die by sickness, because He had a perfect constitution, and consequently was immune to disease. Neither could He perish by any unforeseen mishap, for such accidents, unforeseen by men, are always foreseen by God, and so it might have been claimed that our Saviour had procured His own death. This would not have been in accordance with His character as the Author of life, who was to be for us, in all His actions, a perfect model of all virtues. It was necessary, therefore, that He should expire in the midst of torments, in order to testify more love for us, to acquire for us an immense treasure of merits, and to make abundant satisfaction for the sins of all men.

After having thus satisfied His love for men, and fully accomplished the will of His Father, He delivered Himself up to the power of death. He had already lost almost all His sacred blood, was weakened by the tortures He had endured, His breathing became difficult, and, as He did not lie on a bed but was suspended upon nails, which tore His feet and hands, giving Him not a single moment’s rest, His pains were much greater than those which people commonly suffer in their last agony. For the violence of the pain lessens in us by degrees at the approach of death, and we cease to feel in proportion as we cease to know, but our Saviour preserved all His senses fully to His last breath, and did not cease to suffer until He ceased to live.

Then His head hung down; His eyes, which had been the consolation of all the afflicted, began to close; His lips, from which had proceeded the words of eternal life, turned cold and pale. But that He might show the world that He died because He was pleased to do so, that He gave His life and that they did not take it from Him against His will, and in order to teach us to die well, after having taught us to live well, at the time when other men lose their speech, fortified by His own power, He lifted up His head, opened His eyes, fixed them on Heaven, and cried out with a loud voice: Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit. Afterwards He bowed down His head as a mark of His perfect submission, and opened His mouth to give up His last breath.

Thus died the Author of life, the Redeemer of the mankind, the Son of the living God, the Prince of Peace, the Father of the world to come, our Comforter, our Friend, our Shepherd, our Model, and our only Hope. And thus He died to teach us by His death to die holy, that is, to die submitting ourselves sincerely to the divine will and meekly restoring into the hands of our Creator the soul He gave us.

The best disposition for dying well is to have an
entire conformity to the divine will, for this disposition includes all others. It renders contrition perfect, prepares the soul for receiving the virtues of the sacraments plentifully, elevates and unites the heart with God in greater purity, and gains us the help of the saints. In addition, it humbles the mind of man, fortifies his faith, supports his hope, perfects his charity, makes him diligent of himself and causes him to place all his confidence in God. It also lessens the terrors of death by taking from us that servile fear which arises from self-love and which causes us so much trouble in those last moments. For he who resigns himself entirely to God desires nothing more, and seeks nothing but the execution of the divine will. He renounces everything that he has ever loved, and his only fear, in that most dreadful hour, is lest there should be anything between God and himself, because he loves nothing but the supreme goodness. He casts himself into that immense ocean of mercy, and thinks of nothing but of being cast into the arms of Christ in whom alone he can find true life.

Thus a loving resignation of ourselves into the hands of God, joined to a lively faith, and a humble confidence in our Saviour’s merits, constitute what is necessary for a holy death, and this disposition is wholly included in the words of Christ at His death: *Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.* For this word, *father,* is full of love and tenderness; *I commend* is an act of confidence and resignation; *my spirit,* that is, my soul, my life and, consequently, everything I hold most dear; *into thy hands,* into those divine hands which, faith teaches me, are full of mercy, which can supply all my defects and make me deserve the blessings they offer me.

From this we may conclude also that those who, out of duty or charity, assist their neighbour at death, can do nothing better than to exhort him, after an exact confession of his sins, to forget himself, and to think neither on the punishments he has deserved nor the state in which he shall find himself after death, but to resign himself to God with all his heart, without desiring anything else save that the divine Majesty may be glorified in His creature after such manner as He pleases. There is no better way of dying like a Christian and of securing our eternal salvation.

When our Saviour had expired, the sun recovered its pristine brightness, the heavens became serene, and there took place many other things which clearly showed that He, who had died, was no ordinary man. The Ark of the Covenant and the Tables of the Law were kept in the temple of Jerusalem in a place covered by a veil, and no person entered into that sanctuary except the high-priest, and even he did so only with great ceremony. The veil of the temple denoted that what was contained in the law of Moses was hidden, obscure, mysterious, and was but the figure of the true Messiah and of the new law. Then in order to make us understand that what had been prefigured had been accomplished, that the truth had been disclosed, and that the time had come in which Christ was to be adored by all nations, when He died on the cross *the veil of the temple was rent in two from the top even to the bottom,* and what had been hidden for so many ages was exposed to the eyes of all. Then ended the *law of fear,* which did but make slaves, and then was confirmed the *law of love,* which was for the *children.*

The centurion who, with a troop of soldiers, guarded
our Saviour, having heard the loud cry He sent forth at His death, and which seemed beyond the force of human strength, made open confession to the divinity of Christ, saying (Matt. xxvii, 54): Indeed this was the Son of God. Many, even of those who had loaded Him with insults and curses, seeing the earth quake, the sun darkened, and hearing our Saviour cry out with greater force than if He had been in perfect health, according to St. Luke (xxiii, 48), returned striking their breasts, touched with regret for their fault. They then called to mind His former miracles, praised His doctrine, blamed the cruelty and injustice of those who had put Him to death, wished for His presence and discourse, which had seemed so sweet to them: the virtue of His blood began to soften their hearts, and they judged Him more holy than the priests and Pharisees who, by a false zeal for religion, had delivered Him up to death.

O you imitators of the crucified Jesus! support with constancy the honour of your Master, and show to the whole world, and to your persecutors, that by carrying the Cross for His love, you triumph with Him over your own enemies and His!

CONTEMPLATION

O Good Shepherd! now is the hour when, according to Thy word, Thou art to lay down thy life for thy sheep. Thou hast also said that greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends; but is it necessary therefore that Thou shouldst die? Live, O Thou true friend of my soul! Thou hast already given me too certain proofs of Thy love, and I am very well assured and convinced of it.

But how comes it that death presumes to approach to Thee, who art the fountain of life? How canst Thou depart from this world, and leave me in it? How can I remain therein without Thee, O my only consolation?

The pains Thou endurest in that state, O my God! are excessive. Thy precious body becomes heavy by its own weakness, supports itself only upon the nails which fasten it to the cross. The wounds of Thy hands and feet are enlarged, and increase Thy pains every moment. Why dost Thou not at least take a little repose? Why dost Thou not take Thy breath sometime before Thou diest? Wilt Thou then be tormented without intermission, until Thy last gasp? O constant love! O invincible patience! O incredible perseverance!

What a noble example dost Thou give me, O my Saviour! I will follow it from henceforth, and remain close to the foot of the cross, there to bewail, in the bitterness of my soul, both for Thy death and my sins which have been the cause of it. But I know not, O most holy soul of Jesus! whether I ought to desire Thee to depart quickly out of Thy body, or to remain still therein. If Thou departest from it, Thou takest away my life; and if Thou remainest in it, Thou cruelly tormentest that innocent Lamb. Transport me into all the pains which it suffers, and do afterwards what Thou pleasest.

O Jesus, Thou love of my soul! is it possible that the light of my eyes should not abandon me? How can I see without dying that body become cold by the approach of death? Since Thou hast not the strength
to hold up Thy head, but bowest it down towards me, open Thy eyes once more, and look upon me with mercy. Penetrate my heart with the sweet light which proceeds from those dying eyes, and fill it with Thy love. For how can I live, after having seen Thee die, if Thou leavest me not Thy love to comfort me for Thy death!

O merciful Father! O loving Spouse of my soul! O faithful Companion of its pains! if I be without Thee, I shall be without a father, without a friend, without a master, without a spouse, and without a comforter. Thou wilt then die, O my Saviour! and I cannot oppose what Thou willest; at least abandon me not by dying, since Thou diest for me. But if Thou diest for me, if it be the love Thou bearest this miserable sinner, which reduces Thee to the mortal agony wherein I see Thee, canst Thou, O Lord, refuse me, in this last moment, what I shall beg of Thee?

Thou hast already made Thy will; Thou remittest Thy soul into the hand of Thy Father; leavest Thy body in the grave; carriest Thy riches along with Thee; and hast nothing more to give but Thy Cross. Leave me that Cross, O my Lord and my Father! let it be my portion, and a certain token of Thy love. I receive it, embrace it, will live upon it, and die fastened to it.

Pardon me, O my God! all the sins I have committed. After having done, suffered and prayed so much for me during Thy life, wilt Thou refuse me at Thy death the pardon I beg of Thee? I confess in Thy presence, O Lord! at the foot of Thy Cross, and in the sight of Thy most precious blood that, as an unnatural child, I have sinned against Thee, O Father, full of all goodness! as a faithless servant, I have served Thee badly, O Thou best of all masters! and as a negligent and ungrateful friend, I have abandoned Thee, O Thou true friend of my soul!

Look upon me in this moment when Thou art going to leave me, and hear the prayer I make Thee. I beg the Cross of Thee, O my Saviour! to comfort me in Thy absence; Thy love, to sigh continually after Thee; and a fountain of tears, to weep night and day for the misfortune of having offended Thee. Yes, O my God! Thy Cross, Thy love, and my tears, must be, for the short time that remains for me to live, the common food of my soul.

Ah, my Jesus! I behold the paleness of death in Thy face, Thy eyes are become dim, Thy soul is on Thy lips, Thou expirest.

Depart then, O sweet Jesus! since Thou wilt depart, my only hope! rest Thyself after so many labours, and finish the time of Thy exile. Depart, and give to the good thief what Thou has promised him: receive his soul, as the first fruits of the product of Thy Cross, as the pledge of the salvation of mankind; and let him take possession of Thy kingdom in the name of all sinners.

Consider the extreme sorrow wherein Thou leavest me by Thy departure, the hope and desire I have of seeing Thee glorious, impassible, immortal, wholly resplendent with light and majesty. Rise again, therefore, O Lord! by returning to life, Thou wilt restore it to my soul, it will revive with Thee, in order to possess Thee and be possessed by Thee, to be absorbed and transformed into Thee, O my Jesus, my love, and my sovereign happiness!

O most holy Mother of God! Queen of Angels, Star
of the Sea, and Refuge of Sinners! You, who with extreme pain beheld Him die to whom you gave life, and who expected with a firm faith and certain hope, the moment of His resurrection, grant that I may be crucified with Him; that He may receive me into the number of His servants, and that I may die, live, and reign with Him. Amen.