

Rev. Dolindo Ruotolo

The Sacred Scripture

The Gospel According to Luke

Analysis-Comment-Meditation

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Don Dolindo Ruotolo

Rev. Dolindo Ruotolo was born, in Naples, Italy on October 6, 1882. Ordained at the young age of 23 on June 24, 1905, he dedicated every moment of his long life to prayer and penance at the service of the thousands of faithful who asked for his spiritual direction and turned to him for help and comfort.

Paralyzed for the last ten years of his life, Don Dolindo Ruotolo died in Naples on November 19, 1970, in the extreme voluntary poverty he had lived all his life.

His body lies in the Church where he served as Pastor, *Our Lady of Lourdes and St. Joseph of the Aged*, Via Salvatore Tommasi, Naples, Italy. Today, more than before, people knock at his tomb, confident of his intercession and receiving many graces through his intercession.

Rev. Dolindo Ruotolo wrote a large number of books in his native Italian of high theology that were highly inspired. Today, his books are sold in Naples, Italy and only in Italian. In particular, Rev. Ruotolo wrote an analysis, commentary and meditation on the entire Bible in 33 volumes which has continually been highly acclaimed by Cardinals and Bishops. This volume is the first-ever English language translation of the volume on St. Luke's Gospel of that series.

In the United States, among many others, he is known by the Crosiers Priests, in particular Fr. Raymond Steffes OSC in Minnesota and Fr. Christopher Rengers, OFM in Pennsylvania, and Prof. Scott Hahn in Steubenville OH, who wrote a comment on one of Don Dolindo's books "*Come Holy Spirit*".

Currently a Servant of God, this holy priest's Cause for Beatification is underway.

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Introduction to the Gospel of St. Luke

I. The Kingdom of Christ

Jesus Christ does not rule in the universe like an earthly king; he said this himself: *“My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my ministers would certainly strive so that I would not be handed over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not now from here.”* He did not say that he was not reigning over the world, but that his *kingdom is not now from here.*, that is it did not have its characteristics and it was of a different nature: *but as it is my kingdom is not here (Jn 18:36)*. The kings of this earth impose themselves with power and seek their own gains and glory; they *dominate* not reign, because in reality, with all their laws and their malice, they represent more accurately a violent imposition rather than a government of love. Their subjects are always more or less rebellious, and they champ at the bit; the faithful to the regime represent an interested minority that remains faithful only because they have their own gains. This is the true story of all kingdoms on earth.

Never has a king succeeded in having a kingdom of love: had he succeeded, he would have had no need of fighting or an army. The words of Jesus: *If my kingdom did belong to this world my ministers would strive* are of an admirable depth, and they accurately characterize the kingdoms of this earth: they represent a more or less continuous struggle and constant hidden motives.

The kingdom of Jesus Christ is a true kingdom; it is the only true kingdom, regardless what the spineless adorers of the state say, they who are scandalized every time they believe that people fail to have a servile respect for authorities of earth. The kingdoms of the world are either administrative, and more or less comforted and affected by pathological state-worshippers, or are dominions of a single reigning house, or of a single group that controls everything, absolutely and exclusively for its own interests. Some truths are bitter, but they are truths to which nobody can disagree, because they bear the characteristics of axioms. It is enough to look at history - contemporary or past history - either there is a king ruling in his own interests, or a party ruling in the interest of its members.*

However, human commands never reach the soul and the heart; they are continuous impositions applied with the sounds of arms and of the military, and almost always end in rebellion and the passing of one bully to another. The more a state is authoritarian, thereby having the appearance of a true dominion, the less the subjects are subject to it in their souls and hearts.

* Don Dolindo wrote his Commentary during the Fascist era in Italy when there was only one political party that was allied to Nazi Germany; for this reason his observations reflected the reality of that time period, and he wrote with Christian courage.

(The footnotes denoted with an asterisk (“*”) are observations by the Bishop Vittorio M. Costantini who presented the Italian edition in December 1978.)

All kingdoms in history, in general, can be understood in the following way: a ruler imposes himself by force, at least on part of a nation; the laws imposed are proportional to the motives of the ruler and in reality, are always a source of hateful oppression and imposition for a part of the people. Law after law is created on whim or through arrogance, taxes upon taxes and restrictions of all kinds, gagging liberty, thought, and even our religion, against which they usually rage because, even helpless, our religion defends the divine right and human dignity.

It will never be forgotten in the history of human arrogance the self-described ‘legality’ with which the despicable tyrant, Adolph Hitler, is said to have assumed the supreme power in Germany. Here is the text of the law that nominated him as head of the Reich: Article 1: The Chancellor of the Reich Adolph Hitler is nominated in perpetuity as head of the German state. Article 2: This law is effective immediately. Signed: Adolph Hitler. Later he said to the four winds that he had been instituted head of the Reich not with violence but through legal means. This is insolence pushed to folly.

It is not useless for us to ponder on these considerations; actually we should do it more deeply in order to understand what a heavenly gift for us is the regality of Jesus Christ for the Church and in the Church. If man does not open his eyes and does not see the loving magnificence of this regality, he will always remain shackled to the block of earthly slavery, desperate and with no hope of light. If he does not understand the value - human, social and civic - of redemption and the beneficial repercussions of it in his life, he shall believe it always to be a way of participating in a form of cult, suitable to address a certain need for the divine, but outside the reality of life. We are too accustomed, maybe unconsciously, to regard the kingdom of Jesus Christ in the Church and for the Church in the same way in which we regard wretched religious sects, fragments of faith, generated by Satan, or childish philosophies hatched by the brains of madmen.

We are too used to putting at the same level of the celestial ecliptic, a candle stub and the sun, and to gaze upon with the same attention and appreciation, a putrescent sewer and the splendid mantle of the firmament.

It is necessary to come out from these insidious snares that shackle our thoughts and our lives, remnants of our miserable fallen nature; it is necessary to look at you, Redeemer Jesus, immortal King of the centuries, and to throw ourselves in the arms of your bleeding love that reigns, regenerating us continuously in the cry of the spasm and the immolation of the Blood.

The cross has been the regal bed on which you, Jesus, regenerated your subjects, and your Blood has run like a river of love to give us life.

You are the priestly victim; you ignore the conquest of vengeful blood, knowing only the conquest of the merciful Blood that gives life.

You do not know the impetuosity imposed by terror, but the mercy that is attracted with love.

You do not ask, you give.

You do not subdue, you free.

You do not impose yourself on upon reason, you ennoble it.

You do not have an army, but apostles.

You do not have generals, but bishops; you do not have a custodian of the fortress,

but the shepherd of the flock, free on the free fields of grace and love.

This is Your kingdom, and it is logical *that it is not of this world*, because it does not have any similarity with the dissonant kingdoms of our poor earth.

II. The Gospel of mercy

The Gospel of the kingdom, that we meditate in St. Mark's Gospel is followed by the Gospel of immolation and of mercy, that determines the characteristics and the ways of the kingdom of Jesus Christ. The lion that leaps upon the bastions of the world, roaring with love to prey upon love, is followed by the ox that ploughs fertile fields, and represents the victim of the altar. The configuration of the four evangelists as the four animals seen by Ezekiel is now in the classic tradition of the Church and cannot be put aside; its meaning is wider than we believe; its transcendent poetry is more beautiful than it is appreciated because in truth the four Gospels are the four aspects of Christ the Savior: the man, the King, the Victim and God; the pilgrim on our earth, the ruler of the centuries, the Priest and Victim, and the divine conqueror that carries away on his eagle's wings the miserable human creatures up to eternal heights.

The Gospel of Luke is called by the Fathers "*The Gospel of Mercy*" and mercy supposes a victim and an immolation. Everything is harmonious in this plan. The inspired author is a converted pagan, as it is usually believed, indicated by his very name Luke, which comes from the Roman name Lucius. He was from Antioch, he was an excellent medical doctor and fluent in the Greek language, as is seen from the classic and elegant way in which he writes. As a physician, he was used to having compassion and curing human sicknesses and had a natural attitude toward mercy; as man of letters he had sensitivity toward feelings. He remained a virgin, did not marry, and once converted to the faith, he kept his purity blameless. True purity, the fruit of virtue and love, generates in the soul sensitivity and a compassion for the failings of the poor human heart.

The harshest judges of the poor fragility of sinners are not found among souls who are pure, but among those who know the slavery of the flesh.

It is very possible that the human reason that motivated St. Luke to write his Gospel was indeed a feeling of compassion toward sinners. He heard the preaching of so many events on the goodness of Jesus and not having found them in any book, he thought to record them, almost as prescriptions of mercy to cure souls. The apostles, from fishermen became fishers of souls and he, from physician of bodies became physician of souls. He knew the pathology of sin in the sicknesses he cured, and he wanted to give to the sinners the relief of the divine mercy. God is marvelous in every disposition of His goodness; He made use of the compassion of St. Luke toward the sinners oppressed by sicknesses resulting from their sins, to leave to us a most precious memory of the mercy of our Savior.

St. Luke, who was a virgin, dealt more closely with the Immaculate Virgin, and he knew from Her the details of Jesus' infancy; a virgin evangelist, St. John, pushed his gaze all the way to the eternal generation of the Word; an evangelist virgin and doctor could talk to Mary, Mother of Mercy and gather from her most pure lips the stories of the fulfillment of the divine mercy upon earth with the Incarnation of the Word.

Being a physician, he could appreciate, more than others, the miracle of the virginal

conception, and he could affirm it with the authority of a person who could not believe such an incredible miracle, if he had not perceived in the story of Mary, and we could say, in her somatic traits, the splendor of that virginity which was beyond any comparison. Our minds remain in admiration of the marvelous ways of divine providence, that does everything with infinite wisdom, leaving nonetheless untouched human free will.

From the Blessed Mother he learned the beauty of virginity and mercy, and maybe for this reason he remained a virgin; his heart, in contact with the most pure lily, became spotless and perfumed, succumbing to the divine love. Fascinated with the divine mercy, he wrote his Gospel, to prove that Jesus Christ is the Savior of all people, be they Jews or pagans.

He was a disciple of Paul, the apostle of the gentiles, whom he met at Troas, and he was familiar with those who were eyewitnesses of the Redeemer, when He was walking on earth to evangelize it; because St. Luke was originally a pagan, he wanted to show that the kingdom of God was open to everybody for His infinite mercy, to the Jews, to Samaritans, to pagans, to publicans or sinners, to rich or poor, to all men of good will. He kept for us the account of the most beautiful pieces of the mercy of Jesus Christ: Mary Magdalene, Zacchaeus, the conversion of the thief on the cross on Calvary, the apparition to the disciples at Emmaus, and also the parables of the Pharisee and the publican, the lost sheep, the lost coin, the prodigal son, Lazarus, the rich glutton and so on.

He was not a eyewitness of the accounts he wrote, however, as he himself states at the beginning of his book, he recorded with care and precision the testimony of those who had been with Jesus Christ. He not only recorded the preaching of Paul, of whom he was a disciple, but he also did an accurate historical inquiry, perhaps also in opposition to those apocryphal gospels that already were beginning to appear among Christians. His Gospel, then, has an enormous historical value because it is the synthesis and the accounts of the eyewitnesses that were the contemporaries of Jesus Christ.

To whom the book is dedicated.

As St. Luke states in the prologue, he dedicated his book to a certain Theophilus, believed to be one of his friends, who also converted from paganism to Christianity as he did. However he did not write only for him but for all the faithful, and especially for the pagans, because of the great pain he felt for them for their blindness. In fact he avoids in his Gospel that which could alienate them. For example, instead of putting in opposition to the children of God, *the nations* or *the pagans*, as St. Matthew (Mt 5:47) he opposes *the sinners*, a general term that could apply to Jews as well as to pagans; instead of saying, as St. Matthew (Mt 6:32) *all these things the pagans seek*, he softens the sentence saying *after these things go men of the world*. He is careful to speak of public officials of the Empire, avoiding to blame the pagans for the fault of the death of Jesus (Lk 23:25) and does not mention the episode of the Canaanite woman (Mt 15:22) to whom Jesus had addressed in a not flattering way from the point of a view of a pagan.**

** The choice to recount some episodes in the life of the Lord, to select some and not other events, does not alter at all the historic truth of those narrated. What the evangelist wrote is the truth, guaranteed by divine inspiration. St. Luke wrote that he did not write everything that could be said about Jesus, what the Teacher had said or had done. For this reason the words of the apostle and evangelist St. John also apply equally to the narrative of St. Luke. St. John said, in relation to the Gospel he had written (Jn 21:25): "*There are many*

things that Jesus did, that if they could be written one by one, I believe that the world would not be big enough to contain all the books that should be written.”

All these nuances, and many others, in addition to demonstrating the historic truth of the book and its author, give it an eternal freshness that marvels us. For the same motives, he is silent *on the woman having an issue of blood that in vain had paid doctors and medicine to be healed*, for a sensitivity and respect toward his fellow physicians.

When it was written.

It is contested when the Gospel of St. Luke was written. The view that to us seems most credible is based on an affirmation by St. Paul. The apostle, in his second letter to the Corinthians, written in the year 58, states that of St. Luke is praised for his Gospel; thus in 58 the book must have already been written; since he had met St Paul in 51, the book had to be written after the year 51 and before 58.

His book can be regarded as consisting of a prologue and five parts; in the prologue there is the dedication and the reason why he writes the book; the infancy of Jesus Christ and his hidden life (Lk 1- 4:13); in the second part, Jesus’ ministry in Galilee (Lk 4:14 – 9:50); in the third, the last journey of Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem (Lk 9:51 – 19:27); in the fourth the Passion and Death (Lk 19:28 - 23:56) and in the fifth, the Resurrection of the Lord, subsequent apparitions and of Jesus’ ascension into Heaven (Lk 24).

He wrote, as we mentioned before, in a very elegant Greek, that in those times was the most widely understood language of the known world. Some attribute to him the ability of a skilled painter, besides being a physician, and in fact there are several images of the Blessed Virgin that the popular tradition ascribes to his brush. We do not deny this; as a learned person it is possible that also he knew how to paint; however the most beautiful paintings he left to us are his accounts of the Gospel, that are colored with the most brilliant truth.

He lived to the old age of 84 years, and after having accompanied St. Paul to Rome, he traveled, as it is reported by St. Epiphanius, to Dalmatia, Gaul, Italy and Macedonia. He died as a martyr in Patras, a city of Achaea.

III. The Gospel of Mary

Let us collect ourselves to meditate on this precious book that can be called the Gospel of Mary. What our Blessed Mother kept in her immaculate heart and did not say to anyone, she told to St. Luke and we must be grateful to this evangelist who kept for us the memory of a story so tender and admirable. Had he kept for us only the Magnificat, he would already deserve all our devotion and gratitude.

He was a very good doctor, as can be seen from the very way in which he describes the various ailments, for which he uses technical terms in the same way as they are found in the works of his contemporaries and especially in Dioscorides; we can, therefore, go to him with our sicknesses and beg him to intercede for us with the Most Blessed Virgin, to obtain for us especially the health of our souls and the gift of eternal life.

It is very soothing for us to meditate on this Gospel of mercy, because we are poor sinners, and it is most wonderful to meet along on our way the Queen of Mercy. What a marvel it is to read such beautiful poetry and know that the way of truth brings us to

Heaven! The story fascinates us but does not satisfy our curiosity, it nourishes the heart and pushes us to become wholly of God.

O Mary it is enough to see you, perfumed flower of our exile, to become revived in our painful pilgrimage; it is enough to see the divine fruit of your breast, to feel immersed in the divine mercy!

Where can we find more reassuring words in which to trust? Where can the heart find more wonderful forgiveness?

We are sinners, but the Blood of your Son is our trust, and you are the loving mother that brings us to Him, taking us into the arms of His love. Give us, o Mary, the grace to follow Jesus like little sheep to His sheepfold. And with your merciful love take us to the pastures of eternal life.

Chapter 1

1. The conception of John the Baptist, and of Christ. The visitation and canticle of the Blessed Virgin. The birth of the Baptist.

1 Since, indeed, many have attempted to set in order a narrative of the things that have been completed among us, 2 just as they have been handed on to those of us who from the beginning saw the same and were ministers of the word, 3 so it seemed good to me also, having diligently followed everything from the beginning, to write to you, in an orderly manner, most excellent Theophilus, 4 so that you might know the truthfulness of those words by which you have been instructed. 5 There was, in the days of Herod, king of Judea, a certain priest named Zechariah, of the section of Abijah, and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. 6 Now they were both just before God, progressing in all of the commandments and the justifications of the Lord without blame. 7 And they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they both had become advanced in years. 8 Then it happened that, when he was exercising the priesthood before God, in the order of his section. 9 according to the custom of the priesthood, the lot fell so that he would offer incense, entering into the temple of the Lord. 10 And the entire multitude of the people was praying outside, at the hour of incense. 11 Then there appeared to him an Angel of the Lord, standing at the right of the altar of incense. 12 And upon seeing him, Zechariah was disturbed, and fear fell over him. 13 But the Angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth shall bear a son to you. And you shall call his name John. 14 And there will be joy and exultation for you, and many will rejoice in his nativity. 15 For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and he will not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. 16 And he will convert many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God. 17 And he will go before him with the spirit and power of Elijah, so that he may turn the hearts of the fathers to the sons, and the incredulous to the prudence of the just, so as to prepare for the Lord a completed people." 18 And Zechariah said to the Angel: "How may I know this? For I am elderly, and my wife is advanced in years." 19 And in response, the Angel said to him: "I am Gabriel, who stands before God, and I have been sent to speak to you, and to proclaim these things to you. 20 And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak, until the day on which these things shall be, because you have not believed my words, which will be fulfilled in their time." 21 And the people were waiting for Zechariah. And they wondered why he was being delayed in the temple. 22 Then, when he came out, he was unable to speak to them. And they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he was making signs to them, but he remained mute. 23 And it happened that, after the days of his office were completed, he went away to his house. 24 Then, after those days, his wife Elizabeth conceived, and she hid herself for five months, saying: 25 "For the Lord did this for me, at the time when he decided to take away my reproach among men." 26 Then, in the sixth month, the Angel Gabriel was sent by God, to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the name of the virgin was Mary. 28 And upon entering, the Angel said to her: "Hail, full of grace. The Lord is with you. Blessed

are you among women.” 29 And when she had heard this, she was disturbed by his words, and she considered what kind of greeting this might be. 30 And the Angel said to her: “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found grace with God. 31 Behold, you shall conceive in your womb, and you shall bear a son, and you shall call his name: Jesus. 32 He will be great, and he will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father. And he will reign in the house of Jacob for eternity. 33 And his kingdom shall have no end.” 34 Then Mary said to the Angel, “How shall this be done, since I do not know man?” 35 And in response, the Angel said to her: “The Holy Spirit will pass over you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. And because of this also, the Holy One who will be born of you shall be called the Son of God. 36 And behold, your cousin Elizabeth has herself also conceived a son, in her old age. And this is the sixth month for her who is called barren. 37 For no word will be impossible with God.” 38 Then Mary said: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be done to me according to your word.” And the Angel departed from her. 39 And in those days, Mary, rising up, traveled quickly into the hill country, to a city of Judah. 40 And she entered into the house of Zechariah, and she greeted Elizabeth. 41 And it happened that, as Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 And she cried out with a loud voice and said: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. 43 And how does this concern me, so that the mother of my Lord would come to me? 44 For behold, as the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. 45 And blessed are you who believed, for the things that were spoken to you by the Lord shall be accomplished.” 46 And Mary said: “My soul magnifies the Lord. 47 And my spirit leaps for joy in God my Savior. 48 For he has looked with favor on the humility of his handmaid. For behold, from this time, all generations shall call me blessed. 49 For he who is great has done great things for me, and holy is his name 50 And his mercy is from generation to generations for those who fear him. 51 He has accomplished powerful deeds with his arm. He has scattered the arrogant in the intentions of their heart. 52 He has deposed the powerful from their seat, and he has exalted the humble. 53 He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. 54 He has taken up his servant Israel, mindful of his mercy, 55 just as he spoke to our fathers: to Abraham and to his offspring forever.” 56 Then Mary stayed with her for about three months. And she returned to her own house. 57 Now the time for Elizabeth to give birth arrived, and she brought forth a son. 58 And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had magnified his mercy with her, and so they congratulated her. 59 And it happened that, on the eighth day, they arrived to circumcise the boy, and they called him by his father’s name, Zechariah. 60 And in response, his mother said: “Not so. Instead, he shall be called John.” 61 And they said to her, “But there is no one among your relatives who is called by that name.” 62 Then they made signs to his father, as to what he wanted him to be called. 63 And requesting a writing tablet, he wrote, saying: “His name is John.” And they all wondered. 64 Then, at once, his mouth was opened, and his tongue loosened, and he spoke, blessing God. 65 And fear fell upon all of their neighbors. And all these words were made known throughout all the hill country of Judea 66 And all those who heard it stored it up in their heart, saying: “What do you think this boy will be?” And indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him 67 And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit. And he prophesied, saying 68 “Blessed is the Lord God of Israel. For he has visited and has

wrought the redemption of his people 69 And he has raised up a horn of salvation for us, in the house of David his servant 70 just as he spoke by the mouth of his holy Prophets, who are from ages past 71 salvation from our enemies, and from the hand of all those who hate us, 72 to accomplish mercy with our fathers, and to call to mind his holy testament, 73 the oath, which he swore to Abraham, our father, that he would grant to us, 74 so that, having been freed from the hand of our enemies, we may serve him without fear, 75 in holiness and in justice before him, throughout all our days. 76 And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High. For you will go before the face of the Lord: to prepare his ways, 77 to give knowledge of salvation to his people for the remission of their sins, 78 through the heart of the mercy of our God, by which, descending from on high, he has visited us, 79 to illuminate those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to direct our feet in the way of peace.” 80 And the child grew, and he was strengthened in spirit. And he was in the wilderness, until the day of his manifestation to Israel.

2. The Prologue

Saint Luke begins his Gospel with a brief prologue. He starts to explain why he writes and the criteria that guide his work. Many people, listening to the preaching of the Apostles, had taken notes to preserve the memory of them. They had written down some of the events, more or less detailed, on the life of Jesus, according to the witness of those who were present at the time, and had been commissioned to preach them. These notes and these stories, however, related to the public life of our Redeemer. They were not written with any plan in mind, so to speak, or for any historical purpose. They were single episodes, and those who did not know about them, could not have a clear understanding of these grandiose events.

The holy Evangelist—perhaps moved by his famous and most dear friend, Theophilus, a new convert to the Faith—started to conduct diligent research on the happenings from the very beginning, in order that his dear friend, and other pagans converted to the faith, would have a true story, obtained directly from its historical sources, precise and detailed, to confirm in their hearts the faith received by the apostolic preaching. It is evident that the Holy Spirit moved St. Luke above all to write, making use of human occurrences to confirm him in this work.

The action of God never excludes our cooperation; on the contrary, in some cases it almost seems that God takes it into consideration with loving respect. The inspired Author does his work, and becomes a free and active instrument in the hand of the Lord. The work and the human cooperation are certainly guided by the Spirit of the Lord, made easy by his grace; thus the inspired Author is as if gently moved in his search, and then fully enlightened by the divine inspiration to accomplish the work desired by God.

The Prologue of the Gospel of St. Luke is not without value for us, because it is a precise witness of the value of the tradition of the Church. Those words: *Sicut TRADIDERUNT nobis qui ab initio ipsi viderunt et ministri fuerunt sermonis*, are final words against those who deny the tradition, because it is evident that the Gospel has come to us

in fact through the tradition and the living word. This tradition cannot be entrusted to everybody, but to those who guard it in the name of God, thus to the Catholic Church and to those who support it, commissioned by the Holy Spirit. Many may know the traditions of the Church, and many have attempted to draft the story of the evangelical events; but only the one who has the authority by God can determine the authenticity and the truth. A tradition left to one's own fancy cannot be source of light and truth, nor could it give the certainty of what it teaches.

St. Luke conducted his historical research *from the origin* of the facts, and he certainly did not only deal with the Apostles, but with the most Blessed Virgin Mary. The oriental tone of the canticles that he quotes, and their psychological characters, so well proportioned to Mary, to St. Zechariah and to the old holy Simeon, as we shall see, shows clearly that he drew them from the very lips of the most pure Virgin; he did not change a word of it, accustomed as he was to the scientific accuracy from his own medical profession. His memory was trained to hear from his sick patients the clinical account of their illnesses.

Many had written on the life of Jesus Christ and his works, and yet the holy Evangelist thought it useful that he too should write about it. The delicacy of his personality, as it appears by all his writing, meant that he refrained from making any judgment on what others had written. That he decided to start a work of *diligent* research shows that not all who had written about it had been accurate or precise; there is an indirect hint in those words to the apocryphal gospels, always rejected by the Church.

May our life be a living Gospel

To research, to know, and to practice the word of God: this is the main occupation of our Christian life. To reduce all our religious culture to a few facts, poorly assimilated, and to believe to know everything with few elements of faith means that the true program of our Christian life, that is to know, to love, and to serve God, is not understood.

If in everyday matters of life, which are of small importance, we seem never to learn enough, in spiritual matters the knowledge is inexhaustible, both in theory and in practice. It is necessary for us to meditate on the works of the Saints, and ponder upon these in depth, in order to give our soul a clear certainty of what is already known and leads to the holy life.

The reading and the meditation of holy books nourish our love towards God, and direct us to the practice of solid virtues. Only in this way, so to speak, we can write in our life a living Gospel, and be for others like an open book of grace and knowledge. This is the endless occupation of the Church, that searches in every age the history and the truth of her marvelous treasures of wisdom, and with the works that she does with her unceasing apostolate, gives to souls the bright light that, like a strong sunshine on plants, makes bloom a thousand shoots of goodness.

The world poisons the souls with its polluted publications that become like an endless flow of death. We must instead nourish the souls with celestial wisdom, contributing ourselves to propagate it, if we have this mission or the capacity, and promote with eagerness the good press.

This apostolate is not yet understood by all, but it must become part of the program of a good Christian life: to give a good book or a good newspaper or magazine

means to enlighten, guide and save a soul. The apostolate of the word many times becomes sterile; the apostolate of the printed matter, on the contrary, remains like a lighted lamp and silently continues that of the word.

3. Gabriel announces the miraculous conception of John the Baptist.

At the time of Herod, king of Judea, St. Luke says, there lived two holy people, righteous before God and irreproachable in all the commandments and the precepts of the Lord. Herod, called “the great” for the public works he had promoted in Judea, particularly in the restoration of the Temple, was the son of Antipater, who, under the pontificate of Hyrcanus, was named by Julius Cesar procurator of Judea. Through plots and schemes, Herod succeeded his father, obtained through the Roman Senate the title of king, and reigned from 714 to 750 of the Roman calendar.

Criminally bloodthirsty to an extreme, he reigned through slaughters, massacres and oppression of all kinds and he was the terror of his subjects. His life was an horror of vices and on the throne he was more a wild beast than a man; he had three of his children killed as well one of his brothers, and on the least suspicions sentenced to death many of his best friends. In contrast to this crowned monster, the sacred text portrays the peaceful couple of two Saints: Zechariah and Elizabeth.

David, in organizing the religious service of the Temple, divided the Priests in 24 classes, each called by the name of their leader. Each class served from one Saturday to the next, and in this weekly function, offered the incense and immolated the victims, staying in the living quarters of the Temple.

Zechariah was Priest of the eighth class, by the name of Abia; Elizabeth, his wife was also of priestly birth. They lived in a holy manner, and they did not have children, because Elizabeth was sterile. In those times to be sterile was the greatest disgrace, because every woman hoped to be the mother of the awaited Messiah. Being both old, notwithstanding all the prayers to God to conceive a son, now they had lost all hope. However, all those prayers were not in vain, and had their effect, overcoming all hopes. They were *both just before God and irreproachable* also before man, which makes us understand how deep was their interior holiness and how exemplary was their life. They did not blame God for their sterility that for them was a disability, but their life had a note of sadness, as plants without flowers.

Their house was lonely and silent, with thoughts of the death that would extinguish everything, and the rooms were dark with that fog of the inexorable passage of time, and they had no happy lights of new aspirations.

But what prayer is useless before God? Even when it seems not granted, even when it seems now an absurd to even think that it can be granted, is instead granted in a way far above any expectations, and blooms like a blooming tree in spring. St. Zechariah and St Elizabeth had prayed for very long time to God to have a child, but now old and having lost all hope, they continued to pray that God may grant soon the coming of the Messiah. Their prayer was doubly granted because they had a child and they saw the Messiah, who in fact was even in their kinship.

To avoid arguments among the Priests on call to the service of the Temple, the offices were assigned by lot every morning. The lot of Zechariah had been to offer the incense. The incense burned on the Altar of the perfumes before of the Holy of Holies, in

the hours of public prayer, that is from nine in the morning to three in the afternoon. Only the assigned Priest entered the Sanctuary and the people remained praying *outside*, that is, in the porches or in the courtyards of the Israelites or the women areas. Probably it was the hour of the Vespers, and Zechariah entered the Sanctuary to offer the incense. The multitude of the people fervently prayed, asking to be freed, since they were oppressed by the foreign domination. The glory of Israel had finished and everyday there were news of some oppressive abuse of power by the rulers. Maybe on that day the tribulations had been greater than usual, because usually it is during times of great afflictions that the prayers become more fervent, and hasten the hour of God.

Zechariah, on hearing the lamentations of his people, lifted with more eagerness his heart to the Lord, and considering his own affliction, deeply humiliated himself. He felt unworthy to do the sacred functions; he feared that God would reproach him, believing to be the least and the basest of the Priests. Certainly he was in one of those moments of self-abasement, because the Lord chooses these moments to reveal Him to a soul. The very fear, that overcame him in seeing the Angel, could be caused by this interior humility, believing that He had come to reproach him.

He put the incense on the flame, and in the solemnity of the moment, remained absorbed in deep prayer; the solemnity of the place, his faith in ministering the incense, diverted him from all the surrounding, and with deep respect he turned his heart to God, and his prayer, like the spiral of the perfumed smoke of the incense, rose highly. He was all absorbed in God, and in his service to Him, and was praying. When all in a sudden he startled with a mysterious fright that took hold of him: on the right side of the Altar, unexpectedly, a human figure had appeared, most beautiful, majestic, resplendent, adoring God with such a deep recollection as if all creation had come to a sudden standstill in that instant.

The figure did not say a word in that moment, but all his appearance was like a living word: it was like as he were elevated, like a shining cloud, his eyes, the color of the sky, were sparkling bright, vividly reflecting the splendor of the eternal glory. The light wrapped around him, and it seemed that on his shoulders a regal mantle unfolded in two powerful wings. But they were not wings; they were the expression of his nature, swift like a flash of lightning, and fast to the commands of God. His hands were raised high, clasped in a gesture of immense love; but they were not hands, they were the expression of a serene and irresistible power that embroiders and disposes, and the heavens seemed mute to their command. His body was all light and radiance, showing his spirit, a candid halo that wrapped a life all-active in the Divine Will.

Zechariah stayed in a daze, stopping, fearing, perturbed, while a deep peace flooded him, the peace of God.

The Angel spoke to him; his words were peaceful and penetrating, because they were not the articulation of syllables expressing a concept, but a shining concept, a life that seemed words and was truth. Our word is the vibration of matter moved by the spirit; the words of the Angel were the radiance of the spirit that manifested the light of the Divine Will. The brilliant sight of the Messenger of God was full of goodness, a goodness that man cannot even conceive, and its rays are the warmth of the Christian charity. He reassured Zechariah with one word: *Do not fear*; he elevated him with good news; his prayer was granted and Elizabeth would have a son for their joy and happiness. In a few words he sketched the greatness of the son that God was giving to him, a greatness

unknown to the world that rejoices in miseries and believes to be heights what instead are abysses.

He would be great *before God*, that is, he would have his soul filled with supernatural gifts, and as consequence he would be in contrast with the world. He would not drink wine nor strong drink, because the Holy Spirit would fill him, beginning from the womb of his mother. The strong drink—the *sicera*—was an intoxicating liquor obtained through the fermentation of wheat, or barley, dates, millet, and so on, to make a kind of beer that people would drink to be more alert in their work. The strength of the Baptist, however, would be the Holy Spirit, marvelous rapture of the soul.

It does not strengthen the body, making it instrument of the soul, but rather it fortifies the soul, dominating the body and matter, lights a great interior fire, and instills an immense love to the heart. It does not simply move but enriches, and gives to its powers a spiritual vigor that transforms it, making it able to do great actions, according to the specific plans of God.

In material or human actions when the body is fortified, it becomes more ready; in the spiritual and the supernatural, the body is dominated by penance and temperance, which makes the soul a more docile instrument of the Holy Spirit, because it weakens its tension toward the material life. This is the very deep meaning of the word of the Angel that, after saying that the Baptist would not drink wine or strong drinks, adds that the Holy Spirit would fill him. He would do such a penance, to become a creature of pure spirit, completely strengthened and enraptured by the grace of God.

The fullness of grace would give to him power over the souls; he would dominate the spirits, converting many sinners to God. This is in fact the greatest manifestation of the spiritual power, because any power or any authority is useless, before the stubbornness of the heart; on the contrary it makes the highest power to subdue and convert without oppression.

Filled by the Holy Spirit, the Baptist would subdue and have power over many hearts, converting them to God; he would predispose the coming of the Messiah, *“that he may turn the hearts of the fathers toward their children, and the unbelievers to the wisdom of the just,”* making alive again, in his degenerated generation, filled with vices and unbelief, the great desires and the great aspiration of their fathers, and faith in the divine promises. The Patriarchs, in fact, had become very much detached from the life of their descendants; the loosening of morals had made the people of Israel almost unrecognizable, thus making necessary a rebirth, to have people able to accept the imminent coming of the Redeemer.

Zechariah becomes mute

The program was marvelous, but Zechariah understood very little of it, as it becomes clear from his answer; he was all focused on the promise of a son, and he thought that the Angel’s promise was preposterous, because both he and his wife were now old; thus instead of exulting and thanking God, he said with great distrust and unbelief: *“How shall I know this?”* Also the B.V. Mary, at the annunciation asked a question of the same Angel, but there is an abyss of difference between Zechariah’s reaction and Mary’s. Zechariah’s was focused on himself: *“How shall I know this?”* (The meaning of this interrogation expresses a doubt, almost if he said: “How can I believe it?”)

Whereas the B.V. Mary was focused on the Divine Will: *“How shall this be done?”* Zechariah rejected the annunciation as absurd, Mary asked what God wanted from Her and in which way she would have accomplished his will.

“How shall I know this?” It was the manifestation of the “I”, the “I” that pretends to raise himself to be the judge in the plans of God; the “I” that chokes the most delicate germs of grace, assuming to want to evaluate everything with his own idea; it was the word of his own mind in opposition to the word of God; it was a most wretched human word that dared to overcome the one of God; thus, and rightly so, Zechariah was deprived of his word and became mute. The Angel became stern, his majesty flashed like a thunderbolt. Zechariah had not considered in answering him that he was speaking with a superior being, and that he lacked prudence. Now the Angel called him up to reality, telling him: *“I am Gabriel (which means the strong one of God), and I stand before God.”*

In pronouncing those words, it shined in him what his name meant, and a ray of divine majesty enveloped him. He was *the strong one*, the expression of the true strength, something immense, deep, large, towering, something gigantic and powerful, able to shake the hinges of the world: *“I am Gabriel,”* it was a celestial word, that made its meaning known and by saying it, it made it alive. These words hit Zechariah like a thunderbolt of extraordinary power; they contracted his nerves and made him dumb, even before the Angel would tell him. He did not believe, his soul had been dumb, before his body would become dumb, and his dumbness became a sign of truth: he showed with a visible punishment that what he had heard, was not a deception.

In an unbeliever the spirit becomes dumb and prayer is silenced.

What a lesson for us, who are used to oppose with great ease the plan of God with our own plans and to search with our foolishness to appreciate the ways of the Lord! *“How shall I know this?”* Here our program comes before the grace that can touch and transport us; we stop and we want to evaluate everything in terms of our own “I”; thus our spirit faints and our prayer remains mute.

Oh if we only knew to let go of ourselves in the divine Will, and in the divine action! *“How shall I know this?”* Here is the foolishness of our human word before the mysteries of the eternal truth; here is the attitude of those who look into the abyss of their own powerlessness, and do not know to believe in the power of God!

Zechariah looked at his old age and the sterility of his wife, and claimed to evaluate with this dead light the promise of the Lord; for this he lost himself and remained dumb.

The unbeliever looks at the subject and the laws of the flesh, thus he is unable to accept the truth of Faith. He does not believe, and he remains spiritually dumb, since he does not have in himself any word of truth. There is no one more disheartening than an unbeliever; he does not speak with words of truth; almost, so to speak, we would say, that he speaks with *signs*, as Zechariah did, and his words are only materialistic, because he does not have the interior word of truth, and it is a true sign of the punishment of God.

We believe that is our graciousness to comply, and our condescension to believe and pray, instead it is all a gift of God. When we are not worthy of the Lord because of our pride, we cannot believe and speak to God. This is a truth that we must well ponder.

Our words of faith and the voice of our prayers are the measure of our soul; as soon as our soul is misled, by the proud misery of our “I” or by the degradation of our senses, we lose our word, the interior word that makes us to say “*I believe*” and the exterior words that can speak to God.

A Priest could measure his life from this, to ascertain how close he is to God. When he finds it difficult to pick up his breviary, and does not know how to speak, then it means that his faith has become weak and his heart impoverished by the life of the world.

When a faithful person does not know how to speak to God, he needs to purify or to renew himself, because his spiritual muteness is sign of an interior paralysis.

The people were surprised that Zechariah did not reappear from the Sanctuary, which means that he remained in it for long time after the Angel’s annunciation. To have become mute was indeed for him a very strong sign that the vision was not an illusion; he became full of sorrow because of his little faith, and stayed before God in an intimate prayer begging to be forgiven.

When finally he came out, it was clear to all that he had experienced strong interior emotions, and from this the people understood that something supernatural had happened. Many tried to ask him questions, because a vision in the Sanctuary could mean an announcement of future events or warnings from God to his people; but Zechariah could only make signs. Maybe he made gestures of repentance, striking his breast, maybe only exhorted the people to pray for him, maybe he tried to quiet them to calm their fears; it is not possible to know, but in fact he remained in deep recollection for the rest of his week.

Elizabeth becomes pregnant

When Zechariah came back home, he told to his wife, maybe in writing, the vision he had, and she, after a while, realized that she indeed had conceived. Her happiness was immense, because she was finally free from the ignominy of her sterility, that almost cut her off from the benediction given to Abraham by God (Gen 22:17, 30:23); the Lord showed to her that He had not sent her away from Him, as she had feared so many times. She remained in her house for five months, without being seen by anyone. Maybe she wanted to make sure that she was indeed pregnant, and also to avoid indiscreet questions on the illness of her husband. She quietly prayed in her home, and that voluntary seclusion was as if she communicated somehow to her son that love for the desert and silence that prepared him, later on, for his great mission. Elizabeth was a holy woman, faithful to the Lord and faultless, and nonetheless sterility had befallen her. However, this sorrow was in the plan of God, to make her humble and prayerful, and to prepare her later for this greatest grace. Her motherly seclusion was thus prepared, as if in a perfumed nest of self-sacrifice and when Jesus’ precursor was born, she clothed him in her humility.

How many spiritual souls seem to be barren when on the contrary God prepares them for a strong fertility! Sometimes they must form a generation of souls, able to glorify God and to announce His kingdom. These souls feel a need to yearn for the Lord with sighs of a burning love that seeks only Him and His glory. In this kind of love that seems dissatisfied, they are training themselves for heavenly desires, preparing for that spiritual maternity that one day shall make their life happy.

How to fight the spiritual sterility

Discouragement or desperation is not the way to fight spiritual sterility, but rather fall into the same lack faith that St. Zechariah had for the words of the Angel and thus become dumb and unable to utter any prayer.

When St. Zechariah was offering the incense, he received the great annunciation, and the Lord consoled him during his priestly functions; this should be the path followed by a hardened soul: to pray, to attempt to do some work of sacred zeal. This is the secret of interior fertility. Satan, on the other hand, tempts the soul by inspiring lack of confidence and spiritual inertia and even makes a person believe himself to be on the edge of perdition. Satan, most treacherously, wants to make it impossible for the soul to have a simple, sincere faith and that humble abandonment to God, which makes the soul to hope against hope. The Angel who speaks to the soul is the Priest, and it is necessary for it to accept his assurance, if it does not want to fall into an abyss of darkness, from which it cannot rise and thrive again. Pessimism, looking on the dark side, is always deadly for the life of the spirit. On the contrary hope and abandonment to the Divine Mercy is the secret of a great life.

Is not a plant pruned to make it flourish more richly? God prunes the souls with aridity, sinks then humility, makes them aware of their weaknesses and then, at the right moment, enriches them with grace and accomplishes in them His great designs. A plant is not restored uprooting it but fertilizing it; similarly the humility is the best compost for our interior powers, and when its degree is sufficient according to the plan of God, then these powers flourish all of a sudden, to give true fruits of holy life.

4. The Annunciation of the Angel to Mary.

In a small village, that was famous not for its greatness but for the proverbial scorn attached to it, lived a humble, holy young virgin married to a humble carpenter. When people wanted to give an epithet of scorn, they would say: “He is a fool like someone from Nazareth”, and that village was so humiliated that it did not believe it could ever give birth to something good. The Lord, who scoffs at human views and is pleased with humility, chose that very town as the place for His incarnation. Just as he gently puts the soft pod in the honeycomb and sends the fertilizing dew in the night, similarly he wanted to rest in humility and descend in a place most hidden to men.

Humility

Humility fascinates God, because it is the flame in which his light can reverberate and his greatness can be made manifest. He, who knowing himself generates the Word, does not find any other place where to place the Word, the flower of Jesse, but in humility, the knowing of one’s self, in littleness. The creature, knowing herself and humbling herself before the Creator, attracts Him; in the sublime void of humility, He shines, because in lowering herself lovingly, the creature shows appreciation for God, and also has something of that eternal knowledge of the Eternal Word. It is a mystery of love unknown to the word.

Pride, by its own nature, obstructs and blinds; it is the refusal to recognize God; it is the appreciation of oneself and becomes the least suitable to receive the eternal light, because of its dullness, and it is anchored to its dumbness. The humility, indeed the humility, what a flavor of peace and fertility has this most sweet virtue! Every life, every precious richness of our world, bursts forth from humility: plants grow from seeds, always tiny and deep in the ground; the gem comes from the darkness of a mine; gold is deep within the earth or in the rushing waters of the rivers; the pearl is among the halves of a shellfish anchored to reefs in the depth of the sea. Life is not born if one creature is not humbled by another; it does not flourish in dazzling light but in the silent mystery of the gestation. Everything that appears conspicuously or makes too much noise is more the sign of death than of life.

Humility, indeed humility, how high is this ineffable lowness! It bends down to receive the embrace of God, and becomes power and wisdom and love! Humility, indeed humility, how beautiful you are in your hidden splendor, gem of most pure water that collects the ray of the divine Love and rejoices in silent contemplative adoration! Humility, indeed humility, the virtue that attracts the angelic hosts just as the mother's tenderness is attracted to her baby sleeping in the crib. The heavenly Hosts, after the fall of Lucifer and his group, have a horror for pride and are attracted by the humility that made them eternally blissful!

The holy young Virgin of Nazareth

Humility attracted God to earth, because the young holy virgin chosen by Him as his living tabernacle was the humblest of all creatures. Mary, in the lineage of David, of royal origin, was in fact unknown to everybody and lived as a humble girl of the people in the modesty of her work. She had consecrated herself to the Lord since her childhood in the Temple, and offered to Him her immaculate virginity. However, those who took care of her wanted her to marry a man of the same house of David, Joseph, and as the custom in those times, the marriage contract had been done without her knowledge. She obeyed, trusting to keep herself immaculate knowing that the man to whom she had been given was of extraordinary virtue. Maybe she spoke about it with him, but it is more probable that she trusted herself entirely to the Lord, waiting to be guided by Him in her mysterious journey of life. In her deep intuition of the divine Will, she understood that God had a plan in this chaste marriage and peacefully trusted in Him. This is not a holy supposition but what we can assume by her attitude toward St. Joseph, after the Incarnation of the Word, because she did not reveal to him, as we shall see, the mystery, but she awaited that God would reveal it to him.

The purity of the young holy virgin is ineffable. Nobody has ever delved into the depth of this mystery because she was completely pure.

Conceived immaculate, she was the only creature who bypassed original sin; her soul had descended from the highest Heaven, where God had created her, as a blossom full of grace. Her name, Mary, mirrored her greatness; she was noble as a great *lady*, in her virtue there was something immense; *beauty* was in her soul for the marvelous order of her powers and in her body for the perfection of the most pure lines, through which shined her holiness. She did not have any sign of pretence in her great virtues, and her most beautiful veil was her humility and simplicity.

Nobody would have ever suspected that this humble silent girl, radiating goodness and peace, who everyday went to draw the water at the public fountain, and worked with the spindle and weaved, was greater than the Angels; she was the *enclosed garden*, the dwelling-place of the Most Holy Trinity, *a fountain sealed*, a sanctuary of divine love, where the prayers and offerings of her heart rose like the purest hosts.

Saint Joseph

St. Joseph was also a virgin like her. He was a simple man; he had married her and was her loving custodian, looking silently after her, and full of respect that this immaculate purity awoke in him. From the regal status of his ancestors he had become poor and worked as a humble carpenter. His place of work was not the one of a skilled cabinet-maker, because he made ploughs, doorjambs and so on, to take care of their daily needs. No home was ever more peaceful and greater than theirs, even though materially it was modest and poor. Even today, it is impossible to enter their little home that is still kept in Loreto, Italy, as it was transported there by the Angels, without the feeling of a deep emotion; after two thousands years still is perceived the perfume of the virtues of Mary and Joseph; here sings with immense gratitude: *“Here the Word became flesh by the power of the Holy Spirit.”*

Mary was alone in her little house and prayed. She was alone, because St. Joseph had not yet legally brought her into his home, even though he was already married to her. God, in his infinite wisdom, had chosen him as custodian of the virginal and divine maternity of Mary - that before the world would remain hidden - and safeguarded the great mystery. God had chosen Joseph in order to give Jesus the legal paternity that made him descendant of David, however He did not want anyone to be present at the moment of the Incarnation of the Word, because Jesus had to be and appear completely apart.

It is possible, however, that at the moment of the Incarnation also St. Joseph was praying, because the Angel, as for St. Zechariah, chose the hour of prayer to accomplish the mission received by God. They were two hearts, far apart from each other, who were praying with ardent desire, united in the union of the love of God, filled with holy desires and fervid sighs, for the coming of the Redeemer. God, who is infinitely delicate in all His works, wanted that the two souls were united in Him and together be part of the accomplishment of the mystery. It was the highest union that was possible between two pure virginities.

The prayer of Mary

Mary prayed. We do not know the mystery of those prayers that attracted on earth the Word of God, but we can believe it by the context of the Gospel: the Angel greeted her *full of grace*, this was a surprise for him, so to speak, in seeing Her, because grace was very refulgent in Her; she was rapt in her deep humility, because it is written that God gives his grace to the humble. The Angel said: *“The Lord is with you,”* thus we can see that she was so deep in contemplation to be in intimate familiarity with the Lord, and to host Him completely in the sanctuary of her heart. The Angel called her with a Hebrew superlative: *blessed among women*, that is blessed above all women. She was beseeching the Lord for the great blessing for all mankind, and was yearning for the blessed woman

who would give birth to the Messiah, not knowing that in that moment she herself was the blessed, resplendent among all women for the virginal fertility that was going to make her become the Mother of God. According to the Jews, “woman” was almost a synonym of maternity and Mary had elevated herself among all creatures, with the wonderful miracle of a virgin fertility.

Mary prayed in an ecstasy of love, completely enriched by the Eternal love by the plentitude of his gifts, his fruits and his graces; therefore she was in a moment of extraordinary fervor, and also in a moment of extraordinary interior abasement, because the fervor, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, has always the flavor of a most profound humility. She was with the Lord, contemplating Him; she knew Him in a beatific vision, and consequently she could mirror her littleness. What was Mary before God? She was not only contemplating God as an elevation of faith, but God as He is, the Holy Trinity, and that is obvious, since He would reveal Himself in dazzling splendor to her, in this very moment, in which the greatest work of the Holy Trinity was going to be fulfilled: the Father was sending his Son, the Son was descending from his regal eternal seat, the Holy Spirit accomplished the mystery, giving Him, into Mary, a human body and a soul, shining of mysterious holiness. The heavens lowered upon the earth, and Mary saw Them in Their splendor, because They were lowering themselves to Her. Who ever can probe into the depth of this mysterious moment?

Mary prayed, contemplated, and meditated in silence. As she did, the earth disappeared for her, the walls of her little home became as if transparent; they no longer enclosed her within their confines. She flew through the Heavens. What a mysterious light! The Holy Trinity! The Eternal Origin of everything, infinite and all in Himself, the Father, the fire of eternal knowledge who eternally generates the Son and the fire of the eternal Love bursting forth from the Father and the Son, uniting the Father and the Son in personal Love, subsisting and eternal. What a spectacular sight!

Mary contemplated most of all His infinite Paternity. She saw His splendor most pure, most simple that defied all composition. She saw bursting forth, so to speak, from the Paternity, the Eternal Word and from the Word and for the Word, the splendor of the creation. It was the miracle of miracles, and with her immaculate soul she lowered herself adoring Him, motionless, in an incomparable happiness. She could see how far distant man was from God, and how faint his image was and his similitude with his Creator! She saw in the faraway distance the rotation of the stars; She saw the earth and on earth she saw man, a shoot rotting at his root, its branches withering and wasted, and filled, in fact, with the germs of death. She saw the miserable development of that life that had been created to glorify the Creator; She saw the passing of the human centuries, full of foolishness and crimes, in which the eternal ray of grace did not reach the creatures anymore, who instead were born as if on an icy summit, where the sun never rose anymore and emptiness and frost were endless. What sorrow for the immaculate heart of Mary to see that immense desolation with no hope for humanity!

She indeed saw the efforts of poor mankind to procure for themselves the light of wisdom and life, but this was even more sorrowful: here and there she could see small rays of wisdom. The creatures, with great effort, were trying to have more light by gathering the runners of their dried plants, but the result was only flashes of light and smoke. Everywhere She could see shameful creations made by human hands, put high on precious pedestals, the idols, abhorrent caricatures of the divine, suggested by satan. The

life, that was meant to rise up to the heights to the conquest of happiness in God, was instead plunged into the mire of the senses, moaning in its great unhappiness; consuming itself relentlessly in useless pursuits. She saw the great human powers as haughty puffs of air that opened up ostentatiously, and were dispelled by storms. The empires, the armies, the wars, the miserable efforts to conquer the Heavens were reduced, by their own fault, to be collectors of rubbish, destined for the fire.

The blessed soul of Mary paused before this display of death, and remembering the sighs of the Patriarchs, cried to God with all her love: Come, save us, do not delay any longer, send the One that has to come, to come down as dew on our parched land, flood us with the rain of your mercy, give us the Just One.

Mary prayed. Her people, the chosen ones of God, still had the promise of this immense blessing, and this promise had come down from generation to generation to the house of David. Mary looked toward her people and moaned. The faith was languishing and her people were not waiting for the Redeemer but for a ruler. The words of the Prophets had been crushed by the violent persecution of wicked people, they were forgotten; the desolation had reached also the holy place, and the sacrifices and the oblations were only poor ceremonies without life.

Mary prayed that all those images that she saw would come soon to an end, and she offered herself as a perennial holocaust, renewing the consecration of her virginity to hasten the miraculous maternity that would bring the Messiah. It was the most pure oblation attracting the fire of Heaven, the Eternal Flame, right on her, and accomplished the mystery.

It is the opinion of the Fathers, an opinion concurred upon and that mirrors the truth, that Mary hastened the moment of the descent of the Word of God among us; it was her prayer that opened the Heavens, and it is reasonable to suppose that this prayer reached its climax in the moment of the Annunciation. Therefore we do not make only pious guesses, but we reconstruct psychologically, even if faintly, the mysterious moments in which Mary became the Mother of God by the power and virtue of the Holy Spirit. The Eternal Love made her fruitful when She longed the most for the glory of God and the salvation of mankind.

She was absorbed in God, tending to Him in prayer. How beautiful She was! No painter ever had the possibility to paint this beauty, because nobody could ever paint the light of the spirit emanating from her body, purified by divine love. Mary was kneeling, in an attitude of deep humility; her hands were folded, her head veiled, her heart to God, and her eyes were half closed in most sweet modesty. Her large eyes filled with the light of God, were as if veiled by her eyelids, and were lowered, like the veil of the Temple, on the mystery of truth and love. Her purest forehead was serene and resplendent reflecting her great thoughts. Her pale cheeks, a light shade of rose, made her countenance like an open flower in mid-winter, waiting for the vivifying ray of sun. Her lips had a peaceful smile, a reflection of the interior happiness that enveloped her. *

She was a monument of purity, and the clothes she wore emanated the perfume of the most fragrant lavender. She had not the faintest idea that she could be the elect of God. She prayed.

*Don Dolindo's poetic descriptions evince his enthusiasm.

And behold an Angel of God appeared.

And in that moment a great light engulfed the little room that startled her, and in that light shined even more brilliantly an Angel of God.

Mary was not troubled or afraid, because she was used to be in the company of the Angels; but she saw that the heavenly messenger at that moment was not like the others. He did not have a majestic appearance, but looked like he was prostrated in reverent respect. He was refulgent of a stronger light because he was carrying the greatest message ever brought down from Heaven to earth; however his greatness was veiled by humility.

He paused for a moment, he bowed, admiring the masterpiece of God and exclaimed: "*Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you, blessed are you among women.*" And he stopped, adoring God who had created her so beautiful, because he saw in her the brightest reflections of his infinite sanctity.

Mary, the most humble Mary, heard these great words of greeting and she did not comprehend the meaning of them; thus she became troubled because those words had no resonance in her heart, that was accustomed to becoming smaller; they were for her words of an unknown language, and wondered what was their meaning. She did not suspect them to be praise, so she feared that they were a reproach, a sign of disappointment from God. This appears clear from the words that the Angel added: "*Fear not, for you have found grace with God.*"

It seems it is the psychology of souls who are truly humble; they fear praise, because words of praise are absurd to them and lie heavily on their hearts, because they seem like they diminish in a way the glory of God.

Mary was not troubled by the vision of the Angel, as some people believe, *but in his words*, as it is clearly written in the Sacred Text, and since she did not understand their meaning, like someone hearing an unknown language, showed the extent of her humility. It was in that moment of interior abasement that the Angel foretold her to be Mother of God: "*Behold you shall conceive in your womb, and shall bring forth a son; and you shall call him Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called Son of the most High; and the Lord God shall give to Him the throne of David His father; and He shall reign in the house of Jacob for eternity.*" The Angel said: "*you shall conceive in your womb and shall give birth;* thus she would truly become a mother; she would give her son the name *Jesus, Savior*; thus would be fulfilled the prophecies that announced the salvation of Israel and of the world; the Son would be called *Son of the Most High* and she would become the Mother of God. He would have the kingdom of David forever, the true kingdom promised to the holy king, the kingdom of grace and love that would last eternally.

Mary remained pensive. She was married to Joseph, she had promised to God her virginity and she knew that she had made the same promise to Joseph; what should she do now? She only wished to do the Divine Will, and she wanted to know how to do it. Mary in that moment performed an act of virtue greater than that of Abraham, so instead of showing herself ready to immolate her son, she showed herself ready to renounce her virginal integrity, if it pleased God. It would not be correct to say that Mary would have renounced her divine Maternity in order to not renounce her virginity; this would not be fitting to the full submission of Mary to the will of God. The Virgin only expressed her particular condition, and implicitly Joseph's: *She did not know man* and because of her vow, she could not know him; if God wanted her to have a virgin spouse, who for his

consecration belonged only to God, how would the conception occur? She could not break the vow that St. Joseph had entered with God, and she was asking how the conception could happen. But the Angel immediately reassured her; She would conceive by the power of the Holy Spirit, she would remain intact.

The words of the Angel were not a simple affirmation; they were a great light, because he spoke in the name of God. Nobody can ever understand with what loving respect an Angel pronounces the name of God, from whom he receives everything and in whom he delights.

Gabriel, in pronouncing the name of the Holy Spirit, shined with a love benefiting from the Eternal Love; and in referring to the virtues of the Most High, he evinced his reverent awe of the Almighty. He was refulgent of love and prostrated in so deep an adoration as to make one appreciate the infinite distance that exists between the power of the creature and that of the Creator. Mary in that moment gazed on the power of God and she abandoned herself in an act of unbounded faith. She did not need to know anything else, she did not need to investigate; she did not want to think of the external consequences of a miraculous conception; she prostrated her intellect and believed, bent her will and offered herself, opened her heart and loved God with intense love.

The Angel added that also Elizabeth, even though she was sterile, miraculously * had conceived a son, and she was already in her sixth month, because nothing is impossible to God. This was the human proof that he gave for Mary's human reasoning, because God, in his great works and revelations, always has a delicate respect for human reason. Therefore faith in Him is in this way sustained, and it makes this leap much easier. The light of reason is like the boost of a catapult to an airplane that flies without motor, and thrusting it all at once into the blue sky.

Faith and reason

We believe first, and then we have the light of reason itself, because from the heights it is possible to contemplate the valleys and measure the height; but from the valley it is not possible to contemplate the horizon of the heights. This is something of great importance: one cannot arrive at faith through investigation; but it is possible to investigate, if one believes, to love all the more, to contemplate and to believe.

The efforts of the human reason before having faith are useful only if they push us towards God, to ask to Him for Faith; and this is a transcendent and vivifying light that cannot be found in the poor caves of reason, just barely illuminated. It is much more beautiful to illuminate reason with the sun of faith, than to claim to shed light with the feeble light of reason. We do not ponder how narrow-minded our reason is before the sublime light of God; therefore we give it so much importance. The Saints simply abandoned themselves to the light of God, and always had their reason exceedingly lit, far more than those of the great thinkers of our poor earth.

* "Miraculously" in the sense that at her age was unconceivable to have the son she always desired but was unable to have until then; St. John Baptist was born as all children are born.

Mary believed: “Here is the handmaid of the Lord...”

Mary believed the great mystery that was announced to her and believed in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Her. She lowered her forehead with immense humility, she opened her heart with full dedication, and she pronounced the admirable words that would accomplish the great mystery of the Incarnation of the Word: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Let be done to me according to your word.* It was a solemn moment that my poor pen does not know how to express; it was the moment of the wedding of a creature with the Eternal Love, and the descent of the Word in her immaculate breast. It seems that this descent of love was like a huge weight that overwhelmed the scales of mercy and raised Mary up to where the Word had descended, up to eternal heights. Mary was absorbed in silence, rapt in God, offering herself entirely to Him, bowing down into the dust of her nothingness. In this act of most profound humility she almost disappeared, and she prayed ardently. She felt the deepest peace and perceived in her life a current of boundless purity.

Her body seemed to have become spirit, such was its brilliance, and ethereal in that great light overshadowing her. She was as a living canticle of love: her powers were singing in harmony with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, her intellect was refulgent of divine wisdom, her will was refulgent in complete union with God, an immense light of celestial knowledge inundated her making her able to converse in the Heavens, or better in the loving peace of the Most Holy Trinity, because from that moment God called her almost in the divine union: she was, in fact, the daughter, the spouse and the mother of God, having in herself the greatest image of the Most Holy Trinity, she was the generating principle of the Incarnate Word, she had him in her breast, united to her for the Eternal Love and she could echo the eternal words of the Eternal Father: *Ex utero ante luciferum genui te* (“*From the womb, before the day star, I begot you*”-- *Ps 109:3*) with the words of her maternal love: *From my breast, in God’s light, I begot you.* How marvelous! God speaking of the eternal generation of the Son makes a comparison between his eternal bosom to the virginal womb so that it would not seem strange that from a virgin one day could be conceived the Incarnate Word and Mary could compare her womb to the bosom of God the Father!*

* The sacred author of the Psalm 109 uses the human expression to point out the profound mystery of the eternal generation of the Word.

And the Word became Flesh

The Angel was witness to the nuptials of Mary with the Holy Spirit and of the Incarnation of the Word; that was a moment of immense joy for his ardent spirit, and he stopped in adoration. The Eternal Love that unites the Son with the Father, united the Son to the divine Mother. He kindled in Her an immense love and wrapped her in his flame; he overshadowed her, and almost made her disappear in that flame, making her almost incandescent in Himself. That love was He becoming a flame in the Heart of Mary, in a way that Mary lived all through Him, and for Him in that moment. He burned like the flame of Sinai, and did not consume her, but gave her new life. Mary was as taken up in Him, although keeping her own being. A vital germ of her breast was penetrated by the life that the Holy Spirit made active, and the development was initiated. The germ was not contaminated, virginal, penetrated without a lesion not by a human germ but created by the virtue of God, and the life that made it active was the Eternal Love. Mary could tell him in all truth more than a creature says to the other: "*Spouse of love you are for me.*"

The grace of the Holy Spirit radiates in creatures and enriches them with gifts so that they may be able to give praise to God; in Mary the Holy Spirit did not radiate but gave new life to her, rendering her fertile with the Incarnate Word, to the substantial praise of God; Mary felt twice divinized, and the gratefulness she had for God made her able to feel the sublime tenderness of the divine Paternity. She closed her eyes, glorified the Lord in exultation, and in the silence of her heart, remained prostrated in adoration, more beautiful than all the Angels in Heaven. Gabriel looked at her astounded; he saw transpiring from her the very light of God, because in that moment the grandiose miracle became real: *The woman enclosed and wrapped the man-God* in her own life, she made him live of herself, and she lived of Him, so that her life for Him had something of the divine. The blood that flowed in the Son was hers, and in Him became divine Blood by the hypostatic union; this then flowed from the Son in Her as divine Blood, communicating Himself to her. The great and the small circulation flowed through the immaculate Heart of the Mother, but flowed back in the Heart of the Divine Son, and came back to the one of the Mother. It became saturated naturally of oxygen in the lungs of the Mother and of divine life in the Son, so that the divine Son unceasingly rejuvenated her maternal life.*

This is the most significant marvel of the Incarnation of the Word in Mary, and it is the Communion that elevated her to the highest sanctity in each of those 20 or 30 seconds in which the blood completed the whole circuit of the arterial and venous system. The whole body of Mary was sanctified, and even into the smallest fibers where the capillary reach a diameter of five thousands of a millimeter, even into the organs furthest from the rational life, flowed the divine life, and sanctified all her activities, rendering them praises to God.

It was obvious that where the embodiment of Praise to God was living, everything would have to be praise, and the body that had given the temporal life to the Incarnate Word would be a Body with voices of loving praise to God.

*A brilliant and real observation that the blood of Mary that flowed nourishing the Heart of Jesus Christ afterwards flowed again in the heart of Mary... almost bringing a perfume of divinity.

Even the physical beauty of Mary became mysterious, because all her features radiated something divine. Her muscles were sanctified; the shade of her complexion was as if shining of the divine palette; she was brilliant like the sun, in fact more than the sun in a placid morning azure sky; she had the radiance of the dawn, in her pigments the glittering of the stars, in her eyebrows the majesty of the arch of the firmament, on her mouth the serenity of a silent midday sky.

She was a marvel of supernatural beauty, because all her immaculate body was expression of a new art of love that no sculptor can give to his sculptures. The admirable proportions of her figure were more simple because of her purity, more spontaneous for her abandonment in God; exhaled a perfume of life, even though halted in one gesture and prone in an enraptured adoration. Hers was not a body; it was a living canticle, a diffuse soft melody that was like the sublime whisper of the closed garden and the fountain sealed by God.

Her folded hands were as if singing in their abandonment to humility, her arms inclined to the Divine Will and her Body now Temple of God: like the archways soaring to the heights, raised high in empty space and triumphant over their weight delicate harmony drawn from the coarse matter; a singing gilded hidden archway, shining in the rays of the sun, like orbs of light in the tranquil depth of the nave; singing solid pillars of the apse, standing there like adoring cherubim and refined in the intricacies of their Corinthian capitals, and a singing an Altar that receives the divine Victim among the spirals of the most sublime incense. All her soul shined through her body veiled of mysterious modesty, and the canticle of her love echoed from all her immaculate being: *Magnificat anima mea Dominum (My soul magnifies the Lord)*.

The Heart of Mary, tabernacle of the Everlasting

The Angel, accustomed to the canticles of Heaven, had a start of joy; accustomed to take the prayers of the Saints, he held out his adoring hands to receive those of Mary, because in her prayers were already the sighs of the Incarnate Word; accustomed to watch over the hearts of men like a strong prince, he lowered himself before the Heart of Mary, tabernacle of the Almighty. He did not dare to speak any other word; he did not greet her, but bowed before her, like a flower before the sun, adoring Jesus, the divine dew that had descended most placidly on this immaculate earth in the night of the world. Then he flew back to the Heavens, rich with the first offerings of the Altar of the holocaust and those of the divine *timiama* (incense), to present them to the throne of the Everlasting One: *Discessit ab illa Angelus* (the Angel departed from her).

Mary remained alone; she did not move, all absorbed in prayer; she was wholly one with the Word of the Father, who had made himself smaller, silent, and prisoner of love. In that moment she was his word, and had to gather the Word from the depth of her heart and gushed it from her mouth, as a spring of water gushes forth from an abyss of the earth.

She prayed. In her most intimate possession was the divine life, far more so than of any other soul who, after Holy Communion, prays, thanks and adores his Redeemer.

She prayed, and her fervor was like a threefold flame lit in her by the Holy Spirit, it was a flame that wanted to envelop everything in charity, because Love of God brings

with it unfailingly love of others.

She prayed.

The little house was an abode of peaceful silence; it seemed like a little woods in full bloom, shining in the sunshine with the gurgling of cool fountains. Even the walls of the room seemed happy and rejoicing, tinged with mystical incense, like the walls of a sanctuary after a solemn Mass. The sun entered from the open window, and traced out on the floor a golden band, almost to form a carpet of honor for the Queen of Heaven, rich of God. There was in these humble rooms a freshness of life, like a golden field of ripe corn, because it was there, in that blessed soil that had matured the wheat of the elect. And although poor, it was extraordinarily rich, because it was the fertile ground that contained the most beautiful jewel of the centuries and the most splendid diamond of the eternal mine.

Mary prayed for all men. She felt all of them in her heart, and their miseries and their sufferings moved her. Her heart had expanded, and she felt Queen of graces. Her new charity gave to her a desire to donate: to donate graces first of all to the one who had to prepare the way of the divine mercy; this was her most profound desire. Inside her was Jesus himself who urged her, because he wanted to start the sanctification of men sanctifying his Precursor, since in that moment there was no one else who could start the accomplishment of his designs. This zeal inflamed her, and Mary left her house and set off in a hurry toward the Hebron mountains to reach one of the priestly cities where Zachariah and Elizabeth lived.

5. Mary meets with St. Elizabeth

Mary started her way toward the mountains and walked fast on the desert mountain roads. She sought solitude, because she had a great need to love in silence, and she ran because she was almost like spirit and did not feel the weight of her body.

Whoever has felt a moment of intimate union with God, knows how much life is imbued in the whole body, making it more subjugated to the soul and a more docile instrument of the spirit. This life must have been immense in Mary, so enveloped in the Flame of the Eternal Love. She almost did not touch the ground and, like a dove soaring through the air, raced along the way. She ran without effort, as if moved by the wind, since all creation bowed before her, and the air opened up before her, so as not to be a cause of the slightest opposition to her feet. She ran rejoicing in the spirit, with sure step and with no fear, because pure joy in the soul gives also to the body a new vigor and a stronger motivation to its movements. Her feelings can be deduced from those expressed to St. Elizabeth, sublime expressions of her blessed soul: she magnified God, rejoicing in Him her Savior who was living in her breast; she regarded herself as the lowliest and considering her great mission through the centuries attributed to the Lord all her greatness, pondering on the consequences of the mercy of God on earth, the scattering of the proud, the abasing of the mighty and the lowly who would be exalted. Full of God, she conversed with Him, loving Him with an intense love, full of gratitude for the accomplishment of the promises given to Abraham and to his posterity; she sang in the exultation of her spirit and she poured forth the fullness of her love before her holy cousin.

The greeting of Mary.

Soon she arrived at the house of Zachariah and *greeted Elizabeth*, as it is written in the Sacred Text. She greeted her with the words that were in use at the time, *Peace be with you*, or with similar words, and at the sound of her voice the babe in the womb of Elizabeth leapt for joy, and she was filled with the Holy Spirit.

The blessed voice of Mary was the voice of the Redeeming Word in her, since he possessed her and exalted her whole life; it was a saintly and sanctifying voice that performed what it said in the greeting of peace, and at the same time sanctified the Baptist in the maternal womb and sanctified his mother filling her with the Holy Spirit.

Elizabeth saw Mary in the splendor of her superhuman beauty, and she was profoundly impressed. From walking at a fast pace, the face of Mary had brightened: she was like a most brilliant work of art, a mix of simplicity and great majesty, humility and glory, a harmony of profound joy and dignified unspoiled calm; she was far more beautiful than any creature that has ever existed and was most charming, because she radiated sanctity and peace from each movement and word.

Mary was still a young girl; she was about fifteen years old, and all her being had that chaste and fascinating candor proper to youth. She was a flower open to life and, because opened by the virtue of the Holy Spirit, in her was kept intact that candid wholeness that is proper to virgins. She seemed an Angel of Paradise, more than an Angel, in the splendid ray of the Divinity that rested in her, and radiated around her a most sublime anointing of grace that satisfied the spirit, and lovingly roused her to God. Her voice was not that of a human creature: it was something mysterious, penetrating grace into the heart, and very softly, giving a feeling of calmness; it was like a melody full of expressions drawn by a most sweet instrument.

The greeting of St. Elizabeth

St. Elizabeth, then, seeing her so great and so beautiful, moved by an interior inspiration of the Holy Spirit exclaimed: *Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb*. She hugged her, she embraced her to her heart with a motherly effusion, since she was already advanced in age; but in hugging her she felt something of the divine, she understood by grace the mystery of her divine Maternity, she felt she was hugging the Queen of Heaven and she added: *And how have I deserved that the mother of my Lord, that is of my God made man for the salvation of all, should come to me?*

With these inspired words the testimony of the divine Maternity of Mary and her indescribable greatness was as if engraved for the centuries. Mary is not indifferent to those saved by the Redeemer, she brings Him to them, she offers Him to them, she radiates her grace and her mercy, she offers joy, she is sanctified in his name and she is inseparable from Him in the work of salvation.

If she were only a channel through which the Redeemer passed, as the Protestants maintain, Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, would not have turned to Her but to the Divine Son who was in her womb; but on the contrary she exalted her, blessed her among all women, and she called the Redeemer her fruit, fruit of the most pure plant that, truly, only She could give. A plant is a channel of the fruit, it begets it, nourishes it and matures

it; it is necessary to go to the plant to have it, and without the plant it is impossible to pluck the fruit.

Elizabeth saw in her all that splendor of life and subconsciously contrasted it to the humiliating dejection in which her spouse, dumb and deaf, had come to her after the vision of the Angel, and she understood that faith in the word of the Angel had accomplished in her the great mystery, and the unbelief of her husband resulted in his muteness and the deafness.

Psychologically, that infirmity of her husband had given not a few troubles in the governing of her household and thus she exclaimed: *And blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord shall be accomplished.*

The sublime canticle of Mary

Mary at those words of praise felt her soul all drawn into God; her humility gave to her a feeling of her nothingness before Him: her gratitude made her ascribe everything to his infinite mercy; the divine light that radiated in her made her consider his designs upon men and the triumph of His mercy in all ages until the end of the world; thus she raised her eyes to heaven and exclaimed: *My soul magnifies the Lord.*

Never before had a more sublime canticle of joy come out from human lips; never before had the most profound humility been so sublimely harmonized with the truth, in such a way as to form a melody of annihilation and greatness, of a littleness and an immensity, and of a goodness and strength that delight the soul uniting it to the joy and feeling of Mary.

The scriptural allusions to the canticle of Anna, the Psalms and the Prophets that are found in the most sublime Canticle show not only the familiarity of Mary with the Sacred Scriptures, but they are like the light of prophecies and of the figures that become reality and the accomplishment of the promises of God; far from diminishing the originality of the Canticle, they make it in its concise simplicity more beautiful and sublime.

It is as the stem of the old covenant and the fruitful flowering gem of the new one; it is the accomplishment of past hopes and the hope of the new mercies; it is the synthesis of the accomplished aspiration of the past and a rapid view into the history of the future, until the end of time; the program of the life redeemed and the synthesis of her elevations of love; finally it is the shining flash on the life of the Redeemer and his Mother who had him in her breast. In the whole history of the Kingdom of God this canticle is a voice always alive. In all the development of the Church it is always the current program. In the ascension of all the Saints it is always the harmonious voice that can gather in one sound of love the marvelous harmonies of the grace in them; it is a fruitful and virginal canticle as the heart from which it welled up, rich of meaning and simple in its expression, that the Church sings and sings again everyday, without exhausting her joyful and bright source; it is the canticle of the pilgrims going toward the Eternal Home; of the Apostles that walked the earth spreading the good news; the Martyrs who bear witness to the truth with their own blood; the Confessors who disseminate it; the Virgins who live it; the contemplatives who relish it; the Angels who exult for it; all creatures in their echoes of love; and it is the high note of the eternal canticle in the eternal glory.

When it is recited it is a sublime prayer; when it is sung, it is a triumphant hymn

that raises the spirit exulting in God; when it is meditated, it is as an orchard in bloom, rich of celestial perfumes. It has always new flavors, that the centuries have never been able to age because it is a canticle of life. What a joy, oh Holy Virgin, to receive the grace, to receive Jesus and to be able to sing with you: *Magnificat anima mea Dominum! (My soul magnifies the Lord)! What a peace to be on the Calvary of our test of life and to be able to repeat, weeping, with the heart fully resigned, Magnificat anima mea Dominum! (My soul magnifies the Lord)! What an interior sweetness to rise above the joy of the world, to repeat to the Eternal Goodness in the flight of the soul: Magnificat anima mea Dominum! What a poem of love to recite with the whole Church the great liturgical prayers, to feel satiated of interior uplifting, and to turn the whole soul to God in this canticle of your heart, oh Mary, Magnificat anima mea Dominum! What a comfort for the aridity of the spirit, when our poor fountain is dried up and does not give a drop anymore, to revive the spring of the heart with this canticle and give life to the poor dried earth: Magnificat anima mea Dominum!*

Even at the expense of being lengthy, we cannot move on without at least giving a quick glance to these shining facets of the canticle of Mary and to rejoice in the multiple reflections of this most precious gem of the New Covenant.

We must comment on the deep meaning of this canticle of love, that was given to us so that we might sing to God the gratitude of our love, that in union with the virginal voice of our Mother, we may be less ungrateful towards the Love that came down from Heaven and for the love that redeemed us with His most precious Blood. St. Zechariah did not believe the Angel, and he remained mute and deaf until the accomplishment of the promise; Mary believed and spoke, in fact she sang with a melody that embraced all the centuries. We, her children, sing with her, live of her great faith, partake of the beatitudes of her heart: *Beata quae credidisti (Blessed are you who believed)*, and so we become more able to embrace the accomplishment of the plans of God in us.

6. The Flower of the Old Covenant

The Magnificat

After the fall of man, for four thousand years, mankind yearned for the Redeemer, and yearning for him were his chosen people, put here by God as the brain and the heart of the human family. All nations may glory as much as they want in their great philosophers, poets, men of letters, artists and the ascension of their civilizations; however, it is undeniable that no one had the truth and the true love with the exception of Israel. God gave to it the truth; those people had in Him the thinker, He gave to them the Law and in Him it had the legislator; He gave to it the songs of the soul making them flow from the Eternal Love and for Him it had the true poetry that transcended all human forms. The Jewish people did not remain theocratic for weakness or for infancy of their civilization; it remained thus because it had reached the summit of true civilization. To reject its admirable fruits, that are divine, would be far more senseless and sacrilegious than those who would rip apart the masterpieces of the human civilizations, and demolish the most exquisite pieces of art.

The Jewish people

The Jewish people without doubt strayed and, rejecting the Christ, dreamed of a human kingdom, to the conquest of which, they resorted to any methods to be able to succeed. We do not dwell, however, on its decadence, but rather in the admirable constitutions that the Lord gave to them, and to whom they shall return, uniting themselves in the one sheepfold of the Catholic, Apostolic, Roman Church. Their very aberration and decline is a sign of the divine civilization of its past, because the fulfillment of the authentic prophecies of its inspired Prophets, and its unimpaired survival as a people, in the midst of so many ups and downs through the centuries, shows that the seed, that originated such a vigorous and hardy fruit, is a seed blessed by God. Instead of persecuting them so cruelly *, the nations should have and must call them back through charity and for the Church, they should give back to them the Scriptures which they replaced with the Talmud. In truth their falling into decline started precisely when they wanted to shape a human civilization, rejecting their divine constitution. They ran after and were attracted by the phantasmagorias of a global political kingdom, when instead it would have been sufficient for them to live of the Christ in the Church, thus finding themselves triumphantly at the head of all peoples, just as a patriarch is at the head of his descendants, who are enriched by him.

Mary announces the Savior

The sighs of the Jewish people that spread throughout the peoples of the world, should have culminated in the Christ, like the plant in the flower, and for this reason the awaited Redeemer was compared by the Prophet as a flower from the root of Jesse. So here is Mary, virginal plant of this flower, who has Him in her breast like a tiny bulb and gathering the sighs of the centuries announces the fulfillment exclaiming: *My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior*. It is the answer to all the prophetic voices; the fulfillment of all types and all figures; it is the annunciation of the Savior from his own Mother; it is an annunciation of the truth confirmed by the virginal splendor of this Mother. It is enough in the illumination that she received from the Word that is in her breast, to say with absolute certainty: He has come and then to repeat with her: *Magnificat anima mea Domini et exultavit spiritus meus in Deo salutari meo. My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit leaps for joy in God my Savior*.

* Don Dolindo was writing during sorrowful times for the Jewish people, because the racism of the Nazis caused them to be placed in a bad light. Don Dolindo feels love for the Jewish people, as the vigorous seed blessed by God.

He had to be born by a Virgin and She is the unblemished virgin; He had to descend as *dew on the fleece* (Jgs 6:36-38), and here he came in the deepest darkness in her most pure breast; he had to be enveloped by the woman, *mulier circundabit virum*, and she gave to him the mortal body and enveloped him with her own life; he had to come as utmost condescension in human lowness, and She is the most humble of the creatures, a lowliness all bejeweled with graces: *He has looked with favor on the humility of his handmaid... hath done great things to me...and his mercy is from generation unto generation for those who fear him.*

Fulfilling his promises, God has shown the might of his arm; He has put down the *proud* by antonomasia, the demons in their designs of perdition; He has scattered the pride of the peoples in the tyranny of their short-lived civilizations; destroyed the thrones of the human wickedness, one after the other, and established the kingdom of love among the humble and those that hunger for eternal goodness. Here is scattered the pagan civilization, based on the proud tyranny, and here is the kingdom of the humble, filled with the peace of divine grace and divine mercy.

Nothing anymore has value with the exception of the Christ and his Church; darkness is defeated, the shadows have disappeared, the prophecies of the centuries have been fulfilled, the flower of Jesse is risen: *My soul magnifies the Lord.*

7. The fertile gem of the New Covenant.

What is this life that our Redeemer brings to us? He himself says it with a divine synthesis: *I glorify the Father.* This glorification that he gives eternally as Word of God, He gives to the Father as Redeemer, he gives it to the men that he unites to himself as his mystical body. *Magnificat*, here is the splendid light of the Word; *Magnificat*, here is the illuminating adoration of the Redeemer; *Magnificat*, here are the acclaiming voices of the Catholic Church in all her life glorifying God. The Word exults in the Eternal Love loving the Father; the Man-God exults in his humiliated filiation out of love; the Church exults in the exuberant richness of its adoring life.

The fulfillment of the divine promises that develops in this immense redemptive work, is therefore the glory of God, the exultation of love, the condescension of mercy, the elevation of man, the destruction of sin, the fulfillment of the poor, the defeat of pride, the life that goes on from age to age until the end of time, the fullness of glory and the eternal happiness in Heaven. Mary could not sing with more noble words.

8. Synthesis and program of the Church.

Mary conceiving the Redeemer started the life of the Church in the greatest way, for the intimate union that existed between Her and the Redeemer. The cornerstone of the new building was in her full possession, and her soul rose upon it like the gable wall of a living temple. The pilgrim Church in the centuries, suffers tribulations and continues in Herself the Passion of the Redeemer; it permeates it in the hearts of the faithful and applies it with immense love; however notwithstanding the trial of her tribulations she is a canticle of life.

Persecuted, she does not bend; knocked down, she does not fall; despised, she does not disappear; deprived of everything and bloodstained, she does not become poor, but the

blood of her martyrs become for Her a waterfall of gems. Nothing can silence her, because she is like the crystal sound of an organ that resounds even through her old pipes, and it is always resonant among the walls that contain it. *Magnificat anima mea Domini*, *My soul magnifies the Lord*, here is the melodic sound of all her life, until the end of time, *exultation of love in her Redeemer*, here is the reflection of all her tears; *the gaze of God upon Her*, here is the certainty of all her life; her spiritual *greatness*, fruit of the power of God; her *sanctity*, fruit of the Holy Spirit, here are her riches; the steadfast victory over all the proud that persecute her, who fall one after the other from their heights into the mud; here is her triumph that no one ever could rival; the reality of her goods that appease the spirit, this is her full happiness that raises human littleness to the eternal heights. Her glorious history is all in the canticle of Mary, which the Church repeats everyday at the Vespers, when the day is setting, because her light never dims and her sun is always eternal is in her. Her martyrdom is praise to God, who is infinite truth: *My soul magnifies the Lord*; in her sanctity she exults in God her Savior; in humiliation she grows and rejoices with her impassioned King and in exultation she shows the power of God that conquers and reveals his sanctity that forgives.

The Church wants to save, must save.

In her activities the Church does not seek a kingdom in the world, but rather goes through the nations to spread the mercy of God and to save souls. The world does not understand and never shall understand the anxious desire of the Church to save, and for this reason it mistakes her apostolate as politics. The Church wants to save, must save, because it has been given this mission by her Redeemer; she does not want to dominate but to save, and when clashes with human powers occur, it is when they have become perdition for souls. It is then that she rises, fights, agonizes; she does not compromise, she becomes like an unshakable rock and she wins and she shall always win. The world has not yet learned, it shall never learn it, because it flatters itself to prevail over her, but it is always overcome, it is scattered in its proud thoughts, it sees its mighty thrones overthrown, it is sent away empty and hungry and in misery comes back begging from the Church a bit of life. It is the history of the centuries, and it is the future of those that shall follow until the end of the world.

The Church rises in the world magnifying the Lord, and in this way indicates to the poor the eternal fountain of all goodness that truly satiates and of every treasure that is true richness. It is such a shame to see those who hunger for worldly things believing to be satiated, as well as the miserable rich people of the world who have empty hands, believing to have them full.

The Church does not weep over the poverty of the poor, but over the poverty of the wealthy; she does not weep over starving people but over the greed of those who satiate themselves with trifles!

An example from history.

We report here a couple of examples from history to make it clearer for us to

appreciate the truth. When Jonker found in the field the famous diamond that was to bear his name, he really believed to have found a treasure. He put it in a sock and tied it around his wife's neck and all night long he stayed awake with loaded pistols in his hands. He sold the diamond for \$350.000. When it was time for the diamond to be cut, as diamonds have grains like wood, the best cutter, Lazarre Kaplan, was chosen, because any error in the grain would have ruined it. Kaplan studied the stone for one year before the dropping hammer that would split it. Another great cutter, I.J.Asscher, who cut the famous Cullinan diamond, feared he would have a stroke because of the stress, and he asked to be assisted by a doctor and two nurses. Splitting successfully the stone, he fell on a chair and had to be assisted by the doctor because of the great tension he had suffered. Afterwards he was in a clinic for three months for a nervous breakdown.

All this is frightening, and is even more frightening to think that for the ownership of these most vile stones often blood was shed, and many dreadful crimes have been committed.

Who is more ravenous and miserable than those who cling to such mere nothings? *Magnificat anima mea Dominum, My soul magnifies the Lord*, shout out the Church with her Magisterium of love, *Exultavit spiritus meus in Deo salutari meo, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior*, pointing out the way to the true fulfillment of the heart, and she raises life as a lighthouse that never goes dark. If the world persecutes her, she raises her shout of praise; if it makes her bleed, she increases the exultation of her spirit; if it humiliates her, she multiplies the light of her glory; if it tears her children from her breast, making them Martyrs, she is rendered blessed in her glorious Saints; if the world exudes evil to pollute her, she hastens her merciful attention toward souls; if it conjures up storms to shatter her, they only break upon the tetragonal rock, so experiencing the power of God; if it enslaves her in the idolatry of state-worshippers, it finds its crown broken by social catastrophes; if it steals her possessions to suffocate her, it sees her riches in her poverty without stopping her song of love, the eternal praise to God One and Triune, *Magnificat anima mea Dominum. My soul magnifies the Lord*.

9. The canticle of the loving soul.

Mary sang in the fullness of her love, and with her song she traced the path of love for all the souls who live of God and search for Him above all else. The true life of the spirit, in fact, is in the search for the glory of God, because the creature is an effusion of the divine goodness, it is the work of the hands of the Lord, and cannot truly live without glorifying Him in everything and above everything.

The words of St. Paul: *Do everything for the glory of God*, find the most brilliant expression in our life when we bless the Lord, exalting his power, his wisdom and his love: *Magnificat anima mea Dominum. My soul magnifies the Lord*.

In contemplation, through which the soul raises itself in the divine greatness, is the exultation of spirit in the divine light, it is the joy of relishing the fruits of Redemption, a dash of love for God for his infinite beauty and goodness. The soul grows in the ways of love when it humiliates itself, recognizing its lowliness; it is then that God lowers himself to the soul and is pleased in it, working miracles of grace. To see God and to be seen by God, this is the synthesis of the highest elevation of love: *Respexit. He has looked upon it*. The Faith regards it, Hope and Charity regard it, and He turns to us,

illuminating us, raising and embracing us; the tormented soul regards Him, wandering and crying in this vale of tears, and He radiates His mercy. Love can only grow in the sphere of the divine mercies, because all spiritual and mystical life is a mercy of God. It is mercy that forgives us, mercy has pity on us that enriches, raises, and transforms us. If we could only realize that all our spiritual life is an effusion of mercy, we would aspire only to that, never desiring any high glory, but we would abase ourselves in the last place. The life of love is a banquet to which God invites us, and those who put themselves at the last place, are the ones who will rise the highest. If, instead of invoking love, we would invoke mercy, we would plant in our heart true love, in the depth of our heart, and we would see it blooming from our own very miseries, like a plant is fertilized by the manure that feeds and enriches the soil.

The complex work of grace in a heart that wants to love comes down to only these words: *Misericordia ejus, His mercy*. Our relation to this work comes down to just this expression: *To recognize our own lowliness and have a reverent fear of the Lord*. The victory of the grace in us is in the scattering away of our thoughts of pride, in devaluing our poor strength, and in the appreciation of humility. The power of our dashes of love is in proportion to the firm belief in our own foolishness and poverty. The one who believes to be already at the height of sanctity will fall down: *He has put down the mighty from their seats*; those who are satisfied with their own virtues and do not thirst and hunger for justice, remain with empty hands: *He has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent away empty*.

Oh love, oh love, how much you grow in the soil of humility, and in the rays of God's mercy! Those people lamenting not to possess You must realize that they have in themselves such a dose of pride as to render parched the roots of their soul, and vomit such vanity to darken the rays of mercy. If the soul does not sing the *Magnificat* of humbleness, it does not sing Love. The great and highest contemplatives were all very humble people, because it is with humble people that God reasons and converses.

10. The Magnificat of humility.

Rise, then, my soul, lower yourself and descend into the depths of your nothingness, that you may be filled with the goodness of divine mercy. Humility that does not abandon itself to mercy is not humility, it is spite of its own misery. Humility that does not turn its glance to God in trust, is not a true realization of its own incapacity but is an agitation of the spirit, in the disliking of ugliness that diminishes its own soul before its own eyes of pride. It is not desiring of God, but a yearning of its spiritual vanity. He who falls into the waves and tosses, drowns; who abandons himself shouting and begging for help, floats and is rescued ashore. O my Lord, I am not surprised to be a sinner, because my soul is only capable of this. It is not a surprise for me to be powerless to do good, because without You I am nothing. Yet I rejoice to be nothing, so that my soul may shine more in the light of your greatness: *Magnificat anima mea Dominum. My soul magnifies the Lord!* My sin makes me sorrowful, and you know how much I cried to have offended You, but You redeemed me with your Blood, and *my spirit rejoices in God my Savior*. I would be happy right now to expose all my lowliness and contemplate You, singing in all the modes: I am nothing and full of sins, and You are everything and infinite sanctity. Everything in which my soul rejoiced that is outside your Law is for me a disgrace;

instead my repentance turned this satisfaction into loving regret, attracted Your glance, and filled me with peace.

O what a great beatitude to recognize myself a sinner and to cry for having offended You! But why am I so glad? Because You look at me with mercy. Many small flowers bloom in my soul from the mud of my filth, because the Eternal Sun shined on me and in the stench of my iniquities, opened perfumed buds, because You are mercy: *Magnificat anima mea Dominum. My soul magnifies the Lord!* O how the power of your grace shines so much before my nothingness, and how my sinful soul rejoices in the splendid sanctity of your Name! You did a great thing inside me; You purified, strengthened me, nourished me, forgave me and You sanctified my life in your Name, O Most Holy Trinity: *He has done great things for me and holy is his Name.* You gave me an ardent desire to make amends for my faults and have aroused in me a strong zeal to be good; in this way your mercy goes from You to my heart and from my repentant heart to those who fear You. I am a sinner, and you conquered me with the power of your grace, shattering the useless plans of my pride; I was rebelling against your love, losing my temper, and you humiliated me, but in my humiliation you raised me up again by your grace.

I thirst for you, o my God quench my thirst; I am ashamed of all those miseries that I used to consider as riches of life; oh empty me of these. Take me into the arms of your merciful love, remembering your goodness, and let me rest in your love, according to your promises, now and forever. Amen.

11. A shining picture of the life of the Redeemer and of Mary.

Mary Most Holy, filled with the Holy Spirit and Mother of the Redeemer, expressed, so to speak, with the light of her love, the mysterious beauty of the Divine Son in her womb. He was the Son of God, the living praise of the Father, the voice that exalted his perfections: *My soul magnifies the Lord.* Clothed in human flesh he was the Savior, the *exultation* of the world; humiliated in the maternal womb, he was like the seed that was going to donate to us the flower and the fruit of eternal beatitude. He had assumed human flesh to save us, and God would look at his willing abasement in order to raise us and to spread his mercy on every generation. That abasement was the secret of greatness, and that cloth of sin, wrapped around him, had to rout out human pride and build our sanctity in us. He had to conquer Satan and put him down from his ephemeral seat; he had to break those pestiferous illusions, and He had to be the bread of life, the fulfillment of all his faithful.

No one could ever describe the Redeemer in a more brilliant way: praise to God, exaltation of redemption, abased and therefore the delight of the Father, wrapped in greatness in his humiliation and sanctity in his immolation, mercy that embraces all those who fear the Lord, power that breaks the pride of Satan, victory that destroys his throne, light that overcomes darkness, bread of life for the hungry of God, accomplishment of the divine promises.

This is not a spiritual application of the canticle of Mary; it is the truth, because Mary, in speaking, reflected the Son living in her as King, like children reflect in their words and gestures the personality of their parents; actually even more, because the life of the Redeemer, as we said beforehand, raised, vivified and sanctified all her life.

Mary in her canticle expressed also, I would say, the character of her spirit; but first of all she manifested the character of her Son, living in her, who in those blessed moments was predominant in her life. She was, in fact, praise to God for Him, and her spirit rejoiced in the magnificence of the grace, because He had redeemed her beforehand. She was the delight of God because of Him, who elevated her to the dignity of being the Mother of God, and the Redeemer performed great things in Her, done by the power and the sanctity of God. It was He who dispersed *pride*, Satan, and kept her immaculate; He did not allow her to be dominated by him one single instant, and exalted her from an humble handmaid of God to Queen of Heaven; He filled her with graces, filling her with sanctity and elevating her as the greatest of all creatures and blessed among all women.

This was therefore the character of the Mother of God: She was a praise of glory, an exultation of love, an abasement of humiliation and immense greatness of graces; she was a miracle of the magnificent and glorious synthesis of the greatest works of God, the channel of his mercy; she was the victorious woman over Satan of whom she crushed the head, and the conqueror of human pride because she showed in herself the apex that could be reached with humility; she was the celestial giver of the Bread of Life and the perfumed flower of all the promises given to Abraham and his descendants by God. The heresy that attempts to distort Mary Most Holy giving to her other attributes, and pretending to remove from Her the crown that God put on her head, did not succeed, because She remains the eternal canticle of all ages, and nobody is able to change the harmonies that burst from her great soul.

12. A perpetual voice in the Kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God covers two moments: its development on earth and its crowning in Heaven. Every kingdom has a triumphant march, as well as a flag. The flag unfurls in the wind, symbol of the nation, and the march raises its notes as a paean of victory and life. We dare say that, in the kingdom of God the Cross is the banner and the *Magnificat* is the triumphant song.

It was sung, in fact, at the entry of the immortal King on earth, hailing his first victory in the sanctification of the Precursor. Brought by Mary, He went forth and, with the sound of Her voice, he enveloped, so to speak, the babe of Elizabeth; He freed him from original sin and made him exult in her maternal womb. Grace magnified God in a soul, and the soul exulted in its Savior.

From that time on, all souls became glorification to God because of the Redeemer who called them to Himself, through Mary. There is no spreading of grace without the mediation of Mary, and there is no exultation of supernatural life without the voice of her maternal love that brings Jesus to us and brings us to Jesus.

On earth, the Kingdom of God is above all in the heart, as Jesus said, because it is love that glorifies God, it is exultation in his mercy that raises the human lowness to supernatural life, it is his manifestation of power and sanctity, because it is his victory over human frailties, it is his sanctification of all human powers, adoration of God in the filial humiliation of the spirit, and it is fullness of love, in seeking Him as our last end.

In Heaven, the Kingdom of God is the contemplation of his glory that brings our souls to issue forth perpetual hymns of praise; it is exultation in the eternal happiness acquired by the merits of our Savior; it is an intimate familiarity of love with God and

hymns of everlasting beatitude in the eternal nuptials with Him; it is the full revelation of his greatness and his sanctity that became richness and beauty of the elected souls; it is the kingdom of glorified humility and represents the eternal victory over pride wiped out by the eternal justice; it is the full accomplishment of all the aspirations of the spirit and a fullness transcending all goodness. While singing, Mary led the new song of the pilgrims of the Kingdom and brought to earth the echo of the song of Heaven: *Magnificat anima mea Dominum! My soul magnifies the Lord!*

13. Dazzling light in the darkness of exile.

The militant Church is, like her Redeemer, eternally immolated. It cannot change herself for if she did she would not be anymore the mystical Body of the Savior, as are not the churches of the heretics. To dream for her a political or human triumph would be to diminish her, and would be a fall into the error of Israel, which was expecting a political Messiah.

The Church is the kingdom of truth and love and cannot become a kingdom of selfishness and egoism, like kingdoms are in every political reality. She triumphs in the light of the Most Holy Trinity, not in our vale of tears: she exists, redeems and loves. Her glory is in never ending, and in raising souls to love only God above all else. The Church suffers in her members, without doubt, and her life is the Passion, but her suffering is full of peace and she advances in the world like a crystal-clear, warm current flowing through frozen slush. She has the joy of maternity in bearing labor-pangs, the exultation of true glory in humiliating persecutions, the transcendent greatness in the simplicity of her life, the splendor of sanctity in the face of contemptuous impiety, the irresistible expansion of the apostolate in the face of the obstacles aroused by the world, the spiritual dominion in the face of opposition that is heavily marked against her by human pride; the riches of Providence amidst the plundering of the thieves of the world and her immolated life is all resplendent of light.

Mary, His most precious gem, reflects all of this in her most sublime canticle. Let's look at it in a brief summary: The people are converted, and like harmonious waves, sing in their primitive desolation the song of the new life that glorifies God: *Magnificat anima mea Dominum! My soul magnifies the Lord!* Conversion becomes sanctification because of grace, and elevation for the gifts of the Holy Spirit, shining in the Church the marvels of the miracles, the prophecies, the heroism, the joyful exultation of her life: *Exultavit spiritus meus in Deo salutari meo, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.* The Saints of the Church are such a glory and a marvel that a soul remains ecstatic contemplating such greatness. They are human nothingness raised to the splendor of the divine; they are the glorious expression of the full beatitude and even the admiration of evildoers cannot undervalue this greatness: *Respectit humilitatem ancillae suae, ecce enim ex hoc beatam me dicent omnes generationes. (Because he has regarded the humility of his handmaid; for behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.)* The Saints are not idle during their life, they do great things in the name of God, and they only represent the true and complete civilization of the spirit. They are the true heroes: the blood shed by the Martyrs, the luminaries of truth in the Doctors of the Church and the Apostles, custodians of the true science, the propagators of justice in the Confessors, the delicate purity in the pure virgins, the glorification of life also here on earth in the married

people, great and true demographers of the world, who do not increase the population for slaughtering them later because of wars, but just the opposite, they each increase the family of the Blessed in the Heavens: *Fecit mihi magna qui potens est, et sanctum nomen ejus. (Because he who is mighty has done great things to me and holy is his name).*

The Church is attacked, but she does not know any other way to react except with mercy, which she spreads with full hands, glorifying God who mercifully gives, and exulting in the Savior who merits it. Her initiation is complete forgiveness, a wash that restores the soul whiter than snow. Her arms bring gifts of love from the Eternal Love. Her courts of justice are peaceful oases of reconciliation and peace. Her table has food in exultation that overflows the soul with happiness; her nuptials are sanctified by the Love of the Redeemer; her power is the paternity, or better the maternity of immense goodness, and death itself is illuminated by mercy and peace: *Misericordia ejus a progenies timentibus eum (His mercy is from generation to generation, to those that fear him.)*

She has power, which does not come from violence but from her solidity, because it is a rock erected on rock. The Lord looks after her; He sustains her with his omnipotence, and whoever bumps against her, shatters.

How great it is to see the infernal powers proudly advance like waves, mounting like swarms only to crumble into a thousand pieces while the rock of God stands firm! It is a shameful sight to see the army of evildoers, united in a single group, a single block, a single council, an army, only to start new faiths, new religions, new uncivilized states, disguising them as civilizations, and yet they die under the hammer of the power of God: *Fecit potentiam in brachio suo, dispersit superbos mente cordis sui. (He has showed might with his arm: he has scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart.)* Here they are, the powerful people who make the earth tremble, and for the Church they are only mere stick figures. She knows where they shall go, she knows where they shall fall: *Deposuit potentes de sede et exaltavit humiles (He has put down the mighty from their seat and has exalted the humble.)* The abyss is awaiting them, already it swallowed them and shall swallow also those still living and those that shall come till the end of time. A wave of hunger shall pass over the earth, and all the riches of the world shall be of no use because they do not nourish. The world will hunger for wisdom but it cannot be satisfied because its gaudy thoughts are like the bubbles of bragging children. It hungers for truth, but its store of knowledge is full of errors, none of it explaining the reality of life. It swallows errors, and its hunger increases, because it is a hunger that leaves one empty in the trials of reality.

It hungers for justice and fills itself with torments and crimes; it hungers for love and fills itself with hate; it hungers for peace and fills itself with wars, remaining always empty, awfully empty. Only the Church satiates with true goodness, and walks in her exile with her heart and mind filled with peace and love: *Esurientes implevit bonis, et divites, dimisit inanes. (He has filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he has sent empty away.)*

It is true that souls living in the Church are subject to tests, and even the most devoted souls fall in the aridity which gives them anguish, sometimes even believing themselves to be lost; however, they know that these tests are a mean to receive a much richer gain, and uniting themselves to the divine Will, they sing with the heroism of complete faith in the promises of God: *Magnificat anima mea Dominum! My soul magnifies the Lord!* They already know the ways of immolation and the agony of death

because the Redeemer in the Garden of Gethsemane traced the path for them, and with Him they know to find again the ways of peace in only one leap: *Not mine, but your will be done, Magnificat anima mea Dominum!*

O Mary, o Mary! Your song is inexhaustible, because it is the song of a heart rich in the Word of God! The soul is astounded before this immense fecundity of thought, and does not know better than to repeat the words of the Angel and St. Elizabeth: *Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with Thee, blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb.*

14. The birth of John the Baptist.

Mary remained with St. Elizabeth about three months, that is, through the remaining time of St. Elizabeth's pregnancy. During this time she helped her saintly cousin with house chores and especially continued to sanctify and prepare the Precursor of Jesus in the mission that he had to accomplish. Her immaculate voice made him exult in the womb of his mother and sanctified him for Jesus Christ from his original sin; her voice of continuous prayer transfused in him the gift of interior solitude and of highest prayer.

They were three months of graces for the house of Zechariah, because Mary was like a fire lit by God, that shed the warmth of her interior life. Her presence was enchanting; it was not possible to converse with Her without feeling to be beautifully anointed with graces.

When the Most Holy Virgin saw that the time of her cousin's delivery was approaching, she left, because of her virginal discretion and also because she did not want to be in the midst of a multitude of people, that she foresaw would be at the birth of a baby born to woman who had reached an advanced age. Her help would become unnecessary among such a large number of people.

Shortly after Mary left, the time of delivery for St. Elizabeth arrived and she happily gave birth to a baby boy.

The neighborhood heard of it and in great numbers people ran to congratulate her, not only for the birth of her son, but especially because that miraculous fruit was a sure sign of the distinctive benevolence of God toward her.

The neighborhood, in fact, had believed until then that God had rejected Elizabeth. The number of people increased when, after eight days, in accordance with the prescription of the Law, the baby was circumcised. The circumcision occurred in the house, as is evident by the fact that Elizabeth was present at the event, since she could not leave her house for forty days. Being in a city and in a priestly home, many important people came around her, believing that they should take the initiative and impose a name to the newborn. They wanted to call him Zechariah, which was the name of his father. From a psychological point of view, perhaps they chose this name because Zechariah was old, and it seemed right to them to perpetuate his memory, since he was close to death.

His name is John.

St. Elizabeth, however, on hearing what they were saying, intervened and said that his name would be John. It was customary with the Jews to give the name of a close or distant relative to the newborn, and it seemed odd to everyone to choose a name unrelated

to the family; therefore they made signs to Zechariah for him to make the decision. He asked for a small board coated with wax, as was in use at the time to write on, and he wrote: *His name is John*. Everyone was surprised and moreover remained surprised and even shocked when he, all of a sudden, reacquired his speech and hearing, and he started blessing God.

He had become unable to speak for lack of faith, and he regained it when, with an act of faith, imposed on his son the name that the Angel had announced to him.

That name was not an indifferent name, and in the plans of God it meant the present accomplishment of the promises of God in the Messiah. John, in fact, means *grace that we have*, and the Precursor, in his very name, had to announce the grace that the world would receive; in this way was completed in this little family the announcement of the benediction expressed in their very names: Elizabeth: *God that vows*, Zechariah, *God who remembers*, John, *Grace that we have*. God *vowed* his promise to the Patriarchs; *he remembered* in the fullness of time, and in the miraculous birth of John announced *the grace* that already was given to the world in the Redeemer. It was one of those delicate channels of the divine goodness thorough which the Lord manifests his mercy; John, son of Elizabeth and Zechariah was, thus, in his name the remembrance of the mystery that was accomplished; it was like a shining announcement in his great sanctity, and he said in his name: *The grace is given* to the world in accordance to *the vow* made to our fathers, because *He remembered* his mercy. To give another name to John would have altered the delicate harmony of those three names.

The occurrence of the birth of John clearly disclosed for those people present that a design of God had been accomplished; therefore, they were taken by a reverential fear toward the Lord, that is, a feeling of adoration and waiting. As the news spread by word of mouth throughout the region, all the people thought that the little baby was destined to great things, even though they could not understand them. In fact, according to the Sacred Scriptures *the hand of the Lord was upon him*, that is, John was truly informed and sustained by a singular grace; even before the age of reason, he announced with his birth the accomplishment of something extraordinary, and prepared hearts for the imminent coming of the Messiah.

The canticle of Zechariah.

St. Zechariah, his father, welcomed this announcement and being filled by the Holy Spirit, for a particular prophetic inspiration developed a canticle of gratitude exclaiming: *Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; because he has visited and brought redemption to his people*. The redemption was not yet accomplished, but the promise of God was accomplished, passing from generation to generation and came to rest upon the house of David; the Eternal Word already had descended upon the earth, in the Immaculate womb of Mary, of David's family, and therefore, the power that would redeem the world was set on its throne, according to what the prophets had announced. This regal power had come to save us men from our enemies, *the demons*, and from all who hate us, that is, those who sow evil and who are the fiercest snares of our well-being.

St. Zechariah said his canticle without interruption and without stopping, intertwining one concept after another, because he was inflamed with love, and because after a long stretch of dumbness his tongue almost could not restrain itself for the joy to be

loosened.

God had kept the promise received from the Angel, and He had accomplished the mercy announced since the long past times of Abraham. St. Zechariah, enlightened by God, defined immediately the real nature of these mercies and the fruit that they would bring to his people renewed; it was not a temporal benefit nor a political deliverance, but a spiritual benefit and above all a freedom from the enemies of the soul in order to serve God *in holiness and justice*, that is with a perfect life, *holiness*, and with a regime of order and honesty, *justice*. St. Zechariah had a glimpse of the Catholic Church, true kingdom of holiness and justice, and considered its triumph on earth, when, having overcome the attacks against her by evildoers, She would finally obtain victory and peace.

In the second part of the canticle of St. Zechariah, he turned to his little son and foretold his mission, according to what the Angel had announced to him: he would be called Prophet of the Most High because he would prepare the way of the Redeemer, teaching people penance, and disposing them to receive the great promise of mercy, that like the sun from above, would radiate on everybody, guiding them on the way to the eternal peace.

John the Baptist withdraws in the desert.

After this solemn declaration of the accomplishment of the divine promises, silence fell on the house of Zachariah. The little boy, fortified by grace, withdrew into the desert, where he lived praying and doing penance until the day he started his public mission. It is possible that the real motive that convinced his parents to bring him to the desert was the persecution of Herod against firstborns; because, when they heard of it they must have feared that their child also could be killed by the hatred of this tyrant against the Redeemer; however, whatever the reason was, it was a particular inspiration that the boy could come to lead a life completely devoted to God, and under the most severe austerity and penance.

The grace of God is not received without an appropriate preparation, because God does not grant a grace to those who lead a dissolute life in the world. The holy thoughts that God sends us are the precursors of grace, and we must receive them with sincere faith, that they may produce abundant fruit in us. Those people who receive these inspirations and believe them to be fruits of their fantasy remain deaf to the voices of God and dumb to the expressions of love. The grace, then, does not make them fertile and does not renew them.

The sufferings of life, borne with patience in union with the divine will are precursors of the divine mercy; they are the way that prepares us for the great effusions of the divine Goodness. Let us answer God's calls, and not remain deaf to His voice, that we too, together with the apostolate of Catholic Action *, become the workmen preparing the Kingdom of Jesus Christ.

The world lies in the darkness and shadow of death; it needs the light of the Savior, and this light must reach the souls who are already predisposed, so that their life will not be useless. Let us come first of all to the desert of our interior life, and then in the activity of the apostolate, announcing the kingdom of Jesus Christ and cooperating with the salvation that He comes to bring to souls; without deep introspection our religious activity would be only apparent and our mission would be fruitless. To walk before the

Lord, then, and to prepare His ways, teaching the people to recognize salvation for the remission of their sins: this is the program of Catholic Action in this time of spiritual confusion. O that soon might arrive the day of the great triumph of God, when we too may sing with St. Zechariah the accomplishment of the divine mercies: *Blessed be the confusion. O that soon might arrive the day of the great triumph of God, when we too may sing with St. Zechariah the accomplishment of the divine mercies: Blessed be the Lord God of Israel because he has visited and brought redemption to his people, raising in the Church the power of salvation and giving to Her the triumph over all the kingdoms of the earth. Amen.*

* In the years in which Don Dolindo was writing, Catholic Action carried on an intense and large apostolic activity. In our times there are many movements and lay groups engaged in the apostolate, directed to every social levels.

Chapter 2

1. The Birth of Jesus. Circumcision and Presentation in the Temple. Jesus among the doctors.

1 And it happened in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, so that the whole world would be enrolled. 2 This was the first enrollment; it was made by the ruler of Syria, Quirinius. 3 And all went to be declared, each one to his own city. 4 Then Joseph also ascended from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, 5 in order to be declared, with Mary his espoused wife, who was with child. 6 Then it happened that, while they were there, the days were completed, so that she would give birth. 7 And she brought forth her firstborn son. And she wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them at the inn. 8 And there were shepherds in the same region, being vigilant and keeping watch in the night over their flock. 9 And behold, an Angel of the Lord stood near them, and the brightness of God shone around them, and they were struck with a great fear. 10 And the Angel said to them: "Do not be afraid. For, behold, I proclaim to you a great joy, which will be for all the people. 11 For today a Savior has been born for you in the city of David: he is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be a sign for you: you will find the infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." 13 And suddenly there was with the Angel a multitude of the celestial army, praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will." 15 And it happened that, when the Angels had departed from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us cross over to Bethlehem and see this word, which has happened, which the Lord has revealed to us." 16 And they went quickly. And they found Mary and Joseph; and the infant was lying in a manger. 17 Then, upon seeing this, they understood the word that had been spoken to them about this boy. 18 And all who heard it were amazed by this, and by those things which were told to them by the shepherds. 19 But Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart. 20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, just as it was told to them. 21 And after eight days were ended, so that the boy would be circumcised, his name was called Jesus, just as he was called by the Angel before he was conceived in the womb. 22 And after the days of her purification were fulfilled, according to the law of Moses, they brought him to Jerusalem, in order to present him to the Lord, 23 just as it is written in the law of the Lord, "For every male opening the womb shall be called holy to the Lord," 24 and in order to offer a sacrifice, according to what is said in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons." 25 And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and God-fearing, awaiting the consolation of Israel. And the Holy Spirit was with him. 26 And he had received an answer from the Holy Spirit: that he would not see his own death before he had seen the Christ of the Lord. 27 And he went with the Spirit to the temple. And when the child Jesus was brought in by his parents, in order to act on his behalf according to the custom of the law, 28 he also took him up, into his arms, and he blessed God and said: 29 "Now you may dismiss your servant in peace, O Lord, according to your word. 30 For my eyes have seen your salvation, 31 which you have prepared before the face of all peoples: 32 the light of revelation to the nations and the glory of your people Israel." 33

And his father and mother were wondering over these things, which were spoken about him. 34 And Simeon blessed them, and he said to his mother Mary: "Behold, this one has been set for the ruin and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and as a sign which will be contradicted. 35 And a sword will pass through your own soul, so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." 36 And there was a prophetess, Anna, a daughter of Phanuel, from the tribe of Asher. She was very advanced in years, and she had lived with her husband for seven years from her virginity. 37 And then she was a widow, even to her eighty-fourth year. And without departing from the temple, she was a servant to fasting and prayer, night and day. 38 And entering at the same hour, she confessed to the Lord. And she spoke about him to all who were awaiting the redemption of Israel. 39 And after they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their city, Nazareth. 40 Now the child grew, and he was strengthened with the fullness of wisdom. And the grace of God was in him. 41 And his parents went every year to Jerusalem, at the time of the solemnity of Passover. 42 And when he had become twelve years old, they ascended to Jerusalem, according to the custom of the feast day. 43 And having completed the days, when they returned, the boy Jesus remained in Jerusalem. And his parents did not realize this. 44 But, supposing that he was in the company, they went a day's journey, seeking him among their relatives and acquaintances. 45 And not finding him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking him. 46 And it happened that, after three days, they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, listening to them and questioning them. 47 But all who listened to him were astonished over his prudence and his responses. 48 And upon seeing him, they wondered. And his mother said to him: "Son, why have you acted this way toward us? Behold, your father and I were seeking you in sorrow." 49 And he said to them: "How is it that you were seeking me? For did you not know that it is necessary for me to be in these things which are of my Father?" 50 And they did not understand the word that he spoke to them. 51 And he descended with them and went to Nazareth. And he was subordinate to them. And his mother kept all these words in her heart. 52 And Jesus advanced in wisdom, and in age, and in grace, with God and men.

2. The solemn and peaceful moment of the birth of Jesus Christ.

The prophets foretold that the Redeemer would be born in Bethlehem, and the Lord, who does everything through human events, made use of an occurrence in the civic life to make it possible for Mary to be in Bethlehem.

Nazareth was about 70 miles from this city; thus, without being subject to legal pressures, Mary Most Holy, a young mother close to giving birth would not have believed it prudent to embark on such a long journey. It is true that the Lord could have revealed this to St. Joseph, and the result would have been the same, but God wanted to leave out from the birth of Jesus what could seem done deliberately in order to fulfill the prophecy; the events, independent of the will, really against the human will, would better show the divine dispositions on the birth of the Redeemer.

Caesar Augustus, the first Roman emperor, in the pomp of his glory, ordered several censuses to ascertain the population of his empire and to obligate all his subjects to pay the tribute. The first of these censuses, that included Palestine, was done under Publius Sulpicius Quirinius, who in the Greek text of the Sacred Scripture is called Cyrenius. This census was not done according to the Roman custom, under which

everyone had to be inscribed in the record books of the place where they were living, but rather in accordance to the Jewish custom, in which everyone had to be inscribed in one's city of origin. This was logical, however, because the Jews were firm guardians of their tribes and their families, and a census of a simple dwelling would not give a true demographic perspective of the nation.

Human laws are inexorable and do not accept excuses; it is necessary to submit to them at all costs, whether one likes it or not. St. Joseph, however, and Mary, accustomed to obeying the divine will, accepted this order not as a bothersome obligation for them to endure fearfully, but rather as an indirect request of the Lord. They immediately embarked on the tiresome journey to go to Bethlehem, their city of origin as descendants of David.

It is moving to think about this journey taken when the weather was already cold, as the tradition in the Church that Jesus was born in winter. Two creatures, unknown to the world, but immensely privileged before God, walked carrying with them, hidden in the womb of the mother, the Word of God! They walked in peace, in poverty, praising and blessing the Lord.

According to tradition and indeed it seems reasonable to think, they made use of a donkey to carry their little luggage. Joseph lead it and Mary sat on it; they were a living picture of purity, of love and peace. The little donkey must have unconsciously felt the goodness of having two peaceful masters, and lead by an Angel of God, as we could suppose, followed the right path. The donkey had that bearing of assurance and accuracy of animals that are led by charitable masters, and thus proceeded without opposition or kicking, and went on docilely. Mary was recollected and in constant prayer. She had become more beautiful in her advanced pregnancy; she had a gentle face, full of peace, the true Ark of God, because she was carrying in her womb her divine Son. St. Joseph also went on, recollected, with his handsome face full of virginal splendor, frank and simple; a faithful servant of the divine Will; but he was also very distressed for the lack of comfort that his Immaculate Bride was experiencing.

In the silence of the deserted road, alone through the trees already bare, resounded the clopping of the little donkey and the last soft songs of the birds. Nature around them seemed to reflect man and the sadness due to his sins, and the divine Word, coming as a pilgrim on earth, out of love, approached Bethlehem in the womb of his mother, to accomplish the promises of his mercy and to save him. Nobody imagined that in those moments the prophecies of the Prophets were coming to pass and the Sun of Justice was beginning to rise upon the darkness of the miserable and foggy earth, heavy with sins and anxieties.

Finally they came to Bethlehem where, because of the census, they found great crowds of visitors in public inns and in the houses of people they knew. Therefore St. Joseph could not find anyone who would give hospitality to his Virgin Immaculate Bride. He had to find refuge in a grotto that was used for keeping animals during the cold nights or during storms. In this very poor lodging he did his best to prepare a place, since Mary was now very close to giving birth. It is not possible to say that they were highly distressed by this humble dwelling, as they both were immersed in the divine will, and they both loved humility and poverty; however, Joseph, as Mary's custodian, was afflicted by her lack of comfort and Mary, with immense tenderness and pain was thinking about her little Son that would be born lacking everything. Two branches blossoming with

charity and love were, so to speak, intertwined and the two of them formed like a single sweet smelling ornament in that desolate grotto *.

The Birth of Jesus

Night fell. It was a frigid but serene starry night. A deep silence surrounded the place and a deeper profound solemnity reigned, as the invisible celestial court was already coming down to earth to adore the divine King and shined in the spiritual placid light, made of knowledge and love. Everything was still, and men were asleep; in the distance the glowing light of fires lit by the shepherds watching over their sheep could be made out. The planets traversed the sky, according to the orderly laws given to them by God, and the laws of procreation were being followed with the same precision in the immaculate womb of Mary. The stars were shining, as did the divine Sun toward the horizon of life on earth, like a ray penetrating the immaculate womb of his Mother.

The sun is preceded by the dawn and is accompanied by the brightest star in the night sky that disappears in its rays. Here, the beautiful dawn of the King of Love was Mary, in the elevation of her love and the twinkling star in adoration was St. Joseph. Mary was all resplendent in contemplation and ecstasy. Most beautiful in her most pure innocence, surrounded by a faint rain of light that delineated her like the placid moon in the sky, on her knees, with folded hands and her eyes toward Heaven; she was the image of the bosom of the Father reflecting a glimpse of the eternal mystery.

She contemplated.

She was in between timeless eternity and the times replete with the centuries; she gazed into the eternity of the Word, term of the eternal generation of the Father, and gazed upon the centuries of the promises through the course of time that were accomplished in Her with the temporal procreation of the Word in human flesh.

She was surrounded by the light of eternal harmony and She herself was a whole harmony of love. Grace was overflowing from Her, so to speak, and in such abundance that she was immersed in a most placid rest.

She was looking up to the Heavens and a sweet smile lit up her lips in her immense joy. She was gazing in her womb at the Eternal Word, whom she saw in the Father, and her mortal life was sparkling with sublime radiance, because she was the Mother of God. The Eternal Love had inseminated her, gave her radiance, and she little by little was spiritualized. She seemed to be of light, and like an incandescent iron in the fire, sparkling because from Her was emerging the Word made flesh.

Her immaculate body was like pure spirit, it seemed transparent, or better, evanescent in the light of the Word. The eternal life surfaced from this little human creature and passed through her like a ray passes through a crystal.

Oh prodigy of God! Mothers have incredible pains during childbirth, and they almost feel as if life tears them apart for the little life that bursts into the world; Mary instead was feeling an immense joy that increased as the moment of giving birth was approaching. Love almost melted her and her Body seemed fluid like a delicate cascade of brilliance.

* Don Dolindo, with a soul pure like a child and full of divine love, unites mystic and poetic considerations, it is almost like viewing the nativity scene, where poetic light shines on the divine mystery.

It was a sublime moment: rapt to God she felt immersed in the knowledge of His infinite greatness, she contemplated it lovingly, and wanted to applaud it with a proportionate praise that she would take from the whole holocaust of her own self.

On her lips came back the canticle *Magnificat anima mea Dominum! My soul magnifies the Lord!* She elevated it to God with all the transport of her love, but nothing burst from her heart but the Word, the Eternal Praise of the Father, who came down to earth like a ray of sunlight, praised the Father in human flesh.

He was humiliated for love, and he wailed.

The Eternal Word had the voice of immolation and he was in pain. He was not wrapped in the Eternal Flame that united him to the Father, instead it was the frigid air of the night that enveloped him, and he was trembling. He found nothing else on the earth. Maternal love drew Mary back from her celestial ecstasy, and shaken by the wailing of her Divine Son, she looked at him: he was perfect, rosy as a bud coming out in winter, tinged in goodness, divine, sanctifying, exuding joy. She adored him, picked him up, kissed him, pressed him to her breast, wrapped him up in swaddling clothes; then she put him in the manger, because she did not have a cradle for the King of Heaven.

She adored him, clasping again her hands, she raised her eyes to Heaven and offered him to the Father; it was a flower worthy of Him, he was His Son, and she offered him in the name of all mankind, because he was also the Son of her immaculate womb.

The little baby went to sleep. Alas, the earth was too sorrowful without the light of God, and He was the victim of the sins of all. There started the loving throbbing of his immolation. He went to sleep offering himself, as if he died being born, because his sleep was a loving offering of himself, like his life.

St. Joseph, nearby, was completely immersed in deep humility. No person on earth ever felt his own nothingness as he did in those moments. He did not dare to come near him. The greatness of the Mother and the divinity of the Son were too much for him.

Mary gestured him to come closer, and she took him near Jesus, mediatrix of love and mercy for the first time between Jesus and a creature.

Joseph looked at him and the shining shadow of the Father enveloped him; he represented Him and the poor carpenter was raised to the highest dignity, to a height of sanctity that no one ever had on earth, because no one was regarded as the father of the Word of God made Flesh. He took him in his arms and kissing him he communicated with him, because in that kiss he felt his heart burning with a tenderness of love never felt before; it was like the consecration of his great office of love. He lowered him in the manger, and kneeling down remained in adoration near Mary...

The stars went by as if looking down on the earth; the infinite power that kept them suspended in perennial harmony was in that humble long-lost place... It seemed like a feast day for the celestial bodies to mark the first moment of the temporal life of the Eternal... They marked for the first time a moment that could not be fleeting but would stay in the splendor of the eternal reality. The Lord raised them to a more sublime power, because they marked one by one the pulsation of a mortal life of infinite value. Likewise also the earth was raised, because it had become the throne of God. Nature became more alive, and in fact the holy tradition that makes us see it teem with flowers is not a legend; many times nature has had a florid rebirth in the presence of a Saint, for example, as a privileged member of the mystical body of the Redeemer.

Men were asleep, truly submerged in a deadly torpor, because they were ungrateful; but the Patriarchs and the Prophets in the accomplishment of the divine promise exalted in joy, and over them went a breath of immortal hope for the liberation at hand. The choir of the whole creation was like a subdued accompanying note to the more beautiful canticle of love bursting from the Hearts of Mary and St. Joseph: *My soul magnifies the Lord!*

3. The announcement to the shepherds and their visit.

Mary remained in contemplation and certainly implored God that her Son would be made known among men. The Sacred Text calls him *firstborn*, because this is the way the Jews would call a new baby, including an only child. In truth, Mary, having Jesus, was also expecting at the same time to have him for mankind so already she was feeling the universality of her maternity.

The sinner, therefore, would be her second son, born again by the virtue of the Holy Spirit. Jesus told this one day to Nicodemus, that it was necessary to be born again in water and in the Holy Spirit; thus in one's rebirth no one can be a stranger to Mary, Mother of sinners and Queen of mercy. *

Mary also was praying that all men would soon start to know their Redeemer. Did she not go in haste to the house of St. Elisabeth to announce to her the beautiful news and to give her the grace? Her heart was completely enlightened by zeal, and her prayer opened the Heavens again to mercy quickly bringing the good news of the birth of the Redeemer to the souls who were the most ready to receive this grace.

The Angels took the prayer of the Virgin and, because they surrounded her to praise the Word become Flesh, immediately went around in the vicinity to accomplish their mission of love. This is not written in the Sacred Text explicitly, but can be understood, because God wanted Mary to be the mediatrix of all graces.

Not far from the grotto there were a few shepherds who were awake, guarding their flock; the night was clear and so they were outside and probably attracted by the beauty of the starry night, they were praying.

The readiness of their faith suggests to us that they had their souls predisposed to grace and that, as good and simple Jewish people, they longed for the accomplishment of the divine promises. These were now a reality and that blessed land was as if enveloped in a spiritual splendor that unconsciously renewed in them the desire of the Patriarchs and the Prophets. The Sacred Text says in fact that *the glory of God shone round about them*, not only for the apparition of the Angels, but also for the interior splendor that shone in them, renewing in them the faith in the coming of the Redeemer.

** Very beautiful and most significant this philological explanation of the "firstborn" and the second-born. Also, St. Paul calls Christ the firstborn of every creature.

An angel appeared to the shepherds.

All of a sudden, in the darkness of the night appeared a figure of light that, at first, brought them great fear. It was an Angel of the Lord, of human form, majestic, a most sweet figure, enveloped in light and was himself of light. He shone more than the sun, yet did not blind, and there was a sleekness and swiftness to his splendid form which gave the idea of a most tranquil power to which nothing could resist. His height gave the idea of spiritual greatness, and his mysterious look reflected his eternal contemplation; there was a composed and collected joy in him and charity was resplendent in him.

Turning to the frightened shepherds he said: *“Fear not: for, behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David the Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”*

The Angel spoke of a great joy for the people, while everybody was sleeping and few later knew of the great grace received. Clearly he was looking into the future, to the happiness of the centuries, to the joy of the future Church, to the people of God, made happy by Redemption. How much solemnity was in those words: *For unto you is born this day the Savior, who is Christ the Lord!*”

The heart still rejoices remembering them, and yet it is such a miserable heart! On the mouth of the Angel were luminous words, enlarged, so to speak, in the centuries, past and future, linking the promises, the figures and the prophecies to reality and pointing out in a flash the admirable unity of the plan of God.

From that moment on, the sighs of expectation came to an end, and joy began; all people from that time on started a new life, and little by little this would develop until forming completely, in the unity of faith and love, the kingdom of God.

The sign that the Angel gives to the shepherds is admirable in recognizing the Savior, because at a first glance it would seem to be more proper not recognizing him instead of confessing his true regal greatness: *You shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.*

Three contexts appear so much in opposition to the greatness of our One and Triune God; weakness, *a babe*; constriction, *wrapped in swaddling clothes*; humiliation and poverty, *lying in a manger*. He appeared weak, unable to think and operate, in a throne of extreme poverty, in the frosty night.

And these would be the signs of a God made Flesh? This is something astonishing. Yet these were the unmistakable signs, because another newborn baby in such condition of abasement and misery could not be found nor the grace that he shed with his innocent charm of a babe could be overlooked.

He was God, and any sign of human greatness would have diminished him, not enlightened him; gold, jewels, precious clothes, and a sumptuous home would have shown him to be at best a prince, not God **.

He was light and ornament to himself and his true and splendid courts were Mary and Joseph.

** This consideration of Don Dolindo is realistic in addition to being very beautiful. Clothes and the external splendors do not give dignity to a person; but it is the spiritual nobility of the person makes him great... Thus these are very useful observations inviting to look for the values of the spirit, and to give little importance to exterior things.

The shepherds had not to look at him in a human light, but rather through the great light of faith, and it was logical that He would have no human signs that would proclaim his greatness. On the other hand, if the Word made Flesh had to become, as it was predicted, the victim of love, what better sign of love than his complete humility, his poverty, his charm? He had to embrace a new covenant with his people, and he was born in a stable with animals, put in a manger, a little babe yet immense in the fire of his love, that went, so to speak, between two animals not killed but alive, just as a divine fire went through the slaughtered animals sacrificed by Abraham (Gn 15:17).

Tradition always presents to us a manger with an ox and a little donkey that with their breath mitigated the freezing cold; they were a reminder of the Covenant with Abraham, renewed not in death but in life. One was an animal for sacrifice, the other was not, but both were united near Jesus, with fire of love in his heart, because he was coming to call the sacred people and the Gentiles. It was predicted that he would descend as *dew on the fleece* (Jgs 6:36-38), and he came in the night in a place of animals. He was the Lamb of God, and he was born in a stable, used to keep little lambs, and he rested there waiting to be sacrificed.

It was predicted that he had to be the son of a Virgin mother, and it was enough to see Mary after giving birth, kneeling, adoring, in the splendor of her virginal purity, to understand that she had remained intact and still a Virgin; it was enough to see Joseph in his profound humility, to understand that he had no part in that marvelous fruit. A real father, in fact, is the first one to pour out his tenderness to his son and shows his paternity with loud joy.

The shepherds perhaps were not able to reason this way, but a heart that is simple is most synthetic and knows by intuition the truth that others need from proof; for them, therefore, the condition of the newborn was a sign of truth. To be a shepherd, in those days, did not mean to be ignorant of sacred things, in fact also the well off would take care of their flock...the main wealth of a family. The truth of the future Messiah was familiar to all Jewish people, especially in those times of subjugation and oppression that sharpened their desire of liberation.

However, if all signs of truth would have been missed in order to recognize the newborn Messiah, the presence of the Angel sufficed and the grandiose concert from a multitude of celestial spirits praised joyfully: *Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth, to men of good will.*

It was a most solemn moment: an invisible multitude of celestial beings became visible; it was a choir of light resplendent in the night extending to all horizons. They were figures as radiant as a flash of lightning and as delicate as the dawn; their eyes were turned toward the Heavens, and their bodies were cloaks of glory. They moved like a sky full of the brightest stars, in perfect order, and were singing. Who can ever imagine what that singing was? These were not notes merely reverberating in the matter, those would have been too miserable; they were notes of power, wisdom, and of love that formed a magnificent harmony; they were a deep appreciation of God, a praise to Him, a love enlightened like a magnificent holocaust, and then shed down like a river of graces on the poor humanity. Those words were alive, resounding in their meaning the eternal harmonies and came back in waves of love to the Lord One and Triune.

The Church perhaps has something of those angelic notes in her songs of praise, but here they are composed by vocal cords and instead there were trills of a spirit blessed

that expands, adores, dashes itself, bends, launches itself again on the wings of love; it contemplates in silence, enjoys, uses, satiates itself and lives of God. We would be tempted to translate these harmonies of the blessed spirit into the notes of Gregorian chants; but as much as these may be graceful, they could never express the sweetness and the power of an angelic choir. Besides, which voice can reproduce the voice of a spirit? Our poor notes are like heavy drops of a waterfall that plummet down into a vortex of death, while the angelic notes are like the fragrance of incense rising on high, in the eternal azure; our love is like the sparking of smoking wood, while the love of the Angels is the purest flame, all spirit.

O Holy Angels, let us sing your notes with the blaring voices of the Church, our voices are voices brightened by the divine Blood, that vivifies them, so that we may not be separated for a moment from your joy! That song has not stopped: the Church repeats it everyday, in the darkness of her pilgrimage, in order that everyday the glory of God shines in her life and peace reigns in the hearts of her sons.

These sweetest voices vanished, and the Angels disappeared in the high heavens. The night, that for a moment had seemed to disappear, returned with her mantle of shadows. The sky was shining, yet now the stars did not seem like stars anymore; they were like peaceful eyes looking down at the earth enraptured. They went by, shining over the blessed grotto as if in a dance of love; it could be said that they recognized from their far distance the powerful voice that created them, and sang in tune a canticle of order to the Eternal Wisdom become Flesh that had harmonized them.

The shepherds adore Jesus.

The shepherds were ecstatic, full of joy and love; all together they decided to go to adore the Babe born in the surroundings of Bethlehem. They went fast, running, pushed by love and the desire to see the Messiah. They went looking in grottos, because only there would be a manger. When they arrived at the entrance they were hesitant; Mary already knew it, because she had called them with her prayer. They paused for a moment, kneeling down; they were exulting, their hearts beating hard, almost as if these would come out from their breasts. The divine Infant enraptured them.

Mary made a gesture, and they entered. Without Mary they would have never dared to enter, and it is always Mary who offers Christ to souls. They knelt by the manger, believed, adored. They did not need any proof, the proof is all in those few words of the Sacred Text: *And they found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe and when they had seen him, they believed what was told them concerning this Child.* It was logical they would be persuaded because he was the Truth, Mary was the seat of Wisdom and Joseph was the faithful keeper.

They saw the Child: he was a little rosy-hued baby, most beautiful. He had a little golden lock on his head, like a nimbus cloud; his forehead like the light of mysterious wisdom, his eyes shining with goodness and sweetness, his lips smiling with love.**

**This is all a poetic effusion of the soul of Don Dolindo. Yet it is not just poetry, because the divinity of Jesus, son of God, through his assumed humanity, always emanates a mysterious aura as mentioned frequently in the Gospels e.g. "If only I can touch his cloak"...(Mt 9: 21)

One died of love being in His presence, He aroused tenderness in the soul that moved one to tears. What peace in that manger! He was born in Bethlehem, *the house of bread*, and like the Bread of life, He was in a manger. He was enticing. One would have liked to “eat Him with kisses”. What a beautiful babe, delicate and powerful, most sweet and majestic, very little and yet bigger than the heavens. He spoke softly to their souls. What a talk of love! They felt it into the depth of their hearts, and they felt reborn. They breathed in grace, their souls were enlarged. What love! They could not depart from the grotto. No royal palace was more beautiful than this.

They raised their eyes to Mama Mary: she was sweetest mercy; and St. Joseph, he was goodness personified. Did they talk to them? Happiness made them speechless.

They cried and their tears were like a pearly gems on the Baby’s face; they were like the fusion of the sinner with the Redeemer. They remained silent. The hours went by, fast as instants; their joy made them go fast, because their joy, almost at the steps of eternity, was immense. Heaven does not have hours, because not even the centuries can measure its instants.

The day was beginning to break, and they had to leave. They went back to their flocks that were bleating, but not in pain, but because they too were at peace. Their instinct seemed like reasoning, so much were they at peace as never before.

The shepherds went around everywhere bringing the good news; they were already apostles and from shepherds of a flock they had become shepherds of souls. God always chooses the humble for the great announcements of his love. They proclaimed the marvel they had heard and seen, and Mary kept all in her heart and meditated upon it.

How great is this meditation of the Most Holy Virgin! She meditated on the mysteries that were evolving, the fulfillment of the prophecies, the graces for souls and she blessed the Lord with all her Heart. She meditated on the words that the Angel had spoken to her, and she would compare them with what she was seeing, and she would renew her faith and her abandonment to God. It was for her a great joy that at least someone recognized her divine Son, and paid homage to him; this alleviated the grief of her soul for the ingratitude of mankind.

She meditated in silence, in her Heart, and with these few words the Evangelist illustrates for us the personality of the Mother of God: tranquil, thoughtful, recollected; she spoke little, and her great life of love was all in her interior. She was silent and spoke with God, because her first desire was to be hidden, in contrast to us who speak and squander so many gifts of God in a whirlpool of spiritual vanity.

The Sacred Text adds that the shepherds left glorifying and praising God; in them remained an exultance full of the spirit; their faith was renewed in their hearts, and they repeated to themselves *what they had heard and seen, as it was told to them*. Thus the Divine Infant had conquered them in his deep humiliation and those swaddling clothes that enveloped him in the humble manger were for them the true light to see Him, the Savior of the world.

The way God operates.

It is most important to consider the ways in which God operates, as they are so different from our habits and thoughts. God operates with what appears to human eyes to be most meek and insignificant. It almost would seem that his omnipotence, creating

everything from nothing, looks for what is closest to nothing in order to manifest himself in greater splendor. Through the extreme humiliation of a manger in a grotto, the glory of the Word made Flesh shined upon the soul of the shepherds, and those swathing bands wrapped tightly around him, made manifest his power; the enormous disproportion between the way used by God, and the effect produced, was in itself a true proof for the shepherds and it is still for us today.

How many times we believe to succeed in holy works, and yet we fail miserably, because we use human means! Sometimes we can even see the evidence that ordinary works of apostolate fail even if we believe to be them very efficacious, and instead, a mere word said with humbleness and with blind faith in the Lord succeeds. Sometimes only a single act of our nature or of our pride can ruin a design of grace in a soul or can make useless the best work of love.

The shepherds were awake looking after their flocks and the Angel of God appears to them, announcing the good news of the birth of the Savior; the same happens to the shepherds of the soul: their vigilant prayers and their zeal make them worthy of the divine mercies and they, in the night of the word, see God born in souls, to free them from their sins and to fill them with peace.

Let us imitate the shepherds and quickly respond to God, as soon as he calls us with his interior inspirations and let us not put delays to his mercy. By quickly responding to his voice we are made to find the way to heaven and are made able to reach the place that He assigns for us on our pilgrimage on earth. O Jesus call us, that we may follow you and save us in your infinite mercy!

The Angels sang: *Glory to God in the highest and peace to people of good will*; in those few words they summarized the effects of the Redemption; they infinitely glorified God and reconciled Him with the creatures who enveloped and raised by his divine benevolence, would have the peace of God and peace within themselves.

In the Greek text, *people of good will* are those that are the object of his benevolence that is in the grace of God. * That means that it is useless to expect peace without grace. The world cannot find peace even after the Redemption, because it is not the object of the divine benevolence, and it continues to run away with its cursed sin. It is necessary to yield to peace in one's heart and in the world, embracing divine grace and fleeing from sin.

The more the world burdens itself with sins the more it becomes troubled; if today it has become a theater of wars, it is a consequence of being mired in a pit of awful sins **

We could say, with no exaggeration that each sin corresponds to a new weapon that destroys peace, and the modern inventions of war, all together, are like the total sum of our iniquities. As our pride rises, so also rise destructive airplanes; as the soul without God becomes asphyxiated, so does our body with bombs.

*In fact, in the Bible of the Italian Episcopal Conference (C.E.I.) the sentence is translated...”and peace on earth to the men whom He loves”....

** Don Dolindo was just writing during the terrible time of WWII.

When scandal ruins hearts with the promulgation of false science and false literature, radiating death, there rises *the ray of death*, the new discovery that paralyzes, destroys and kills at a distance *.

To have peace, neither negotiations nor the use of force are of use; what is necessary is a true conversion to God of the people and of the nations. This is an undeniable truth. Men go marching toward death when they march against perdition; and since also young people often today fall in the sins of adults, here they are, just immature beardless children, with rifles on their shoulders **. People can say what pleases them, using pretentious words of heroism, and boasting of the strength of the weapons of their nation; the real truth is that this is a sign of the nations' sins and of their moral degradation.

Never have people talked about peace as they do today, and never has the world been a theater of war as it is today. If mankind does not give glory to God, how can it have peace? These are two words that cannot be divided and that the Angels on purpose sang together: *Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth to men of good will.*

4. The circumcision.

On the eighth day after the birth of the baby the rite of the circumcision was accomplished, sign of the covenant made with God by the Jewish people. It consisted in a painful cut on a delicate part of the body, that was to be the way, blessed by this suffering, for the propagation of the chosen people. Symbol and figure of the immolation of the Redeemer, from whose most precious Blood we would be thus born true sons of God when he would forgive the original sin and unite the souls to God.

Women did not receive any particular sign in the covenant with God, because the woman was an integral part of the man, and in this way she would partake of the union with the Lord. As Mary was immaculate *intuita meritorum Christi (in consideration of the merits of Christ)*, in the same way the woman, of whom Mary was the representative, participated in the justice of man with the sign of the circumcision. Pain had to redeem us and as result the covenant, representing the Redemption was a sign of pain; the Blood had to purify us and rightly so in the blood shed was renewed the hope of salvation and the announcement of its accomplishment.

Man had become proud and he found death; therefore, it was right then that the reproduction of the human race, that had to overcome death and to continue in others an extinguished life, would be marked by a sign of humiliation, until the time when the humiliation of the Redeemer and his wounded nakedness would make this reproduction a Sacrament, in his Blood.

*At the time of Don Dolindo there was a great deal of talk about the invention of a death ray... but it was never confirmed to have been built.

** Don Dolindo here speaks of the "Balilla e Avanguardisti", members of an obligatory youth organization. Children would be introduced to using weapons. The propagandist phrase at the time was: "Book and rifle make the perfect fascist." However Don Dolindo was against the war and he was very courageous to write it so openly during those times.

On the Cross He was entirely circumcised, and he generated the Church from His Heart with the last shedding of Blood and He espoused her. This was also logical because souls who marry become united in the heart and because of the heart, before their bodies become united. Jesus consecrated the human heart through the wound of his Heart and consecrated the flesh in the wounds of his infinite love.

The woman had her expiating consecration through her very maternal function, accomplished in pain, and taking it from life, she took her own purifying immolation. To give birth, therefore, was for her a confession of the original sin, and the Lord submitted her to the purification in the Temple to envelope her in his mercy, until when, regenerated by the Blood of Jesus Christ, she would not anymore represent the prevaricator, but instead the Church, full of grace and mother of the children of God. Everything is marvelous in God's dispositions, also when man with his little intellect does not see and does not understand Him.

The circumcision, as we said before, was done on the eighth day from birth, in the presence of at least ten witnesses, almost to represent the people by this great number. It was done either in the house of the newborn or in the Synagogue, and it was done either by the father or by a Priest. While he did the cutting the minister said: "*Blessed be the Lord our God, who sanctified us with his precepts and has given us the circumcision*"; the father of the newborn who had to be present, would answer: "*That has allowed us to introduce our son in the alliance of our father Abraham.*" Then all the others would say: "*Health to the one you chose for your son.*" After this ceremony a name was imposed on the newborn in memory of the new name that God had imposed on Abraham in the institution of the circumcision.

Jesus Christ, innocence itself, had no need to be circumcised; nevertheless he wanted to be like his brothers (Heb 2: 17) to redeem those who were under the Law (Gal 4:5), to humiliate himself deeply by receiving the sign of sin and to spread the first drops of his most precious Blood.

We cannot identify exactly the place where he was circumcised; most likely it occurred in the grotto where he was born, because with the uninterrupted flow of people for the census, it would not have been easy for Joseph to find a house. We also cannot say who performed the painful cut; perhaps it was St. Joseph himself, to consecrate better his legal paternity. Certainly he was present, as it was prescribed and took the Baby as his own, imposing on him the name of Jesus.

Satan did not yet understand what the goodness of God was accomplishing in the world because, as St. Ignatius the martyr says, the Lord did not allow him to know. Satan could never get close to Mary, who made him feel crushed and beaten; he was unsettled by her immaculate purity and angered by that very deep humility.

When the Angel announced the great mystery, Satan was thrust again into hell by the celestial hosts, and he was not aware of the wonderful operation of the Holy Spirit. But when the name of Jesus was pronounced for the first time on earth, the entirety of hell shook and, according to the words of St. Paul, a strong dominating power compelled all the demons to adore Him. A cloud of dazzling splendor enveloped them and humiliated them and, as when a strong electrical charges and lightening in the atmosphere cause the flickering of electric light bulbs or power failures, in the same way, at the mentioning of the divine name, the infernal arrogance of those spirits, who believed to be in command, was suddenly dimmed, and they were humiliated.

It was then, possibly, that Satan full of anger decided to declare war against the Redeemer, everywhere He would appear and later, recognizing Him because of the visit of the three kings, he incited Herod against Him and tried to have Him perish in the Slaughter of the Innocents. Satan remembered his defeat that he had had in Heaven and foresaw what he would have on earth; he had fallen because he refused to adore the Word made Flesh, when the eternal splendors were shown to him, and the name of Jesus renewed in him the stupid pride that had made him to refuse to glorify Him in order to keep glory for himself; his most gloomy spirit was perturbed and his unhappiness became even more terrifying.

The Presentation in the temple.

Mary Most Holy, most pure Virgin and Mother of God, was not subject to the law of purification, nor to the presentation in the Temple nor the ransom for her divine Son. A woman in fact that gave birth to a son was considered unclean for forty days for all the stain and sensuality accompanying the birth; the first born was considered by law as belonging to God, and he could not belong to his mother if she had not redeemed him.

Now Mary had begotten Jesus by the Holy Spirit, and his birth did not violate in any way her immaculate virginity; besides, Jesus, being the true Son of God, did not need either to be consecrated to him nor, even less, to be redeemed. However, He and His Mother submitted to this legal custom to humble themselves and to give us the example of virtue, and they also wanted to appear before the world as ordinary people.

On the other hand it was logical that it was so, because the moment had not yet come to make it known that the great mystery was accomplished. If Mary had not gone to the Temple and had not offered Jesus, she would have appeared to the ignorant as a profaner of the Law, and God did not allow this. Truly, she was not going there to be purified but to purify, perfuming with immaculate purity the world and the Temple of its figures and promises; more than to offer to God the son who already belonged to Him, she offered him to the world as the Savior and the King of love; she humbled herself legally but she was Queen in accomplishing the Law and fulfilling the words of the Prophets.

For this reason the Church sings on the Feast of Purification beautifully: “Adorn your bridal chamber, o Sion, and receive Christ the King; greet Mary, the Gate of Heaven, for She brings the King of glory, the new light. The Virgin bore the Son generated before the dawn, and Simeon on receiving him in his arms proclaimed to the people that He was the Lord of life and death and the Savior of the world.” This is the true meaning and the true light of the mystery of Mary’s Purification and the presentation of Jesus.

The sacred Family, then, arrived at the Temple, crossed the atrium of the Gentiles and the atrium of the women and went up the fifteen steps that brought one to the entrance between the atrium of the women and the one of the Israelites. The Priest on duty at the Temple sprinkled Mary with the blood of a victim and prayed over her. Mary was kneeling, all suffused of sublime purity, all holy, a most pure flower, humbly sprinkled by blood. Right after they gave the prescribed offering, which for the less poor was a one year old lamb given in holocaust with a dove or a turtle-dove, and for the poor two doves or two little turtle doves.

Mary chose the offering of the poor because she was poor; but in reality she could not offer a lamb because in her hands she had the real Lamb of God, she could not give a symbol when she was presenting the accomplishment. She went to the Temple under the appearance of a legal humiliation, but in truth she accomplished in that moment the fulfillment and the prophecies of the past and offered to the Throne of God the true victim for the sins of the world.

For the ransom of the firstborn five shekels were given, equivalent to about 70 cents; those five coins gave back the son to his father and mother, who thus recognized the right of God over His creatures. Mary presented the divine Son to the Father and offered five shekels to have him back; it was the last symbol that shone in the Temple, because those five shekels represented the five wounds that the Redeemer would give to God for ransoming man. Jesus Christ, covered by our sins, represented in that moment all of humanity and, ransomed with five shekels, expressed through himself the ransom that man would have to have. He was the Redeemer, and he wanted to ransom man, and offering himself to God covered by our sins, represented before Him the sinner marked symbolically with the price of the ransom that He would give with his wounds and his death.

The holy old Simeon

This great mystery would have been unknown to all if the holy old man, Simeon, had not revealed it by divine inspiration. He was a very old man, *just and devout to God*, that is, according to the Greek text, *a holy and conscientious observer of everything that was related to religion*. He went through life, *awaiting the consolation of Israel*, that is, the Redeemer, and he had prayed intensely that the time of his arrival would be shortened. Because of his prayers, he received by the Holy Spirit, with an interior inspiration, the reassurance that he would not die without seeing the Messiah. Since he was very old, this reassurance was equivalent to the imminent announcement of the accomplishment of the divine promises.

On the day that Jesus was presented to the Temple, Simeon felt one of those interior inspirations that are very difficult to resist, that is he felt a deep joy in his soul, a feeling of recollection, and at the same time an expansion of heart that turns one's thoughts to God, making it very easy to pray, with an impetus of love and an assurance of being satisfied and heard. These are in fact the feelings of a soul filled with a special light by the Holy Spirit. He felt attracted to go to the Temple; he felt in his body a vigor that pushed him as if he were supported. He left in a hurry, went to the House of God where he found Mary, Joseph and the divine Baby.

For him it was a vision: the humility and the purity of the Immaculate Mother was like halo of light around the Baby she had in her arms; the recollection and the simplicity of St. Joseph were like an aroma of fragrant flowers adorning him; he understood immediately the mystery of the Divine Infant, and asked for the grace to hold him in his arms. He picked him up and he felt himself wholly vivified by grace, his heart was on fire and the Holy Spirit effused in his mind a great light of truth. He raised his eyes to Heaven, and holding up the Baby exclaimed: *Now, Master, let your servant go in peace, according to Your word: for my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in sight of all the peoples; a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people,*

Israel. He spoke all in one breath, without interruption and without stopping, as St. Zachary did in his canticle; the ideas in him were not a reflection but a great light, flowing from him like a splendid ray that nothing could stop.

Now his soul no longer had any attraction for things of the earth, and he considered death as liberation from his exile; his eyes had seen *the salvation of the Lord*, that is the Savior, and his soul had seen him as well because he had believed. In fact he confessed what it truly was: the accomplishment of the divine promises, a light of truth for all the nations, and unutterable glory of his people Israel.

Simeon's inspired intonation was so solemn that Mary and Joseph *marveled at those things which were spoken of Jesus*. They were not marveling at what Simeon said, as some have interpreted, but rather this phrase mean that they were surprised *he said this of the Baby*, as the Sacred Text clearly states. Their faith was far above Simeon's, and their knowledge of it much deeper than what he said; but it is precisely about this faith that made them rejoice at the light that gives confirmation to the truth, and to marvel even more over the harmony in the reflexes that it spreads around. Mary and Joseph lived more ardently than what they themselves thought, because the confirmation that Simeon gave them was for their mind like a bright light and for their hearts flames of love.

They were marveling because they were in full admiration, not because they doubted, and their faith expanded in their mind like illuminating reason and like flames in their heart. They marveled because they humbled themselves interiorly, thinking they did not suitably appreciate the gift they had received from God. They marveled in the transport of their interior joy, because deep joy is always united to wonder for that which pervades it in the soul.

Mary and Joseph had not spoken with anybody of the mystery of the Incarnation, yet Simeon knew of it by the light of the Holy Spirit; thus this spreading of the truth was a marvel that also foreshadowed the diffusion it would have over all the world because of the Holy Spirit.

Simeon was old, and he had a paternal feeling toward these two persons younger than he, and he felt love toward them. Looking at Mary and Joseph in their deep loving recollection, he felt very touched, and he blessed them with that loving way that a good old man does. After he had another inspiration, he turned to Mary and in a solemn way, speaking of Jesus, he added: *Behold this child is set for the fall and the rising again of many in Israel; and to be a sign that will be contradicted and you yourself a sword will pierce so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed*.

In a few words he traced the sorrowful walk of the Savior and that of his Mother: In Israel many would believe in him and would be saved, but many would reject him and would be lost. He would be a sign of contradiction for the legal authority and for those souls who were not upright; the soul of Mary would be pierced by the sword of most bitter sorrow, because of the contradiction against her Son and his sorrowful death.

The words opposing the Redeemer would be the result of bad feelings, and thus would reveal the evil of those who would oppose Him.

That was what happened to Jesus, and this still happens any time in the history of the Church, His mystical Body, in which He continues the salvific work and his Passion: those who do not follow the truth are lost, and take the cause of their damnation from the very reason that would save them.

The Church is a perennial sign of contradiction on behalf of the evildoers of all the centuries, and the sword of moral suffering in the midst of violent and bloody persecutions pierces her soul. In this way the thoughts of many are manifested, and their intentions revealed.

There are many, in fact, throughout history; and today we have a large number of them who present themselves as saviors and even seem like great doers of good; but they do not reveal, especially at first, their malice. However, their attitude toward the Catholic Church exposes them for what they are: if they persecute her, or if they simply put obstacles in her way, they show themselves to be evildoers, enemies of the truth and the genuine well being of the people. Whoever is honest and good is in harmony with the Church, because he knows not of reproaches or disapprovals; on the contrary, he receives spiritual help; but whoever is dishonest and evil works against the Church because he knows that he finds a formidable obstacle to his own evilness.

With this measure it is possible to evaluate the true nature of some governments and some nations; hypocrisies do not deceive, and deceptions do not mislead when one considers the attitude of a government toward the Church. Whoever sees a government persecuting the Church must not believe in it, even more he must consider it a great calamity for the nation, because all of that regime's bragging and empty words, sooner or later will bring it to certain collapse.

Exultation of Anna, a holy woman of the Temple.

While Simeon was ecstatic with joy, holding the Baby Jesus in his arms, there came a holy woman by the name of Anna. She was 84 years old and she was in the Temple *day and night*, that is, she had living quarter in one of the rooms attached to the Temple and rendered her services for the Temple, keeping herself in prayer and fasting, imploring for the accomplishment of the divine promises. This woman became a widow after seven years of marriage and had never remarried. She was now 84 years old, and as it can be understood from the context, was dedicated to the holy apostolate of the souls who attended the Temple, keeping awake in them their desire for the coming of the Messiah. In the Sacred Text, in fact, it is written that after she had seen the Baby, *she spoke about Him to all who were awaiting the redemption of Israel*; thus through her apostolate she related with the more just souls and spoke to them of the designs of God. This is the reason why she was called prophetess and received the trust of those who felt most oppressed in their lives by the difficulties they experienced and encouraged them with the hope of the imminent redemption.

Just as Simeon did, Anna, too, felt compelled to go to the Temple by an interior inspiration and since she was accustomed to the mysterious ways of God, she felt instantly in her heart that she was being transported with a joy that prompted her to bless and praise the Lord because He had sent the Redeemer.

It was very moving and mysterious that these two people, very advanced in age, would give witness to the newborn Messiah; they represented the old covenant that confirmed the truth of what was accomplished. In that moment the royal court of the Divine King was formed by the Old Testament and the Old Law, represented by the two old people; it was glorified by Simeon, a name which means *who grants and who obeys*,

and by Anna, whose name means *grace, mercy that gives*, daughter of Phanuel, *vision of God*, of the tribe of Asher, *beatitude and happiness*. The very names of the two old people radiated a reflex of the mystery that had been accomplished; God had *granted* the sighs of humanity, He had made himself *obedient*, and He radiated *mercy and grace*.

The little Infant was a *divine vision*, because he was God, and the work He came to accomplish was directly aimed at the eternal *beatitude and happiness* for those who would believe and would be saved. Through this delicate way in which God awaits everything with his wisdom, it was as if in that tender scene of the Presentation in the Temple, there was affixed above it an inscription of what was occurring: *The Word of God is descended from Heaven becoming obedient to his creatures. God heard the sighs of the peoples and spread his mercy and his grace. See in the little Infant the Lord himself, who comes to give again to men peace and eternal beatitude. – Here is the Savior, Jesus – here is the Queen of the world, Mary – who brings souls to life – here is the new people that grows, Joseph, and like a thriving offspring sprouts and expands. – the old promises are accomplished – the Prophets and the Law – give praise to God!*

All this is not an appropriately clever fantasy, because God, through the events of our little earth, always writes sculpted pages of his marvels and his glory, and the little creatures that go by, through the fleeting centuries following one another swiftly, are like grains of sand which, one way or another reflect like droplets of sunshine, the design of God. Once in Heaven, we shall be surprised to see a marvelous harmony in all the tangled mass of human events, and a marvelous assertion of the glory of God even in those events that appear to us as disastrous. Let us bow our heads and adore, pray, and instead of becoming upset with the events in the world, let us wait with faith the revelation of the glory of God.

The Church recites the three canticles of the descent of the Word upon the earth, *Benedictus, Magnificat and Nunc dimittis*, at dawn, at the Vespers, and at the end of the day and in doing so blesses God who visits us, exalts him in his glory, and rests in his arms. This is the synthesis of her life and of our day on earth. The Church, the accomplishment of the old promises, blesses God and announces his kingdom among the peoples; rich in her Redeemer, she exalts in him and for him, the Lord: *my soul magnifies the Lord*; she is a pilgrim and waits for her homeland and she sighs: *Nunc dimittis..Now let your servant go in peace...according to your word*. We get up blessing the Lord, we work glorifying him in the accomplishing of his will, and at the end of the day we rest in the hope of the eternal reward.

This is a synthesis of a truly Christian day. Let us go day after day to the temple of God, let us offer Jesus to the Father through the hands of the Church, let us present him as our own gift, let him circumcise us in our hearts by his love, let him purify us in his mercy and let us live in the expectation of the kingdom of God. Let us not make our lives a mindless aimless pursuit steeped in evil desperation: life is a preparation for eternal life, it is the accomplishment of the divine and most loving will of God in us and a reposing in his love while awaiting the resurrection. It is a *Benedictus*, a *Magnificat* and a *Nunc dimittis*; however when instead it is warped by sin and transgression from the divine Law it is a malediction, a desperation and an eternal death. Oh my Lord, free us from the spirit of the world and allow us to possess, in love, the treasures of your mercy, which we received with the redemption.

5. The infancy of Jesus. The losing of Jesus and his hidden life.

Mary and Joseph, after accomplishing all what the law prescribed, went back to Galilee and to the humble town of Nazareth with their divine Son. Since St. Joseph, when they returned from their flight into Egypt, wanted to make Bethlehem their home, it is possible to contemplate that after the purification, the holy family went to Nazareth for a while, before returning to Bethlehem, where afterward the adoration of the Magi occurred, followed by the flight into Egypt and the definitive return to Nazareth where they finally settled.

In this forgotten village Mary raised her Child and St. Joseph took care of his little family working as a carpenter. The idea he later had to return to Bethlehem lets us suppose that in Nazareth there was not much work for him to do, and the holy Family knew the distress of poverty; however amid this poverty radiated Jesus, the divine treasure, and he was the joy of the house. The holy text says that *the child grew, and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom and the grace of God was upon Him*. From these few words, which St. Luke received from Mary's mouth, it is possible to understand the life she had with her divine Son. Every mother is tenderly drawn to speak of her son as *growing and becoming strong* and she is delighted at the first manifestations of his intelligence and his heart.

Any woman who raises a son knows the joy that she feels to see him in good health, intelligent and good, that is to notice his moral and physical development. This loving satisfaction was great in Mary, because she felt from the life of the Redeemer a continued communion of graces; she was as if immersed in the rays of his divinity. Jesus was *growing* and also the love of Mary grew; the little body was *becoming strong* and her maternal tenderness also increased. He did not babble but he spoke to her in her heart about God and revealed to her the treasures of his charity.

Therefore Mary was in a constant contemplation. No maternity was more joyful than hers. Jesus *grew and became strong*, thus beginning to walk and ready to do little tasks in the house and in the workshop of St. Joseph. What a tender and loving example of intimacy was the house of Nazareth! Peace reign unsurpassed, the recollection, the most intimate and pure joy that the divine light changed into a temple. What was Jesus on the maternal breast of his mother! With what most humble love She continued to give her life to him though her milk and with what tenderness she felt nursing life! One of the most tender maternal functions is nursing; for Mary it was almost an opening of her heart, offering herself, feeling herself lightly bitten, seeing the satisfaction of the little infant, his eyes, and his very eagerness that moved her deeply. She felt lightened by her little one, because she emptied herself of that fullness that her love wanted to give and when she saw him moving away from her breast, asleep, she remained looking at him and kissed him tenderly, and caressed his cheeks tenderly.

The Church sums up this maternal function of Mary with one admirable sentence: *Sola virgo lactaba, ubere de caelo pleno (Only the Virgin nursed him having the fullness of the Heavens)*; she had her virginal breasts filled of the heavens because they were made fertile by the Holy Spirit. Therefore she not only gave to him her virginal milk, but she also effused her life of love and enveloped him in the essence of her purity and her humility. That immaculate breast was truly a field of lilies where her beloved descended to feed of love, and She gave to him her immaculate Heart, drawing from him, on the

other hand, the grace of which he was filled. She knew very well, moreover, that at her breast she had the Son of God, and her humility at that contact had to be immense, sublime. She touched him like a consecrated Host; she enveloped him in her arms more than the angel enveloped the Ark; she was radiant with love, she was the Mother of God, the only Mother in which this name is truly divine!

Jesus was growing and was becoming strong, he began to walk and, as we said before, he was beginning to do small tasks. The sweetest little toddler walked in the rooms like a heavenly vision; his form was perfect, he had blond curls, and he was radiant in his divinity; he was amiable, gentle and his eyes shined with an intelligence that compelled adoration. There was sorrowfulness about him because he was the Victim of love, and Mary, looking at him, penetrated the mysteries of that infinite Heart and kept them in her own heart, moaning in deep sorrow. The prophesy of Simeon was always before her, and the passing of the years brought her closer to Calvary. She knew it, but she united herself completely to the divine will and prayed for mankind.

And the child grew up and became strong, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was in him. He, in fact, as man, possessed the blessed science and the infused science a thousand times more perfect than the angels and the saints had; he also understood the experimental or acquired science in proportion to his age and based on the admirable perfection of his natural faculties. His human soul was filled with sanctified grace and he possessed to the utmost the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the graces *gratis datae, freely given*, and all the virtues innate or acquired. He was most perfect even in his tender age, and shed such a gentle majesty that conquered all. Each of his acts was divine and in the little things that he did here and there was something solemn, because He did everything adoring, making reparations, thanking and praying to the Father for the men he had come to redeem. The little house of Nazareth, therefore, echoed of mysterious praise more than a temple did, and to those divine praises responded the hearts of Mary and Joseph, two hearts that beat in unison with the Incarnate Word.

Jesus lost and then found in the Temple.

Every year Mary went with Joseph to Jerusalem for the solemnity of the Passover, even though she was not obliged since she was a woman; men had the duty to go to the Temple three times a year, at Passover, Pentecost and for Feast of the Tabernacles; the women were excused and only the most pious would go at Passover; children assumed this legal obligation when they were twelve years old. When Mary went to Jerusalem she would take Jesus with her, but when he became of legal age, she had to let him go with the party of the men, according to the custom. It was for this reason that she did not realize, returning home, that He had remained behind in Jerusalem. She believed, and so did St. Joseph, that he was among other men and so they went on for a day. At the first stop, however, they saw that he was missing and in vain they searched among their relatives and acquaintances. Extremely troubled and in anguish, they then went back to Jerusalem which took one more day; they still did not know how to find him and so they searched another day without success.

Passersby were of no help because they did not know him. Finally on the third day they went to the Temple, maybe to beg God to help them to find him, and going through

the rooms connected to the holy place, where the Rabbis would go to teach the Law, they heard the voice of their most beloved Son. He was sitting down among the doctors of the law, like a disciple, listening to them and posing them various questions.

It is not possible to grasp the magnitude of the sorrow felt by Mary and Joseph for the loss of Jesus; to do so would require measuring first of all the love they felt for him. They were in anguish; they were agonizing, fearing to have brought on themselves his departure for their unworthiness; they were anxious for his safety and their feelings of loss were excruciating.

Jesus was their life and their souls were in anguish without him. How those two days of searching must have been! They did not lose their inner peace, because they were most holy; although they did lose their hearts, feeling an excruciating pain for the loss. Jesus knew their deep pain, but he allowed that terrible trial to occur in order to sanctify them more and to be an example for all peoples. His divine Heart suffered more than theirs did, but in the moment in which he was starting his legal life, to accomplish his work for mankind, a great immolation of love was necessary to enable man able to receive his love.

The frightening indifference created men have for all that belongs to God, and the restlessness of the world in its miserable trivial activities, always oriented toward things of the earth, required the agony of those two souls that were only inclined to God and living only for Him. The terrible resistance that so many hearts have to the call of God, preferring their choices to his will, required the sacrifice of Jesus of his love toward Mary and Joseph, as preparation and reparation to welcome the plan of the divine will. He had to affirm the right of God over the young people who are the future and hope of the nations; he had to destroy in one stroke the tyrannical claims on hearts that belonged only to God; he had to give a light that would never be extinguished, on the education of children and their vocation; thus he needed great suffering to plunge this seed of life into the hardened heart of mankind. If he had warned Mary and Joseph beforehand of his intention, he would not have achieved the highest purpose that he wanted to achieve; therefore, he set aside the feelings of his heart, withdrew, and came back to the temple, opening his mind to the teaching of the Law in order to teach to the young to open their lives to God and to follow, without human hesitation, the individual inspiration of the divine will upon them.

At the age of twelve, Jesus was well developed, judging from the height that he reached when he was a grown man. He had a perfect form, he was very handsome, splendid, and fascinating. His hair, as it was the custom of the Nazarenes, went down to his shoulders, and adorned his face like a glorious halo. His most beautiful eyes revealed the divine mystery that was hidden within Him; they were mysteriously expressive and shown with an indescribable light, penetrating, so to speak, the hearts.

He entered the room where the doctors of the Law were gathered and sat down to listen to them. His Heart was filled with joy with the divine Word and burned for the glory of the Father. Immediately he attracted the attention of all who were present, because when they questioned him he gave most profound answers and asked questions that bewildered them all. What did he talk about? The Sacred Text does not tell us, but it is possible that he spoke about the fullness of the time and of the Messiah and about his celestial Father, as could be assumed by the answer he gave to Mary. He spoke about God

and for the first time there resounded on earth divinely luminous words on the darkness that weighed down mankind.

When Mary and Joseph entered the sacred area they were surprised to see that Jesus had manifested himself to the people in this way. His love to remain hidden was so deep that they would never have thought it possible. Maybe they were surprised that he had shown himself insensitive to their deep sorrow, knowing how much he was loving and affectionate. Mary could not restrain her maternal heart: she ran to her Son, interrupting him while he was talking and exclaimed: "*Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety.*" All her deep pain was expressed in these few words: she called him Son, and with this word she said that she was looking for him as mother, and as divine Mother; she asked him why he had done this, and with these words she manifested all the anguished trepidations of her heart and St. Joseph's; she expressed their pain in looking for him, and the love that had brought agony to her maternal fears and to those of St. Joseph.

Jesus Christ did not answer with harshness, as it may appear from the Sacred Text; we are accustomed to become upset when we are opposed, and on reading this episode with passion, we can easily come to attribute a sense of bitterness to the answer of Jesus; Jesus instead answered with great sweetness and infinite compassion for their sorrow: "*Why were you looking for Me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?*" If they had reflected on the love that He had for them and the mission that He had, they would not have doubted his affection, and would have understood the reason why he stayed in the temple. What He was saying was: how could you think that I would have neglected you, how could I have not considered your pain? But you know that I am the Son of God, and thus you could suppose that I would be attracted by the House of my Father and in the interests of his glory.

The Sacred Text adds that "*they did not understand what He said to them*", not because they were not able to understand his words, but because they concentrated their emotions and love only on Him. How beautiful was that sacred place, the brilliance of love in his words, and the depth of his answers, that they remained enchanted and did not reflect on his words. There was only the longing to have him back and for this reason the Text adds: *He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them.* They did not pay attention to his words, then, because they invited him never to leave them alone; and in fact He immediately obeyed.

If he had answered to reproach them he would not have followed them and he would have continued to speak; instead he stopped talking immediately; Mary's maternal voice was a command for him and always would be; for this reason Mary, with the impetus of her love and with a feeling of deepest humility, meditated in her Heart on what had happened and the mystery of the love that He felt for her. He obeyed her. He, the true Son of the Father! His divine Majesty bent before her word! Far from showing carelessness or treating her badly, as the Protestants say, He left doing the work of his divine Father to take care of his Mother, and showed that he loved her with the same love, and for him to agree to what She wanted was the same as glorifying God his Father.

When he went back to Nazareth, Jesus remained hidden until he started his public life. What did he do during this hidden period? Certainly he was occupied *with the things of his Father*, that is, his glory, and he was doing this while humbling himself, with obedience and work.

The Sacred Text says that *Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men*. From these few words it is possible to know intuitively something of the mystery of that divine life: *increased in wisdom* not because he was studying, but because he increasingly made manifest the mysteries of his blessed and infused science, and meditated with acquired science, that is with the energy of his human soul, the divine marvels, through speaking with his Mother, St. Joseph and with other people in his family. And it was logical that he would do so, because he wanted to elevate and ennoble in himself human nature, and there is nothing nobler than to meditate upon the celestial marvels.

Increased in stature because he was growing up, and He, being also truly man, showed it in all aspects of his life. However, he had in *his stature*, that is, in his appearance, a marvelous attractiveness that struck whoever saw him, and thus he grew in this attractiveness as the sun rises on the horizon. *Increased in grace*, not as a habit that in Him was perfect and unswerving, but in accordance to the effect of his efforts, doing works more and more magnificent which showed his greatness. Toward God his life was a perpetual and ever greater offering, toward men it was a manifestation increasingly more beautiful; to God he offered the acts of the life progressing and, according to the natural development, he grew in these gifts of love; to men he increasingly manifested the greatness and the wonder of his goodness and gentleness.

6. For our spiritual life

Those few words that the Sacred Text says on the infancy and the childhood of Jesus are a model of life for the education of our children, the only model that can truly foster an increase of goodness and liveliness to the souls of the youths. The Baby was born in a grotto, and he was subject to all the prescriptions of the law with all the complete attention that Mary and Joseph had in everything concerning the Lord. He was circumcised, and He was given a name not on a whim, but according to the one that was revealed by the angel before he was conceived in the womb of Mary. The angels sang around the grotto, giving *praise to God*, and this was the celebration given to the divine Baby, a celebration of heaven; he was put in a manger, poor from an earthly perspective but extraordinarily rich in celestial treasures, lovingly looked after by Mary and Joseph.

In the same way the life of every newborn must begin: he is born on earth and, notwithstanding how rich the parents may be, he is always *born in a grotto*, because earth is a place of exile. It is necessary then, to surround him with spiritual gifts and praises to God; to give to him the first spiritual impression in his opening up to life. That little human being receives the form we give to him, almost like a soft wax, and those first few days that he spends on earth can have an enormous influence on him.

Let the angels sing around his crib, not music-hall singers or poor actors of theaters loaded with worldly trifles; instead let there be voices singing praises to God and voices of peace, so much so that the little soul, without realizing it, is immediately oriented toward the Lord and breathes an air of peace. As soon as possible he must be given the grace of the Baptism, in accordance with the prescription of the Church, and also let him be given a name *suggested by the angel*, that is, in agreement with the usage of the Church, enabling the expression of at least a special devotion or an act of faith.

An outlandish or profane name will leave on the soul of the newborn a mark of frivolity that can damage him all his life. The baby should be brought to the Church and he must become incorporated into the mystical body of Jesus Christ in this sacred place, which can almost be seen as a new altar raised by the hand of the Priest. It is necessary *to present him to God*, praying that in this new life the will of God be done; and offering to the Lord the mystic lamb by receiving the Holy Communion; and offering the little turtle doves, by keeping marital purity and chastity, in order to give to the little infant a mark of purity.

All newborns have the old Simeon who almost prophesies for them because all newborns are surrounded by votive offerings or by special prayers of the people who receive them. It is necessary to include in a model of upbringing not things that are great on earth, but rather the Law of God, because the little one can become the ruin or salvation of many, depending on the development of the divine will in him and he can also be a sword of sorrow for his parents.

We are convinced, through experience, that the lives of many newborns start on the wrong path; they are led astray by those who promote earthly trifles and fail to orient the infant in the divine will. The children announced, so to speak, by prayer, born blessed and offered to God so that in them His will be done, are sheltered by the harmonious holy life of the parents, and always grow up well; and especially, if they are entrusted to Mary and St. Joseph, they will be protected by marvelous heavenly help.

Baby Jesus *grew and became strong, filled with wisdom and the grace of God was upon Him*. Parents cannot only be concerned with the physical development of their children, they must take care that they grow with *grace*. It is true wisdom to steer them toward God and everything that is holy from their tender years, and teach them to love Jesus and Mary; it is true wisdom to form in them in their first notions of the virtues and give them an attraction to charity and peace.

All their toys must have a virtuous intent; they should not merely amuse the child educating him to trifles. In this way *wisdom* will grow in him and, by the grace of God, will form in him the first ideas of goodness. The little one must grow in *grace* as his body grows; he should learn his first prayers with childlike acts of love, with kisses impressed on sacred images, with rudimental considerations on Jesus' passion pointing to the crown of thorns, for example, or the wounds on his Body. The child must grow in *grace*, bringing him to the temple, asking a Priest to bless him and giving him the first attraction for all that is holy.

Removing little ones from God, dressing them in the rags of the politicians*, desecrating them with badges of apostasy, not putting in their hearts signs of the name of Mary or Jesus, and giving them weapons as threatening toys that inspire violence, is a terrifying crime, is to give them to Satan to form them into precocious criminals. The lazy or the wicked, who devise such expedencies, shall realize too late that they have formed a generation of violent people and have driven mankind back into the primitive state from which Jesus Christ had drawn it out by his own Blood.**

When he was about twelve years old, Jesus went to the temple. There he sat to listen to the doctors of the Law, and to attend to the things of his Father. He lived of work and obedience, and he remained hidden until he was thirty years old. Young people must open up to the supernatural life, not to the political or military life; they must attend to the things of God being instructed in the faith, and they must work daily in obedience and submission to their parents, especially to their parents. The impetuosity and the generosity

of young persons must turn to God, and their lives must be calm and untroubled, not agitated by premature passions, that stir imprudently in their souls. To give young people excessive importance means disorienting them, and teaching them very sorrowfully, as it can be seen, not respect their elders, and to become unruly and rebellious. For this reason it is the Church that must educate youth; only this delicate and most learned mother has the secret of the formation of souls, because only she has the richness of the truth and supernatural treasures.

Mary and Joseph lost Jesus when he was in the group; they lost him because he remained in the temple, but if they had looked after him, they would have avoided that great suffering. This is a lesson also for parents and for those who educate young people; without careful supervision, they become lost in their group or in their meeting-places, and differently from Jesus who went to the temple, they often go on the way of evil.

Mary and Joseph sought in vain Jesus in the group and in the city; they only found him when they went to the temple. How many times we lose sight of Jesus during our lives that then becomes empty and sorrowful! It is necessary to look for him in the temple, at the feet of God, going to his ministers in the Sacraments. Let us convince ourselves that there is not greater sorrow in our life than to lose Jesus, and we should not rest even one night in this immense misfortune. When we are at a loss in our spirit, let us go to Him, let us find refuge in the shadow of his tabernacle, let us seek him with immense love, and He will show himself to us; He will come back to us and will give us peace. How many souls lose Jesus because they send him away, only to carry on a very sorrowful life away from Him! O my Lord, born on this earth for my love, do not allow that I ever lose you; give me death instead!

* It was the time of the “fascists”, in which the children, almost as toddler, were given to wear the uniform of ‘the children of the wolf, emblem of Rome.

** Observations and warnings that today have become a reality.

Chapter 3

1. Mission, preaching and imprisonment of St. John the Baptist. Baptism and genealogy of Jesus.

1 Then, in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being procurator of Judea, and Herod tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, 2 under the high priests Annas and Caiaphas: the word of the Lord came to John, the son of Zechariah, in the wilderness. 3 And he went into the entire region of the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, 4 just as it has been written in the book of the sermons of the prophet Isaiah: "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord. Make straight his paths. 5 Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low. And what is crooked shall be made straight. And the rough paths shall be made into level ways. 6 And all flesh shall see the salvation of God." 7 Therefore, he said to the crowd that went out in order to be baptized by him: "You progeny of vipers! Who told you to flee from the approaching wrath? 8 So then, produce fruits worthy of repentance. And do not begin to say, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that God has the power to raise up sons to Abraham from these stones. 9 For even now the axe has been placed at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that does not produce good fruit shall be cut down and cast into the fire." 10 And the crowd was questioning him, saying, "What then should we do?" 11 But in response, he said to them: "Whoever has two coats, let him give to those who do not have. And whoever has food, let him act similarly." 12 Now the tax collectors also came to be baptized, and they said to him, "Teacher, what should we do?" 13 But he said to them, "You should do nothing more than what has been appointed to you." 14 Then the soldiers also questioned him, saying, "And what should we do?" And he said to them: "You should strike no one, and you should not make false accusations. And be content with your pay 15 Now all were thinking about John in their hearts, and the people were supposing that perhaps he might be the Christ. 16 John responded by saying to everyone: "Indeed, I baptize you with water. But there will arrive one stronger than me, the laces of whose shoes I am not worthy to loosen. He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit, and with fire. 17 His winnowing fan is in his hand. And he will purify his threshing floor. And he will gather the wheat into the barn. But the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." 18 Indeed, he also proclaimed many other things, exhorting the people. 19 But Herod the tetrarch, when he was corrected by him concerning Herodias, his brother's wife, and concerning all the evils that Herod had done, 20 added this also, above all else: that he confined John to prison. 21 Now it happened that, when all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized; and as he was praying, heaven was opened. 22 And the Holy Spirit, in a corporal appearance like a dove, descended upon him. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my beloved Son. In you, I am well pleased." 23 And Jesus himself was beginning to be about thirty years old, being (as it was supposed) the son of Joseph, who was of Heli, who was of Matthat, 24 who was of Levi, who was of Melchi, who was of Jannai, who was of Joseph, 25 who was of Mattathias, who was of Amos, who was of Nahum, who was of Esli, who was of Naggai, 26 who was of Maath, who was of Mattathias, who was of Semein, who was of Josech, who was of Joda, 27 who was of

Joanan, who was of Rhesa, who was of Zerubbabel, who was of Shealtiel, who was of Neri, 28 who was of Melchi, who was of Addi, who was of Cosam, who was of Elmadam, who was of Er, 29 who was of Joshua, who was of Eliezer, who was of Jorim, who was of Matthat, who was of Levi, 30 who was of Simeon, who was of Judah, who was of Joseph, who was of Jonam, who was of Eliakim, 31 who was of Melea, who was of Menna, who was of Mattatha, who was of Nathan, who was of David, 32 who was of Jesse, who was of Obed, who was of Boaz, who was of Salmon, who was of Nahshon, 33 who was of Amminadab, who was of Aram, who was of Hezron, who was of Perez, who was of Judah, 34 who was of Jacob, who was of Isaac, who was of Abraham, who was of Terah, who was of Nahor, 35 who was of Serug, who was of Reu, who was of Peleg, who was of Eber, who was of Shelah, 36 who was of Cainan, who was of Arphaxad, who was of Shem, who was of Noah, who was of Lamech, 37 who was of Methuselah, who was of Enoch, who was of Jared, who was of Mahalalel, who was of Cainan, 38 who was of Enos, who was of Seth, who was of Adam, who was of God.

2. The political status of Palestine at the time of John the Baptist.

St. Luke, as the accurate historian that he was, before writing on the apostolate of St. John the Baptist, sketches the political situation in Palestine, the people who ruled at the time, and the High Priests who oversaw the religious part. It is not by chance that the Holy Spirit made him do this, because it was the foreigners who ruled the region and the High Priesthood that was subjected to their political whims and deprived of power at their discretion, and further impoverished to the point of being dominated by pagan principles who gave evidence of the fullness of the time predicted for the advent of the Messiah, which was the complete ruin of the kingdom of Judah.

Tiberius Cesar, son of Livia Drusilla and Tiberius Claudius Nero, adopted as son by the Emperor Augustus after he married Livia, his mother, was first associated with the government of the empire and installed as administrator of the provinces, and later, after the death of Augustus, became his successor and was the emperor of Rome from 767 to 791. [St. Luke refers to the years of the Roman calendar beginning with the foundation of Rome] St. Luke counts the years of the empire of Tiberius not from the death of Augustus but from his first ascent to the government of Rome in 764 -765; since Jesus was born during the years 748-749, he was about 30 years old during the 15th year of Tiberius' reign as St. Luke says in verse 23.

The government of Palestine was formed in this way: Judea, annexed to the province of Syria after the deposition and exile of Archelaus, had governors who depended on the chief of the province. The first governor was Coponius; the fifth was Pontius Pilate, who governed from 26 A.D until A.D. 36-37. At the death of Herod, called the Great, his kingdom was divided into four parts, each called a tetrarchy, that is, four persons ruled it. Judea, Samaria and Indumea went to Archelaus, who later was removed, as we said before, and Galilee and Perea went to Herod Antipas, who ruled from 4 B.C. to A.D. 39-40. Philip, the tetrarch, son of Herod the Great, inherited from his father Iturea, that included Butanea, Trachonitis, Auranitis and others; he married his niece Salomé, daughter of Herodias, who was the wife of another brother on his father's side, also called Philip Herod. Herod Antipas would ultimately take away Herodias from him. Philip Herod was disinherited by his father and lived privately. His wife Herodias, an extremely

ambitious woman, let herself be seduced by Herod Antipas and followed him in the kingdom, becoming his adulterous and incestuous wife; Philip the tetrarch governed rather fairly, and he was the one who built Caesarea Philippi at the foot of Mount Hermon and Bethsaida Julias on the north shore of the Lake Tiberias.

A certain Lysanias, of whom little is known, governed Abilene, the region between Lebanon and Mount Hermon, northwest of Damascus. An inscription recently found at Abila, capital of the region, confirms the words of St. Luke, referring clearly to a tetrarch Lysanias at the time of Tiberius.

With regard to religion, the Sacred Text notes that at the apex of Judaism were the High Priests Annas and Caiaphas. The Jews had only one High Priest who ruled for life; but the Romans did not tolerate this and wanted a pontiff that would answer to their own authorities, both in being nominated as well for the length of their pontificate. Annas had obtained supreme religious power from the legate governor of Syria, Quirinius, in the year A.D. 7 but was removed in the year A.D. 14 by Valerius Gratus. However Annas nevertheless continued to be prominent and he was considered High Priest together with Caiaphas, his son in law, who was named High Priest in the year 18 and remained as such until A. D 36.

The preaching of St. John the Baptist

This hence was the religious and political climate in Palestine when the voice of God was heard with a particular revelation to St. John, son of Zechariah, who lived in the desert of Judea, following a life of penance and prayer.

The Lord spoke to him in his heart, and motivated him by His grace to confront boldly the people, and gave force to his words so that they would conquer hearts. For about 400 years no Prophet had ever been in Israel, and so the sudden appearance of John, raggedly dressed in a coarse camel hair cloak and a leather belt, made a profound impact.

His voice seemed like a cry from beyond the grave, his life seemed to recall the old glory and the sanctity of the patriarchs, his zeal and his courage emulated that of Elijah against the evildoers and the perverse princes of the people; he seemed a man who transcended human nature, and his mere presence was imposing. The grace of God, and especially the grace of God, gave him a sharp tone of authority that conquered hearts and paralyzed, so to speak, the evildoers and the powerful that could have stopped his apostolate. Nobody opposed him: even those who endured him reluctantly but would have liked to eliminate him.

This is the defining characteristic of the great divine manifestations on earth, because when God wants, He makes Himself heard through those He selects and act according to His will.

John went through the entire region of the Jordan River, wherever he could find abundant waters, and he preached penance, starting with those who believed in him, with baptism, that is a washing; a symbol of internal purification and the only act that could prepare one for coming of the Redeemer. To receive water from John's hands was the same as confessing that one was a sinner, and one received it with interior remorse; the water, thus poured, was a beneficial humiliation and, its pouring announcing the Savior, renewed the hope in his coming and was beneficial for the remission of sins.

The souls John found were like wretched impenetrable deserts precluding the salvific passage of the Redeemer to go through them, triumphantly, over their sins.

As in a desert there are valleys that block the way, mountains and hills that obstruct, and barren and crooked roads that hold back, so too in the souls there were abysses of moral misery, obstacles of pride and arrogance, a complete lack of righteousness of heart, the first condition for receiving the Lord.

St. John with his baptism of penance and his austere, harsh life was like a voice crying in this moral desert, eliminating miseries, humiliating pride, renewing the hope of salvation and rectifying the intentions and the aspirations of the heart; thus he accomplished in the soul, deprived of graces and virtues, the prediction of Isaiah (40:4-5) that the Sacred Text cites freely from the version of the 70.

The crowds ran in great numbers to the banks of the river Jordan, moved by a desire of renewal and redemption. They came from all social classes, and they looked for direction as to what they should do to hasten the ways of God. In their subconscious, they felt that something great was going to happen; they hoped to escape the foreign domination that oppressed them, hoping in a new time of glory for the nation, and they ran to John as to a new light of hope.

The proud Pharisees were also among those who went, but with the worst disposition; they only desired their own glory, their intentions were evil, their criticism poisonous; they only went because they did not want to be perceived as being less righteous than the others, and to watch over the works of the Baptist.

They were proud, believing to have no need of penance, they watched how things progressed, but they did not participate in them, because they believed to be the true children of Abraham and believed that this glory was enough for them.

United with the Pharisees were also the Sadducees (Mt 3:7); they were people frozen in their unbelief and indifference. John spoke to them sternly in order to shake them, and they dared not react; he called them *a brood of vipers* for their sly and poisonous malice; he asked them: *Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?* That meant: "Who assured you that your false justice and your errors will justify you before God, thus to escape the punishment you deserve? On what solid facts do you base your belief of being righteous and to not be included in my threats to the people? It is not enough to come; it is necessary to do worthy acts of penance! What does it avail you to be children of Abraham? What does it avail to you to be his descendants and be part of the chosen people, almost if this simple descendants could give you the right to grace? God does not need to shed his mercy on you, to have a faithful people, because He can arouse even from the stones, that is from the gentiles, the true children of Abraham, his spiritual descendants, able to receive and make fruitful their redemption. This is not anymore a privilege of race, but a gift of mercy; the Lord will cut off completely from his new people those who, like barren trees, do not bear fruit."

The speech of John, as we see, was extraordinarily severe; it cut off with a single blow any illusion of a false justice. The expression *brood of vipers* could seem harsh and even uncharitable, but the Pharisees and the Sadducees, arriving on the esplanade where God was performing miracles of grace, with the sly and subtle ways that characterized them, truly gave the impression of poisonous vipers, trying to stop the rush of the people to conversion with their cutting words of derision or diffidence.

John surely did not speak to them in this way out of animosity but out of zeal, and so in front of the people that could have been influenced by them, he humiliated them, that they may finally open their eyes. As the Pharisees and the Sadducees were trying to push the people into ruin and away from the ways of God, John was justified in using such harsh language. His sternness was like a last bolt of light of the Old Covenant because John was at the boundary between the two Testaments, and it was also an act of mercy for the proud and hardened hearts not able to hear gentle words because of their arrogance and contemptuousness.

St. Luke gives us some brief examples of the preaching of St. John to various categories of people, to show the awe that he inspired in all classes. The multitudes, hearing his menacing words to the Pharisees and the Sadducees, were terrified by the judgment of God, and anxiously asked what they had to do to avoid it. The words of the Precursor, in fact, vivified by the grace, had a power that deeply penetrated hearts. He answered them, exhorting them to do charity through the two works of bodily mercy: dressing the naked and feeding the hungry.

It was like an anticipation of the great law of charity that, for divine clemency, covers a multitude of sins. The Pharisees drained the people by oppressing them, and in doing so distanced from them the mercy of God; now the way to merit His mercy was just the opposite: to dress and not strip the poor; to feed and not starve them.

The appeal to charity made the publicans concerned, because they, being tax collectors, could not stop collecting taxes; they asked therefore how they should go about it, and John told them not to ask more than what was required by law. The tax collectors, in fact, were used to the most exorbitant abuse of power, they cleverly stole as much as they could and thus were not worthy of the kingdom of God.

The publicans were aided in their work by the forces of public order and in talking with the soldiers, awakened in them the desire to better themselves; they too went to John and asked him how they should deal in their work; he answered that they should be careful not to do any unjust violence to anyone, not to slander and also to be satisfied with their pay. Most likely among the multitude there were also law enforcers sent by Herod to spy on the Baptist or to keep public order, considering the throngs of people.

3. The insignificance of human greatness. The true greatness that is humility.

When St. Luke talks of the preaching of the Precursor, he paints two pictures that are in striking contrast: the greats of the world who ruled Palestine and the humble penitent sent by God, who prepared the people for the coming of the Redeemer; the first is a picture of short-lived greatness, of which there are not even minimal traces anymore, and the second, a picture of humility that remains immortal in the centuries and in eternity.

The pompous names of these great figures have vanished in a whirlwind of empty vanity that surrounds all it touches with nothingness; instead the humble name of the great saint has remained as light shining on all people. Gone is the imperial and tyrannical Rome, gone are even the names of the countries over which she ruled. Who can remember anything about Tiberius Cesar? And even if those enamored with ancient history could remember something about him, what would be the reason to remember him? Not even

his ashes are kept, and if his body had been kept like those of the Egyptian rulers, it would be merely a lurid mummy.

The names of the great Romans, in the Sacred Text that is always full of fresh images of life, are less than decaying bones strewn on fertile soil. In contrast to those holy names in the Sacred Text, these either have no meaning or have a useless and evil meaning. Even in this simple context the material world is truly empty and its temporal greatness is nothing. The name Tiberius means *son of the (river) Tiber*, a name without any reference to true greatness; the etymology of Cesar is from *slaughter, wound*, and so has a very sorrowful meaning because the power of the conquerors, in fact is only to slaughter and bring death; it signifies murder and not life. Pontius Pilate means *man of the sea, armed with javelin*: a hollow name, just as hollow as his power; Herod, *fire-dragon*, Lysanias, *destruction, sorrow*, all names that are stamped with the empty seal of the world, servants of Satan, belligerents, lovers of foolishness, destroyers of good and sowers of sorrow.

Opposite to these pompous names, remembrance of deadly miseries, are the names of John, *grace, the mercy of God*, son of Zachary, which means *the Lord who remembers*.

Tiberius Cesar had the power of the army but ultimately this gave him nothing and he died; John had in himself the grace of God and spread the first seeds of an eternal kingdom that shall never end.

Pilate was at the service of Cesar; John was at the service of the Savior.

Herod was cruel like a “dragon”, John was full of goodness, sanctified in his mother’s womb as the precursor of the Eternal Truth.

Lysanias did not leave traces of himself; John is a blessed memory in the Church.

How many laws were issued by the greats in Palestine? They are numberless, because it is characteristic of the miserable power of the world to feed its impotence with laws, decrees, instructions, threats and sanctions that are always oppressive in nature.

John with few precepts, inspired by the divine law that never changes, led souls who were sincere and who had good will, to the ways of Heaven. The powerful of every age create deep abysses of misery and John filled them; the powerful created obstacles to the spreading of goodness, and John demolished them; the powerful make rough the ways to freedom, and he made them smooth.

O why do we let ourselves to be more fascinated by the things of the world than of God’s? Why does what is miserable seem great, what perishes immortal, and what makes us sad seem to be a source of goodness? We marvel at tall buildings, for instance, and we admire those who build them and yet if we were to rise to one thousand meters (3000 ft) how impressive would they seem? And if a tremor, a simple seismic wave shook the earth to what would that greatness be reduced? O if we only knew to appreciate what comes from God, if we could truly value the Church, how little the things of the world and the kingdoms of the world would appear to us!

4. John bears witness to Jesus.

The life of John the Baptist was viewed prodigiously by the Hebrew people, and even though he did not perform any miracle, many thought that he was the Christ, the awaited Savior.

This suggestion, instead of being an honor for John, was sorrowful to him and he

immediately rushed to dispel this misunderstanding with all his might, telling the truth in clear terms. He was baptizing with water, that is, with a simple symbol of penance and humiliation. The Savior, infinitely more powerful than he because He was God, and of whom John declared himself to be unworthy even to unloosen the strap of His sandals, would baptize pouring forth the graces of the Holy Spirit and the fire of love. Hence His Baptism would be a true rebirth. John could threaten the punishments of God, but he had no power over souls. The Savior, instead, *would have the 'candelabra' in His Hand*, that is, He would be the Judge of souls, He would purify his people, saving the righteous and condemning reprobates as useless chaff for the eternal fire of hell. Thus it was important that the symbol was not mistaken for the reality, nor that the servant be confused with the Master.

The witness of the Father and the Holy Spirit

God Himself took care to confirm John's witness. Therefore, Jesus Christ also, went to be baptized, and in the moment when, he received the water, covering himself in all our sins, *the sky opened*, and there appeared an intense brilliance, almost as if the sky were rent asunder, projecting eternal light. In that splendor the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus like a halo of light, almost like a shining dove, and the voice of the Father could be heard, saying: "*Thou are my beloved Son, in You I am well pleased.*" The white shining dove and the voice of the Father revealed the sanctity of Jesus Christ and His Divinity. The Holy Spirit consecrated His Humanity in the fullness of grace touching the infinite, and the voice of the Father declared him clearly His Eternal Son, object of His satisfaction. In this way the testimony of John was confirmed and his mission could be said to have come to an end with the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus. For this reason St. Luke mentions the imprisonment of St. John before the solemn testimony of the Father and of the Holy Spirit. Chronologically it happened later on, but St. Luke mentions this before in order to bring to a closure to the public ministry of the Baptist.

It is possible that the precursor himself, very much loved by the people, desired and asked God to disappear in prison in order not to hamper the ministry of the Redeemer.

What a great example he is for us, when Providence calls us to make the Redeemer known in the lay or in the priestly apostolate! We must not find our reward in our glory, but rather all our attention must turn to the glory of God. What is the value of our personal effort in this regard? Less than pouring a drop of water on hearts to make them less hard. What is needed, instead, is the grace of the Holy Spirit and the fire of divine love to instill zeal for the glory of God. The Holy Spirit cannot live in souls who impede His action with our arrogance and our pride.

When we confess our nothingness, the Heavens open; declaring our unworthiness, we call for Divine graces to be poured on souls and which now hear the voice of God and therefore are changed into objects of divine delight. To suppress what is ours, this is the true secret of the apostolate; humbling ourselves and confessing to be unable, unworthy, incapable, this is the secret to making it fruitful.

Genealogy of Jesus and the ascending genealogy of the soul.

St. Luke reports the genealogy of Jesus Christ ascending from Him to God; we have already commented on this genealogy in our book on the Gospel of St. Matthew, and we refer the reader to it; here we only remind the reader that from Jesus Christ we all must ascend to God, and He is the marvelous ladder that brings us from our poor exile into the arms of our Celestial Father.

To rise, to rise, this is our life; ascending breathlessly as we breathlessly read this genealogy. We cannot remain stagnant as in a ditch in the earth, never even in the most common things of life, but rather we must ascend from one activity to another until we reach God, and His infinite glory must dominate each of our actions.

Here, for instance, is the “ascending genealogy” of the food required for our life on earth, our daily bread. The land belongs to an owner. His steward is told to cultivate the land by sowing the wheat. The wheat grows, and the steward harvests it and stores it in the barn; later on the wheat is sent to the mill, sieved, kneaded, cooked, sold; having become bread it goes to the table and sustains life so it may grow, become active, and become the instrument of the soul that works to gain the eternal recompense of belonging entirely to God.

Here is another example: the “genealogy” of the studying. A young child is the son of his father and mother; he grows up and develops reason; he has his first ideas in kindergarten, begins to draw lines, then writes small letters, then syllables, then words, then numbers; he reads, learns the first truths and makes sense of them in his next class; he studies first grade, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth; he leaves for middle school and then for secondary school; he then perfects himself in college, he learn a profession, deepens his knowledge of the truths to know more still; the more he rises the more he finds darkness, like someone who rises into the stratosphere; he holds on to faith and because of his good studies, he can arrive better prepared to the heights; he rises to ponder the divine science from which all sciences come, he reaches the eternal light, and finally knows God, the eternal Truth, Wisdom and Love.

Man works to live, but he lives to give room to the spirit; he cultivates his spirit for a more beautiful life; he passes from play to virtue, from virtue to heroism, to the love that gives of itself, to God. Nothing should stop or remain mired, nothing should descend; rather it is necessary to rise, to rise from one intention to the next, from matter to the spirit, from the spirit to sanctity, from sanctity to God. This is what St. Paul says: *To do everything for the glory of God*, nothing excluded, and to work for the glory of God, in order to save oneself and reach God. The intentions of life, then, must all be like many ascending genealogies; one nobler than the other until at last one reaches God, crown and prize of all our intentions and our activities.

In order to ascend it is necessary to start with Christ and end with God, because Jesus Christ gives us life and then He changes our life in a constant ascension to the Father. If we remove Jesus from our life, our life does not rise, it becomes ruined, and if we remove God, our life does not rest and becomes lost. This is the marvelous secret of the entire spiritual life, the true life: to become united with the Redeemer, to rise from Him to the Father, and for the merit of his death and passion, to repose in eternal happiness, in the full possession of God.

Chapter 4

1. Fasting and temptation of Jesus. Preaching in Galilee and in Nazareth. Healing of a possessed person. Healing of the mother-in-law of St. Peter and other sick people.

1 And Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan. And he was urged by the Spirit into the wilderness 2 for forty days, and he was tested by the devil. And he ate nothing in those days. And when they were completed, he was hungry. 3 Then the devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, speak to this stone, so that it may be made into bread." 4 And Jesus answered him, "It is written: 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.'" 5 And the devil led him onto a high mountain, and he showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, 6 and he said to him: "To you, I will give all this power, and its glory. For they have been handed over to me, and I give them to whomever I wish. 7 Therefore, if you will worship before me, all will be yours." 8 And in response, Jesus said to him: "It is written: 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and you shall serve him alone.' " 9 And he brought him to Jerusalem, and he set him on the parapet of the temple, and he said to him: "If you are the Son of God, cast yourself down from here. 10 For it is written that he has given his Angels charge over you, so that they may guard you, 11 and so that they may take you into their hands, lest perhaps you may hurt your foot against a stone." 12 And in response, Jesus said to him, "It is said: 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.' " 13 And when all the temptation was completed, the devil withdrew from him, until a time. 14 And Jesus returned, in the power of the Spirit, into Galilee. And his fame spread throughout the entire region. 15 And he taught in their synagogues, and he was magnified by everyone. 16 And he went to Nazareth, where he had been raised. And he entered into the synagogue, according to his custom, on the Sabbath day. And he rose up to read. 17 And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. And as he unrolled the book, he found the place where it was written: 18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; because of this, he has anointed me. He has sent me to evangelize the poor, to heal the contrite of heart, 19 to preach forgiveness to captives and sight to the blind, to release the broken into forgiveness, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord and the day of retribution." 20 And when he had rolled up the book, he returned it to the minister, and he sat down. And the eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fixed on him. 21 Then he began to say to them, "On this day, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." 22 And everyone gave testimony to him. And they wondered at the words of grace that proceeded from his mouth. And they said, "Is this not the son of Joseph?" 23 And he said to them: "Certainly, you will recite to me this saying, 'Physician, heal yourself.' The many great things that we have heard were done in Capernaum, do here also in your own country." 24 Then he said: "Amen I say to you, that no prophet is accepted in his own country. 25 In truth, I say to you, there were many widows in the days of Elijah in Israel, when the heavens were closed for three years and six months, when a great famine had occurred throughout the entire land. 26 And to none of these was Elijah sent, except to Zarephath of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. 27 And there were many lepers in Israel under the prophet Elisha. And none of these was cleansed, except Naaman the Syrian." 28 And all those in the synagogue, upon hearing these things, were filled with anger. 29 And they rose up and drove him beyond the city. And they brought

him all the way to the edge of the mount, upon which their city had been built, so that they might throw him down violently. 30 But passing through their midst, he went away. 31 And he descended to Capernaum, a city of Galilee. And there he taught them on the Sabbaths. 32 And they were astonished at his doctrine, for his word was spoken with authority. 33 And in the synagogue, there was a man who had an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice, 34 saying: "Let us alone. What are we to you, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know you who you are: the Holy One of God." 35 And Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent and depart from him." And when the demon had thrown him into their midst, he departed from him, and he no longer harmed him. 36 And fear fell over them all. And they discussed this among themselves, saying: "What is this word? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they depart." 37 And his fame spread to every place in the region. 38 Then Jesus, rising up from the synagogue, entered into the house of Simon. Now Simon's mother-in-law was in the grip of a severe fever. And they petitioned him on her behalf. 39 And standing over her, he commanded the fever, and it left her. And promptly rising up, she ministered to them. 40 Then, when the sun had set, all those who had anyone afflicted with various diseases brought them to him. Then, laying his hands on each one of them, he cured them. 41 Now demons departed from many of them, crying out and saying, "You are the son of God." And rebuking them, he would not permit them to speak. For they knew him to be the Christ. 42 Then, when it was daytime, going out, he went to a deserted place. And the crowds sought him, and they went all the way to him. And they detained him, so that he would not depart from them. 43 And he said to them, "I must also preach the kingdom of God to other cities, because it was for this reason that I was sent." 44 And he was preaching in the synagogues of Galilee.

2. The mystery of the temptation of Jesus in the desert.

Jesus Christ, true God and true man, having subjected himself to all our sufferings, wanted also to be subjected to the temptations of Satan. St. Luke states in Lk 4:1-13 that Satan, after he had tempted Him in the desert, *departed from him for a time*, or as the Greek text says: *Till a more suitable time*. This means that Jesus not only was subjected to temptations in the desert, but that Satan, even though he was defeated, came back to assail him again at other times. Certainly he attacked Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and during his Passion, not only in the interior of his soul, but also making use of perverted people who tormented him, as it appears clearly from the Gospels, in the suffering that he endured in the Garden of Olives and the cruelty of his enemies, for which there is no explanation except for the presence of a very strong diabolical suggestion.

It is an impressive fact that He, full of the Holy Spirit after his Baptism in the Jordan River, was later attacked by Satan. Certainly it was the *Spirit*, the Holy Spirit, that brought him to the desert to prepare him for his approaching public ministry; but when Jesus was filled with spiritual graces in his Most Holy Humanity, he was subjected to temptation.

Satan had been watching him since his birth, because he had a suspicion that He was the Messiah; he tried to have him killed by the wicked Herod, and he probably influenced in a sinister manner many people of Bethlehem before He was born, to make them hostile and hardhearted towards the Holy Family. When Satan understood from His

life and from the fullness of the Holy Spirit that He was not a man like others, he tried to lead Him astray by the same malignant envy for which he led astray Adam. It is logical that the second Adam would not be free from temptation, since He had to make reparations for the tragic consequences of the first temptation.

This fact is of great comfort to those pious souls, who often become lost in temptation, failing to understand how Satan can bring them the most awful suggestions, since they are filled with the special graces they receive from trying to be good. It is repeated in them, more fervent members of the Body of Christ, what happened to Him, as an instruction and comfort to us. Does not heat immediately attract cold currents? The hot strata rise and the gelid currents precipitate on the flames. Now Satan, like a deathly frost, comes down where he sees a stronger flame burning, not to absorb the heat but to extinguish it, because in his pride, he believes that his deathly ways are better than life; in his evil wrath, he is envious of the happiness that brings true life to us. Therefore, as soon as a soul becomes, so to speak, enflamed in the Holy Spirit, Satan rushes over to upset that soul.

Temptations therefore are not a sign of failing, but rather are a sign of a more intense action of the Holy Spirit within us. It is important not to take temptations lightly, nor see these logical or rational choices; we should also not remain alone in the sad thoughts that temptations provoke thus and refusing and the light that we receive from those who guide our soul. Those who refuse direction become entangled in temptations, in fact to them these become acceptable in their minds; they believe these to be right beyond any doubt and in so doing expose themselves to the danger of being deceived by Satan. Just as Jesus drove out temptations with the word of God, so too must a person drive temptations away with the word of the minister who represents God for him; he must react to the evil suggestion that may appear positive, not through reasoning, but by hurling away Satan with the words that the Lord gives him through his minister.

3. The fasting of Jesus

The fullness of the Holy Spirit gave to the soul of Jesus such life and, we would say, interior nourishment that He fasted for forty days and forty nights. St. Luke in his Gospel has special words for this fast, saying that *Jesus did not eat anything in those days*. Thus it was a complete fast. He fasted in order to be able to extract the flame of love from his own soul, to reduce his corporal activities, to give priority to those of the spirit, mortifying his divine body with the immolation of the lack of food, in order to make it food for our souls later. He almost sowed, in his fasting and penance, the Eucharistic grain that later on he had to grind in the Passion and make his love food for our souls. Our limited human minds feel very, very insignificant before the mysteries of God!

Fasting is an immolation of one's life, partial but real; it is a sacrifice that is consummated in the presence of God.

When in the past a victim was immolated it was killed; however, it remained a lifeless body, a present and real witness that only God is life and outside of Him everything dies. When an animal holocaust was immolated, the victim was killed and burned, almost substituting its life with the flames, symbols of the love that consumes everything in us that is not of God. Fasting is a decrease of the bodily life; it is a holocaust of its material tendencies, done for the love of God. As when one reduces the electrical

current, the light from a light bulb emanates a lower volume of light, almost “dying”, so too fasting lowers the volume of one’s physical life, and in this way one becomes immolated before God.

For this reason fasting is a powerful source of supplication before God, and for this reason Satan tries to reduce it to a minimum in the spiritual life. We add, though, right away that fasting is tied to obedience, because if the decrease of physical life is immolation, it is useless without the immolation of the soul. The body decreases its physical life with sacrifices, and the soul almost comes out from its physical boundaries with obedience. This is why it is clearly said that *Jesus was taken by the Spirit into the desert*. He did not go of his own will, and he added to the immolation of the body that of the spirit. We also add that the fasting commanded by the Church, even if it is so light, is the best that we can do, because it is the Holy Spirit who guides the soul to do penance for the Church.

4. The first temptation.

Jesus Christ went to the desert obeying the Will of the Father: He fasted to immolate himself, and fasted for forty days, completely, because this was in obedience to the Holy Spirit. After these days of very intense spiritual life “*he was hungry*”; this makes us believe either that Jesus did not feel hungry before this point or, after, he felt it enormously. He was truly a man, and it was natural that his physical body would signal its needs.

Satan was waiting, and he made his move on Jesus in this moment of physical weakness to tempt Him. This is always his *modus operandi*: he takes advantage of a deficiency in the physical body or exuberance, which are miseries, to attract a soul to do evil or to subject the body as a slave or a prisoner.

Jesus Christ was perfectly ordered in all His powers and in all His most sacred body; therefore it was impossible to tempt Him in attempting to bring disorder to his temperament, and this is a fact. Satan attacked the weakness of His body after the fasting, and attempted to bring his spiritual power to a lower level. Pointing to one of the stones, of which that arid desert was full, he said: “*If you are the Son of God command this stone to become bread.*” It is possible that Satan first pointed to the *stones* collectively to move Him to change them into bread, and then he showed Him a single one that He could transform miraculously. This explains why St. Matthew speaks of *stones* and St. Luke of *one stone*.

Man does not live on bread alone.

At first glance there does not seem to be anything wrong with miraculously changing a stone into bread, since Jesus was omnipotent. But in fact, it was a very subtle temptation, worthy of Satan’s diabolic perversion. Satan, in fact, attempts to substitute himself for God; this was the origin of his ruin, this was the origin of the temptation he did to our first forefathers, and this is why he tempted Jesus in that way. Jesus Christ, in fact, often repeated that: “*He did the work given to Him by His Father*”; Satan would have liked that He would do something suggested by him; Jesus Christ stated that he wanted only to glorify His Father, and Satan wanted Him to operate for his own good, glorifying

Himself; Jesus Christ fasted in order to enlarge his activity on souls, and Satan instead wanted to narrow it to a purely corporal need. He wanted to destroy in a moment the very effect of the fasting, and concentrate it all in corporal desires.

It is, after all, what the majority of Christians do hundreds of times during the great solemnities of the spirit, changing the Feast day into an orgy or steeped in corporal preoccupations.

For this reason Jesus responded in the most profound way: *“It is written, Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.”* Jesus’ life in the desert can be deduced from this answer: the Holy Spirit became his teacher and had him concentrate as a man, on the Sacred Scriptures. He had to teach the truth, and he was kept in meditation on the Word of God; he made it his food in order to feed others, and he was hungry to promulgate it. The hunger that he felt in his body was a manifestation of the hunger he had to make known the divine Word, just as the thirst that He suffered on the Cross, was an expression of the thirst that He had for souls. Every act of his material life showed his marvelous spiritual life, because He, as God and as man, was a glorification of the Father. Satan, on the other hand, mistakenly believed that He was hungry only for bread, while instead he yearned for the glory of God. The answer of Jesus nailed him, and thwarted the centuries-old trap that Satan would lay upon men so that they would concentrate their efforts on the search for material goods to satisfy their physical desires.

... but by every word of God.

All human life, in fact, is constantly under the allure of this temptation: *“to change the stone into bread”*. We work, we find it hard to go on, and miracles, so to speak, are done with technology and chemistry, to extract bread from stones, that is, from gold and riches that are being piled up to safeguard the material life. Wars, be they individual, social or national, are always waged for this reason: to be guaranteed one’s daily ‘bread’, and to have it, be prepared to undergo even the most degrading injustices.* The apostasy of the French and even more horrible Russian revolutions, vacuous words given to the peoples by rulers and social meddlers, who thirst for their own glory, have at the bottom this temptation, to *“change the stones into bread”*, to identify life with food and whatever is connected with one’s physical conditions.

Jesus Christ takes life back to the right equilibrium between soul and body, and with that loudly proclaims that man does not live *“only of bread”*, but nourishes himself with *“every word of God”*. He says that spiritual nourishment is the *“word of God”*, and with this He clearly refers to Himself, the Eternal Word of God. In his clear vision of all mankind’s future, He sees the bread that He shall give to man, transubstantiated in His Body, true food of the soul, just as the physical bread is food for the body.

* The teachings of the Gospel do not condemn progress or the search for personal well being in fact man must use the talents he received from God. However his first search must be for justice, because riches must not be fruit of oppression or violence. When we first search for the word of God , since God calls all of us to love as He has loved us, through His words all progress is good because it would exclude selfishness and greed.

Satan wanted him to change the stone into bread, and Jesus, moved not by him but by love, would change bread into his divine Body, and to change the stone of the human heart into love. The divine answer of Jesus is concise, admirable, and in only one flash of wisdom it confuses the aberrations of man, unmasking the insinuations of Satan and announcing in a disguised way that infinite mystery of love that would change our exile on earth into the threshold of fulfillment in God of the eternal possession of God.

How ungrateful is man in concentrating all his life in material bread and forgetting the Eucharistic treasure! Bread is the concise representation of the material life, the Eucharist is the food of the soul; the bread for the body, without that of the soul, reduces man into a beast; it makes him concerned only about the passing physical life, while he goes onward to reach his eternal destination. What an immense sorrow it is, to observe men discussing only material affairs, and to see them toiling away to acquire wealth, while completely forgetting or almost putting aside, their own soul!

5. The second and third temptations of Satan.

The answer of Jesus Christ confused Satan but did not disarm him, because the perverted spirit is resolute in his temptations. It can be said that stubbornness is precisely the character of Satan, eternally unmovable in his malice and eternally concentrated in his false judgments, even when confronted with his own faults.

Satan never surrenders, always attempts revenge, looks for setback, in order to prove himself and convince others that he is right. He attempts to instill into man his spirit of stubborn illogicality even before solid evidence, and to the contrary for this reason there is no better evidence of the deceitfulness of a spirit, or a spiritual attitude, as being stubborn in our own judgment, in a state of rebellion and disobedience. A soul who does not listen to counsel, persists in its own ideas, is firm in its own viewpoints, who sees itself to be the source of all reason and logic, while all others, and even worse those who speak to this soul in the name of God, are dismissed as being in a darkness of illogicality and lack of understanding, this is certainly a soul on a false path, a soul certainly tempted by Satan, and in great risk of eternal perdition, unless it denies itself entirely and completely.

The devil, then, came back on the attack, and since he realized that he could not overcome Jesus in his physical appetite, attempted to overcome him on a spiritual level by focusing Him on the desire of glory and power. This is the essence of the other two temptations that he did. In the account of St. Matthew and of St. Luke these two temptations are reported in a different order. St. Matthew put first the temptation on the pinnacle of the temple first, and St. Luke puts the one on the mountain first; however, the difference is incidental, because both temptations were attempts to win over Jesus, dragging him into the cupidity of glory and power.

God let the Evangelists write their accounts freely, as they believed would best serve the reasons they intended, even though they wrote under divine inspiration.

They drew their information from different sources, naturally, and God allowed some slight differences in their accounts, to leave the happening indisputable in its historicity. If, in fact, they had created a fictitious story, working together, they would both have come to an agreement with each other. The differences, even though purely accidental, show that each Gospel is an historic source of inestimable value and that each

Evangelist wrote independently from the others, each reporting the facts as an eye-witness or as an advocate of facts received by eye-witnesses.

However, comparing the accounts of St. Matthew and of St. Luke, the justification of the incidental differences can be found. St. Luke, in fact, in confessing to have collected diligently the witnesses of the facts that he reports, had to be more precise and detailed in the circumstances and can be considered, so to speak, more accurate. It is possible to believe that Satan tempted Jesus two times to adore him; the first time after the temptation to change the stone into bread, and the second time after the temptation to throw himself from the pinnacle of the Temple. Of this second temptation St. Luke does not say anything, because it was identical to the first, but it seems that he hints to it when he says that the devil, after the third temptation, *departed from him for a time, till a more suitable time*. Then Satan came back on the attack, and he must have come back with the plan that for him was the most important: to substitute his own kingdom for the kingdom of God, thereby enslaving the Word become man.

This second time Satan was even more arrogant than before, and for this reason St. Matthew, in recounting this temptation, says that Jesus Christ chased away Satan "*Begone, Satan*" and St. Luke, who accounts for the first temptation of the devil, does not say that He chased him away, because in fact the first time He only confused him. This explanation is however, only speculation.

The diabolical psychology of temptation.

Satan, even though he still possesses the gifts of natural science as consequence of his angelic nature, has a great deal of folly in his reasoning, because his intellect is not properly oriented, which is only done by the light of God. This is typical of some non-believer scientists, who may know so many scientific notions but lack sound judgment, and fall into the most trivial contradictions and the most childish suppositions.

Satan, then, did not understand that Jesus, saying that man did not live by bread alone, was speaking of the supernatural life that comes from the nourishment of the soul; he supposed instead that Jesus only desired to have great powers.

This is the psychology of Satan, we would say, which is worthy to investigate, in order to understand the reasoning behind his temptations.

A man fixated on an idea, does not see anything but that single idea, and everything whether related directly to it or not reminds him of it. Similarly a hungry animal is completely focused on a piece of meat, or a child fascinated by a game who does not notice anything besides it. Now, Satan is fixated by a single idea: to rule and be glorified on earth; to maintain his most wretched and miserable isolation in order to build a kingdom not only of rebellious angels but also of men occupying his seats of glory.

In order to build this kingdom of souls, he has to subtract them from God; thus he tries in every way to draw them to do evil, putting before them sin as object of happiness. Satan also seeks to have ministers and cooperators of perdition among the great people of the world, whom he helps to prosper; he makes their earthly way easy, he makes them into cruel tyrants, unjust, violent sinners, and into accomplices for the perdition of souls. This comprises sorrowful, behind-the-scenes activity of so many rulers of the world.

Satan is used to live in contact with these human beings, who are arrogant, thirsting for success who will stop at nothing, to secure their own glory. He follows them

so that they do not escape him, he sees them pensive, frowning, worried and he recognizes well, so to speak, the somatic traits of a dictator.

Psychologically, whoever is taken with the idea of ruling, thinks little about his daily needs, he is able to do any sacrifice, he never sleeps, appears lost in thought about his distant vision, he shuns human society, his eyebrows are raised, he has a knitted forehead, clenched teeth, an authoritarian look, because he keeps ruminating on his plans of conquest and glory.

Satan saw Jesus all pensive and collected, he saw his fasting, and since He indeed was thinking about the kingdom of His Father and he was concentrating on it, since He was preparing himself to establish it, Satan thought he perceived in the Savior the characteristic thirst that a ruthless ruler has for glory.

He first tempted Him with food, to see if Jesus believed himself to be powerful and to have a will aimed toward the marvelous and grandiose; he wanted to see if He was a strong-willed person, as we usually characterize those wretched rulers of the world; Satan was ready to offer himself to change a stone into bread, in case Jesus could not have done it.

It is usually believed that Satan tempted Jesus with gluttony, proposing to change the stone into bread; but this is not the case, because it would not have been gluttonous to eat a piece of bread after forty days of fasting; he tempted Jesus to focus his attention on the material, and he wanted to see if He was willing to want to do extraordinary things.

From the answer of Jesus and from the expression on his face, he believed to perceive that He was prey to the allure of power, and even if he felt that Jesus was not aspiring to a kingdom like other rulers, he thought that in facilitating his glory on earth, he could enslave Him. He was a fool, beyond any doubt, but he believed that he was on the right track. The refusal to change the stone into bread seemed to him a confession of impotence, and the reference to the word of God, a justification so as to not diminish Himself in the light of His inability. Satan was making a judgment based on his own pride, and he believed that Jesus was prey to thoughts of pride; thus he offered to help Him by showing Him a view of prideful power and glory in order to enslave Him.

He brought Him *on a high mountain*, that is, to a height from where he could see in an instant all the kingdoms on earth in a phantasmagoric sight. He showed Him a kind of geographical map, a kind of scale of human power, and he told Him that he would give it all to Him, all of it, if He only prostrated Himself before Him in adoration. To show to Jesus that he could give all this to Him, he told Him that he owned all of it and could give whatever he wanted to whomever he wanted.

Certainly Satan at that time still had dominion over the earth, and in a certain sense it belonged to him as it was within his sphere of activities; but certainly he could not claim to be the owner of the earth. Hence he lied, as he usually does, in order to deceive Him. He did not realize, the wretched being, that he was talking to the very One who would defeat and dethrone him, and right in the midst of his kingdoms of evil, He would put His Church.

Jesus Christ answered: *"It is written: "You shall worship the Lord, your God, and him alone shall you serve,"* that is, you will desire that God alone will rule the earth, and only to Him shall you give honor and glory.

The answer of the Savior was an announcement of the Kingdom of God, a solemn proclamation of His right over all creatures. Jesus had to rule and had to subjugate all the powers of earth, but only for establishing the glory of God.

How sad it is to think about those words of Satan: *“The kingdoms of earth have been given to me, and I give them to whomever I want!”* This is a lie; however, it is not a lie in the sense that kingdoms give themselves to him and apostatize, and that he lords over them with his demonic influences.

Which are the powers over which Satan does not lord? Are they not diabolical activities the wretched influences of sectarians and the hypocritical imposition of control prevalent in totalitarian states most hurtful for the Church? With the exception of those kingdoms governed by saints, are not all the others whether dominated by kings or presidents reduced to a mix of oppression and miseries with continued harassment both open and effective toward the Church? The history of the kingdoms and of the kings of the earth is almost always full of disgrace, and it is a marvel that the Church, in the midst of these dreadful deserts, goes on prospering and flourishing.

The human ambition.

It can be said that there is not one soul that does not undergo this temptation by Satan, who is not brought up high to the height of pride and does not dream of greatness in a way that is lethal for the life of the spirit.

In whatever place one finds himself, even ordinary or low, man imagines himself to be able to dominate, and is drawn to leadership. It is rare to find someone who does not desire to be at the top in his field, or does not think that he could be above everyone else.

Satan encourages our pride in being adored through the cult of the vilest passions, and he hopes to deter us from the true love of God, centering us on things of the world*

Jesus Christ teaches us the true way of the eternal kingdom, and he shields us from diabolical illusions saying: *“You shall worship the Lord, your God, and him alone shall you serve.”* To serve God is the same as to rule, because it means to dominate our own nature, to rise above the miserable things of the earth, and to fly freely through the Heavens.

To serve God is the most complete independence that the soul can attain from the bonds of earth and is the kingdom of love to which nothing can compare. He who rules in the world is its slave; he who serves God, rules.

To have all the kingdoms of the earth, therefore, means to submit to all the slavery of the spirit; instead to adore God and to serve Him means to rule and to dominate over all the miseries of our life.

* This recalls the “cult of personality” that was in recent times first an object of power (Stalin) and later one of disapproval.

Satan felt defeated, but he tried a new way to induce Jesus to come down from the height of the supernatural life to the natural and human level. This time he attempted to compromise His entire mission with a colossal failure or with a boost of notoriety that would compromise his path of humility. Thus, he took Him to the pinnacle of the Temple, that is, the highest part of the sacred building and, distorting the meaning of a scriptural text, incited him to throw himself before the crowd of people already gathering there, promising that He would not be hurt. God protects us if we are in danger and sends His angels to guard us, but He does not favor presumption and vanity. To throw oneself from that height for a vain reason, is not begging God for help, but rather will result in receiving punishment from God. This is the reason why Jesus answered: *“You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.”*

These words were for Satan like a thunderbolt; they had on him an extraordinary power of humiliating reproach, because in that moment he indeed was tempting the *Lord his God*.

Psychologically, one who is fixated on a thought, or is unwavering in his own belief of an idea and speaks up, has a powerful impact on those who hear him and his thought makes an impression.

When Jesus told Satan: *“You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test”*, He was God. Satan, in hearing Him, had to become aware of an unusual majesty, because Jesus could not help but to convey through his words at least a reflection of his divine nature. Satan was crushed by those words, almost like a wild beast struck by the look or the powerful whip of the tamer, and he stopped tempting Him; he did not dare insist, and feeling ravaged, left to recuperate.

This psychological, subtle distinction confirms the explanation that we gave on the differences between the accounts of St. Matthew and St. Luke: Satan, struck by the words of the Lord, suspected very strongly that He was God, and he wanted to try again with a daring temptation, transporting him to the top of the highest mountain and promising all the kingdoms of the earth, as St. Matthew says. It was then that Jesus drove him away, repeating to him with His divine power those words that alluded to Himself as God: *“You shall worship the Lord, your God, and Him alone shall you serve”*.

Satan felt the divine in the Redeemer, more than he had ever felt it before; he felt that He was the master of the kingdoms, and feeling overpowered by His glory, and refusing to adore Him, he ran away.

Satan and the powerful of the world.

Satan, the damned, knows that man does not live of bread alone, and so he is not satisfied to tempt him only with greed for material things, but tries to convince him of false ideals in order to take him away from the Lord. His purpose is always the same: to substitute his kingdom for that of God, and he lures man into the abyss of his rebellion. He tempts everyone with the ambition and pride; he tempts in proportion to each man's condition, but he attacks with special force and cunning the so-called “greats of the world”, whose ambition and pride is beyond measure. He tempts them by giving them an unquenchable thirst for power and glory at all costs, including the complete disregard for justice and truth, and proposes that they trade their conscience and their eternal salvation

for these; in practical terms he induces them to reject God and what is of God, and to adore the principles of evil as the unavoidable laws of greatness.

Those men that have the misfortune of keeping away from the Catholic Church become unaware of the deception of Satan, and be dragged down into the abyss.

How many philosophers with their crazy theories, and how many politicians with their pretences, are the servants and accomplices of Satan; and he tells those who lust for power and glory to adore him and to refuse to adore God! It is impossible, in fact, to violate laws, natural and divine, without adoring the false principles and the vile ideas that Satan proposes. There does not exist a corrupt person who does not try to justify himself and his crimes by creating laws to protect him.

It is a most sorrowful experience that we have experienced and we still experience, in seeing the arrogant rising in the world: they rise up high adoring Satan in his errors and in his aberrations; they reach the heights of power like first-rate criminals and evildoers, adoring Satan, rebelling against the Church or persecuting her; in order to succeed, they resort to all sorts of wickedness and falsehoods; they do not put limits on their crimes, even though they try to disguise them under the cover of laws; and they are the scourge of the people. The criminal seizes, abuses and kills those who do not submit to his arrogant demands, and he serves Satan.

The ruler first conceives of a crime and then codifies it into law; for this reason he is an adorer of Satan.

Thus, the Temple, the House of God, and the Church become the stool of his arrogant acrobatics; he rises up to the pinnacle of the Temple, that is to the highest authority of the Church; he has the pretence to dominate it, and he proudly believes he will subjugate it. He hurls himself down and calls his fall great, believing that his glory on earth is intact, and is completely uninterested in his eternal ruin.

It is historically true, now well demonstrated, that the rulers of the world, when they have a falling out with the Pope and with the Church, are ultimately put down and destroyed. In their arrogant tyrannical acts, they are not aware of being tempted by Satan, but support him miserably. It is necessary that they come back to their senses, lest they become victims of their arrogance and their impudence.

Oh, if one would only remember that everything has an end, how could one lust for power and glory on earth? Is it to become immortalized in history? But true history only brands the arrogant and the unjust, and on the last day before the Eternal Judge, it will only bring the highest ignominy for the evildoers. Besides, who is interested in history? Often is not the monument erected in a square just a measure of human silliness? Are they not often objects that are cursed by the people?

Ambition also tempts in spiritual matters...

Let us also be vigilant against the snares of Satan, because, sorrowfully, ambition is not only a temptation for the so-called great of the world; it can also devastate our humble lives, causing us to desire useless things and harming our conscience. Let us be vigilant, because even in piety and in the spiritual life we could desire spectacular demonstrations that encourage our pride. We should have a single goal in life: *To adore and to serve only God.*

6. Jesus preaching of in Galilee.

Jesus Christ, after overcoming the temptation of Satan, started His ministry in Judea, as is reported by St. John (Chapters 2, 3, and 4), and there he did many miracles, which were witnessed also by some Galileans. After that Jesus, moved by the Holy Spirit, went to Galilee, where the fame of His miracles and of His words had already spread; thus around Him there started to be a great number of people who followed Him to listen to Him in the synagogues where He would teach, and *they acclaimed Him*.

The acclamation of the people makes us understand that the divine Word penetrated the hearts of all who heard him with extraordinary awe.

Traveling through the cities of Galilee, Jesus went also to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and which he loved as His homeland. He went on a Sabbath to read the Scriptures and to teach. It was customary, in fact, to read some passages from the Law or from the Prophets in the Synagogues on the Sabbath, and afterward to explain them to the people. When in the gathering there was also a person with authority, he would request to read, and the book was given to him -- that is, a scroll of parchment rolled around a wooden spindle on which was written on one side only the Word of God -- that he may choose the text. The person who read stood up out of respect, and after, rolling the scroll back up, he would start his talk.

In the Synagogue of Nazareth Jesus was given the book of the Prophet Isaiah; Jesus opened it, and found the passage that was in reference to his own mission. The Prophet was speaking in the name of the future Messiah saying: *The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because He has anointed me; to bring good tidings to the poor; He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord and the day of reward.*"

It was the description of his work until the end of time; it was the summary of his spiritual mission and the marvelous miracles that would go with it. He, the anointed of the Holy Spirit, had to evangelize the eternal truth to *the poor*, that is to the people, the sinners, the ignorant, all those poor in the light and supernatural grace; he had *to heal the brokenhearted*, that is the people who were suffering, and the timid and those who, disheartened by their sins desired to rise again. He would announce liberation to these and to the souls in Limbo that were waiting their salvation.

With His words of truth He would give sight to the blind; with the propagation of the Gospel, all over the world, He would give freedom to the oppressed, filling hearts with happiness for the grace of God; with the propagation of the divine mercies He would preach *a year of favor*, that is the time of great grace for all souls and finally would announce *the day of reward*, that is the final judgment.

In the words of the Prophet Isaiah there was the prophetic announcement of the work of the Redeemer and the development of His immense mercy for all future centuries until the end of time. He would actually benefit the people, console the sorrowful, heal the sick, give sight to the blind and so on; but these benefits were symbols of the greater benefits that He would provide for His Church in the centuries.

Seven great pronouncements can be regarded as prophecies of the seven periods of the history of the Church: 1. The evangelization of the poor. 2. The renewal of all men, debased by paganism, through the sacrifices of the martyrs, the *great contrition* for human wickedness. 3. The triumph of the Church, which had been previously reduced to bloody

servitude by the Caesars. 4. The illumination of the truth to the entire world, through the Doctors of the Church. 5. The freedom from new persecutions during the apostasy of the nations, and the triumph of the Church, which had been oppressed by Tyrannies. 6. *The acceptable time*, that is a time of great graces, and a great triumph of the Church in the kingdom of God and 7. The last prevarication and the final judgment.

Jesus Christ, rolling up the scroll handed it back to the minister of the Synagogue and sat down.

His face was shining with truth, looking to the entire future, and the eyes of all the present were upon Him, attracted by His grandeur. His appearance captivated, and his words were fascinating and for this reason everyone was looking at Him, not to miss one word of what He would say. Looking at them to capture all of them into his Heart, He exclaimed: *Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.*

Most likely, these words were only the introduction to a sermon that He gave, or the final summary of it. The evangelist does not specify it, but it is evident that Jesus demonstrated the way in which those words had been fulfilled and how this fulfillment would unfold, because the Sacred Text adds that *all spoke highly of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. All spoke highly of him, that is, they were convinced of what He said. They were enthusiastic and spoke with each other to share their impressions and their amazement.*

Others, however, casting doubt among the people, just when the Word of God could have sprouted in their hearts and made them ready to follow the truth, exclaimed: *“Isn’t this the son of Joseph?”* They said these words with contempt, as it is clear from the account, thus preventing the others to open their hearts to the truth.

Many had gone to the Synagogue with the hope of witnessing a miracle, and felt deep disappointment in seeing that Jesus did not perform any, and for this they remembered that Jesus was *the son of Joseph*, as they believed He was, unaware of the mystery of the Virginity of Mary and that of her divine Maternity. Jesus exposed their concealed thoughts, showing that he could not operate miracles because of their little faith; He attested to this with stern words, indirectly but clearly, that more mercy would be shown toward the gentiles, just as mercy was shown to the widow of Zarephath by Elijah, and to Naaman the Syrian by Elisha, because a Prophet is never accepted in his own country.

The stern words of Jesus reveal all the hidden evil intention within the hearts of those that were listening to Him, but were directed at their conversion; but they, refusing the divine mercy, became as if possessed by Satan, and getting up in fury threw Him out of the Synagogue and the city, pushing Him to the summit of a mountain, where on the southwest side was a deep precipice of about ten or twelve meters (30-40ft), with the intention of hurling Him off to kill Him. Jesus, however, showing His divine power, went through them calmly and left, without anyone daring to put their hands on Him. He demonstrated in this way that He was a complete master of the situation, and without his permission no one could do anything to Him.

The ungrateful people of Nazareth.

It is sorrowful but highly instructive to see how those Nazarenes received Jesus: in the beginning they were very enthused by His words, calling them sublime; afterward, however, upon the insinuations of some evil-minded individuals, they were surprised that

He, *the son of a carpenter*, could talk in that way. They were taken by a spiteful envy, and devalued all His wisdom. They were expecting miracles, but Jesus could not do any except for some of little note because of their lack of faith as St. Matthew and St. Mark report, and this made them dismiss reports of His great powers that they heard from other cities.

The stern reprimand of Jesus angered them even more and, engulfed in a great rage, they thought to kill Him. The lack of responsiveness to grace made them first to become more evil and then left them in the power of Satan, who pushed them to throw him down from the mountain's edge, maybe in the hope of vindicating his defeat in the desert. But Jesus, just as he did not want to throw himself down from the temple's pinnacle to show His power uselessly, in the same way He did not allow the Nazarenes to throw Him down, showing in this way that He was the master of the situation and the dominator also of the wretched human will.

This is the way men are!

Men become easily enthused by beautiful words, but as soon as they are moved by a temptation or a disordered feeling, they go the opposite direction, and are even moved to criminality. It is painful to see how many souls start their spiritual life with fervor and enthusiasm and later not only become lukewarm, but fall into indifference and even lose their faith.

They lament of not receiving graces and not ever being granted anything from God, while they do not humble themselves and understand that it is because of their little trust in Him. They begin to look to the ways of God with a spirit of hyper-criticism, and then end up becoming completely disheartened; in their thoughts they are miserably wrong and the judgments they form are so faulty for their spiritual life, that they become completely disoriented.

All souls are the object of the Redeemer Jesus' special care, and for each soul He accomplishes what He does for all mankind: He revives the soul in the Holy Spirit, enlightens it with the light of truth, heals its interior sickness, frees it from the chains of the passion, gives it back the vision of Heaven and raises the soul to flights of love in the midst of the oppressions of life; He has for the soul *an acceptable time* of special graces and exceptional mercies; He becomes the prize and retribution of the soul in the interior sweetness that He enriches it, and its eternal award.

The soul must respond to this.

This is the essential condition for its perfection; if the soul does not respond, it puts itself in opposition to the grace, and thereby arrives even to its complete ruin. *Jesus knocks and leaves*; He cannot stay in an ungrateful heart, and He cannot do anything for it with His infinite love. If we only could understand this great lesson, how quickly we would become saints!

7. Jesus at Capernaum.

From Nazareth in the Galilee heights, Jesus descended to Capernaum on the lake of Genasaret, and continued his ministry teaching in the Synagogue on the Sabbath. The Nazarenes had driven Him away threatening to kill Him, and so He went to a more faithful town where the good seed could bear fruit. He taught, but not as those who relate a doctrine of others, but *with authority*, like those who speak the truth, and His dignity was so great in his manner of teaching that everyone was amazed.

His words contained the theme of the truth that He spread, because He was God; with his authority he gave the true reason for belief, spreading in the hearts the faith, that is the consent to the authority of God who makes it known. No reasoning and no argument can have the strength of the Authority of God, because only this can bring the full consent of human reason; all darkness is dispersed by this light: *God speaks, the Church teaches me, I believe.*

The possessed.

Satan, as he did in Eden, attempts to substitute for the truth, human reason or his negation of the Authority of God who reveals, and in this way attempts to destroy the faith in the soul, even when it seems that he wants to support it. In the Synagogue of Capernaum there was a current of true faith; their marveling at the doctrine of Jesus was a marvel to them because of faith, because He convinced with divine authority. Satan attempted to disturb this spirit of faith, shouting through the mouth of a possessed man and affirming that Jesus was the *Holy One of God*.

It is possible that the man possessed was taken to Jesus to be freed of his possession, but it is also possible that the devil had moved him to come to upset the assembly. *He was possessed by an unclean spirit*, says the Sacred Text, and he pretended to substitute the testimony of the Infinite Purity with his own, and thereby the people would believe in Jesus not by His own authority, but for the testimony that he was giving.

It was a subtle and dangerous deceit, and for this reason the Redeemer rebuked it, ordered it to be silent, and commanded it to leave the man that it was possessing. This miracle was performed to return to or strengthen within those hearts the supernatural faith, because it was a miracle of divine authority; Satan felt that command like a blow and for the hate he feels for man, he did not want to leave without showing his spite for this creature of God, and threw the poor man on the ground because he possessed him, but he could not hurt him, because God did not allow it.

The assembly was dismayed at that sight, scared and at the same time in awe, asking themselves what powerful words were these of Jesus, to whom even the demons obeyed.

The mother in law of St. Peter.

From the Synagogue Jesus went to the house of St. Peter, where he used to stay. The mother-in-law of the Apostle was sick with a dangerously high fever, and they

begged for her to be cured. St. Luke, as a physician, characterizes the fever with the technical terminology used by the famous physician Galen, also to make clear that the fever could not have disappeared in an instant. Jesus Christ bent over the sick woman, ordered the fever to leave, and it immediately left her without even leaving her with the natural weakness that follows a recovery. The woman, in fact, got up from the bed and started to serve them.

At sunset, after the period of rest taken on the Sabbath, all who had people afflicted with different ailments brought them to Jesus, and He, with great gentleness, put his hands on each of them and cured them, driving away their demons and enjoining them to be silent and not to say that He was the Christ. He could have cured all the sick presented to Him with only one word but He wanted to lay His hands on them as a sign of mercy and love, and so he spent the night engaged in this work of mercy.

As the next day was underway, he went to a secluded place to pray; but the crowds went looking for him and wanted Him to stay, anxious to hear more and to receive new benefits. He said that he had to also go to other cities to evangelize for the Kingdom of God and so he left to go to preach in other Synagogues of Galilee.

Some people drive Jesus away and some welcome Him.

One city drives Jesus away and threatens to kill him, and another welcomes him with enthusiasm and wants Him to stay. Nazareth, a name which means *the city that flourishes* drives him away, and Capernaum, signifying *the beautiful city, field of penance*, welcomes him. The meaning of the name of these two cities mirrors what actually happens in the world. The cities who flourish in a material sense, cannot bear to have the presence of Jesus, and those who are spiritually beautiful because of their penance and for their good deeds welcome Him and do not want him to leave.

Nazareth was famous for its little intelligence, to the point that it had become notorious in its stupidity; its only glory was to have hosted the Savior, but unbelievably they refused Him.

When the world rejects the Redeemer it, too, becomes the emblem of stupidity. Today we are witnessing the sad display of apostasy of many nations from God and from the Church; it is the most revolting phenomenon of stupidity that can be imagined, because it is the rejection of Life for the embrace of death.

Stay with us, Jesus, do not abandon us! So many times we ourselves are the ones who remove you from our hearts and become part of the apostasy of the people. Stay with us, Jesus, do not abandon us, and forgive us! Bend over our sorrowful hearts, order the fever of our passions to leave us alone, bring us back to the activities of the holy divine services, give us the fullness of your life, that living for You and in You, we may live glorifying God. Amen.

Chapter 5

1 The miraculous catch of fish. The healing of the leper. Jesus prays. The healing of a paralytic. The vocation of Levi. The fast.

1 Now it happened that, when the crowds pressed toward him, so that they might hear the word of God, he was standing beside the lake of Genesaret. 2 And he saw two boats standing beside the lake. But the fishermen had climbed down, and they were washing their nets. 3 And so, climbing into one of the boats, which belonged to Simon, he asked him to draw back a little from the land. And sitting down, he taught the crowds from the boat. 4 Then, when he had ceased speaking, he said to Simon, "Lead us into deep water, and release your nets for a catch." 5 And in response, Simon said to him: "Teacher, working throughout the night, we caught nothing. But on your word, I will release the net." 6 And when they had done this, they enclosed such a copious multitude of fish that their net was rupturing. 7 And they signaled to their associates, who were in the other boat, so that they would come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they were nearly submerged. 8 But when Simon Peter had seen this, he fell down at the knees of Jesus, saying, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." 9 For astonishment had enveloped him, and all who were with him, at the catch of fish that they had taken. 10 Now the same was true of James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were associates of Simon. And Jesus said to Simon: "Do not be afraid. From now on, you will be catching men." 11 And having led their boats to land, leaving behind everything, they followed him. 12 And it happened that, while he was in a certain city, behold, there was a man full of leprosy who, upon seeing Jesus and falling to his face, petitioned him, saying: "Lord, if you are willing, you are able to cleanse me." 13 And extending his hand, he touched him, saying: "I am willing. Be cleansed." And at once, the leprosy departed from him. 14 And he instructed him that he should tell no one, "But go, show yourself to the priest, and make the offering for your cleansing, just as Moses has commanded, as a testimony for them." 15 Yet word of him traveled around all the more. And great crowds came together, so that they might listen and be cured by him from their infirmities. 16 And he withdrew into the desert and prayed. 17 And it happened, on a certain day, that he again sat down, teaching. And there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting nearby, who had come from every town of Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was present, to heal them. 18 And behold, some men were carrying in the bed of a man who was paralyzed. And they sought a way to bring him in, and to place him before him. 19 And not finding a way by which they might bring him in, because of the crowd, they climbed up to the roof, and they let him down through the roof tiles with his bed, into their midst, in front of Jesus. 20 And when he saw his faith, he said, "Man, your sins are forgiven you." 21 And the scribes and Pharisees began to think, saying: "Who is this, who is speaking blasphemies? Who is able to forgive sins, except God alone?" 22 But when Jesus realized their thoughts, responding, he said to them: "What are you thinking in your hearts? 23 Which is easier to say: 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise up and walk?' 24 But so that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins," he said to the paralytic, "I say to you to: Rise up, take up your bed, and go into

your house.” 25 And at once, rising up in their sight, he took up the bed on which he was lying, and he went away to his own house, magnifying God. 26 And astonishment took hold of everyone, and they were magnifying God. And they were filled with fear, saying: “For we have seen miracles today.” 27 And after these things, he went out, and he saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the customs office. And he said to him, “Follow me.” 28 And leaving behind everything, rising up, he followed him. 29 And Levi made a great feast for him in his own house. And there was a large crowd of tax collectors and others, who were sitting at table with them. 30 But the Pharisees and scribes were murmuring, saying to his disciples, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” 31 And responding, Jesus said to them: “It is not those who are well who need a doctor, but those who have maladies. 32 I have not come to call the just, but sinners to repentance.” 33 But they said to him, “Why do the disciples of John fast frequently, and make supplications, and those of the Pharisees act similarly, while yours eat and drink?” 34 And he said to them: “How can you cause the sons of the groom to fast, while the groom is still with them? 35 But the days will come when the groom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast, in those days.” 36 Then he also made a comparison for them: “For no one sews a patch from a new garment onto an old garment. Otherwise, he both disrupts the new one, and the patch from the new one does not join together with the old one. 37 And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine ruptures the wineskins, and it will be poured out, and the wineskins will be lost. 38 Instead, the new wine is put into new wineskins, and both are preserved. 39 And no one who is drinking the old, soon wishes for the new. For he says, ‘The old is better.’ ”

2. The boat of Peter and the teaching Church.

God is marvelous in his language, and with humble things He expresses very grandiose plans full of wisdom and love. Who would not say that the scenes of the Pentateuch appear to be more solemn and marvelous than the parables and the stories of the Gospel? Yet those scenes were only a prelude, while the Gospel is the reality and not only the reality but also the announcement of greater things; the Gospel is the depiction of the marvelous development of Redemption. For this reason it is called “Gospel”: the Good News.

In the Old Testament God lent his words a more human character; thus it seems more accessible to us and consequently more grandiose; in the New Testament His words have a more divine character, and we understand the New Testament less and it seems to us less grandiose. We are very far from the divine; our thoughts are not those of God, and for this reason we value more a mountain of marble than a small gem extracted from a mine.

For instance, the scene of Jesus teaching the populace from the boat of Peter seems more simple and mundane than the crossing of the Red Sea on foot or the canticle of Moses; it seems to be of little importance compared to these, and yet it is the expression of the immense greatness of the divine Magisterium entrusted to the Church and to the Pope, as we shall soon see. It is not the passage of a people from one side of the sea to the other, it is the passage of the divine light of truth from the infinite sea to our littleness; it is not the figure of the liberation from sins through the Baptism, as happened in the crossing of

the Red Sea, but it is the synthesis, it is the fruitful seed of the greatest mercy ever given to a free and intelligent man, the infallible Magisterium of the Church and the Pope.

The critics and the overly critical, so miserable compared to the thought of God, busy themselves in analyzing each letter and word, and believe to have discovered the sun, when they discover an old text or a temporal interpretation of a Sacred Text; they strive to fill, so they say, gaps within the Sacred Text and claim to find here errors, and there missing and mismatched parts in it. They dig with all their strength in the dead depth of history, obstructed by ruins, and believe to have discovered it all, when they cobble together a dubious bit of information to put alongside the Sacred Text, without thinking that they are placing a fake gem next to a real one, and they go to great lengths to bring out what God wanted to keep obscure and remain hidden*, because of its uselessness or harmfulness to His purpose in communicating to us.

These critics and overly critical people do not realize that they thwart with their tiny or false claims the reason why God wanted to leave some shadows in the Text and omit some information. These are very important considerations that must deeply humble us before God, and teach us to deal with his Word with a true spirit of faith.

When Jesus Christ went for the first time to preach in Galilee, He called initially Simon, Andrew, James and John to follow him, as is written in St. Matthew (4:18 and following) and in St. Mark (1:16 and following). He met them by Lake Gennesaret when *they were dipping the nets into the sea*, and He called them to be fishers of men. At the sound of his voice they left their nets immediately and followed him, but it is clear from the context that they did not follow him once and for all; actually after a while they went back to their nets and their boats thinking that it was necessary for them to return to use their talents and professions to make a living. They followed Jesus, and when they saw that he lived poorly and from alms, they believed that it would not be reasonable to leave their livelihoods and so went back to fishing. This is revealed by the psychological reconstruction of the attitude of St. Peter during the miraculous catch of fish, as we soon shall see.

In calling the four fishermen, Jesus would have liked to have them all for his work, and at first they accepted to do so, but later they decided, maybe even with good intentions, that they should not be dependent upon him; they felt that the alms that Jesus received were not enough to sustain them, and they went back to the lake to fish during the night, hoping to earn at least something. Jesus went to see them on a night that they had been fishing, -- with no results -- while they were washing their nets. There were two boats moored there, one belonging to Simon and the other to John, or more accurately to his father, Zebedee.

The throng of people that followed Jesus crowded the bank of the lake and He, in order to make it possible for everyone to hear him, went on Simon's boat and asked him to move a little bit from the shore; then, sitting on the deck of the boat, he taught to the people. This was not a vain gesture, nor a fortuitous move. He was looking far, to the accomplishment of his work, to future centuries in which He would teach to the world from St. Peter's chair, instructing the people from his boat, which is the Church.

*A thought that even today should be considered by those who put all their efforts in just analyzing and dissecting the word of God, without obtaining any spiritual benefit from it.

His gesture was a divine gesture, and as such was most simple, underscoring for all times the right of the Catholic Church and the Pope to instruct all peoples.

All the sophisms of the heresies and the violence of the tyrants could not and never can take away this right. The boat of Peter became in that moment as immovable as a granite block; it became a seat of bronze, an immortal monument. The gesture of Jesus was like consecrating the boat, changing its nature, and making it a conqueror of souls, in His adorable Name.

The Church has passed through the fleeting centuries and still endures the strongest storms, but it is never submerged and continues to catch souls in her net, even when they seem to elude her or that nothing more can be obtained because of the universal apostasy.

The miraculous catch.

Jesus wanted to show to Simon and the other three Apostles, whom he had called on the shore of the lake, that His providence was enough to support them and also tell them ahead of time of the miraculous catch of souls that the Church would accomplish in the great triumph of his Kingdom; thus he told Simon to go out to sea and dip the nets. Experienced as he was, Peter knew that there was no hope to catch fish anymore because they had spent all night, the best hours for fishing, and had caught nothing; however his faith felt revived being close to Jesus and in light of His teaching, without hesitation, in his Name, he cast the nets.

Immediately fish filled the nets and in such a large quantity that they were almost at their breaking point; in his boat perhaps was his brother Andrew, and with him he waved to the other boat where John and James were, to come to their help; and they, rowing hard came alongside and catching all the fish, they filled both boats to the point that they were almost sinking.

The faith of Peter, at that point, reawakened; he had come back to the boat and the nets because he thought it imprudent to be without a sure source of income, yet now he became sure that Jesus not only could provide to his needs, but that He could do it abundantly; he felt his ingratitude and his misery and *he fell at the knees of Jesus*, who was sitting on the edge of the boat, and he cried out to Him: "*Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.*" He wanted to say: You called me, promising me to feed me also bodily, and I doubted You, and believed that my work as a fisherman had more value than your Providence; I had left everything for You but because of my inconstancy I returned not so much to my boat as to my trade, practically refusing your call; I am not worthy that You accept me in your group, depart from me, you are in bad company with me, I am a sinner. Also the other three fishermen who were with Peter were taken by the same feeling, because also they had not trusted in divine Providence. But Jesus, full of love, speaking directly to Peter, because to him especially he wanted to give the lesson and because he was the most sorrowful, said: "*Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.*" Then all of them, brought back their boats to shore, left everything and followed him once and for all.

**After the night of apostasy, the boat of Peter
will be full of a miraculous catch.**

Jesus Christ renewed the faith of his first four Apostles, and he had also announced the miraculous fishing for souls that the Church would do in the last times. The difficult times for the Church, without any doubt, have been the centuries where it has collected souls, but the souls acquired, compared to those that escaped the loving net, could be said to be almost none. Most of mankind is not even nominally part of his flock; moreover, in the apostasy of the nations, to which we are witnesses in the present time, the catch is even less.

But the Church does not die, and her apostolate cannot be in vain.

Jesus shall come with particular graces, shall instruct from the boat of Peter, shedding an even greater light on its eternal truths; the Pope shall go *out a short distance from the shore*, which means he shall open hearts to a greater trust and shall go toward the nations in Jesus' divine Name, and the Pope shall cast the nets.

The catch shall be great...

But it is not only the boat of Peter that shall catch souls; there is also the boat of John, the apostle of love, because, if the Pope catches peoples in the nets, love assembles them in a single flock and love comes to help the marvelous apostolate of the Pope.

Then we shall have a kingdom of great humility, and like Peter confessed to be a sinner, likewise nobody shall hesitate, for the glory of God, to recognize his/her own sins, wiping out sad memories of past failures, and to unite the world again in a most tender embrace.

This is not a dream or a fantasy; it is the great hope of the Church, especially in this time of apostasies and bitter trials.* Too much trust has been put in men; too much hope has been placed in their loyalty, and the nets have been cast in the night, without Jesus, in the hope of a more human rather than supernatural success, with the belief of adding, through human ingenuity, their own capabilities and influences. However, no fish were caught in the night, and the night passed without success.

It shall be necessary to cast the nets in high seas, even when there is no hope to catch anything, but with great trust in Jesus, the universal king of all the centuries; then the nets will fill up and the Church shall have in her true triumph, which is love.

Two boats were at sea.

Two boats were at sea, but the one that caught the greatest quantity of fish was Peter's boat. The boat of John was in the open sea, far away, and probably helped to spread the net. It is always and only the Church that catches souls in the net of love, because only the Church has the great mission of saving souls. Jesus Christ leaves private initiatives fruitless, even when they are inspired by the best intentions; the supervision and the blessing of the Church is always necessary for any holy work.

* These prophetic predictions of Fr. Dolindo have been fulfilled literally in our time, when Pope Paul VI embraced the Patriarch of the Eastern Churches out of love, so that the unity of the Church may be reconstituted.

Peter's boat could not get the fish without the help and the participation of John's boat, because of the great quantity of fish that was almost breaking the nets and sinking the boat; this is also symbolic and calls to mind a great truth: the conversion of peoples will create such a pressure for the centrality of the Church, that it could appear as a threat for the stability of her discipline.

But charity and the love of God will make harmony possible and instead of increasing the bureaucracy of the ecclesiastic ministries, they shall be diminished because of charity; the boat of John shall join in this way that of Peter, and the single crowded fold shall be in perfect harmony.

The souls' only preoccupation shall be: *to follow and love Jesus*, and for a period of time temporal things will matter little, as it is proper and logical, and will take secondary place in life's activities. At the present time, first we look for material gain which is seen as having paramount importance and the kingdom of God and his justice are considered secondary; but later, instead, the kingdom of God shall be the aspiration of the souls, and in addition will also bring about temporal prosperity. This is not a prophecy, but it is the aspiration of the Church, the true hope of souls who put God above all things.

3. The healing of the leper.

Those poor people who had become sick with leprosy could have no contact with the general public and since the sickness was incurable in most cases, lepers lived in squalid desolation. Christian charity may still isolate lepers to avoid contagion but in doing so does not abandon them, on the contrary, it surrounds them lovingly with treatment; however, in those times they were abandoned without any hope to be cured. A leper, who had heard Jesus, ran to Him full of hope and then, becoming bold, prostrated himself at His feet and begged Him in a new way: "*Lord, if you wish, you can make me clean.*" He recognized in Him a divine power, because he appealed to the divine will of Jesus; he did not explicitly ask to be healed, but he abandoned himself to His mercy, and waited to see if He would take this opportunity to grant his request or not.

It was a prayer, then, made with living faith, and to this faith was united a deep humility, because he was begging with his face on the ground.

At the approach of the leper, the crowd spontaneously moved away, fearing some infectious contact. Jesus instead extended his hands to him, touched him and said: "*I do will it. Be made clean.*" In an instant leprosy disappeared, and the poor man found himself entirely healed.

It was a great moment compared to moment of the creation of the world, when God, with his Word - with the one word that was the expression of his Will - created everything.

Infinitely good, He deigned to touch human infirmity and, in order to renew the health of this man, suspended with His creative will the pathogenic germs that infested his body and eliminated them. He called back to life the tissues that had become atrophied, and they were regenerated instantaneously; in the short time in which He pronounced His omnipotent words, He reduced the sickness to nothing and recomposed the rotten flesh.

Where did the divine hand of Jesus rest when He touched his head, to gesture to him to get up. He touched him because he wanted to show that His infinite charity did not disdain human misery, and by touching him projected His healing power. The poor sick

man, free in an instant of his terrible sickness, got up and instinctively ran toward the crowd that had moved away, to praise the greatness of God; but Jesus did not allow it, because to reenter into civil society he needed the declaration of a Priest, according to the Law. He commanded him to show himself to the Minister of God, and to make the prescribed offering (Lv:10-21) to give witness to the miracle received. Certainly, Jesus could have allowed the leper to reenter society; but God never excludes Authority, and requires that there always be one of His Ministers to be the mediator between Him and us.

The leprosy of sin.

That sick leper was not simply a sick man but a representation of human sickness, and especially the awful leprosy of sin.

The poor sinner stains and disfigures himself because he is in opposition to the Divine Will; to be healed he must go to God, and go back to His Will. God outstretches his merciful hand towards him, welcomes him and forgives him as soon he has repented with sincere and perfect contrition, but does not allow him to consider himself justified and healed unless he first presents himself to the Priest, telling him his faults and his sorrow in confession. The offering of the repentant is not a lamb or a couple of doves; it is the offering of his love towards God, and this gift must go through priestly hands.

We cannot see the awful leprosy of sins that covers us, and for this reason we carry our spiritual stains with indifference. We do not see the leprosy that mars us when we disagree with the Divine Will, and for this reason we find it hard to conform to His Will, placing more value on our miserable desires.

Let us then trust in Jesus and let us tell Him with all our heart, in union with His Will: “Cleanse me from what is mine, touch me with your divine hand and heal me, and allow me to want only what you want.”

Jesus withdraws to solitary places to pray.

The Sacred Text adds that the fame of Jesus spread more than ever, surrounding Him constantly by enormous crowds of people who would go to hear him and be healed of their infirmities.

However the Savior, though being constantly and tirelessly at the disposal of all, would find time to withdraw to solitary places to pray. He was teaching us that works of goodwill and charity should not take us from prayer, without which we would miserably wither and become completely parched.

Jesus prayed, and in which way? If He was God in which way could He pray? He was God but also true man, and he prayed as the Eternal Priest, as a victim and a Mediator; as Priest, he offered himself to the Father in an eternal sacrifice, and gave himself as a victim of love. His heart was a holocaust, his body a perpetual sacrifice, because it was continuously oppressed by our iniquities; He was a lighted candelabra, for the splendor of his thoughts, he was a fragrant altar for the loving expressions of his love, he was like an altar of “the loaves of proposition” (Ex 35:13; Mt 12:4) because he already thought of himself as living Bread with which to feed mankind.

He was the Temple of God, that is the true Temple, and being true God by the

hypostatic union, he had in Himself the *Sanctum Sanctorum* (Holy of the Holies), and being true man, he was, so to speak, the atrium of the chosen people and the vestibule of the peoples. His prayer was the equivalent of the union of all the holy services of the Temple, to their fullest extent, and in this way He reconciled man and God.

He would go to solitary places in order not to be seen, but also as an example for us; he dominated the inevitable necessities and wants of his body, rising in ecstasy and contemplating the Divine glory, and loving with the same divine Eternal Love.

He was the mediator between man and God.

Jesus would always consider human frailty, he knew all of them and his prayer was also an agony of love and reparation. In praying he would incorporate all men into himself, presenting them to the Father in Himself, as his own descendants and offspring; his heart was roused to compassion and spread great warmth of mercy. We, too, when we pray for others, we feel as if they belong to us, and we present them to God in the activity of our spiritual life; but Jesus, praying for men, assimilated them in himself, presenting them to the Father, enveloping them in his divine merits, accumulating for them reassurances of grace.

Jesus praying: the eternal lamp before the Father.

Alone, prostrated before the Father, with open arms and his eyes turned to Heaven, Jesus prayed.

It was a sight worthy of God, as the Eternal Word, knowledge of the Father, light from infinite light.

He was like an eternal lamp before Him.

As light reveals the beauty of things, Jesus Christ revealed the beauty of God.

The Church preserves an eternal memory of this characteristic prayer of Jesus, in the lamp that burns before the Most Blessed Sacrament. That little lamp enhances the beauty of the Altar, and speaks of the indescribable love that silently burns in the holy Ciborium; it expresses in a delicate symbol the infinite reality of the Eternal Word, light of the Father, and the reality of the Word made Flesh, the shining victim who endlessly consumes himself. He gathers our souls in the faith, that is the knowledge of God, and lights them with tender love; this is not a simple lamp, but rather a union of shining hearts burning before love, which gives of itself.

Each flicker of that light expresses a flicker of a soul, every trickle of oil towards the little flame expresses the pouring back of life towards God, burning of love and consumed by charity; every peaceful twinkle of that quiet light expresses the trepidation of interior charity.

The lamp, put in place by the Church, is not silent; but is the representation of the Church, generated by the Redeemer and his eternal glorification.

The lamp! The prayerful little flame, all enclosed in its small vase, enveloped in peace in the simple humility of oil, a quiet liquid expression of the compression of the olive in the oil press. The lamp! Little heart that beats; it expresses the cycle of a life that is a flame, and a flame that is holocaust. It is sweet symbol of the blood of our life of prayer that runs peacefully, anointed by grace, pours again into our intellect to enlighten

it, into our hearts to ignite it, into our lives to immolate it, diffusing interior warmth of charity and tender love.

The lamp! Little solitary pilgrim in the Temple of the Lord, that never takes anything from anyone, but only needs the love of one person that would supply it again; it is suspended, left alone, very poor, very little, defended from the wind that would extinguish it with a breath, all for God, only for Him, as well for all those who pray and offer themselves to Jesus.

This was the way that Jesus prayed: an eternal light before the Father, a light for our earthly pilgrimage to show to us the way to Heaven, an effusion of charity from his Heart, a pouring of graces and blessings and a continuous immolation of love.

He prayed for us, he prayed for his work, and accomplished in silence what his very charity would not allow Him to accomplish in the hearts of men.

He healed people, consoled them, assisted all those who went to Him, yet he had to feel a great pain in seeing the throng of people begging for corporal benefits but indifferent to those of the spirit. He granted his charity, but He felt the need to pour into the hearts of the people and so he prayed.

The prayer that He taught us, after all, was his prayer: he turned to his Father, glorified Him, prepared his kingdom among men, united his Will to His Father's by offering of himself, and asked for mercy for men in their temporal lives and for forgiveness for their eternal life, as well the grace to be able to reach Jesus in the adversities and the tests of the pilgrimage. His Heart, as true Son of Jesus, also, felt the need to flow into the Father, and he prayed with immense tenderness of love. All the mystical ecstasies of the saints are nothing in comparison to those of the most holy soul of Jesus in his prayer: it contemplated, loved, united itself to the Father and there was a continuous intimacy with Him, giving Him glory with sublime canticles of his substantial praises.

The Eucharist, the great school of our prayer.

What an example for us who are pilgrims on earth, who have an extreme and continuous need for grace, and yet we pray so little!

What a vivid example: that is renewed for us every moment in the most holy Eucharist! It can be said, without exaggeration that as Bread of life Jesus Christ nourishes us, and as prisoner of love in the holy Tabernacle, He prays and teaches us to pray.

The Eucharist is the great school of our prayer, and for this reason souls who are deeply Eucharistic are souls of deep prayer. It is enough to concentrate in the sacramental Jesus in faith and with steadfastness, to learn how to pray from Him. He vivifies us and imperceptibly steers us to God; little by little he enlightens us, warms us and enables us to speak to God. The silence that surrounds him is a school of interior silence for us, and the peace that He diffuses everywhere makes us become used to the peace of putting ourselves in the hands of God, which is indispensable for praying.

The soul before Jesus becomes convinced that it cannot do anything by itself, but this does not discourage it; instead it fills the soul with trust in Him. If it becomes distracted with the thoughts of this world, if it is focused on its own crosses, if it worries

about its own future, if it becomes agitated and anxious and cannot collect itself in prayer, then it cannot concentrate.

Before Jesus, only renewing its faith in Him, the soul feels itself to rise from earth, and confident in God's help, prays peacefully awaiting His mercies.

O my Jesus, praying in this Host of love, teach us to collect ourselves and to pray; do not ever allow, having you truly alive with us, that we live anxiously and that we fail to give witness by faith in you, our filial trust and the true abandonment of love.

We suffer, it is true, but is not suffering a treasure for us? Aren't You the perennial victim for us on the Altar, and don't you teach us to immolate ourselves continuously for love? If for instance one of our eyes is aching, isn't this a secret calling to look more often at you Crucified? And if a foot hurts, isn't this a secret calling to be nailed with You on the Cross?

O how a life full of suffering can become a life of prayer before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and can become a perennial sacrifice of love!

Someone offends me, and what does it matter? Are my injuries more than the ones of my hidden King who receives only ingratitude and offenses in the Most Blessed Sacrament?

People look at me as if I am nobody, and what does it matter? Jesus is completely hidden and prostrated, and my humiliations unite me to Him, and to his life.

O my Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, truly alone in your prayer on the mystical mountain on the Altar, teach us to live your life and to change all our lives in an eternal prayer and eternal holocaust!

4. The healing of the paralytic and the remission of sins.

Jesus Christ that day was teaching in Capernaum in the house of Peter, where he usually was staying, and a great multitude of people was assembled around him and more crowded the entrance door. He was teaching in the upstairs living room or the cenacle of the house, that is, the place where the family assembled; around Him there were Scribes, Pharisees and Doctors of the Law who came from nearby villages of Galilee, Judea and also from Jerusalem.

Maybe not everyone was there for the right reason, especially those who came from Jerusalem; they were there to spy on him and scrutinize him by order of the religious Authorities. Jesus wanted to give a precise sign of his divine mission, that they might recognize him as the true Messiah. The Sacred Text says that *the power of the Lord was with him for healing*, that is, Jesus Christ manifested in that moment his power and the Father was with him to accomplish these wonderful works to be shown. *The power of the Lord was with him*, and in that room there had to be a feeling of something hidden and mysterious, that gave to the words of Jesus the character of enlightened truth.

Many sick people had come to be cured, as is evinced by the extraordinary crowd of people that usually come to those places where there is a hope to receive a physical benefit. Soon some men arrived, carrying a paralytic on a stretcher; they tried to enter by the door, but they could not, because of the stretcher and the crowd. St. Luke uses medical terminology to characterize the sickness of the poor man brought to Jesus (paralclumènos), a paralysis that made it impossible for him to move by himself, and even

if they removed him from the stretcher, it would have been impossible to move him through the crowd by holding him.

Then they had an idea suggested by their strong faith: the Jewish houses had an external ladder, and they, seeing it empty, went up to the roof on top of the living room. They removed the tiles, enlarging probably the skylight that gave light to the interior, and with great care, and with ropes, lowered the invalid before Jesus, laying him together with the stretcher in the open space that was still free in front of Him. The room did not have a high ceiling so the move was not dangerous, but it was certainly an unusual manifestation of great faith that surprised everyone and resulted in much whispering among those present.

Those caring men did not even need to say what they were asking for the invalid himself was the expression of a vivid supplication, his lost look, his limp limbs spoke very clearly that he needed a miracle to recover from his condition. From the words that Jesus spoke, it can be understood that his sickness was the consequence of sins committed and the invalid, contrite before the divine majesty of Jesus, and in bad shape from the uncomfortable journey, suffered in pain and implored forgiveness for his sins. He must have surely had an interior feeling of repentance, because the remission of sins can only be given to those who abhor them.

The faith of the men themselves who brought the paralytic before Jesus and their act of charity had to move that poor man to repentance because the Sacred Text says that Jesus *seeing their faith* exclaimed: *Man, your sins are forgiven you.*”

O *man*, said the Redeemer, and he looked not only to the poor man but to all mankind that He had come to redeem; o *man*, he said reminding the poor sinner of his dignity, as sin debases one to a level below animals; o *man* and He turned to him with greatest charity calling his soul to a new life with the remission of sins.

What happened in that moment is a secret of God, because we cannot understand clearly what happens in a soul when its sins are remitted; but let us try to understand this profound mystery of mercy that marvels the Angels of Heaven.

The forgiveness of sins.

Sin is a detachment from God and a giving in to temporal beings: *Aversio a Deo et conversio ad creaturas*; the soul created for God who is all Good is attracted to a false goodness; it lets itself be seduced by a mirage of transient happiness, and prefer creation over the Creator, including its most wretched aspects. Freely by of its own will the soul distances itself from God, and remains without His help and His grace, left on its own and slave of Satan.

Repentance destroys in the soul the allure of sin, restores the soul's appreciation of God, and with that, the desire for his love becomes stronger, and God most merciful approaches this soul. The deadened powers atrophied for a lack of supernatural life, are reenergized by the current of grace, the heart opens itself up again to God and loves Him; the conscience enlightened by an internal splendor, balances again and finds the way to goodness, aware of its duty and responsibilities; the interior light, blinded by sin, reopens to the eternal reality, and the soul, in loving God, is forgiven by Him and becomes free from its slavery.

The forgiveness of God is immensely more beautiful and great than any human forgiveness, because it is not simply compassion or a simple indulgence, instead it is an interior renewal, given by divine grace in union with the effort of the sinner, that eliminates the sin at its roots so that it does not exist anymore, remits the eternal punishment and also the temporal one in proportion to the love of the soul.

The sinner is not simply someone who collects words of forgiveness; he is the rebuilders of himself who, by the grace of God demolishes his evil, and making use of this rubble contributes to rising the new building, uprooting weeds and brambles, collecting the rubbish of his corrupted life, and using it as mulch together with his repentance, digging into the soil of the Divine Mercy, picking up the new seeds of grace and letting them flourish again.

If his soil still retains remnants of his misery, and these are not able with loving mortification to be part of the new life he is building, then they must be eliminated little by little with penance.

Penance is like the refining of a building still coarse but solid; it is like the watering of a plant, still weak and half withered, because it has not taken its life completely from the soil; it is the last satisfaction that repentant love gives to the offended love; it is the outpouring of the soul that before the goodness of God does not have the courage to call itself just, and still keeps its sinful garments to hide the horror of its sin.

The remission of sins is the masterpiece of the goodness of God, it is the glory of his omnipotence that manifests itself, as the Church says, forgiving with compassion; it is the harmonious fusion of justice and mercy, that has the wonderful secret of not humiliating but rather elevating human dignity and human freedom.

Just the consideration of the elements of the remission of sins and therefore the Sacrament of Penance itself, which is the “Court of Forgiveness”, is enough to make us understand the divine origin of Confession and how it exposes the lies of sin.

Man is not capable of this kind of loving invention; man creates jails, penitentiaries, life sentences, death sentences and atrocious tortures and punishment; even if amnesty is sometimes granted, this does not remove the brand of infamy and the permanent police records are there to show the inexorability of human injustice and the wretchedness of human mercy*.

Jesus forgives sins, therefore He is God

The Scribes and the Pharisees, equally in their moral misery, can be given credit for confessing this truth, and listening to Jesus who said: “*Your sins are forgiven*”, they thought to themselves: “*Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who but God alone can forgive sins?*”

* This most beautiful page on penance and confession shows their value and fruits.

Accidentally, and in fact against their evil will, they added to the foundation of a great discussion on the Divinity of Jesus; if in fact it could be proved that He truly remitted sins, it followed that indeed He was God.

Jesus Christ accepted the terms of the question, and he came to its demonstration first by giving another sign of his Divinity: he read the hearts and minds of his opponents and without them having said a word, he read their intentions and malicious thoughts, and exclaimed: "*What are you thinking in your hearts? Which is easier to say 'your sins are forgiven' or to say, 'rise and walk'?*" It was an "*ad hominem*" (to the man) argument; it revealed the hidden agenda and subconscious malice of the Scribes and Pharisees; what they thought was that the Redeemer, realizing that he could not heal an invalid, who was incapacitated from his sickness, had to fall back on inventing a spurious spiritual healing as an expedient to get out of an embarrassing situation. According to their thinking, it would be easy to say: "*Your sins are forgiven*" because the true effect of these words could not be checked; instead it would be difficult, actually humanly impossible, to say to an invalid: *get up and walk*, because these words alone would not even be sufficient to fake an healing, thus showing the inability to produce the desired result.

Jesus Christ, with infinite mercy, gripped them in the vice of their own reasoning and giving a palpable confirmation of the truth of his divine mission, he produced incontrovertible proof with a miracle to show that he had indeed remitted the sins of that man, and so with divine majesty and power, he exclaimed: "*I tell you, get up, take your stretcher and go home.*"

The moment was of an unequalled solemnity: in one instant the elements of his sickness disappeared, his body felt reborn as his soul had felt reborn; before he felt an interior joy, now he felt a refreshing stirring of young life; the numbness disappeared, the head cleared, the nerves relaxed, his breathing extended, he felt engulfed by a joyful , vigor, his lifeless eyes brightened; he folded the clothes that covered him with his free hands and with the strength in his feet, leaped out from the stretcher, the *grabàto*, a kind of cot with a rope webbing, immediately put it on his shoulders, self-confident, like the most vigorous of young men, and went home glorifying God.

He did not stay where he was, because the omnipotent word that had healed him hastened him, so to speak, to go; the sickness could not resist, and he could not resist it either - not even for an instant; the divine Will thrust him like a wind, the joy at being cured gave wings to his feet, he had spiritual and corporal joy; he made his way through the crowd, descended, reached the door magnifying God, and disappeared in the street, anxious to go home.

What a marvelous scene! Jesus had told him: *Go home*, and maybe with these words He had ordered him to become again the support of his family, because it is probable that his paralysis was caused by his vices, and he had abandoned his family for filthy pleasures; he felt the strength of that command and he did not hesitate; once he decided to go back home, he could not hesitate and went to his dear family as an example of a renewed man with the joy of being the support of the family he had been able to reacquire.

The joy of feeling free from sin

The Scribes and the Pharisees on seeing this scene were confused and remained silent, as it appears from the context; everyone was greatly surprised and glorified God,

because the matter of the divinity of Jesus Christ was clearly confirmed. They were also taken by fear and were telling each other: "*We have seen incredible things today.*" We can repeat these same words every time we receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation; it is enough to enter a Church in which this Sacrament is administered to become aware that hundreds upon hundreds of souls, paralyzed by sin, rise from their misery and *go happily home*, that is to the house of their heavenly Father. How many times we have been resurrected to new life by Jesus and experienced his unutterable peace in our hearts!

If only men understood the benefit of a good Confession, they would come in droves to the House of God to obtain mercy, and if all souls understood the unhappiness of not living in God's favor, they would revive the work of mercy like those who carried the weight of the paralytic, pushing and accompanying the poor sinners to Repentance. The poor sinners are somehow frozen; they do not know how to move, they need help and need to be pushed and this is why we must be ready to do this loving apostolate. If we wait for a sinner to move by himself to go to a Priest, we shall wait in vain, because he is paralyzed in all his powers; we must push him and almost lift him up. And if he resists even to our zeal, we must take him to the feet of Jesus with our insistent prayers, and beg in His mercy to have pity on him. If sick people move us to compassion, would not sinners move us even more, they who are the unhappiest of all?

5. The vocation of Levi, the issue of fasting and the prudent consideration of the ways of the spirit.

After healing the paralyzed man, Jesus left the house and went toward Lake Genesaret. He went to a custom post for tax collection where a publican by the name of Levi or Matthew was sitting. He looked at him and his grace conquered his heart, so much so, that upon being given a simple invitation, he immediately left everything and followed Him.

In those times there was more freedom and greater respect for the individual as well a stronger sense of one's duty, and as consequence there was less need for too many formalities. Today a public officer, even a high ranking officer, is reduced more or less to the level of a college graduate; he wears a uniform and has to abide by thousands of rules and regulations that in practical terms do not enhance the public good of expanding and nurturing one's sense of duty, giving a sense of initiative to one's actions, but reduce everything to heavy and demoralizing formalities, for appearance's sake. *

Our famous supermen and reformers very soon will realize how simple minded their views on life are and they shall see, as they already see, the failure of their initiatives. They wanted to imitate the Church in her admirable organization, but they forgot that the Church has Jesus Christ who gives her life while they only have violence and their bombastic words, that do not penetrate souls but provoke dangerous reactions. The very different way of life at the time of Jesus makes us understand many things that for our modern mentality would seem absurd.

Levi might have had a subordinate to whom he left his office and this man assumed automatically his responsibilities; Levi did not care about anything else, left everything and followed Jesus Christ.

* Don Dolindo writes during the Fascist regime, when the choreography of uniforms for all ages and for all levels had become mandatory and Nazism was spreading at the same time, making matters even worse.

He was certainly a righteous man because grace seeks an open heart to be able to work on it; he must have been bored with the work that impelled him to harass his neighbors, and instead by temperament he must have been inclined to generosity, as he showed as an apostle. Maybe he was very irritated to be considered a slave-driver and a sinner, and thus the invitation of Jesus, like a seed in well prepared soil, immediately took root in his heart, and he decided to follow him.

These are no suppositions, but psychological inferences of great importance, because Matthew was not enchanted by the look of Jesus, as it could be possible to believe; instead he was conquered by the divine grace that Jesus poured into his soul. The grace, as it always happens, came to him at the most favorable psychological moment, and made use of his natural disposition to win him over easily.

The Pharisees are scandalized.

The banquet that Levi gave in honor of Jesus, to make solemn his apostolate and to which a huge number of publicans was invited, underscores for us that he was not fascinated but rather thoroughly changed. Levi went to Jesus with all his soul; he considered the call as a special, unique grace and he wanted to share his joy with others, starting an apostolate of belief among his very companions. He felt understood and conquered by the Redeemer and in talking to Him face-to-face he felt that He was Truth and he wanted to make it known to his colleagues as well, and thus he organized the banquet. That this was his intention is also made clear from the answer of Jesus to the Pharisees and the scribes.

They were in fact scandalized by the great participation of publicans and sinners and, since they could not complain directly to Jesus, as he must have been sitting at the center of the banquet, they protested with the disciples closest to the door, from where they were watching. On the other hand, they were among people who could make life difficult for them, as they were public tax collectors, individuals who were always feared, and seeing them so devout toward Jesus, did not dare to talk to Him directly for fear of upsetting them. Jesus, however, heard their reproaches, and full of gentleness and mercy, in a way that could not be offensive for the persons sitting at his same table, and with a love so strong that conquered all, answered that people in good health did not need a doctor but the sick did, and that he had not come to seek the righteous but sinners.

That banquet, therefore, was not just any banquet, but a gathering of an apostolate; He was not there to eat but to cure souls and save those who were around him; they considered themselves healthy and righteous, but if they had thought about their own responsibilities, they would not have believed themselves to be better than the publicans and sinners.

In the words of Jesus there was also an indirect invitation to the scribes and the Pharisees who were sick and sinful like the others and even more so; but they did not understand because they were full of pride. They must have feared that the publicans were offended by their comments because they understood, by some stern glances, that their remarks were inappropriate, and so changed the subject, pretending to be scandalized only because of the unrepentant lifestyle of his disciples. It is typical of the evil minded and the hypocrites to attack with a bite but then immediately change the subject and claim to have

a different intention and mislead when they realize they had chosen the wrong expression or to have been exposed in a humiliating way.

The answer of Jesus to the Pharisees.

Jesus gave them two answers, one to justify his disciples and the other to establish a very important rule of balance and wisdom in bringing souls to perfection. For the disciples it was a moment of interior joy, because he was still with them, it was like a wedding feast, in which they could not think of fasting; but when he would be removed from them with the violence of the Passion, then, surely they would be fasting. They would fast both through a voluntary penance and also by being persecuted and enduring suffering.

The Pharisees and the Scribes were satisfied with a justice made of appearances, and when they recruited a disciple, they would impose on him a severe external, physical discipline, that did not correspond to true interior virtue.

It was a method that formed hypocrites, not righteous people.

Jesus, using an analogy, told them how wrong that method was: to demand the practice of virtue of one without first addressing his current natural internal state; it was like to put a new piece of cloth on an old cloth. To give the precepts of perfection to a soul that was not disposed to accept them, would just debase them, just as it would be pointless to cut out a piece of fabric from a new garment, thereby ruining it, and sewing this cloth onto an old garment, which would only tear further and not adhere to the new piece of fabric. An appearance of virtue in a heart not yet well formed is incongruous, because it is an hypocrisy; a very high precept taught to one who is still struggling with elementary matters is a profanation, because the high precept can be misdirected due to insufficient understanding and can do more evil than good.

Jesus Christ insisted on this important point with another comparison, showing how imprudent it was to force to extreme human frailty and how difficult it was to make someone understand the holy news of the work of God; putting new wine in old wineskins breaks them and wastes the wine; it is necessary to put the new wine in new wineskins and wait until the wine becomes somehow seasoned in order for it to be accepted by those who are used to the old one.

Jesus wanted also to admonish the scribes and the Pharisees, attached to their old traditions and incapable of understanding the new mercy of God, and wanted to tell them that they had to renew themselves interiorly in order to be able to accept it. If he did not ask for a stronger exercise of virtue of his disciples it was just because he did not want to discourage them, making them inadequate for the kingdom of God; the hour of trials and suffering would come later and in their afflictions they would be perfected and ready to fast and practice the highest perfection.

For those who guide the direction of souls...

Unfortunately the mistake of the scribes and the Pharisees is common to many who have in their care the spiritual formation of souls to sanctity, and as a result they cause an immense damage. The principal reason why there is so little sanctity in souls that

are consecrated to the Lord is just for this lack of prudent care in their formation. Prescriptions, rules and the norms in a community are all like new pieces of fabric sewn on old cloth, and the high teachings of mystical love are like new and fermenting wine, put in old wineskins, which break and do not resist the pressure of a love that is alive and bursting.

It is necessary to study the souls, to reform them little by little in their thoughts, their appreciations, their tastes, leading them step by step in the way of God and to make sure that everything that is discipline comes from the interior, and not just a pharisaical obligation. It is indispensable to educate the heart, illuminate the mind, guide the soul's reason so that all souls, renewed in grace, can rise to God and be capable of those expansions of love that bring one to the highest perfection.

At the beginning of the spiritual life, a great compassion and great charity toward human weakness is needed, and it is necessary to fight character flaws more with prayer and charity than with severity and sternness. Sternness can only discipline the souls like soldiers in formation in a field, but cannot bring them to the way of sanctity; it can frighten but not inspire them, and it can make them as ineffective as buds that in storms do not open and remain forever buds without fruit.

In the ways of the Lord, the holy newness.

A too methodical and mechanical approach to the way of sanctity can be harmful, as it would be harmful to grow plants following rigorously an agricultural book, without accounting for the particular conditions that surround the young plant.

To take as infallible only that which is tried and true and not to consider the accidental elements that surround one is a mistake because the Church prays on every Holy Tuesday that her faithful be open to the holy news of the Lord, and the ways of God are truly full of graces that would be foolish to ignore.

There is the old wine and the new wine, there are the foundations and the roots that do not change, and there are the decorative elements of buildings and young plants that can have a new branch or a new bud. For this reason souls are formed in a most sure way when they are directed according to the way of the Church, in her doctrine and her liturgy; souls can grow in sanctity when they are first educated in the interior life, and when they are disciplined more by love than by the external laws of the world.

Sometimes some difficult personalities that cast doubt as to their potential for sanctification can be modified little by little, keeping in mind their weaknesses; sometimes some of the character flaws are the results of physical problems that needed to be cured by charity; sometimes it is time that changes completely some false conceptions of life, and the solution is to wait a while, and with patience and charity, an unbearable character can become a saint.

Jesus Christ did not want to teach us to ignore flaws, but he wanted them eliminated little by little; he did not want to justify intemperance, but rather He wanted to teach us to have compassion for spiritual infancy; he did not want to condemn what is good in old habits, but He wanted to tell us that grace, in order to operate freely, needs a heart without prejudices. In the Church there come times of exceptional graces; there come gifts of a new manifestation of love, and we should not categorically refuse to drink this new wine in order to drink the old one at all costs; the soul must welcome all that is

true love, under the guide and the illumination of the Church, and must desire to contrive to grow more and more in the way of God.

Chapter 6

1. The ears of wheat and the Sabbath. The withered hand. Election of the Apostles. The Beatitudes and the woes. Love for one's enemies. Warning to the Pharisees and Christian charity.

1 Now it happened that, on the second first Sabbath, as he passed through the grain field, his disciples were separating the ears of grain and eating them, by rubbing them in their hands. 2 Then certain Pharisees said to them, "Why are you doing what is not lawful on the Sabbaths?" 3 And responding to them, Jesus said: "Have you not read this, what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him? 4 How he entered into the house of God, and took the bread of the Presence, and ate it, and gave it to those who were with him, though it is not lawful for anyone to eat it, except the priests alone?" 5 And he said to them, "For the Son of man is Lord, even of the Sabbath." 6 And it happened that, on another Sabbath, he entered into the synagogue, and he taught. And there was a man there, and his right hand was withered. 7 And the scribes and Pharisees observed whether he would heal on the Sabbath, so that they might thereby find an accusation against him. 8 Yet truly, he knew their thoughts, and so he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Rise up and stand in the middle." And rising up, he stood still. 9 Then Jesus said to them: "I ask you if it is lawful on the Sabbaths to do good, or to do evil? To give health to a life, or to destroy it?" 10 And looking around at everyone, he said to the man, "Extend your hand." And he extended it. And his hand was restored. 11 Then they were filled with madness, and they discussed with one another, what, in particular, they might do about Jesus. 12 And it happened that, in those days, he went out to a mountain to pray. And he was in the prayer of God throughout the night. 13 And when daylight had arrived, he called his disciples. And he chose twelve out of them (whom he also named Apostles): 14 Simon, whom he surnamed Peter, and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, 15 Matthew and Thomas, James of Alphaeus, and Simon who is called the Zealot, 16 and Jude of James, and Judas Iscariot, who was a traitor. 17 And descending with them, he stood in a level place with a multitude of his disciples, and a copious multitude of people from all of Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast, and Tyro and Sidon, 18 who had come so that they might listen to him and be healed of their diseases. And those who were troubled by unclean spirits were cured. 19 And the entire crowd was trying to touch him, because power went out from him and healed all. 20 And lifting up his eyes to his disciples, he said: "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. 21 Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who are weeping now, for you shall laugh. 22 Blessed shall you be when men will have hated you, and when they will have separated you and reproached you, and thrown out your name as if evil, because of the Son of man. 23 Be glad in that day and exult. For behold, your reward is great in heaven. For these same things their fathers did to the prophets. 24 Yet truly, woe to you who are wealthy, for you have your consolation. 25 Woe to you who are satisfied, for you will be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. 26 Woe to you when men will have blessed you. For these same things their fathers did to the false prophets. 27 But I say to you who are listening: Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. 28 Bless those who curse

you, and pray for those who slander you. 29 And to him who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your coat, do not withhold even your tunic. 30 But distribute to all who ask of you. And do not ask again of him who takes away what is yours. 31 And exactly as you would want people to treat you, treat them also the same. 32 And if you love those who love you, what credit is due to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33 And if you will do good to those who do good to you, what credit is due to you? Indeed, even sinners behave this way. 34 And if you will loan to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is due to you? For even sinners lend to sinners, in order to receive the same in return. 35 So truly, love your enemies. Do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return. And then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and to the wicked. 36 Therefore, be merciful, just as your Father is also merciful. 37 Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. 38 Give, and it will be given to you: a good measure, pressed down and shaken together and overflowing, they will place upon your lap. Certainly, the same measure that you use to measure out, will be used to measure back to you again.” 39 Now he told them another comparison: “How can the blind lead the blind? Would they not both fall into a pit? 40 The disciple is not above his teacher. But each one will be perfected, if he is like his teacher. 41 And why do you see the straw that is in your brother’s eye, while the log that is in your own eye, you do not consider? 42 Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, allow me to remove the straw from your eye,’ while you yourself do not see the log in your own eye? Hypocrite, first remove the log from your own eye, and then will you see clearly, so that you may lead out the straw from your brother’s eye. 43 For there is no good tree which produces bad fruit, nor does an evil tree produce good fruit. 44 For each and every tree is known by its fruit. For they do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather the grape from the bramble bush. 45 A good man, from the good storehouse of his heart, offers what is good. And an evil man, from the evil storehouse, offers what is evil. For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. 46 But why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I say? 47 Anyone who comes to me, and listens to my words, and does them: I will reveal to you what he is like. 48 He is like a man building a house, who has dug deep and has laid the foundation upon the rock. Then, when the floodwaters came, the river was rushing against that house, and it was not able to move it. For it was founded upon the rock. 49 But whoever hears and does not do: he is like a man building his house upon the soil, without a foundation. The river rushed against it, and it soon fell down, and the ruin of that house was great.”

2. Divine dominion over times and mankind.

On a Sabbath, that the Sacred Text calls the *second first*, perhaps because it was the second of the seven Sabbaths which separated the first solemnity of the sacred year, Easter from Pentecost, Jesus was walking together with the Apostles through rich fields of ripened grain. Amidst this glorious spectacle on another occasion, Jesus had spoken about the harvest of souls. It is possible to suppose that this time as well his Divine Heart was entirely filled with love for all the creatures He had come to redeem and would later bring to Heaven through the work of the Apostles. In His life there was nothing that was not in

harmony with the love that was burning in his Heart for the glory of God and for the goodness of souls; thus it is logical to suppose this.

The disciples still did not comprehend their mission, even though Jesus had hinted at it, saying to those He had called first: *I shall make you fishers of men*. They had not yet entirely understood the meaning of this expression. They were just walking through the rich fields like little children, and they were only interested in the hunger that felt. Evidently they had already covered a long way and had still more to cover, and for this reason they were picking up ears of wheat, and they would eat the kernels rubbing them in their hands.

According to the Law it was perfectly acceptable for wheat to be picked by hand, but not with the sickle, if one needed it to sustain oneself, if one did not own the fields; it was thus a kind of charity, I would call it hospitality, but however nobody was permitted to abuse this possibility, limiting oneself to situations of pure need and not capricious reason or theft.

God, the owner of everything, had allowed it.

The day the Apostles were taking the wheat, however, was a Sabbath, and what was even more important, it was a solemn Sabbath, and for this reason the Pharisees were scandalized. For them to pick the ears of wheat constituted work, and to rub them in one's hand was the same as harvesting them; they were being pedantic, as usual, but believing to be right, they rebuked the Apostles saying: "*Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?*" According to St. Matthew (12:2) and St. Mark (2:24) they rebuked Jesus; but comparing the texts it is evident that they spoke first to the disciples walking among them, and then to the Rabbi, seeing that the Apostles ignored their rebuke.

Jesus Christ could have answered that this act was not a violation of the Sabbath, by comparing it simply to eating. However His heart was filled with His high thoughts of the fight against hell and the success of His kingdom, and so He gave a deeper reason, to declare the power that He, the universal King, had over all creation and over all time. The argument also was marvelously proportioned to the souls of His opponents, compelling them to take into consideration the foolishness of their exaggerations.

It was an argument *from more to less*, so to speak, and at a level *ad hominem* (to the man). If David, being in dire need, did not believe it to be a sin for either He or His men to eat of the sacred breads, nor the Priest who gave them the bread believed it to be a sin, how much more His men, also moved by great hunger, could pick and eat the ears of wheat. If they would contest that David had the permission of the Priest, He, the Son of Man, owner of all time and the Sabbath itself, gave them permission.

As a loving father, Jesus defended His dear Apostles from the accusation of violating the Sabbath; but what depth there was in His words! The Sabbath, the wheat, and the bread of offering are respectively: the Easter Sabbath, remembrance of the immolation of the Lamb; the wheat becoming the food of His disciples and the sacred breads of the table of the Temple; these three images of great sanctification were those that He wanted to give to the souls through His sacrifice, becoming food for them.

He would first immolate Himself in blood at Easter, then the Apostles would take the wheat as food of life and renewing His sacrifice, in an unbloody way they would put before God the true bread of the offering, to feed their own and strengthen them for the war for the conquest of His Kingdom.

Jesus' thoughts transcended the poor quarrels of the Pharisees; He looked far into

the times of mercy and love, and in an indirect way announced the Sabbath of the souls, intent to eat the Eucharistic bread. He was the true David, He went forth to conquer his kingdom of love, and His divine mission was far more sacred than the services of the Temple, which only resembled His; He could also let his Apostles eat on a Sabbath, even if it were to be considered a “work” to pick and rub together the ears of wheat, because only He was the owner of this Sabbath of true joy and true mercy.

Did not the Priests work in the Temple during Sabbath? Did they not immolate victims? Did they not offer incense? And yet nobody ever said that they were violating the Sabbath; now Jesus, the Eternal Priest, did an act notably of high priest in His divine mission and He was to rule and let the people, who were helping him, to eat the ears of wheat, to sustain lives that had to serve only for the glory of God. Besides, they were not eating out of avidity but because they did not have any other way to get food, and also they were eating while walking, thus indirectly giving to God even the time needed to eat a regular meal.

The scribes and the Pharisees could not object to Jesus any further, nor did they understand the whole meaning of His words, because they did not dare to be in opposition with an event written in the Scriptures. They continued to follow him in order to judge his actions and soon they found themselves before another event which also proved embarrassing for them.

Jesus heals the man with a withered hand.

On another Sabbath Jesus entered in a synagogue and started teaching. As usual his presence brought around Him many poor, sick people who were hoping to be healed, and among them there was a man with a withered hand. The scribes and the Pharisees were intently looking at Him, to see if He would heal someone on that day, they were hoping to find ways to accuse, and get rid of, and kill Him. Their intentions were murderous and were observing Him not out of zeal for the Law but for the evil intention of causing Him harm.

Jesus knew their thoughts, and called the man with the withered hand to come up to the middle of the assembly, so that his condition might be better observed. Afterward, speaking to the Scribes and the Pharisees, aware of their evil and murderous intentions, asked them on purpose, *“I ask you, is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath rather than to do evil, to save a life rather than to destroy it?”* After saying these words, looked around to all the people present, a look that by itself made the people understand that He knew the scheming of their heart, a look of a judge that left them speechless.

They were thinking, during a Sabbath, how to harm and kill him, and instead on a Sabbath He wanted to do good to a man, and save him. Therefore they did not dare to rebuke him in the name of the Law, since they themselves so openly violated the law under the eyes of God.

A deep silence fell over the assembly, and Jesus speaking to the sick man, with an omnipotent commanding voice, said: *“Stretch out your hand”* and immediately his hand extended and was perfectly healed. The Scribes and the Pharisees, on seeing this, were filled with a raving rage and discussed with each other what they should do with Jesus,

and how to kill him. How incredible! Such an extraordinary miracle should have opened their eyes to recognize the full command that Jesus had over all! They should have adored Him and instead they were conspiring against Him; they should have repented, but they became more arrogant!

The persecutors of the Church.

The persecutors of Jesus Christ in His Church blind themselves in the same way. They keep watching over the Church as it was an assembly of criminals, and they seek to destroy her, when the Church only does good and save men for their eternal life. What aspect of her can they oppose? Even though its members sometimes individually make mistakes at fault, nobody ever can say that the Church is a danger to the State. Its history is a history of wisdom and goodness, because She is the light of truth and true dispenser of goodness for all people.

The hypocrite evildoers of the nations see the Church as a thorn in their eyes, they know that she raises her voice against injustices and abuses of power; they know that she relentlessly eradicates all errors and mistakes, and for this they try to destroy her. This happened in the past and, most sorrowfully, happens also in the present time. People seek pretext and frivolous reasons to hurt the Church, with pharisaical excuses of needing to provide for national security and even to honor God.

They say that Faith is the opiate of the masses, not because they are convinced of it, but to use their criminal opiates, with which they numb the peoples to their evil and wicked deeds, and prevent the activities of the people to be done in a right way.

The Church, on the other hand, revives the people and is the safeguard of the truth; she is the guardian of freedom, the defender of the weak, the avenger of injustice; further it is historically certain that without her today, the world would be a barbaric place, as indeed it is wherever the Church does not have any influence.

It is not without a deep reason that the Sacred Text notes that those who plotted against Jesus "*were filled with raving rage*". This is a characteristic of the persecutors, in fact, a trait that beyond any doubt characterizes them. They are taken by a rage that is true folly; they do not reason; they are violent, cruel and ruin themselves with their own hands and are the ruin of people. Often, and we could even say, most of the times, madness is diabolical, or at least is exploited by Satan for his wretched reasons. It is not unusual that madmen are marked with the typical signs of Satan: pride, malice, anger, violence and impure acts.

The persecutors of the Church have pride, and they pretend to impose their most foolish ideologies upon others; they are evil, because they make use of all kinds of ways to seduce; they are wrathful, because interiorly they burst with an unquenchable hate against all that is good; they are violent, because they make of force use in a barbaric way.

Their life, above all, are a heap of miseries, and this is why they fight against the Church, which boldly condemns that which causes the degradation of people. Like Satan, they seek to destroy all goodness and promote evil; they hate virtue and exalt vices; they are lovers of blood and wretched homicides under the veil of the laws, that they themselves create to give a juridical appearance to their evildoings.

God, however, confuses these people and often He makes use of the smallest and

humblest strength of forces to topple them from their pedestals, which were seemingly unshakable. Only a mere glance of His justice is enough to rout them out, and so sooner or later they pay for their crimes and end in disgrace.

Today the persecutors of the Church, unfortunately, are many and often more violent than those of old. However we must not become discouraged, we must continue to pray, because prayer will either convert them or eliminate them. God shows very clearly, especially in persecutions, that He is the owner of time and men; at the appropriate time he eliminates the evildoers, He effects His plans and shatter their perfidious designs like vessels of clay.

The election of the Apostles and the profile of the Church through the centuries.

Jesus Christ knew that he would sacrifice his life for the salvation of mankind and, in order to continue His great plan of salvation on earth, He began to choose the first elements of his Mystical Body, the Church, electing twelve Apostles. He looked to the humblest men of the world, those who were not attracted to culture and wealth, mostly fishermen and workmen, so that the world would understand Who truly is the author of this marvelous work of salvation.

Nevertheless, though He wanted them of humble station, humanly speaking, He did not want them to be without supernatural graces, therefore, He spent the whole night in prayer, and He acquired for them the help and the graces they needed for the accomplishment of their great mission.

How sublime is this prayer of Jesus! The world prepares its ministers with human culture and enlightens them with its feeble lights; Jesus Christ prepares his own by attracting the lights of the Holy Spirit upon them; the world clothes its ministers with apparent high stature and instead Jesus showers the souls of his Apostles with graces; thus He prays and His prayer renews them and starts to form in them new men. More than a mother can do, He took them into His heart and with prayer fed His life to them, even though at that time they did not realize it.

From the world's perspective the Apostles remained the poor creatures that they were, but before God, and in all truth, they became new creatures, especially when the Holy Spirit renewed them entirely. Looking at them we can say that they were not vile instruments, but rather they were transformed by grace, and were marvelously formed and suited to their office. A farmer who, studying, becomes a genius is not a farmer anymore; he is a scholar.

Alfredo Trombetti, began as a humble cobbler before studying countless languages, he became a famous linguist; he did not remain a cobbler.

Similarly the Apostles, taught by our Lord and the Holy Spirit, rose in the world to be above geniuses and they represent the most noble and greatest of what the world has conceived, even among the greatest philosophers. Their testimony and their doctrine are not from our earth but from Heaven; in their humility they were and are great; and truly and uniquely so.

The Lord, let us repeat, appropriately selecting the means to His ends, chooses the

things most rejected by the world, but by his grace He makes them fitting and suitable for the things He chooses for them to do, and his works are always marvelous; thus the Apostles, besides being the greatest saints, are also the greatest honors of our poor earth, and are the true scholars who gave us the light received by the Savior; and in Him, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, they also gave, naturally speaking, a new face to our civilization and a new perspective to the framework of the nations.

Jesus Christ ascended on a mountain and prayed the whole night before selecting his Apostles; in this way he taught to His Church to pray before consecrating her Priests and Ministers. He was accustomed to go to high places to pray, but it may be said that in this occasion He did it for a special reason, because His ministers would have no other purpose than to attain celestial heights.

He descended from the heights and selected them to accomplish His mission, they also would need to ascend high above, through prayer, and then descend to the people to teach them and bring them to their eternal salvation.

Jesus came down from the mountain and his countenance had a special paternal tenderness, because in selecting His own, He generated in them a new life. He chose them in a way so as not to awaken jealousy or animosity among them, thus he had certain criteria regarding seniority in choosing them; only for Simon Peter did He make an exception, naming him first, because He wanted to make him head of the Apostles and of the Church.

The election of Judas Iscariot.

Jesus also selected Judas Iscariot, even though He knew that he would betray him, because he did not want to do a wrong to him eliminating him and because grace does not fail to pour over the creatures, even on those who later would abuse of it, since God is not an acceptor of people. Certainly Jesus felt a great sorrow in calling him, knowing what he would do, but He called him because he could have responded in kind and become a saint.

If God would deny us the grace considering our future malice, He would put our free will in the impossibility of operating according to grace, and He would deprive us of true freedom.

God does not do that, because He never punishes the offender before he commits an evil action, even though He knows it, due to His infinite prescience.

Judas could not have been eliminated; the charity of Jesus could not permit it, He called him to give him new graces, and who would criticize this act of divine charity?

Certainly the company of Jesus did not make him worse; maybe instead of being only a traitor and confess in his desperation the innocence of the Savior, he would have become one of his the worst crucifiers; maybe instead of taking advantage of the alms that were under his care, he would have become a bandit and a public murderer.

Jesus called him to save him, or better to make an Apostle of him and if Judas did not correspond to such a love, it was not certainly for the love that Jesus had for him. It is true that his crime was most awful, because it arrived to the limit of cowardice and wickedness, but Jesus did not elected him to make him a traitor; His mercy would have been ready to make him a saint, more than St Peter, if only he would have responded to his unutterable love.

The elected Apostles.

The list of the Apostles given by St. Luke is almost identical in order of the names to those listed by St. Matthew (Mt 10:2-3) and it is different from the order given by St. Mark in his list of the twelve (Mk 3:18). It has this difference, that he calls the Apostle *Jude of James*, the brother of James the minor, while the other Evangelists call him Thaddeus, and he calls Simon the Zealot the one the others call Simon the Cananaean. Clearly these are incidental differences, due to the many nicknames by which the Apostles were called. What all Evangelists agree upon is they all put Peter at the first place, as the leader of all of them. It is a constant detail each time St. Peter is named with the other Apostles, a very clear argument for the place the Lord had designated for him.

The twelve Apostles, in the very meaning of their names, give us almost the perspective and the profile of what would be the Church throughout the centuries. Made by Jesus at the price of His divine Blood, She gathers around Him, *listen to Him* as Master, *obeys Him* as legislator, *is put* like beam of light and as sign of contradiction, in continuous fights, oiled with the oil of the strong to win, and with the *ointment* of the glory in her triumph: *Simon*. She is founded on the *rock*, on the living *stone*, that is on the Redeemer, the corner stone, and on the Pope, her visible leader: *Peter*. She starts her way facing the great fights and the persecutions in a manly way, stern in defending the truth: Andrew.

With his *heel* crushes the head of Satan, *tread underfoot* the devil, and widens more and more the kingdom of God: *James*. She does not conquer by violence, but spreading *the gifts and the mercy of the Lord*: *John*. Warlike only in facing the evil: *Philip*. Travels over earth and *ploughs the land*, spreading the *water* of the truth for the fertilization of the souls, *Bartholomew* and because the gift of God is not wasted, *Matthew*.

The continuing fights the Church endures makes her moan, and once she establishes herself firmly in the world, her fights start all over again. Her second period is almost *twin* of the first, *Thomas*, characterized by what was special of St. Thomas: he wanted to touch everything by hand. After the time of the lively faith, follows the relaxed faith of his children, first symptoms of rebellion of intelligent people against her teachings. The Church suffers, moans, agonizes, but is not overcome; *treads underfoot* again the kingdom of Satan, crushing his head with her *heel* with her truth, and *teaching* with the Doctors of the Church the truth, *James of Alpheus*.

After the sad times of the errors and apostasy follow a new period of faith, in which, as in the beginning, mankind *listens* to the Church, *obeys* her, She is like oiled with oil of new graces and with *ointment* of a new joy of love; she grows for the ardent zeal of saintly people : *Simon* the Zealot. It is the time when the *praises of God* resound throughout the earth, and the kingdom of God shines in the most vivid splendor among men; the Church treads over the kingdom of Satan who tries his last battle hoping to *supersede* the Church and attacks at her *heel*; *Jude Thaddeus*.

Afterward the *praise of God* ends, charity becomes cold, the Antichrist, *the killer* comes; he *wounds, breaks out, cuts off, wipes out* the flock of the Lord, *Judas Iscariot*. To this time follows immediately the day of the reward and retribution, the Day of Judgment,

and with it ends the history of the Church on earth, and starts eternity.*

This is not a puzzle or a play of words because, just as someone, putting down the foundation of a building has before him his entire plan, also Jesus, in electing his Apostles, had surely before His eyes all the plan of His Church and on them He laid the foundation, and through them the Church would expand in the centuries, until the end of time.

Simon Peter represented the cornerstone and Judah Iscariot represented the Antichrist, the bloodthirsty traitor, who shall try to make the Church die, first with the betrayal and then in blood.

Andrew represented the love that *manly* gives and *strenuously* immolates itself, in his love for the Cross and in his martyrdom.

James, surnamed the major, son of Zebedee, man of great prayer, represented the souls dedicated to the contemplation of celestial things, fighting with prayer and *take over* the kingdom of Satan.

John represented *the gift and the mercy of God*, in the love and charity that tinged all his life.

Philip represented the strength of the Church that *moves war* to the world and makes it come closer to Jesus; in fact he presented to Jesus the Gentiles, and was preoccupied for the needs of the hungry crowd, as Jesus was, and together with Him wanted to feed them.

Matthew represented the generosity of those who abandon everything and give everything to the Lord; he was almost the symbol of the finances put at the service of the Lord.

Thomas, with his incredulity, expressed the doubts of the souls before the manifestations of God and, with his faith, their humble return to truth in the splendor of the celestial light.

James of Alpheus, nicknamed the Minor, was relative of Jesus, represented the renewal of the triumph of the Church over the apostasy, as it was represented by Simon the Zealot and Jude Thaddeus.

In the works of the Lord that have universal character, the representations are typical because the chosen people transcend the passing time of their mortal life, becoming expression of the plan of God. It is shame that Christian people do not have a tender devotion for the Apostles, since they have been part of the foundation of the Church and surely in their hands they have particular treasures of graces to help the various needs of the Church. Nowadays, when the Kingdom of God is getting closer at great speed, it seems that the world almost should be divided in twelve parts of actions, and to each should be appointed one of the Apostles, that the Church from Heaven may continue in the souls the work of love received from Jesus.

* It is a method very dear to Fr. Dolindo to bring teachings from the etymology of the names. He realizes that his interpretation may seem strange, "a puzzle", however it is a fact that he brings many and always updated teachings from them.

4. For the Apostles and for those who spread the kingdom of God.

It is evident from the contest that Jesus elected His Apostles when He was still on the mountain where he had been praying. Later, He descended with them from the mountain and they stopped in the valley below. Other disciples were there and a great crowd of people met Him; they had come from Judea, Jerusalem and even from Tyre and Sidon, two pagan cities.

There was, therefore, around Him a remarkable presence of the Jewish world and that of the Gentiles, as area of work that one day the Apostles, just being elected, would receive. Those people had come to listen to Him and were hoping to be healed of their infirmities. Our good Jesus with great tenderness comforted them, driving off also demons from the obsessed who tormented them.

It was just what the Apostles would have to do in the world: announce the word of God, heal sick souls, relieve human miseries and drive off Satan. To reach this highest level they had not to follow the principles of the world, instead they had to form the world on the marvelous doctrine Jesus taught to all people on the mountain.

With immeasurable love Jesus then looked at his disciples, and particularly to those he had elected, and started saying: *"Blessed are you who are now hungry, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who are now weeping, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude and insult you, and denounce your name as evil on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice then and leap for joy, because, behold, your reward will be great in Heaven. For their ancestors treated the prophets in the same way.*

It is evident from these last words that Jesus was talking to his apostles, *the Prophets* of the New Testament, and He was comparing them to the Prophets of the old covenant, who spread the Word of God and defended it at the cost of their life. Had he spoken to all the people present there, He would not have used this expression as a conclusion of four fundamental maxims. However He wanted that everybody would hear on which basis He was constituting His Church and His apostolate, that may be more evident for His Apostles and for their successors the responsibility that they would assume before the people and the example of perfection that they were called to be.

There is no propagandist of an ideology that does not make sure first of all the financing of his mission.

All social movements, even those who seem the most spontaneous and based on enthusiasm, have directly or indirectly this backstage finance. Jesus instead puts poverty as the basis for the conquest of the Kingdom. In St. Matthew, speaking to the crowd, He said: *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, because for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."* It was the fundamental principle for the conquest of the Eternal Goodness: not to be involved in the wretched snares of temporal goods. Shortly before electing his Apostles for the conquest of the Kingdom of God, Jesus said to them, applying His principle: *"Blessed are you, poor, because the Kingdom of Heaven is yours."*

Thus is not money that will enrich the Church, but the hunger for the glory of God and the salvation of souls; it is not money that will conquer peoples to the Church, but the zeal of the apostles, thirsty for love. In St. Matthew is said: *"Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, that is for sanctity, for they will be satisfied.* God will satisfy those who want to be saints; those who hunger for it will become saints; a saintly person

has hunger for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, and he will be satisfied.

The apostolate, then, moves to the conquest of the Kingdom of Heaven without material resources and with great resources of sanctity; it moves with the same exultation of those who conquer a position in the world, but at the same time in the painful moaning of those who till the fields sweating and sowing it; not among the splendor of human prestige, but among the most bitter adversities and the most violent persecutions.

It is the peculiarity of the apostolate of the Church, entirely different from sectarian proselytism. It can be said that this is the basis that distinguishes the true from the false apostles. For this reason Jesus, addressing the future mercenaries, that would bring sorrow to His Church with the sound of dollars and sterling, without aspiration to true sanctity, thirsting for adventures and pleasures, and resting on the prestige of their banners, said: *“Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation; woe to you who are filled now with material goods and earthly aspirations, for you will be hungry for God in eternity; woe to you who laugh now, amid the joys and comfort of the world, for you will grieve and weep in eternal torments, woe to you when all speak well of you, supporting and praising you, for their ancestors treated the false prophets in this way.*

It is a fact of which we ourselves are aware, that the supernatural and fruitful works of true apostolate have always these characteristics: poverty, suffering, lack of means, and persecutions; and for those who promote these works it is a great relief to see the seal of God in these characteristics.

In poverty the apostolate leans on Providence, in suffering trusts in the help of God, in persecutions becomes purified and only trusts in Him. It is in this way that grace takes over the poor activities of men, and instead of recruiting proselytes, has a crowd of souls for their eternal salvation.

The apostolate is not simple evangelization, but it is a fight between the world and hell; this is the reason that supposes the violent clash of evil against goodness, not only for the ministers of the Lord, but also for the faithful around them. And Jesus Christ, summoning all, made known what must be attitude of His followers in these situations: *“But to you who hear I say, love your enemies, considering them creatures of God, do good to those who hate you, trying to save their souls, conquering them with your kindness. Bless those who curse you, that your blessing may make better people out of them, and pray for those who mistreat you that the light of God may change their evil mind and they may recognize their wrongdoings.*

What would be the use of a violent reaction? It would only make things worse; people would become crueler, and would push to the utmost their wretched mind to do evil, justifying it as a reaction. This is why, instead of reacting to violence, it is necessary, *to offer the other cheek as well*, almost as a blow to the cheek, which means to be ready, heroically, to submit, to receive more blows, in order not to yield to the arrogance of those who try to stop goodness; not to make use of force to avenge temporal goods and harming souls, but show to be ready even to yield, like someone who is so little concerned that a thief has taken his cloak, that gives to him also his tunic.

This is the place where the Apostles of the truth will be, together with the faithful they have gathered: they will find themselves among the enemies of goodness, evildoers, full of hate and ready to curse, slanderers, violent people, thieves, that with their slanders will attempt to destroy the truth and through violence paralyze the truth and who, with legally organized theft, will believe to take away from the Apostles the means of

spreading their message. The followers of Jesus, instead of fearing their snares, must show themselves to be above them, confiding only in God and entrusting to Him the protection of the good.

We are witnesses of what takes place and also what happens in the persecution against the Church; we are witnesses of the calumnies, the hate, the violence and the thefts of her enemies; many times we were also victims. The remedy is only one: to submit to the persecution and to continue unperturbed in doing good, with or without material means, because the strength and the support of the apostolate and of the faithful is only God.

5. The kingdom of God can only be established in charity.

After briefly describing the supernatural means to succeed in the apostolate in the world, Jesus Christ shows the fruits that it must produce, uniting all peoples in charity. The Church does not want to promote a kingdom of power and strength, instead it wants to create a kingdom of love, eliminating every cause of dissention, uniting all the creatures of God, for the Church and in the Church. The foundation of this love cannot be intolerance and selfishness rather goodness and charity, having as measure, almost as basis, the very selfishness and for this reason *we must do to others what we would like others do to us*.

This is an excellent rule that corresponds to a personal psychological experience, because a feeling of compassion and charity comes first from one's own experience.

It is almost impossible to have compassion and to feel a full empathy with another if one has not suffered personally the pain of his neighbors; it is from ourselves that we comprehend the meaning of true charity.

If someone sees a person suffering what he himself went through, it seems to him almost to live again that pain for the painful memories he has of it, and he does those acts of charity in the same affectionate way he would do to himself, if he had to do them. It would be almost a relief to give comfort for a pain suffered long ago, as it is also an interior satisfaction to be able to show the experience of an affliction, receiving the tardy compassion of someone who suffers it. If a pain is not experienced, it is necessary to enter into it, picturing in the mind the suffering it causes.

This is the way to do to others what we would like would be done to us, helping to eliminate what can be bothersome or painful to another.

The foundation however of every act of charity cannot be based on a natural sympathy, or for hope of reciprocation; the measure of compassion must come from our own experience to be truly sincere and effective, but the reason of charity must be God and His love.

All other reasons have no basis and can also be motivated by a hidden selfish motive. It is natural in fact to love those who love us, to do good to those who do good to us and lend to those from whom we hope we shall be reciprocated; also *sinners*, that is souls without supernatural life, arrive to this without any effort or merit.

For giving honor to the Lord and conquering ourselves, on the other hand, we must love our enemies as children of the same divine Father and do good to them for the love of Him, imitating His goodness. This is not a secret of weakness, but an immense superiority and greatness, because it is in that moment that we truly rise above our enemies, and we

conquer with love, showing a great superiority of soul, when we do good to them with no other interest.

God, in His infinite greatness, is infinitely merciful and kind toward the ungrateful people and evildoers, and while He does not need anybody, He always gives. We want to imitate Him in His goodness and mercy, and instead of letting ourselves be entangled in petty selfish competitions, let us rise to the highest peak of that love that conquers evil doing good and keeps harmony and peace in charity.

Today unfortunately so many false prophets, who presume to establish the human society on another basis, intensely advertise principles diametrically opposite and spread in the world internal unrest and wars. To have as principle to hate and to do violence as reaction to evil means to multiply it, and to increase indefinitely the cause of contrasts. In this way the unrest never stops, because each violent tyrannical act begets another and then another, more fierce than the first, because hate ends in the desire to exterminate the opposing part, and only ends in the most dreadful ruin.

The kingdom of God is kingdom of love and in charity destroys all discords, giving peace to man.

Roots of dissensions are the judgments done on the actions and intentions of others and the lack of generosity toward our neighbors. For this reason Jesus Christ added: *“Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap. For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you.”* This is the true meaning of the charity established by God Himself, that is, to receive in the same measure that it was given, in good as well as in evil.

Too bad that this law is taken very little into consideration, this is very sorrowful; it has its root in the justice of God as well as in human nature. The one who judges another without charity attracts upon himself unconsciously the judgment of others, and God permits that he endures the requital of what he does; the one who condemns and who does not forgive, is subjected to the same law and ultimately ruins himself.

The one who judges and condemns and does not forgive is always someone with a vulgar and base soul, and aiming his arrows against others attracts the attention to himself and is subjected to the same treatment. Daily experience shows how true are these words of Jesus, and instead also shows how rich of goodness are generosity and charity when it is done for the love of God.

The Saints have been always full of these virtues, and they were recompensed by the Divine goodness and the divine Providence, because through their charitable hands went treasures of providence.

Jesus Christ was speaking especially to the Apostles and to all who would spread His kingdom, because if charity and generosity are a duty for everybody, for the Ministers of God they are an indispensable requirement. A Priest who easily grumbles, who condemns without mercy, who does not forgive and is not generous in giving, is constantly exposed to the rejection of others; this may indeed be the ultimate reason why the Ministers of God suffer so many adversities, easily grumbling about everything and everybody, often mercilessly valuing the actions of their neighbors and reluctantly doing charity.

Since the kingdom of God is founded on charity, it is logical that whoever is its

representative and minister must give a true example and for this reason Jesus added that a blind person cannot guide another blind person without dragging him also in a pit, and He also said that a disciples is not superior to his teacher.

If a Priest is blind to these precepts of charity and does not observe them, he shall bring people to ruin, and shall form souls without charity.

It is never a valid excuse to judge, in order to blame, and be stern to obtain an improvement, because the one who transgresses the law of charity does not promote true good, which must start at oneself; he observes the splinter in the eye of his brother, instead of removing the wooden beam in his own eye. It cannot be a good fruit of charity the fruit taken from the transgression of a precept of God, and it cannot be considered a fruit of goodness what is taken from the thorns of an angered or unsettled nature. If the heart of a Priest is truly upright and good, he will not give from the riches of his inner goodness only a pittance of charity, because the mouth speaks from the abundance of the heart.

The Priest cannot deceive himself thinking to fail in charity for love of goodness, because from a tree of life cannot sprout a fruit of death.

Here then is the sure foundation of the kingdom of God: charity. Any work of an apostolate that is not grounded in charity is like a building planted on the sand that a storm completely destroys.

The Priest must establish his apostolate on the rock of charity and plant this virtue so deeply into his own heart that cannot be shaken by any storm moved against him by the world. Only in charity can he recognize all men as brothers and children of God; only with charity he can placate them and bring them like docile little lambs to the sheepfold of the Savior.

This is the great resource of the zeal for bringing souls to salvation, because we have been redeemed by the charity of Jesus Christ, and only in His love can we continue to conquer hearts for Him until the end of the times.

Chapter 7

1. The servant of the centurion. The son of the widow of Naim. John the Baptist's question to Jesus. Jesus praises John the Baptist. The sinner at the feet of Jesus.

1 And when he had completed all his words in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. 2 Now the servant of a certain centurion was dying, due to an illness. And he was very dear to him.ⁿ³ And when he had heard about Jesus, he sent elders of the Jews to him, petitioning him, so that he would come and heal his servant.ⁿ⁴ And when they had come to Jesus, they petitioned him anxiously, saying to him: "He is worthy that you should provide this to him. 5 For he loves our nation, and he has built a synagogue for us." 6 Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying: "Lord, do not trouble yourself. For I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof. 7 Because of this, I also did not consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant shall be healed. 8 For I also am a man placed under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." 9 And upon hearing this, Jesus was amazed. And turning to the multitude following him, he said, "Amen I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith." 10 And those who had been sent, upon returning to the house, found that the servant, who had been sick, was now healthy. 11 And it happened afterwards that he went to a city, which is called Nain. And his disciples, and an abundant crowd, went with him.¹² Then, when he had drawn near to the gate of the city, behold, a deceased person was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the city was with her. 13 And when the Lord had seen her, being moved by mercy over her, he said to her, "Do not weep." 14 And he drew near and touched the coffin. Then those who carried it stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." 15 And the dead youth sat up and began to speak. And he gave him to his mother. 16 Then fear fell over all of them. And they magnified God, saying: "For a great prophet has risen up among us," and, "For God has visited his people." 17 And this word about him went out to all of Judea and to the entire surrounding region. 18 And the disciples of John reported to him concerning all these things. 19 And John called two of his disciples, and he sent them to Jesus, saying, "Are you he who is to come, or should we wait for another?" 20 But when the men had come to him, they said: "John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying: 'Are you he who is to come, or should we wait for another?' " 21 Now in that same hour, he cured many of their diseases and wounds and evil spirits; and to many of the blind, he gave sight. 22 And responding, he said to them: "Go and report to John what you have heard and seen: that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise again, the poor are evangelized. 23 And blessed is anyone who has not taken offense at me." 24 And when the messengers of John had withdrawn, he began to speak about John to the crowds. "What did you go out to the desert to see? A reed shaken by the wind? 25 Then what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Behold, those who are in costly apparel and finery are in the houses of kings. 26 Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Certainly, I tell you, and more than a prophet. 27 This is he of whom it is written: "Behold, I send my Angel before your face, who shall prepare your way before

you.” 28 For I say to you, among those born of women, no one is greater than the prophet John the Baptist. But he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.” 29 And upon hearing this, all the people and the tax collectors justified God, by being baptized with the baptism of John. 30 But the Pharisees and the experts in the law despised the counsel of God concerning themselves, by not being baptized by him. 31 Then the Lord said: “Therefore, to what shall I compare the men of this generation? And to what are they similar? 32 They are like children sitting in the marketplace, talking with one another, and saying: ‘We sang to you, and you did not dance. We lamented, and you did not weep.’ 33 For John the Baptist came, neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon.’ 34 The Son of man came, eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Behold, a voracious man and a drinker of wine, a friend of tax collectors and of sinners.’ 35 But wisdom is justified by all her children.” 36 Then certain Pharisees petitioned him, so that they might eat with him. And he went into the house of the Pharisee, and he reclined at table. 37 And behold, a woman who was in the city, a sinner, found out that he was reclining at table in the house of the Pharisee, so she brought an alabaster container of ointment. 38 And standing behind him, beside his feet, she began to wash his feet with tears, and she wiped them with the hair of her head, and she kissed his feet, and she anointed them with ointment. 39 Then the Pharisee, who had invited him, upon seeing this, spoke within himself, saying, “This man, if he were a prophet, would certainly know who and what kind of woman is this, who is touching him: that she is a sinner.” 40 And in response, Jesus said to him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” So he said, “Speak, Teacher.” 41 “A certain creditor had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42 And since they did not have the ability to repay him, he forgave them both. So then, which of them loves him more?” 43 In response, Simon said, “I suppose that it is he to whom he forgave the most.” And he said to him, “You have judged correctly.” 44 And turning to the woman, he said to Simon: “Do you see this woman? I entered into your house. You gave me no water for my feet. But she has washed my feet with tears, and has wiped them with her hair. 45 You gave no kiss to me. But she, from the time that she entered, has not ceased to kiss my feet. 46 You did not anoint my head with oil. But she has anointed my feet with ointment. 47 Because of this, I tell you: many sins are forgiven her, because she has loved much. But he who is forgiven less, loves less.” 48 Then he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven you.” 49 And those who sat at table with him began to say within themselves, “Who is this, who even forgives sins?” 50 Then he said to the woman: “Your faith has brought you salvation. Go in peace.”

2. The faith of the centurion, model of our faith.

A Roman centurion, stationed at Capernaum, had a servant, or better a slave, most dear to him who was very sick and close to death. The centurion had heard about the miracles that Jesus was doing and hoped that He would heal him. He sent some of the Jewish elders to go and ask Him and obtain from Him the grace to heal his servant. Being a military man, he was used to dealing within a chain of command structure and so did not dare to talk directly to the Lord; and in particular his reservation about going directly to Him was especially because he believed himself to be unworthy. Additionally, as he was familiar with the uses and customs of the Jewish people, he also thought that the Lord might reject him as he was a pagan.

The elders gladly accepted to be intermediaries between him and Jesus, because

the centurion was one of those rare pagans who loved the Jewish people, and he was very respectful of their Religion even to building at his own expense the synagogue of the city. Perhaps he was a convert. Inviting Jesus, the elders pointed to the merits of the centurion, and Jesus knowing his heart and his faith immediately started going to his house. Someone, evidently, had gone before Him to announce His coming. The centurion, confused by so much kindness and not being prepared to receive Him properly, sent some friends to beg him not to disturb Himself, and afterward, as can be read from St. Matthew Gospel, he himself went to beg Him, feeling unworthy to receive such a high honor.

From the context it is clear that the centurion sent ahead friends to keep Jesus from going to his house, then, having been told that the Savior, notwithstanding the prayer of his friends, did not stop coming, he went to beg Him not to inconvenience Himself, because he knew that by only saying one word He could heal his servant.

He had great faith in the divine power of Jesus and he believed that a mortal sickness would obey His word as well, just as a subordinate obeys his superior. Being a soldier, he was used to obeying a command without hesitation and he had absolute faith in the command that Jesus would give that sickness; in other words he recognized Him to be true God, because only God can have everything that He says happen.

His faith was so sincere and perfect that even Jesus was astonished, since He had never found such faith in Israel.

In that same instant He healed the servant from afar, commanding the sickness to leave him with a simple act of His will.

It is for this important reason that the Church repeats to Jesus the words of the centurion before distributing the Most Holy Eucharist to the faithful: *Domine non sum dignus* (Lord I am not worthy), because she demands from them this humble and confident faith.

The soul certainly does not pray that Jesus not come to visit it, on the contrary, a soul desires it deeply, but recognizing not to be worthy to receive Him, asks for His vivifying act: *Dic verbo et sanabitur anima mea*. (*Say the word and my soul shall be healed*). Jesus Christ is our life with his divine Body, made food for love, because His Body is hypostatically united to the Word and the soul declares itself to be unworthy to receive the Incarnated God, and at the same time begs, like the centurion, for His vivifying act. *Dic verbo et sanabitur anima mea* (*Say the word and my soul shall be healed*): this is the invocation of the sick to the divine Doctor, those who suppose that also the soul can be sick and so ask to receive Him not only as love but also as medicine. This sickness, like the one that afflicted the servant of the centurion, is a paralysis, an interior paralysis, a kind of impotence to move supernaturally, and the divine Eucharist heals the repentant soul.

It is in fact this Sacrament that moves our interior powers for the glory of God and makes of our soul a hymn of love and an offering of charity to the Lord.

The faith of the centurion was profoundly humble, and this must characterize our faith as we approach the Eucharistic Jesus: we are not worthy of Him, and we absolutely need His help. Realizing our unworthiness, we will have that loving and respectful gratitude that we owe Him, and at the same time, our need of His help causes us to abandon ourselves to His mercy. It is a shame, but our poor faith often has the character of presumption, and for this reason we obtain little or nothing. We do not go to Jesus with a reverent feeling of our own unworthiness, but we believe that deserve what we want, and

we grumble at the divine goodness when He does not grant our petitions. O if we only knew to believe and to be humble, how many times we would experience the infinite mercy of God!

3. The widow of Naim's son.

Continuing His mission, Jesus Christ, together with his disciples and followed by a large crowd of people, set off from Capernaum to go to the city of Naim, which was about a day's journey on foot from Capernaum.

At the city gate, a very crowded place where people usually met to transact business, passed by the coffin of a young man, the only son of a widow, which was to be interred. The mother, left alone without her only son, was crying desolately. Jesus went near her full of compassion and told her with a reassuring voice: *Do not weep*. He was moved not only by the pain for that poor woman but also He saw in her the image of His Mother, Mary Most Holy, that in a not too distant future would cry for Him dead on the Cross.* Psychologically, in fact, feelings of compassion are most vivid when the sorrow of others is reflected and echoed in our own hearts; as Jesus always had present in His mind His own Passion and the pains that His divine Mother would suffer, seeing this mother crying so desolately could not but bring to His mind the thought of Mary.

Saying to the woman: *do not weep* was the same as promising her His miraculous intervention, and so really gave her comfort. In that very moment His omnipotence eliminated the cause of that poor mother's sorrow; He stepped forward and touched the coffin, using that gesture to direct the undertakers to stop. Turning to the corpse He said in a commanding tone: *Young man, I tell you, arise*. And immediately the dead boy revived and began to speak.

It was an astounding moment.

Everyone had seen that the young man was truly dead, and because the body was traveling in an open casket, everyone saw him revive in an instant. In the words of Jesus: *Young man, I tell you, arise* the omnipotence of His voice was heard, just as the echo of the mystery of the afterlife was heard in the words of the dead boy. Everyone was thus taken by a great fear. What the boy said we do not know, he probably uttered fearful exclamations at finding himself in a casket and probably shouted out to his mother. For this reason Jesus, told him to have courage and because no one dared to come closer to the dead boy who was alive again, He freed him from the bandages in which he was wrapped and gave him back to his mother.

The awe that came over all who were present moved them to give glory to God and to recognize that a great Prophet was in their midst, and that the Lord had visited his people. They did not openly confess that Jesus was the promised Messiah but many must have thought this because the miracle had been great and astounding.

*Very delicate and beautiful reflection: Jesus, who sees future events, with the love of a Son compassionately thought of the immense suffering that one day His Mother would suffer.

The young who are dead to grace

This young man is a vivid image of those who, carried away by their passions, die miserably to grace and go to their eternal damnation.

Motionless, unable to operate supernaturally, corrupted by their power and their possessions, they are mourned over by the Church like that desolate mother. She follows them in their ruin in the hopes of reviving them with her tears and her prayers. With her desolate tears, the Church invokes Jesus and asks for His intervention, that they may stop their way to perdition and to give them back life. It is not possible to resuscitate oneself from spiritual death without the intervention of Jesus, because only He, with a single touch of the grace, can stop the march towards death and give back life.

How many funerals we see along the pathways of the world and yet we are not aware of them!

Often the motions of others that we see around us are like the commotion that we see at funerals, because the souls that participate in them are dead to grace and their lives seem to take them to their eternal perdition.

We should cry bitterly and instead we remain indifferent; we should cooperate with zeal and try to stop that race to perdition, and instead many times we are part of it! Especially today how many snares kill the souls of the young, and how many of these early flowers are already cut from the live plant and strewn on the ground to rot in the mud! Let us pray for the youth, let us stop them from doing evil in the name of God with our apostolate and help them to return to the Church, who alone has the right to guide them, and to cry over their miseries, begging for them mercy and life from Jesus.

4. The disciples of St. John the Baptist go to Jesus to ask questions on behalf of their teacher.

St. John the Baptist was incarcerated by Herod in the Machaerus fortress where he lived the remainder of his life suffering and praying. He had prepared the way of the Lord preaching and baptizing, and now prepared his followers with his prayers and suffering. That was the richest time of his apostolate, even if it did not seem so by the people of his days. His disciples were free to go to him because Herod, for that reverential fear that saints inspire, permitted his disciples to go and speak to him. Perhaps St. John the Baptist was also in spiritual darkness, because physical pains, especially when they fetter the soul depriving it of its freedom, leaves one in an interior darkness even to the point of blocking from view the plan of Divine Providence, and preventing the discernment of her ways.

This darkness, which with greater ease enters into those souls who are tormented about their accomplishment of a mission received by God, is the fear of being mistaken, because the natural tendency would be to find a way to escape from it. This darkness is endured also by the most saintly souls, who must fight temptation and rather trust the Lord in remaining faithful to His Will.

The Baptist was in one of those moments of interior darkness when his disciples went to tell him what Jesus was doing, asking Him what they should believe. They did not

speak to the Redeemer out of envy or out of jealousy of His glory, but to gain guidance for their lives, as they felt attracted to Him. This is evident from the context.

John talked about the Messiah to them many times and in doing so, he had pointed to the person of Jesus Christ; but in his suffering and darkness he did not trust his own words and he called on the testimony of the Redeemer. In doing this he showed how much he thought of Him and how much he believed that He was the one who had to come. He also wanted that his disciples, who naturally were very fond of him, would ascertain the infinite superiority of Jesus and become His disciples.

Thus, he chose two among the most representative of his followers, two who would be most able to influence the others; he sent them to the Redeemer with this message: *“Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?”* Jesus Christ did not answer with words but with facts, and He did many more miracles, showing the fulfillment of the prophecies of Isaiah in Him (Is 35:5), and therefore declaring that He was the One who was to come. Speaking to the Scribes and the Pharisees who, even seeing all these miracles still persisted in refusing to acknowledge Him as the Messiah, Jesus added: *“Blessed is he that shall not be scandalized of Me”* (Mt 11:6).

“Blessed is he that shall not be scandalized of Me” is a very important admonition for those who find themselves to be before supernatural events, because every divine event has for us light and darkness, far above our weak understanding.

To pretend that we can understand everything and be able to delve into everything is foolishness; once it is ascertained that in an action or situation there is truly God, it is necessary to acquire an attitude of humility and trust, which is the only way to make us understand its harmony.

Only the Church is able to give a judgment on supernatural happenings and it is only the Church who gives it; whoever accepts the judgment of the Church cannot pretend to verify it but must submit to it with great humbleness.

Sometimes we are scandalized by these very mysteries of Providence, and we see disorder and injustice where instead all is marvelously proportioned and in equilibrium. Let us trust in the Lord and let us be sure that as far as our faith is pure and simple, we shall have its fruits, strengthened by the grace and the mercy of God.

The message of John was not due to a lack of faith but rather, it was a way to shed light on his disciples and to obtain from the Redeemer the confirmation and the endorsement of all the apostolate of preparation he had done before going to prison; for these reasons Jesus, after the messengers of John left, endorsed the mission John had done with marvelous words.

First of all, Jesus proclaimed his fortitude: John was not like a reed bent by gusts of wind; he remained strong against all the opponents of goodness and even against Herod, who had imprisoned him. His fortitude was indicative of and confirmed the strength of spirit that was his very being and the truth that he proclaimed, because he was incapable of lying.

To this fortitude within John, which guaranteed his truthfulness, was united a great penance which was a sign of his union with God and the mission he had received. His penance was extraordinary and evinced his extraordinary mission. He did not speak for any human reasons, nor did he seek any personal gain because he didn't feel like he needed anything; John was a Prophet—truly, even more than a Prophet—because he did

not prophesize about the Messiah, he actually pointed to Him as already arrived and made Him known.

He was a Prophet because he revealed Jesus for who He was, when Jesus was still hidden; he was more than a Prophet because he pointed to Him and prepared His way, thus accomplishing the prophesy of Malachi (Mal 3:1). Therefore he was not just a Prophet by announcing Jesus to the crowds, but also in the life he lived that was more saintly than those of all the old Prophets.*

Jesus praises John the Baptist.

Jesus said that *among those born of women* there was no one greater than John, and with this He wanted implicitly exclude himself, because even if He was born from Mary Most Holy, He was born by the virtue of the Holy Spirit, and His Mother was not a simple woman, but a divine Mother, greatest among all creatures.

After confirming the sanctity and the mission of John, He addressed with severe words the Scribes and the Pharisees who had despised God's plan of John's being Precursor, and in refusing to be baptized. They wanted to be above all people and did not want to be associated with the Publicans; but in reality, they had fallen below them, refusing to acknowledge the way of God.

The excuses they raised to justify their contemptuous air was their condemnation; they in fact, seeing John's penance, to the point where he did not eat bread or drink wine, declared him possessed by a demon; for his way of life to them was exaggerated and a diabolical illusion. They would have liked him to have been more normal, easygoing, sociable, and regarded his austerity and his lifestyle as heresy. They believed this to quiet their consciences, and thus despised him and refused his Baptism.

But the evil in their souls was revealed when the Redeemer came: His life was simple and normal, the sort of life they would have liked John to have lived; his ways were cordial with everyone, also with sinners, and they scoffed that he was a glutton and a drunkard who associated with everyone. Thus they revealed themselves dim-witted, that is, oblivious and not serious, like children who play, refusing to be either happy in times of mercy or sorrowful in times of penance.

They did not accept the austere life nor the simple one, because in truth they only wanted to follow their own mind and their own pursuits, but the *wisdom of God was vindicated by all her children*, because everyone could see for themselves the justice of the reprimand given to them by that the Incarnate and Uncreated Wisdom, and it was possible in future centuries to decide their guilt by their very opposition.

The never-satisfied

The judgment of Jesus upon the Scribes and the Pharisees applies in all times and it is levied upon all those who are evil in spirit, those in the presence of great

* It is well known that the Jewish people called Prophets those who consecrated their lives to God in the religious life.

manifestations of the mercy of God but refuse them in bad faith, and quibble in all possible ways to justify their refusal.

Austerity seems to them an exaggeration and a folly, cordiality they brand as thoughtlessness.

A Saint too stern is for them a maniac; a Saint with a jovial temperament seems frivolous.

If they see a normal life, they seek the extraordinary, and if they see the extraordinary, they despise it as a fantasy.

If they are called to God with loving words, they see these words as fawning affectations and do not accept them; if they are exhorted with strong words, they reject them as an oppressive and offensive.

They are cannot be satisfied, because in reality they do not want to accept any counsel and only want to follow their personal views.

This inability to be satisfied is maybe one of the most dangerous temptations of a soul who is obstinate in its judgment, unwavering in its pride, and desiring only to follow its own will. For these people any reasoning is illogical and annoying, because it does not correspond to their obstinate will; it is as if they are electrified by pride, and at the least bump or contact with the judgment or the will of another, even of a saint, they flash sparks of prideful reactions, discharging the maleficent currents of their nature, losing their tempers, stirring their wrath, and refusing any guidance or counsel.

The irritable.

Also in the common interactions of social or family life the state of being never satisfied is unhappily the cause of so many disagreements and so many quarrels. Some short-tempered, irritable people are impossible to deal with, whether with a gentle approach or a stern one; they are unable to agree, have a constant spirit of contradiction and it seems they have the “gift” of being able to quarrel and argue about any small matter.

Their unbalanced nature and their little virtue creates in their lives the need for frivolous things and the adherence to affected methods and practices that makes them unbearable, and makes everything unbearable to them.

For instance, if they are in a conversation, they dread it as being boring and try to end it, and if they are alone, they complain they are lonely and oppressed.

Joyful talk bothers them; serious and calm discussions aggravate them.

They complain about everything and everyone because everything annoys them, and their wretched pride finds problems with everything.

They are not in harmony with anyone, not even with the Lord, who seems excessive in His goodness if He allows and forgives, and seems implacable if He punishes in His mercy.

In whatever situation they find themselves, they are irritable and discontent; everything goes wrong, everything is bad, everything is unjust, everything is unbelievable... and so they have a desperate life, making it equally bad for those who live with them.

They lack mercy, and believe themselves to be merciful with their natural tendencies and capricious natures.

Thus, for example, they have pity for an animal and mistreat a human being.

They obsess over what is of little importance and neglect what is essential.

They feel compassion for outsiders and are a torment to their own family.

In all this, they deceive themselves into believing that they are the only ones who are reasonable, balanced, just, and do not tolerate the slightest reproach, lashing out vehemently against whoever makes any comment to the contrary.

Certainly, these are more or less internal forms of lack of personal balance, but unfortunately they are causes of great unhappiness in life. It is necessary to correct ourselves, seeking only the divine Will and true charity; it is necessary to humble ourselves before God and before men, feeling our nothingness, and convincing ourselves that we do make mistakes and need to submit to the judgment of others. Oh how blessed humility pours so much peace in our lives!

5. The repentant sinner at the foot of Jesus.

One of the Pharisees, Simon, wanted to show Jesus what a friendly and generous person he was, and so he invited Him to eat with him at this house. Perhaps he was hoping to reason with Jesus and rebut so many of His ideas; he might have had also a secret desire to talk to Him in an effort to scrutinize His thoughts. This can be gathered from that fact that he did not extend to Jesus the normal ritual acts of kindness due to guests. If he had invited Jesus for the honor of having him as a guest, he would have treated Him warmly and with honor. It is also possible that he had received some favors from Jesus and out of politeness he had invited Him to return the favor; this can be assumed from the parable of the two creditors that later the Redeemer told him.

Jesus accepted the invitation not so much for the Pharisee, but because His mercy was waiting for a poor sinner who was searching for Him and He wanted her to find him easily.

The people of the Middle East used to leave the doors of a banquet open to everyone, so that passersby could see who were the invited guests; Simon, then, followed this habit also because he knew that many people were looking for Jesus.

And so, as soon as she came to know that Jesus was at this table, a woman identified as Mary Magdalene by the foremost scholars, a known sinner in the city, that is “a public sinner”—a prostitute, having a feeling a great repentance for her own sins and filled with a great, supernatural love for the Savior, came into the room where Jesus was and threw herself at His feet.

In ancient times people used to eat while reclining on couches, lying on one’s left side and with one’s feet extending behind; therefore, it was easy for the woman to kneel and hug the feet of Jesus. Jesus’ feet were bare, because sandals were left outside when people were at table so as not to dirty the couches.

She was a poor sinner lead astray more by her heart full of ardor than by inner degeneration; she heard Jesus speaking, perhaps she had been present at the miracle of the young man who had come back to life, and she felt a deep sorrow for her faults. The sight of Jesus’ countenance had overcome her with the purest love that changed and

transfigured her; and through this love she was able to experience and review just how deep the degradation of her life was.

Was she a seducer of the young man who had died prematurely in Naim? Did she feel in that death the first strong sorrow for her sins, seeing his mother crying uncontrollably? Did she see in the miracle of that resurrection the possibility for her to resurrect herself from her own faults? It is a possibility, because it seems in fact that she was a public sinner right in Naim.

She entered the house of the Pharisee, without paying attention to anyone, all taken by her feelings of anxiety and repentance. She had brought with her a little vase of precious ointment; she knelt, hugged the feet of Jesus and at that divine contact she felt a profound repentance before such pure love and so she started sobbing and sobbing like the women beggars at the entrance of the Temple who wet the ground with their tears and dried it with their hair. She loosened her hair (that was tied up), feeling in that Divine Body a mystery more ethereal than in the Temple, started to dry those divine feet with her hair and anointed them with the ointment.

In her tears she poured out her repentance and in the ointment she showed her love, a love that renewed her entirely, because it attracted the mercy of God. It was a most sweet moment: she poured out her repentance and love, and the Heart of Jesus expanded with infinite tenderness. He communicated His mercy and purity to her and in that communion she understood Who was her Lord. She had the experience of human contact; she knew very well the tormenting flames that the senses ignite, she knew the stench of the flesh, and was awestruck at how marvelous and divine the Body of Jesus was.

What life was transfused in her soul, and with what faith she hoped to be forgiven of all her sins! She understood that Jesus was the fount of mercy and she did not move away from His feet without receiving His forgiveness. Her tears were a confession to Him, her sobbing was public reparation, and her heart was broken with love and sorrow. She understood that Jesus was God, that He was the One offended by her sins, and that mercy could only come from His absolution.

She cried and cried; the tenderness of Jesus made her understand the love that He feels for all souls, and she cried for all those that she had scandalized. Her tears were the expression of her deep sorrow.

Like a mother, who when caressed by the soft hands of her baby, feels very loving and tender and that sweet loving touch moves her deeply, so Jesus, at the tears of the woman, at the touch of her hair, and at her expression of adoration and love, felt moved and showed on His radiant divine face the mercy that He had for her.

He was most tender, most sweet, and majestic, and His cerulean eyes were shining with grace and were radiant with charity. He was absorbed in the great mystery of the regeneration and the great gift he wanted to give to mankind of His Body and His Blood for their Redemption and Food for life. He communicated for the first time in that special way to a soul, and anticipated the banquet of life.

An ethereal virtue flowed from Him, not to heal just a body but a soul, and He gave the first fruits of the love of His adorable Heart.

The Pharisee could not at all be scandalized that Jesus allowed a woman to touch Him, so powerful was the light of divine purity that transpired from Him; on the contrary, he was scandalized that His sanctity would allow Him to bear that contact, and from that fact he immediately judged that he could not be a Prophet, since Jesus had not realized

that the woman was a “public sinner”, a prostitute. This occurrence shows us to what degree he appreciated His immaculate purity, notwithstanding that he, as a Pharisee, was always suspicious.

Jesus Christ, however, demonstrated to Simon that without a doubt he was a Prophet answering his suspicions immediately with a parable, and to make it clear to him that He knew their hearts and scrutinized them. He asked him a question, almost flattering his wisdom, asking for his opinion. It was an act of divine delicacy, because He wanted to rehabilitate the poor woman in his eyes, compelling him to give Him almost the basis for it.

A creditor, He said, had two debtors; one who owed him five hundred days’ wages and the other fifty. Since they had no money to pay him back, he forgave the debt to both. Who, then, will love him more? And Simon answered that the one who would love him more would be the one who had been forgiven the most, out of great gratitude. Jesus, almost applauding, said: “You judged well.” After that He described to Simon in a friendly manner what he had not done when he received Him in his house and made him realize instead what the woman had done.

It was the Jewish custom to honor the arriving guest first by having his feet washed, or even personally washing them, because they were covered with dust and dirt. After this washing, a kiss of peace and friendship was given and then the guest’s hair and beard were oiled with perfumed ointment. Simon had done none of these things; instead the woman washed His feet with her tears and dried them with her hair, and repeatedly kissed them and anointed them with ointment.

With divine delicacy, Jesus did not want to be severe with Simon, and He did not ascribe the lack of hospitality due Him to unkindness, but only to a lesser debt of gratitude that he had toward Him. The woman instead received an immense benefit, which is the forgiveness of her sins, reason of her loving gratitude. Indirectly, and with His usual divine grace, Jesus made clear to Simon that he had received little benefit from His visit to him, and for this reason had loved Him only a little. The presence of Jesus, that could have renewed his heart entirely, had only slightly removed some small defects and a little “rust” from his soul. He loved little, thus he had obtained only a little.

Jesus almost ascribes to Himself the reality of this small amount that Simon had received, in order not to mortify him before all the others. He justified him for his lack of hospitality, He continued with extreme delicacy to explain the little benefit he had received from His visit, and manifested to him the great fruit that the “public sinner” had received. Of course, He did not speak to the fundamental question with which the Pharisee concerned himself, that is, how He could allow a prostitute to touch Him, since she was already regenerated; for this reason, looking at her he said in a loving omnipotent voice: *“Your sins are forgiven.”*

This last expression of mercy makes us understand with how much humility this woman, a sinner, received this discussion about her. Rather than justifying or excusing herself, she agreed with her tears and moans that she was a great sinner. Since she had exposed herself to be despised by the other guests, Jesus wanted to rehabilitate her, and He said to her: *“Your sins are forgiven.”* He already had forgiven her, but with these words gave her the assurance of His absolution.

He spoke with so much divine majesty and with such force of truth, the guests could not doubt that He really had forgiven her, thus they asked each other amazed: *“Who*

is this who even forgives sins?" Jesus then, once more assured the woman of the mercy He had given her, saying to her: *"Your faith has saved you; go in peace."* She had not been saved by a sterile faith, nor was it only her belief that had justified her; she confessed her sins crying and she received solemnly the absolution from Jesus. The loving acts she did afterwards were her penance of reparation. This is a decisive reason against the claims of the Protestants who deny the Sacrament of Penance, saying that is enough to believe to be justified.

We who are sinners and the mercy of God.

This beautiful scene of the poor sinner must help us to open our hearts to penance and to love. We are sinners, but we must never doubt the divine mercy and we must implore it at the foot of the Confessor, who represents for us Jesus Christ. In Church, where He sits at the banquet of life, let us seek out the feet of Jesus, humbling ourselves in the forum of Penance; let us cry for our sins, using the same things in our lives that can be symbolized by hair unloosened, to purify us with charity, and to anoint Jesus' feet with the precious ointment of the virtues which are opposed to the sins we committed. This is the best penance we can do.

What would be the use of a simple prayer of penance if does not remove the habitual vices from our souls? Rather, if pride is our vice, we must give Jesus the fragrance of humility; if it is impatience, the fragrance of meekness; if it is avarice the fragrance of generosity; if it is impurity it is necessary to give Him the fragrance of the pure lilies.

To cry, to dry, to kiss, to perfume, those are the acts of true penance: to cry out of sorrow, to cleanse in order to amend, to kiss in order to express love, and to anoint with virtue.

We need to cry before others and not only in our own hearts, because penance is also an external act of reparation for the faults committed; to cleanse the feet of Jesus, that is the poor, as the Fathers explain, is to atone for the sin with alms; to kiss Jesus is to trust in Him, because penance is never separated from love; and finally anointing Jesus with perfume as He sits at the eternal banquet, is to open our hearts before the Blessed Sacrament.

The world is full of "public sinners", prostitutes, who are not only those who sell themselves to sin, but are also those who invite others to sin by showing the impurity of their body and soul.

What are all of the indecent fashions, displays at beaches, at dances, and in sports wherein feminine decorum is forgotten, if not a prostitution of souls? Many prostitutes live to attract the careless in the snares of the pleasures of the flesh, but they have a mark of infamy that distinguishes them in the sense that their offer is evident; the sophisticated women of the world—no less temptresses—live to attract souls into the degradation of their elegant dresses and they are even more dangerous and deadly. The first group demands a price for their sin, the second group does not overtly ask for money, but multiplies their sins.

Are sins of thought and desire less grave than those which are consummated? Jesus said: *Everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*

How many “*public sinners*”, prostitutes, need to go to the foot of Jesus and ask for His mercy!

Oh, if only this great truth would be understood! It is rare to find a woman of society who is not a prostitute, because it is rare that she does not stain her soul with her lewdness.

How can she remain at peace knowing that she aroused in others the flame of concupiscence? How can she show herself instead of hiding? With what heart can she present herself in the Temple of God unworthily, when she should enter only to cry for her sins?

It is possible to sin with the eyes: may they cry bitterly to be purified.

It is possible to sin with the ostentation of riches: may these riches work to comfort the pain of the poor.

It is possible to sin with suggestive makeup and perfume: let women renounce to them for the sake of Jesus.

Let us cry for our sins, because nothing is more comforting and sweet than to cry for them, and let us implore the mercy of Jesus that He may also say to us these consoling words: *“Your sins are forgiven.”*

Chapter 8

1. Jesus and the Galilean holy women. The parable of the sower. The Mother and the relatives of Jesus. The calming of the storm. The possessed man of Gerasenes. The daughter of Jairus and the woman with a hemorrhage.

1 And it happened afterwards that he was making a journey through the cities and towns, preaching and evangelizing the kingdom of God. 2 And the twelve were with him, along with certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, who is called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had departed, 3 and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many other women, who were ministering to him from their resources. 4 Then, when a very numerous crowd was gathering together and hurrying from the cities to him, he spoke using a comparison: 5 "The sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell beside the way; and it was trampled and the birds of the air devoured it. 6 And some fell upon rock; and having sprung up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. 7 And some fell among thorns; and the thorns, rising up with it, suffocated it. 8 And some fell upon good soil; and having sprung up, it produced fruit one hundredfold." As he said these things, he cried out, "Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear." 9 Then his disciples questioned him as to what this parable might mean. 10 And he said to them: "To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God. But to the rest, it is in parables, so that: seeing, they may not perceive, and hearing, they may not understand. 11 Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. 12 And those beside the way are those who hear it, but then the devil comes and takes the word from their heart, lest by believing it they may be saved. 13 Now those upon rock are those who, when they hear it, accept the word with joy, but these have no roots. So they believe for a time, but in a time of testing, they fall away. 14 And those which fell among thorns are those who have heard it, but as they go along, they are suffocated by the concerns and riches and pleasures of this life, and so they do not yield fruit. 15 But those which were on good soil are those who, upon hearing the word with a good and noble heart, retain it, and they bring forth fruit in patience. 16 Now no one, lighting a candle, covers it with a container, or sets it under a bed. Instead, he places it on a lamp stand, so that those who enter may see the light. 17 For there is nothing secret, which will not be made clear, nor is there anything hidden, which will not be known and be brought into plain sight. 18 Therefore, take care how you listen. For whoever has, it will be given to him; and whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken away from him." 19 Then his mother and brothers came to him; but they were not able to go to him because of the crowd. 20 And it was reported to him, "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you." 21 And in response, he said to them, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it." 22 Now it happened, on a certain day, that he climbed into a little boat with his disciples. And he said to them, "Let us make a crossing over the lake." And they embarked. 23 And as they were sailing, he slept. And a windstorm descended over the lake. And they were taking on water and were in danger. 24 Then, drawing near, they awakened him, saying, "Teacher, we are perishing." But as he rose up, he rebuked the wind and the raging water, and they ceased.

And a tranquility occurred. 25 Then he said to them, "Where is your faith?" And they, being afraid, were amazed, saying to one another, "Who do you think this is, so that he commands both wind and sea, and they obey him?" 26 And they sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. 27 And when he had gone out to the land, a certain man met him, who had now had a demon for a long time. And he did not wear clothes, nor did he stay in a house, but among the sepulchers. 28 And when he saw Jesus, he fell down before him. And crying out in a loud voice, he said: "What is there between me and you, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you not to torture me." 29 For he was ordering the unclean spirit to depart from the man. For on many occasions, it would seize him, and he was bound with chains and held by fetters. But breaking the chains, he was driven by the demon into deserted places. 30 Then Jesus questioned him, saying, "What is your name?" And he said, "Legion," because many demons had entered into him. 31 And they petitioned him not to order them to go into the abyss. 32 And in that place, there was a herd of many swine, pasturing on the mountain. And they petitioned him to permit them to enter into them. And he permitted them. 33 Therefore, the demons departed from the man, and they entered into the swine. And the herd rushed violently down a precipice into the lake, and they were drowned. 34 And when those who were pasturing them had seen this, they fled and reported it in the city and the villages. 35 Then they went out to see what was happening, and they came to Jesus. And they found the man, from whom the demons had departed, sitting at his feet, clothed as well as in a sane mind, and they were afraid. 36 Then those who had seen this also reported to them how he had been healed from the legion. 37 And the entire multitude from the region of the Gerasenes pleaded with him to depart from them. For they were seized by a great fear. Then, climbing into the boat, he went back again. 38 And the man from whom the demons had departed pleaded with him, so that he might be with him. But Jesus sent him away, saying, 39 "Return to your house and explain to them what great things God has done for you." And he traveled through the entire city, preaching about the great things that Jesus had done for him. 40 Now it happened that, when Jesus had returned, the crowd received him. For they were all waiting for him. 41 And behold, a man came, whose name was Jairus, and he was a leader of the synagogue. And he fell down at the feet of Jesus, asking him to enter into his house. 42 For he had an only daughter, nearly twelve years old, and she was dying. And it happened that, as he was going there, he was hemmed in by the crowd. 43 And there was a certain woman, with a flow of blood for twelve years, who had paid out all her substance on physicians, and she was unable to be cured by any of them. 44 She approached him from behind, and she touched the hem of his garment. And at once the flow of her blood stopped. 45 And Jesus said, "Who is it that touched me?" But as everyone was denying it, Peter, and those who were with him, said: "Teacher, the crowd hems you in and presses upon you, and yet you say, 'Who touched me?' " 46 And Jesus said: "Someone has touched me. For I know that power has gone out from me." 47 Then the woman, upon seeing that she was not hidden, came forward, trembling, and she fell down before his feet. And she declared before all the people the reason that she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed. 48 But he said to her: "Daughter, your faith has saved you. Go in peace." 49 While he was still speaking, someone came to the ruler of the synagogue, saying to him: "Your daughter is dead. Do not trouble him." 50 Then Jesus, upon hearing this word, replied to the father of the girl: "Do not be afraid. Only believe, and she will be saved." 51 And when he had arrived at

the house, he would not permit anyone to enter with him, except Peter and James and John, and the father and mother of the girl. 52 Now all were weeping and mourning for her. But he said: "Do not weep. The girl is not dead, but only sleeping." 53 And they derided him, knowing that she had died. 54 But he, taking her by the hand, cried out, saying, "Little girl, arise." 55 And her spirit returned, and she immediately rose up. And he ordered them to give her something to eat. 56 And her parents were stupefied. And he instructed them not to tell anyone what had happened.

2. Women as collaborators of the Kingdom of God.

Although not reduced to the shameful level to which the pagan world had relegated women, the Jews nevertheless still held women in a condition of inferiority that had little difference from the pagans, due to the abuses and tyrannies of men who were not faithful to the Law. Jesus Christ rehabilitated women in a marvelous way; he was born from the Virgin Mary forming in Her a masterpiece of grace and sanctity. But not satisfied with just this marvelous elevation of a woman to being Co-Redemptrix and Mother of mankind, He also wanted to have women as collaborators in the apostolate.

Women often assisted Rabbis, taking care of them in their needs, but they did not dare to follow them and show themselves openly; Jesus Christ, instead, wanted some pious women to follow him and made them the forerunners of the innumerable forces of women who would cooperate in His Church to evangelize the world. We can truly say that these women were the first women of Azione Cattolica. (An Italian lay group devoted to evangelization).*

Psychology of Woman.

Woman is a marvelous creature, enriched with gifts if she does not move away from her mission; she is imbued with a strong spirituality. Even though she is frequently very preoccupied with the needs of her daily life, she nevertheless has a practical intuition, superior to that of men; her mind, often less tired from useless studies, is thus more clear and virgin, letting her be more easily open to the spiritual and supernatural world; her heart is more tender and generous, and she knows the dedication of love, charity and sacrifice.

She seems weak, but in truth she is made of steel; tempered and unbending; even when she surrenders, she persists in her opinion and in her powerful will. She prays, not because she feels weak, and she is not more religious than man for any sentimental or imagined nature. She prays and believes because she has a stronger sense of the secrets of the life in the spirit, and this makes her stronger than man who is very often distracted by his material life.

This would seem paradoxical, as a woman is completely taken up with her household responsibilities, so long as she has retained her feminine nature and not taken on a miserable masculine one; her work, however concerns the real needs of life and these do not distract her easily from spiritual thoughts; men instead almost always spend their

*A clear description of the value of women and their mission as they were invited by Jesus to cooperate in the apostolate of evangelization (as embraced by the "Azione Cattolica", an Italian lay group devoted to evangelization, and many other similar groups).

time in a world of their own design—with artificial tasks and stresses, and so become absorbed in these concern.

It could be said that the woman floats atop the waves of material needs, while man is swept away by their current.

The woman therefore is the help of man, *similar to him, adjutorium simile sibi*; she is like the other pole of a current and can be said to complete him.

When a man falls thus debasing himself, he sadly finds in a woman the help *similar to him*, but in evil, and in that case this woman becomes ruinous.

It is always *from his rib*—that is from within his chest—from the heart of man that a woman is formed. If he has a pure heart, the woman is pure; if he is wise, the woman is wise; if he is passionate, she is passionate; if he is a saint, she is a saint.

This fact is very little understood, but is of immense importance: it is not the woman who is initially perverted, but rather the heart of man is; if he is perverted he generates perversion; his eyes are easily aroused and his lustful glances lead the woman astray making her shameless and immodest.

In a cruel environment created by ruthless men, the woman becomes immediately a helper of this barbarous attack on humanity, as was seen in Spain during the “Red” regime, now a terrible, deplorable memory.*

In a spiritual environment the woman becomes angelic, and in an apostolic environment she becomes mother of souls.

Her holiness, when it is true holiness, is more absolute, generous, and deep, because a woman takes everything seriously and profoundly, in good as well as in evil.

Her self-esteem and pride are more hidden but stronger; how she reacts and her wrath are more devastating, as a bottled-up explosive, that creates havoc when it goes off.

She has a keen prudence but can become sneaky and cunning if it is in her self-interest or worse if it is for evil.

She is an excellent strategist and can manipulate situations wonderfully.

She can smile even when she is in a paroxysm of anger and wrath; she can cry with a gelid or calculating heart; she can be very kind even when she deeply despises; she can be false and lie with surprising aplomb.

On the other hand, if she is committed to good, these qualities, like raw materials, change; they become diligence, endurance, supernatural prudence, wisdom and alertness in thorny situations, a charitable smile, sweet compassion and wise silence.

Woman in the apostolate.

Divine grace transforms souls for the apostolate; however the woman brings to the ways of the spirit her practical intuition that comes to her from her knowledge of domestic economics; she knows how to save at the right time; she knows to patch something when needed; she knows to soften an excess of zeal and she knows that one “cooks better with a slow flame”, in other words, to be prudent. Her delicacy makes her rebukes gentler; her smile softens and dulls the pain of a strong thrust of a scalpel into a malignant tumor; her

* This is a reference to the anticlerical Republican government in Spain defeated by the Nationalists in the Spanish Civil War (1936-39)

goodness makes bad reactions impossible and makes it easier for others to think things over.

She is affable and naturally eloquent, because she knows to touch those with a confused or upset mind. She has more patience in waiting for a sinner to change his ways, like a cat waits, and she can make use of her charm at least to put him on the path toward being good.

She feels like a mother of souls and follows them with the care of a mother helping her baby at his first steps; she knows to be above someone who has lost his way in life even in winning him over; if she realizes that there is an openness in his heart, she comes in daringly; if she misses in her attempt, she is a master of strategic withdrawal. She is less poisoned by the wretched errors ravaging the world, and thus her faith is simpler and she prays with more abandon, which are great helps for her apostolate.

The pious Galilean women who were followers of Jesus.

Jesus Christ wanted women among his followers, not so much for helping in the inevitable needs of daily life, to which He had subjected himself in his humanity, but for forming the first group of those who would work and cooperate in the apostolate.

The pious women who followed Him, were attracted to Him because of the spiritual or material benefits they had received, and gratefully they provided out of their own resources; but it was really the divine grace that attracted them and the Lord gave them the most beautiful gift, calling them to Himself.

They were not many, although the few that were there remained faithful up to Calvary, and if their faith in the end was shaken, there remained in them the faithfulness of compassion up to the tomb of the divine Master, and before all others they announced the Resurrection.

The Apostles had their faith shattered and they fled, while the pious women lost their faith but did not flee; and the compassion that remained in them was like fertile soil from which grace could resurrect their faith.

The Sacred Text names a few of these pious women: Mary Magdalene, the sinner, from whom seven demons had gone out when Jesus made her free from sin; Joanna, wife of Chuza, Herod's steward and treasurer, and most likely the one whose son was healed by Jesus resulting in his belief and that of all his family (Jn. 4:53); Susanna, of whom little is known and many others. Mary Magdalene, redeemed by her love for the Redeemer, and first among the others in this pious group, gave courage in all future centuries to all women who go astray, showing them how a sincere repentance can transform and completely renew a soul.

Woman and her mission in the Church.

This is the mission of a woman in the Church: to serve God, to cooperate with the hierarchical apostolate, and to be, through prayers, penance, and deeds, an element of

regeneration for the world. She cannot pass the time, like Eve, lazily seeking out diversions and picking prohibited fruits; rather, she must tremble at just the thought of scandalizing a soul with her cursed ostentations, and she must fear even more to be a cause of stumbling for ministers of God in their life of sanctity and holiness.

When a woman is near a Priest she must remember that she is next to Jesus and she must think of a Priest as if he were a monstrance with the consecrated Host.

If she becomes aware that she is becoming a cause of sin and weakness, she must run away immediately and not steal even minimally from God that love that was consecrated to Him. To *Azione Cattolica* (an Italian lay women group devoted to evangelization - see also previous note) she must bring not a mere generic sense of femininity but rather holiness.

To be saint, a woman must be very vigilant over her own nature that can be terribly prone to a bias towards pride, vanity and impurity. She must let herself be guided by a spiritual director step by step to enable her to renounce her indomitable judgment; she must live humbly hidden and work for the love of God in the purest way, to win over her vanity; the woman must live for the glory of God and to be before Him as a handmaid, entirely trusting in His Will.

Her role models cannot and must not be the women of the world; they must be holy women; her inspiration should be the B.V. Mary imitating her in all her virtues.

What will she do? Jesus calls her to follow Him, but will she allow the world to seduce her?

And what will the world give her but only degradation and shame?

Can she lose herself in vanities while there are souls who clamor for her maternal help?

A carousing woman, neglecting her maternal duties, is not a woman; she only damages her maternity, and she is a betrayer of her mission. Jesus always entrusts souls to save and to be brought to Him Christian women by those who work in Catholic women's lay groups, and thus she cannot jeopardize her mission with a worldly life, which is an immoral offense to her spiritual maternity. Follow Jesus, you good women; minister to Jesus in his Ministers and in his poor; be the glory of the Church and aspire to the glory of Heaven.

3. The divine Sower.

Creation, the marvelous manifestation of divine power, high above whatever we can possibly imagine and poor human science can try to comprehend, is the fruit of one Word of God: *Ipse dixit et facta sunt* (He said it and it was done). The kingdom of the God within the soul and the renewal of all things because of the Redemption is also the effect of the Word of God. The Eternal Word became flesh and from His assumed humanity the divine Word resounds. The Redeemer saved us; He sent us the Holy Spirit to teach us what the Divine Word means and to speak to us in the depths of our soul; the Church has the infallible expression of the divine Word in the Pope while in the priesthood it has its disseminator.

The world is like a field sown by the Word, and because of it, it sprouts, blooms and gives its fruits. The Word rules over the creative, redemptory and sanctifying works of God; it rules over transcendent Spirits with its intellectual light, and rules over men

with its truth; it moves the angelic wills to love and the will of earthly travelers toward goodness; it manifests to the Angels the magnificence of God, and discloses to men who have Faith, the hidden mysteries of its nature and its glory; for the Angels it is like a light that shines and like eyes that enable them to see God, and for men it is like a lamp that guides them from the darkness of exile to their homeland.

The Word of God is our companion in this vale of tears, a friendship that sustains us, a maternal caress that gives us comfort.

It is a lighting bolt that cuts through the darkness of our lives; an infallible guide on uncertain, anguish-filled paths; and a star to guide us on our difficult journey.

The Word of God, seed of life.

The Word of God, therefore, is of ultimate importance in the foundation and the propagation of the kingdom of God. Jesus, with a most beautiful parable, wanted to illustrate its action and to preannounce its splendor in harmony with human free will as it is welcomed by those who are open to it, and to describe the disposition of the souls who either allow it to yield good fruits or who render it useless for them by rejecting it.

A sower went out to sow his seeds; this is the very Word, which sprang forth from the bosom of the Father and came to earth to sow his Divine Word. He did not instill it with force, *he went out to sow his seed*, needing our cooperation, just as the seed needs the earth. If the earth does not receive it, if it does not give of itself, the seed remains barren. Jesus describes the fate or effect, so to speak, that the divine Word had or will have in a soul, by comparing the various places where it may fall; there were places where it was scattered in vain; places where it fell upon hardened hearts of stone and so withered; places ensnared by thorns of passion suffocating it; and those places that received it with the right disposition and made it fruitful.

Jesus Christ in fact, spoke to the multitudes, and many listened to His words but they did not keep them in their heart and they let Satan take them away. He spoke to the Scribes and the Pharisees but the hardness of their hearts made his teaching fruitless; he spoke to those who were preoccupied with the worries of their lives and they let his words suffocate—choked off by their many other concerns; He spoke to the Apostles and to the disciples and the Divine Word produced in them abundant fruits.

This is the story of evangelization in the world throughout history: the pagan world rejected the divine Word; it let Satan pull it away and then trampled on it and persecuted it. Wise men accepted it as an interesting novelty, but their hearts of stone did not succeed in changing it into a life-giving force. The crowds and masses received it and converted; the society became Christian that was once pagan, but the thorns of preoccupation with riches and pleasures slowly suffocated it and so practically speaking society went back to paganism in spirit and in life. The souls who were good received it with sincerity, transfused it into life, and brought forth abundant fruit, to which St. Luke adds the multiplier, *a hundredfold*.

The journey of the Word of God in the centuries.

As we have done for the history of civilization, we could identify, with the guidance of the Gospels, the different ages of the propagation of the Divine Word: the Jewish people were like the public path: they heard the word of God and they wasted it. The world was like rocky ground: it received the sacred preaching, but did not allow it to produce fruits for it did not take root. The Christian nations welcomed it, but slowly choked it off, overtaken by the anxieties of their daily worries. Finally, at the end of times, in the one sheepfold and in the Kingdom of God, the divine Word shall make an abundance of fruits.

Jesus Christ, after speaking of the way the preaching of the Gospel would be received, spoke of the need of a full and open propagation. The Gospel could not remain hidden; it was necessary to be the light to the world, and thus it had to be like a lamp on a lamp stand.

The Church is the lamp stand that keeps on high the divine Word, and from the Church, the infallible Magisterium of the Pope, it enlightens all peoples. It is a Word even mysterious sometimes, because what is divine is awesome, and cannot be understood easily, but Jesus announced that one day it would be manifested and propagated in the whole splendor of its light, because the Church herself would explain it with the clarity of her scholars and her Doctors.

Jesus then alerted his Apostles and those who would succeed them, urging them to keep in mind how to listen to the divine Word He spoke, in order to preach it and not to waste it in their hearts so as to not make their own mission useless. *Take care how you hear*, that is, pay attention to what I say, and do not believe that you can interpret My words according to your whims; do not pay attention to your thoughts, but make an effort to understand My thoughts in truth. Do not render your preaching worthless by distorting My thoughts, because you would no longer be ministers of the divine Word but of your own ideas, and you would also lose what you believe you have achieved.

Jesus was speaking also to future heretics, who by distorting his Word that they proudly think to have, would in fact have the Sacred Text of the Scriptures taken from them. The heretics do not know how to listen to the divine teaching, because they adapt it to their own mistakes and their passions, and thus they end up losing the pure Text of the Scriptures by rejecting or distorting it.

The reason for the parables.

The parable of Jesus, as He explained it, warns us on how we must listen to the divine Word, and on the obstacles that oppose its becoming fruitful for our souls. He did not speak openly to the Jewish people but used parables that *“they may look but not see, and hear but not understand”*, so that the evil-minded would not become more guilty by rejecting and disowning His word after having heard it clearly. For these people the parables were a puzzle, and therefore their lack of understanding was an excuse for them for not putting them into practice.

However to the Apostles and to his future followers Jesus spoke clearly, because the Word of God had to be made known to propagate His kingdom. Our soul cannot

welcome the Word as we idle away our time in earthly, secular pursuits where it is practically lost and snatched away by Satan; it cannot be received by a heart of stone which would prevent its germination or in a heart filled by the thorns of material needs and concerns that suffocate it; the Word must be received *in rich soil*, that is by a heart that wants to be saved, faithful to God and ready to fight against the attractions of temptation, in order not to lose the great gift of God.

The Mother of Jesus and his relatives.

We must agree that too often the divine Word is squandered, especially in the times in which it should produce the most fruits—that is, during the more solemn times of the Church’s liturgical year. The parable of Jesus then has its fullest realization, and we must sorrowfully admit that there are only a few souls who offer the Lord rich, fertile soil.

Let us then humble ourselves and let us receive with the right disposition this great gift of God, thinking that on the day of judgment we shall not have to make excuses but rather we shall account for every word sown in our hearts by the infinite mercy of God. The Evangelist Luke himself calls us to this sacred duty recalling the words spoke by Jesus when his Mother *and his brothers*, that is his closest relatives, were trying unsuccessfully to pass through the crowd and speak to him. However these “closest relatives” had not come to him in faith, but were going to Him with hostile intentions and to reach Him easily they had forced the B.V. Mary to accompany them.

From St. Matthew’s Gospel (Mt 12:24), the Pharisees already had spoken with Jesus as if he had been possessed and his relatives were going to Him in their imaginary fears to save Him or even to hold and isolate Him. Jesus therefore, even though they were with his Mother, did not want to receive them, and He said that his mother and his brothers were those who would listen to the word of God and put it into practice.

Jesus did not want to treat his Mother badly, who with utmost faith always listened to Him and put into practice His divine Word; but because his relatives put her in front of them to hide their intentions, in answer to their deceitful maneuvers He naturally refused to receive them with his Mother used in that way, knowing that their intentions were absolutely not shared by His Mother.

In fact, if someone uses the name of a princess to conceal a fraud and his fraudulence is perceived by the target, the target will respond: “I do not want the princess nor you; go away.” (*This is an Italian saying.*) The retort is not meant as an offense to the princess, but to let the swindler know that his fraud attempt has been discovered.

It is important to mention that Jesus, in speaking of his Most Blessed Mother, wanted to say indirectly that She was indeed like those that followed the Word; she had been raised to this highly honored level because she listened to the message of God and obeyed it.

Mary became Mother of God because She welcomed the divine Word.

Mentioning this episode St. Luke wants us to consider how important the divine Word is for the life of the soul; the divine Maternity, that is, the highest honor that a creature could have, would have been useless if, with the Word becoming flesh, his Word

had not been accepted. Mary was the Mother of God because she welcomed the divine message and believed it; she was immensely great and holy because she practiced with sublime accuracy what she learned from the Sacred Scriptures and what she learned from the mouth of her Son. May this beautiful thought envelop all of us with veneration and faith in the word of God, to let it become food for our souls and put into practice in our lives, according to the directives of the Church.

Believing that we can save our souls by only reading Sacred Scripture is the greatest foolishness and illusion; to think practicing it according to our own views or whims is irresponsible; to believe to be specially inspired by God in interpreting it and in applying it, apart from the Magisterium of the Church, is pride beyond measure, because it is tantamount to believing oneself worthy of special insights from God and to be independent from the Magisterium of the Church, established by Jesus Christ. In fact, if the conclusions drawn from private interpretations were truly from the Holy Spirit, they should be the same in all cases, which is the exact opposite of what is observed in practice and made evident by the great number of Protestant sects. Let us go, then to the Catholic Church and to her one and infallible Magisterium to learn how to know and put into practice the divine Word.

4. The storm on the lake.

Jesus Christ, climbing on the boat, told his disciples to go out to sea and cross over to the opposite bank of the lake. It is clear from the context that He wanted to land at the town of Gerasenes, to free the town from two possessed men who were terrorizing it. St. Matthew speaks in fact of two possessed men who lived in the cemetery (Mt. 8:28). St. Luke though, like St. Mark, speaks only of one of them, the most raging and dangerous because he was possessed by a legion of demons.

While they were sailing, Jesus fell asleep but soon a squall blew over the lake, putting the boat in danger, because it was taking on water. It is possible to think that the demons themselves aroused the storm to make it impossible for Jesus to land, sensing His intentions; it is possible that the same demons that possessed that unhappy soul, that made him furious, and that later on entered the swine throwing them into confusion and causing them to fling themselves off the cliff as if taken by the squall, were the spirits of enormous agitation and provoked storms.

The windstorm was howling *and Jesus slept*, but sleeping He allowed both the evil spirits and the wind to blow on the waters; he allowed it but he was there, He slept, but his Heart was awake.

The apostles, who were terrified, did their best to keep the boat afloat, because they were experts of the maritime arts, but when they saw that they were not succeeding, they woke up Jesus telling Him: *Master, we are perishing*. He woke up and quickly, with great majesty, *rebuked the wind and the waves*, which subsided and a great calm followed. He *rebuked them*, even though waves and winds have no intelligence, because being God, He commands also inanimate objects; as *He rebuked them*, perhaps He addressed the raging spirits who agitated the lake. After that, he addressed the Apostles and he said: *“Where is your faith?”* Why were they panicking if Jesus was with them? And since He was with them why had they confided in their own ability to stay afloat, instead of calling

Him first? How could they fear being submerged knowing that they had a mission to accomplish and knowing that their Master had to do his work? Their faith instead had disappeared, as if swallowed by the storm; the spirits of the storm, ravaging the lake, ravaged also their souls.

The Church and good souls in the storm.

Jesus Christ wanted to give his Church a lesson of unequalled value, because the Church always walks amidst squalls and storms since her mission is to oppose the kingdom of Satan.

The Church walks through storms and so do the souls that the Lord chooses for missions of charity, because every small initiative of apostolate and every charitable institution have the purpose to thwart Satan's plans. Those who think of doing a good deed without the storm of contradictions or tribulation, thinking that the storm is a sign of bad luck instead of a sign of the presence of God in the act and a great privilege, only deceive themselves. Those that in their thoughts believe in seeking out human successes and accolades are not only deluded, but it is a sure sign that their plan to do good conceived in this self-serving way is only a miserable collection of purely natural processes that can be compared to the life of a mushroom: it is born, it grows and it dies.

This fact should be examined with great care so that we may not be scandalized by the storms in the Church or the storms encountered by the good people active in the ways of the Lord.

Also in the natural lifecycle of plants, the winds, atmospheric disturbances and even storms play an important role: they circulate the air around plants, strengthen their hold in the soil, help pollination by transporting pollen, and shake away the buds that are not essential and borne from the exuberance of the plant, which if left on its branches would prevent the full maturity of its fruits.

Our body lives through the circulation of blood which is pushed through the pressure within the arteries and veins by the beating of the heart even to our smallest organs. This circulation is a storm of blood, a beneficial storm; if it were not there the blood could arrive to the main organs but the humblest would perish. Suffering and contradiction not only purify the soul and strengthen its activities supernaturally, but also allow the fruits of goodness to reach the most humble creatures. They represent the beating of the heart and the pressure of the veins that push the blood even to the smallest capillaries.

The value of contradictions.

Some contradictions appear to kill good initiatives, but instead they bring them from the bottom to the surface, from the stony ground to the good soil, and force a soul to rely not on personal strength but on the power of God, not on personal prestige but on grace, rendering the soul more beautiful and alive in its good activities. Sometimes contradictions seem to kill a good activity but in reality they prune it or even transplant it, giving it the possibility of sprouting an even richer array of holy works, purifying some

souls who started and saw their efforts fail, and making it possible for them to even arrive to sainthood.

Those who aspire to do good do not seek the satisfaction of personal pride, nor expect to capitalize upon it; if they did they would be doing something completely secular and sometimes even deleterious in nature.

Goodness is done by God, and the storms compel us to go to Him and give to Him the precious contribution of our sacrifice. We do not see how much dross covers our hearts and our intentions, and we do not know how to humble ourselves to remove it. The Lord allows these storms to purify us and when we respond to his loving invitation we then become instruments in His hands.

Further, honor and prosperity often only spoil us because they awaken in us the seeds of our disorderly nature. There are souls who are very holy, because of grace, and they cannot be thrown into the mire of worldly honors; the Lord allows them to suffer storms almost as if to cover these treasures of His with topsoil and algae so thieves do not steal them. The perfection of a soul is like a fruit that must be hidden under the ground or covered by straw, and the Lord, to Whom it is most dear, lets the storm preserve it, not suffocate it.

We cannot determine where our faulty nature can take us, and thus some contradictions and humiliations seem calamitous to us; but God, *who controls all the events of his creatures* does not hesitate sometimes to even shut off all the lights, to reduce us to the level of imprudent children, and to form around us a tough skin of humiliation that we need to preserve the good fruits He gives to us.

To believe that if this or that should not have been said or done thus avoiding a humiliation, to believe that without humiliations a good work could go forward full speed ahead, to regret a failure that seems beyond repair, means to be unable to know to what point we can be pushed by our own misery, and it also means not to have faith in the successful interventions of God.

God removes *the poor one from the dung* and places him among the princes of his people; He draws out life from the same mire and at the appropriate time makes what looked dead flourish again.

To those souls who complain about contradictions and do not know to appreciate the vivifying value of a pain can be said what Jesus said to the Apostles: "*Where is your faith?*"

God is omnipotent, and when we have unshakeable faith in Him, he draws life from what is dead. Everything depends on our putting our trust in Him. The most awful calumnies can be transformed in His sacred hands into praises if He wants it; the voluntary humiliations to which a soul succumbs, perhaps due to imprudence, become drills of love to pierce hearts, when God revives them.

It is not through our own efforts that we win the battles of the spirit, but it is through grace; it is also true that grace penetrates us more the less we rely on the world. A humiliation is a like void in our ego, a void immediately taken over by God, who renders our weakness alive and at His service.

During storms it is only necessary to have faith and, through prayer, awaken Jesus who is sleeping. We must believe and abandon ourselves to God who alone can conquer. On occasion He wants to show His omnipotence without any doubt and so He chooses ways that for us seem to lead to disaster.

He chose the Cross to overcome Satan and the world, and he won. The cross, a sign of *scandal and foolishness* He used nevertheless to sanctify mankind and overcome the pagan arrogance.

This is a truth that no one can deny. God in some of his works imposes his terms on the defeated, and He wins. This is what He does with souls whom He chooses for very great works; he allows them to endure the most humiliating events, imposes his terms of love in those very debased circumstances, He makes himself known, He makes Himself be loved, and He conquers!*

Victory belongs to God.

The Church, the work of his hands, has always taken this route and she shall continue along it until the end of the times. She lives to drive out Satan and chips away at his dark kingdom; Satan conjures up storms to sink her. Jesus allows this to make his Church more beautiful and active, while He sleeps; that is, He seems to be asleep; instead with his Sacred Heart He watches over his bride. Human attempts to quiet the storm fail and only increase it, because man does not have the secrets of grace that alone profess the glory of God and conquer hearts. Human attempts are only seeds of new tempests, and nothing else.

The Church prevails when she calls on Jesus with all her heart and when, like Him, she bleeds, suffers, and is crucified. She then has an immense radiant strength and produces marvelous fruits of love. Nations do not add anything to the prestige of the Church because her prestige is supernatural; nations add to her glory not when they reach a political agreement, but when they are converted and walk on the way to their eternal salvation.

The kingdom of Jesus Christ is not of this world; that is, it does not work toward the vainglory of the world, but to save souls and to give glory to God. When the Church's inner turmoil becomes more disastrous, then her cry to God must be stronger, and in so doing she will lose her outward appearance but will grow in substance, like a tree in winter that loses all its leaves and plunges its roots more deeply into the soil.

The triumph of the Church is only in the triumph of saving souls; a political triumph does not mean anything to her—on the contrary, it can harm her if it becomes a forced compromise with the world. The souls that are truly faithful to her do not help her become friendly with the so-called great people of the world, but assist her with the propagation of the faith and good works.

The “Azione Cattolica” (Lay Catholic Women Group) and other Catholic lay groups, which seek to evangelize and practice the Christian virtues, are truly the army and the prestige of the Catholic Church. To the Church, souls are her jewels, the poor are her treasure, prayer to God is her power, Jesus Christ is her refuge, and when Jesus rises on her storm-tossed deck everything becomes quiet and peaceful.

Jesus *sleeps*, apparently, in his Tabernacle, until prayer awakens Him; *He wakes* when He is solemnly put in the monstrance and exposed. The Eucharist triumphs, deep in souls, like the rising of His love and the silencing of storms and waves in us, and leaves

* Don Dolindo, perhaps unintentionally, describes the violent storm in his life, and also the divine strength and light that guided him through it so that he would not fall.

perfect calm. O Jesus, awaken, rise upon your throne of love, because your Altar is like the deck of the ship of the Church. Rebuke from this throne human ingratitude and impose your calm by imposing your love on everyone. Amen.

5. The possessed man of Gerasenes and the loathsome legions who move amid the souls that are dead to grace.

After the storm had been quieted, Jesus with his Apostles sailed to the town of Gerasenes, which is across from Galilee. Suddenly a naked man, contorted and exceedingly perturbed, emerged from some burial caves of a cemetery nearby; he threw himself at the feet of Jesus and started shouting: "*What have you to do with me, Jesus, son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me.*" Jesus, in fact, before even seeing him, with His mere presence enjoined the evil spirit to go back into the abyss.

Satan is an impure spirit, dethroned, and degraded, but always prideful and eager to dominate; when he sees the opportunity to invade and possess a man, he knows he is taking away from the Lord something that belongs to Him; thus he feels he is a master and finds a certain satisfaction in his extreme unhappiness. To be thrown into the abyss is a brutal blow to his most abhorrent ego, and for this reason he begged Jesus not to torment him. He is a loathsome spirit, and he finds pleasure in filth and loves nakedness and impurity. For him it is a victory to have a creature disrobe and profane his body; it becomes for him a desecrated temple, a shattered altar to the glory of God, an idol erected upon the earth set to receive the adoration that would have been destined to the Lord.

Satan had possessed the unhappy man of Gerasenes in a particular way, stripping him, and compelling him to hide in the putrid detritus of the tombs; the man was like a trophy for him, and so he did not want to be forced to leave him. For this reason he filled him with violence, made him terrifying, uncontrollable even with iron chains, and made him the terror of the entire village.

Jesus Christ knew very well that more than one demon had taken hold of the poor possessed man, and questioned him in order that all the people present with him could hear. Thus He asked him, "*What is your name?*" He replied, "*Legion,*" because thousands of demons had entered into him. Thousands of demons could possess a single man, because a spirit does not occupy physical space.

The people with Jesus were terrorized to know that they were present before a multitude of evil spirits, and their blood ran cold with fear. The demons then, pushed by Jesus to go back into the abyss pleaded with Him to allow them to enter a herd of swine feeding on the nearby hillside, and immediately, after having been given His permission, they burst into them like lightning and with untold fury the pigs rushed down the steep bank of the hill into the waters below where they drowned.

The demons wanted at least to inflict damage on the swineherds, and Jesus permitted it because the Law prohibited that kind of grazing. The man who had been possessed and who was now free and in peace, was clothed by some of the people that were present and went to the feet of Jesus, full of gratitude.

Diabolical obsessions.

It is mystery to us how Satan possesses a man or an animal. Most likely he takes hold of its nervous system and through it, takes hold of its physical activities. He cannot enter the soul of a man unless sin opens the door for him; but even in this case, he invades the body that he then molds.

More common than full possession is diabolical infestation, which is a more violent temptation of Satan, which he usually sets on those he hopes to form to be his followers or on those who may give occasion of scandal, corrupting souls in this way and inducing them to perdition.

It is most sorrowful that in our own time Satan infests countless creatures which propagate around them irreparable damage.

Theater actors or movie stars, shameless and provocative women, those who spread errors and who support harmful ideologies and ways of living are, unfortunately, the diabolical legions infesting the world today. In these poor creatures satan lurks almost unseen; and in addition he disguises their awful misery under a glamorous, alluring appearance and so makes them the ruin of countless souls. These creatures hide *in the tomb*, that is in the putrid detritus of a corrupt and immoral life, and from their caverns, disguised as places of joyful gatherings, they bring death, corrupting and infesting, using the attraction of their impurity, other souls dead to grace.

It is necessary to pray insistently to Jesus that He might intervene with His power, even with his timely scourges and dispel these awful legions of corruption. Every public meeting place because of them has become a tomb of souls, and the lairs in which they lurk—let us all call them as such—recall the corrupt sinful cities of the past that deserved the fire that rained down on them from the sky. May the power of God dissolve these lairs, where Satan triumphs and human dignity is perverted. May the mercy of God convert all souls led astray and eliminate forever from the world these horrors of impurity.

When the swineherds told the Gerasenes what had happened, they came in great numbers to verify what had occurred, but instead of being grateful to Jesus, they asked him to leave.

The loss of the herd of swine instilled in them a fear of even greater punishments; they believed that Jesus was a prophet who would call down fire from Heaven upon them, and so they preferred that He leave them. Only the man who had been possessed and who was now free, asked Jesus the grace to stay with Him, but Jesus did not permit him to do so.

Sent away from the town, Jesus did not push the matter and stay there anyway, as He could have done, but rather immediately left. In His mercy He left there that one freed man to glorify God and spread the blessed seeds of faith among those people who would listen to him. Contrary to what He was accustomed to doing, He told the man to go back and proclaim *what God had done for him* thus announcing the great thing Jesus had done for him, and his recognizing in Him the true God.

How often does Jesus Christ come to visit souls but is driven away! They feel troubled by his presence, because they do not want to leave their sinful habits especially because they fear *for their herds of swine*, that is, for the impure passions they cultivate in their hearts.

May the merciful Lord have pity on them and call them to salvation through his Ministers, to show the people the magnificence of infinite goodness.

6. The daughter of Jairus and the woman with a hemorrhage.

When Jesus came back from the town of the Gerasenes He was received by a multitude of people waiting for Him to be cured from their diseases; perhaps the extraordinary event of the curing of the possessed man had already reached them. A poor father, by the name of Jairus, head of the Synagogue, had a daughter who was dying and knowing that Jesus had come, ran and threw himself at His feet, begging him to come to his house to heal her. She was his only daughter, and he loved her deeply.

Jesus without hesitation moved toward his house, jostled by the immense crowd, when a woman, who for twelve years had suffered with an hemorrhage, ran after Him. She was sure that if she could only touch his cloak she would be healed. Her faith was so great especially because she had already spent all her possessions on many doctors and medicines and had never been cured.

St. Mark (Mk. 5:26) adds that she had suffered a great deal at the hands of the doctors but instead of being cured, she had actually gotten worse. St. Luke, who was also a doctor, out of sensitivity to his colleagues, only notes that no one had healed her. The woman went to Jesus full of faith in His divine power, and secretly, being behind Him, touched the hem of His cloak, and instantly she was completely healed.

Jesus was immediately aware of what had happened, because He felt coming out of him *a power*, that is a flowing out from Him of power and mercy that produced the miracle. Being God He knew and saw the intention of the woman and as Man-God he felt the flowing of that power from himself. How did He physically feel it? His Heart certainly felt the tenderness of a great charity flowing toward a certain presence of human unhappiness; He felt as if drawn toward a creature and His love wrapping itself around her, healing her. Her blood vessels felt His omnipotence and immediately stopped the hemorrhagic flow; His creative touch immediately restored to normal the damaged tissues, and completely and entirely healed the woman's body.

Jesus as man did not know her, nor did He see her because she was behind him; that is the reason he asked like someone who is unaware: "*Who touched me?*" He wanted the miracle to be known for the glory of God and wanted to make this an unequivocal sign thereby giving an assurance also to the woman for her future; maybe He wanted to prevent future objections regarding the miracle, for those that would try and explain it away as the result of sudden emotional outburst that somehow could have tightened her blood vessels. He thus wanted that the woman herself confess the miracle and thank the Lord. His senses had become aware of the miracle for the power that had flowed out of Him, almost like the release of current that results when opposite electromagnetic poles touch, and He wanted to crown it with an admission and a test, showing himself in this way to be also a man.

The poor woman had a firm faith, but her faith had still one imperfection: she believed Jesus to be a magician having in himself a hidden power to do miracles, and she could not imagine that He could feel the consequences of his own power; she believed him to be almost like a powerful antidote and a source of healing. Jesus wanted to show

her that He did not do the miracle unconsciously, but it was His will that had healed her, and for this reason He asked: “*Who touched Me?*”

Everybody denied touching Him, but to St. Peter and the other Apostles that denial seemed ridiculous, because so many people were touching the divine Master, in fact he was pressed on all sides by the crowd. Jesus, however, was not talking about occasional contact, but a voluntary contact done because of faith, a faith so strong that it could incline his omnipotence to work a miracle, and he insisted: “*Someone has touched me; for I know that power has gone out from me.*” The poor woman then understood that she had been noticed, and she became afraid because she had been bold and deserving of a strong reproach—unclean as she was under the law—to dare to touch if even just the bottom of the cloak of the Redeemer; for this reason trembling, falling at the feet of Jesus, she explained in front of everyone what had happened to her. Jesus did not reproach her at all, on the contrary, reassured her and ascribed to her faith the miracle that He had done for her and sent her on her way in peace.

Jairus had urged the Lord to come to his house to heal his daughter who was dying and the pause for the miraculous cure of the woman with the hemorrhage must have been excruciating for him. It could be said that Jesus, in delaying, was not giving full attention to the affliction of that poor, desolate father; yet on the contrary Jesus knowing what would happen to the child, wanted to encourage him and strengthen his faith with this miracle. In fact, while he was still speaking, someone came to tell Jairus to not trouble the Teacher any longer because his daughter was dead. Jesus encouraged Jairus and exhorted him to have faith; and had Jairus not been present for this miracle, his pain would have been so overwhelming that it would have shaken his faith.

When they arrived at his house, the mother of the dead child came out crying, and there were also other neighbors all crying and shouting out in grief. Jesus exhorted all present not to cry, because the girl was not dead but only asleep. On hearing this, they started mocking Him, because they knew she was dead.

They were crying more for outward appearances than for actual grief, as it usually happens in the case of people who are unrelated to the dead person; thus they could easily go from crying to mocking. They were people without faith and so Jesus did not want anyone to join Him in the room where the dead child was lying; however, in order for his prohibition to not seem unilaterally harsh, He did not permit his own people to follow Him either, with the exception of Peter, James and John and the girl’s parents. The lack of faith of the others would have been an obstacle to the miracle.

On entering the room, the parents must have burst into heart-rending tears, especially the father who only then saw his daughter dead. It is psychological trigger, in fact, that at the death of a dear one, such things as a visit, a condolence or even a change to something in the house, renew the distress bringing more grieving tears.

At the renewed pain of the parents, Jesus did not hesitate, but taking her by the hand, with his omnipotent voice cried out: “*Child, arise!*”

The soul of the deceased girl was not dead, it lived independently of her body, as an immortal spirit, and the Sacred Text gives us this testimony saying: “*Her breath returned and she immediately arose.*” The soul heard the command of Jesus and Jesus taking the corpse by the hand, healed it, and thus restoring it to normalcy, the soul reentered the body and gave it life again, and the child got up. She was however weakened

by the sickness, perhaps it was tuberculosis, and thus Jesus ordered them to give her some food.

The parents were astounded and since Jairus was the head of the Synagogue he said he wanted to speak of this extraordinary event to the Sanhedrin and to other Priests to show them that indeed Jesus was the Messiah. This is evident from the text, since it is written that the Redeemer *instructed them to tell no one what had happened*; but of course, since there was crowd gathered in the house and surrounding it, and with the child who just come back to life, this prohibition of Jesus would have had no practical meaning; thus Jesus gave this instruction especially for the authorities. He knew very well their evil dispositions, He knew how they would ill-treat Jairus and his family, as they had done in the case the healing of the man born blind, and He did not want the poor father to have trouble on account of Him. His prohibition was a touch of His most delicate goodness.

The mystery of sacrifice and providence

The dead child was twelve years old and the woman who was sick with the hemorrhage had suffered for twelve years; she was stricken by sickness as the child was born, then she was healed and the child lay dying. Is there a providential match between these two creatures? There might have been, since God often utilizes the suffering of one person to provide his Divine Mercy to another. It might well be that the sickness of the woman was changed into blessings of fertility for the barren house of Jairus, and the illness and the death of the child contributed sacrifice and suffering like a treasure to the healing of the woman.

The understanding of these mysteries of immolation and providence belong only to God, and we cannot say anything more. We can believe, however, that everything is done with infinite charity and the Lord tempers the things of this world with marvelous harmony. Even misfortunes, even the most awful and painful temptations have a reason in the divine Providence, and they cannot go beyond a limit that God imposes on them.

When the coffee bean is put to the flame to be roasted, it is exposed to the danger of being destroyed, because the flame envelops it to its potential destruction. The roaster's wise care, however, permits the flame to go to a certain limit, and when the bean is roasted and gives off its aroma, he takes it away from the fire and leaves it to crackle by itself.

Tribulation and temptation come to destroy and ruin us, and the Lord permits them to work on us to bring from our souls the aroma of virtue. It is necessary then to trust in God and to abandon ourselves to His love. When we do not have this trust we either leave ourselves open to attack by these contrarian forces or we fight against them with our insufficient strength, and so are ultimately crushed. What can a poor coffee bean do against fire? It can try to resist it with its weak, wood-like shell, use its oily coating as a shield against it, but it will only crackle and cannot be saved unless a careful hand takes it away from the flame at the right time.

The poor woman with the hemorrhage put her trust into doctors' hands, she wasted all her money, but she only became worse; had she gone to ask God at the same time, she would have improved. When she went to Jesus she abandoned the doctors and trust in human solutions, and it was enough for her to touch the hem of His cloak to be restored to health.

O if we only would touch the hem of the supernatural world, if our prayer would rise above the limits of our poor earth with a faith fully alive, how many marvelous consequences we would have!

Jairus begged Jesus to heal his daughter, and the first result he saw from his prayer seemed disastrous, because Jesus delayed his visit due to the hemorrhagic woman, and the child died. However, Jesus encouraged him and exhorted him not to fear and to have faith. Sometimes the Lord waits to answer our prayers, sometimes it seems as if our prayers are unheard, do not have an effect or even have the opposite effect of what we ask for; *let us not fear, then, and only have faith*, because to hope beyond hope is a secret to receive from God not only a help but real and wonderful miracles.

To the crowd that was crying over the dead child, Jesus said: “*Do not cry because she is not dead but asleep.*” These great and beautiful words He also says to us when our dear ones depart from this life, because they are also asleep, waiting for the final resurrection. What are the years or the centuries of the tomb if not time spent sleeping? Can we keep time if we sleep? A night seems like a minute, and after the dark of night immediately returns the light. Let us not be excessive in crying over our departed ones, but let us trust in the glorious coming of Jesus who shall call us from our tombs and resurrect us. The obsessive mourning for the departed is not a sign of love but rather one of little faith in the eternal life and in the resurrection. Yes, we cry, because the heart tenderly aches, but we must remain at peace because the soul does not die and the body itself is waiting at rest for the resurrection.

The girl was brought back to life, and Jesus asked that some food be given to her. The soul also resurrects when it is lifted out of the death of sin, after which the soul needs to feed on the Bread of life to be sustained and not fall again into the darkness of death. It is impossible without this food to live to God and persevere in being good.

Chapter 9

1. Mission of the Apostles. Herod the Tetrarch and Jesus. First multiplication of the loaves. Confession of St. Peter. Christian abnegation. The Transfiguration. Healing of a possessed epileptic. Prediction of the Passion. The true greatness. Jesus refused by the Samaritans. Requirements to follow Jesus.

1 Then calling together the twelve Apostles, he gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases. 2 And he sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the infirm. 3 And he said to them: "You should take nothing for the journey, neither staff, nor traveling bag, nor bread, nor money; and you should not have two tunics. 4 And into whatever house you shall enter, lodge there, and do not move away from there. 5 And whoever will not have received you, upon departing from that city, shake off even the dust on your feet, as a testimony against them." 6 And going forth, they traveled around, through the towns, evangelizing and curing everywhere. 7 Now Herod the tetrarch heard about all the things that were being done by him, but he doubted, because it was said 8 by some, "For John has risen from the dead," yet truly, by others, "For Elijah has appeared," and by still others, "For one of the prophets from of old has risen again." 9 And Herod said: "I beheaded John. So then, who is this, about whom I hear such things?" And he sought to see him. 10 And when the Apostles returned, they explained to him all the things that they had done. And taking them with him, he withdrew to a deserted place apart, which belongs to Bethsaida. 11 But when the crowd had realized this, they followed him. And he received them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God. And those who were in need of cures, he healed. 12 Then the day began to decline. And drawing near, the twelve said to him: "Dismiss the crowds, so that, by going into the surrounding towns and villages, they may separate and find food. For we are here in a deserted place." 13 But he said to them, "You give them something to eat." And they said, "There is with us no more than five loaves and two fish, unless perhaps we are to go and buy food for this entire multitude." 14 Now there were about five thousand men. So he said to his disciples, "Have them recline to eat in groups of fifty." 15 And they did so. And they caused them all to recline to eat. 16 Then, taking the five loaves and the two fish, he gazed up to heaven, and he blessed and broke and distributed them to his disciples, in order to set them before the crowd. 17 And they all ate and were satisfied. And twelve baskets of fragments were taken up, which were left over from them. 18 And it happened that, when he was praying alone, his disciples also were with him, and he questioned them, saying: "Who do the multitudes say that I am?" 19 But they answered by saying: "John the Baptist. But some say Elijah. Yet truly, others say that one of the prophets from before has risen again." 20 Then he said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" In response, Simon Peter said, "The Christ of God." 21 But speaking sharply to them, he instructed them not to tell this to anyone, 22 saying, "For the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the leaders of the priests and the scribes, and be killed, and on the third day rise again." 23 Then he said to everyone: "If anyone is willing to come after me: let him deny himself, and take up his cross every day, and follow me. 24 For whoever will have saved his life, will lose it. Yet whoever will have lost his life for my sake, will save it. 25 For how does it benefit a man, if he were to gain the whole world, yet

lose himself, or cause himself harm? 26 For whoever will be ashamed of me and of my words: of him the Son of man will be ashamed, when he will have arrived in his majesty and that of his Father and of the holy Angels. 27 And yet, I tell you a truth: There are some standing here who shall not taste death, until they see the kingdom of God.” 28 And it happened that, about eight days after these words, he took Peter and James and John, and he ascended onto a mountain, so that he might pray. 29 And while he was praying, the appearance of his countenance was altered, and his vestment became white and shining. 30 And behold, two men were talking with him. And these were Moses and Elijah, appearing in majesty. 31 And they spoke of his departure, which he would accomplish at Jerusalem. 32 Yet truly, Peter and those who were with him were weighed down by sleep. And becoming alert, they saw his majesty and the two men who were standing with him. 33 And it happened that, as these were departing from him, Peter said to Jesus: “Teacher, it is good for us to be here. And so, let us make three tabernacles: one for you, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” For he did not know what he was saying. 34 Then, as he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them. And as these were entering into the cloud, they were afraid. 35 And a voice came from the cloud, saying: “This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.” 36 And while the voice was being uttered, Jesus was found to be alone. And they were silent and told no one, in those days, any of these things, which they had seen. 37 But it happened on the following day that, as they were descending from the mountain, a great crowd met him. 38 And behold, a man from the crowd cried out, saying, “Teacher, I beg you, look kindly on my son, for he is my only son. 39 And behold, a spirit takes hold of him, and he suddenly cries out, and it throws him down and convulses him, so that he foams. And though it tears him apart, it leaves him only with difficulty. 40 And I asked your disciples to cast him out, and they were unable.” 41 And in response, Jesus said: “O unfaithful and perverse generation! How long will I be with you and endure you? Bring your son here.” 42 And as he was approaching him, the demon threw him down and convulsed him. 43 And Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and he healed the boy, and he restored him to his father. 44 And all were astonished at the greatness of God. And as everyone was wondering over all that he was doing, he said to his disciples: “You must set these words in your hearts. For it shall be that the Son of man will be delivered into the hands of men.” 45 But they did not understand this word, and it was concealed from them, so that they did not perceive it. And they were afraid to question him about this word. 46 Now an idea entered into them, as to which of them was greater. 47 But Jesus, perceiving the thoughts of their hearts, took a child and stood him beside him. 48 And he said to them: “Whoever will receive this child in my name, receives me; and whoever receives me, receives him who sent me. For whoever is the lesser among you all, the same is greater.” 49 And responding, John said: “Teacher, we saw a certain one casting out demons in your name. And we prohibited him, for he does not follow with us.” 50 And Jesus said to him: “Do not prohibit him. For whoever is not against you, is for you.” 51 Now it happened that, while the days of his dissipation were being completed, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem. 52 And he sent messengers before his face. And going on, they entered into a city of the Samaritans, to prepare for him. 53 And they would not receive him, because his face was going toward Jerusalem. 54 And when his disciples, James and John, had seen this, they said, “Lord, do you want us to call for fire to descend from heaven and consume them?” 55 And turning, he rebuked them, saying: “Do you not know of whose spirit you are? 56 The Son of man came, not to

destroy lives, but to save them.” And they went into another town. 57 And it happened that, as they were walking along the way, someone said to him, “I will follow you, wherever you will go.” 58 Jesus said to him: “Foxes have dens, and the birds of the air have nests. But the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head.” 59 Then he said to another, “Follow me.” But he said, “Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father.” 60 And Jesus said to him: “Let the dead bury their dead. But you go and announce the kingdom of God.” 61 And another said: “I will follow you, Lord. But permit me first to explain this to those of my house.” 62 Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow, and then looks back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”

2. Mission of the Apostles and those of the Priests.

The crowd around Jesus was constantly increasing, forcing Him to delay His travelling from town to town. For this reason He called all his apostles and began to send them ahead of Him to do what He was doing.

He gave them power over the sick and over evil spirits, thus multiplying through them, deliverance and healing. Thus the crowd of people around Him that sought to be cured began to lessen, and it was possible for Him to announce the Kingdom of God across a more extended area. The Apostles cooperated in this effort through their initial preliminary preaching. In this way Jesus Christ was able to associate them closer to Himself and to spark in the Apostles a feeling of spiritual dignity and their responsibility. In fact the ministries of charity and the apostolate are invaluable aspects of the formation of those called by God to the Priesthood.

When a person, after the right preparation, comes close to the physical and spiritual misery of the populace, he feels the call to be more holy and to act; he abandons the puerile ideas that he had in childhood, and for the same very real trials and difficulties of the apostolate, there awakens in him the need to conquer himself and to pray. Keeping young people isolated, always considering them not yet ready or not to give them, with the appropriate cautions of prudence and care, the initiative to do good things, means to keep them always children and to implant in them frequently a kind of childish mindset concerned with games and pranks, spite, idleness, the seeking of personal comfort, pettiness, and gossip that it is so prevalent in the lives of the young.

Taking on good initiatives, the soul feels more adult and when difficulties arise, it ceases its childish approach to life. The very contact with kinder souls which thirst for the divine Word, are anxious to do good and are humble in their faults or weaknesses, helps a youth to awaken in his heart the desire to acquire virtue and to fear the possibility of causing scandal. It is also necessary that young people be trained in the apostolate from their earliest years, because in this way they submit easily to the directions of those who are more expert and are ready to accept with more humility their advice or admonishments.

A simple life, without excessive comforts.

Jesus wanted the Apostles to start under His divine eyes the apostolate, which they later on would continue after His passion, death, resurrection and ascension into Heaven. He gave them sound advice to facilitate their success and ability to produce good results.

He began by eliminating from their life all that could complicate it: , *"Take*

nothing for the journey, neither walking stick, nor sack, nor food, nor money, and let no one take a second tunic. Jesus did not want to prohibit them from taking precise things, so to speak, with the literal strictness that the Pharisees put in their interpretations, but He only meant for them to avoid all that was unnecessary and that could complicate their life or give them a certain affectation of human prestige. This is very clear, in fact in St. Mark (Mk 6:8) who notes that Jesus permitted them the use of a staff, if they felt they needed it during their travels, but it would have to be an ordinary staff, not a staff of honor which could give an aura of importance.

Jesus Christ spoke in broad terms and themes and the Evangelists, in writing down His words, gave them the same broad, overarching meaning that they had received when they heard them; they did not concern themselves with insignificant, trivial details that would not change the sublime thought of Jesus. He said to *not take a staff*, as a sign of majesty or to use one to suggest one was like a teacher or a Prophet, as St. Luke says, but He also said that they could bring a cane to lean on, as St. Mark said.

If a Protestant would like seize upon this verse, taking the occasion to use the words of Jesus to complain against Catholic Bishops, he would show that he does not understand that the crosier (pastoral staff) is part of the sacred vestments; it signifies the participation of the Bishops in the power that the Pope has to minister to the flock. This is further demonstrated in the fact the Pope as the only Supreme Pontiff does not use the pastoral staff, because he has the full mandate to minister to the flock.

Jesus Christ wanted his Apostles to be free, without temporal worries and without useless accouterments of human prestige, because they had only to trust in God; they had to wait for His providence for their necessities. It would be pharisaical to say that it would go against the word of Jesus if someone carries some minimal, rudimentary supplies during an apostolic trip; by the same token it would be wrong to carry many suitcases or trunks and other numerous comforts, because the true apostolate is always founded on trust in God, in poverty and in simplicity.

Poverty, simplicity and trust in God.

We all agree that travelling with all the comforts we are used to having, is always more agreeable, but it is very necessary to get used to more simple ways; it is necessary to educate young priests and seminarians (and all who are called to an apostolate) to get them ready for everything and for all the disparate conditions one experiences in life. This means to eat everything, to get used to different surroundings readily and joyfully, to prefer discomforts instead of what we like in the spirit of penance, to always give to others what is better and to accept everything from the hand of God, to get used to not caring about money but to rely on Divine Providence, to not create useless health-related regimens without the strict need for them, and not to obsess in changing shirts or clothes, only for the sake of having a feeling of well being. To rid oneself of the inconvenience of useless habits, fashions and whims: this is what forms an apostolic soul, and this is what Jesus was saying when He made recommendations to the Apostles about their way of life.

If someone who is in charge of a Seminary or is a spiritual director of souls, especially if destined to the Holy Priesthood or to Religious life, realizes that a person in his charge has an inclination or a habit that is opposed to this free, holy life, he must

correct this in that person nicely but firmly, directing this soul to the way of penance and to mortification for the love of God, which is the easiest way to obtain victory, with the help of the Lord. Certain things that are not good for certain people, and it is also necessary to have charity when correcting these tendencies, proceeding methodically; however someone who has the misfortune to be a slave of habits that complicate his life must feel the desire to be freed of them and accept things contrary not to one's health but to one's taste, in a spirit of penance.

The search for luxury in life is a great source of unhappiness, and the penance done to overcome the desire for material comfort, later brings the greatest and incomparable pleasure of having full freedom of the spirit, and reducing at the same time considerably the actual material discomforts of the earthly pilgrimage. The insufficient, the ill-made, the uncomfortable, are all found everywhere and he who gets used to them, for the love of God, is happy wherever he finds himself; but those who are used to the good things in life, to the whims and vagaries of fashion and luxurious living, becomes a cross to himself and to others.

We insist on this fundamental point, because Jesus himself made it an essential basis for the mission of the Apostles. It is a grace to have the opportunity to deny ourselves and to do penance for the love of God, because this is the seasoning and the fruitful essence of all zealous works of the soul. To have the opportunity to deny oneself means to abandon something of ourselves and to make great strides in the way of divine love. It is necessary to reduce to a minimum the needs of our daily lives, to minimize our encumbrances according to our nature, to minimize resistance, and so to be able to fly up high and take others with us. Just as is done with an airplane, that being heavier than air must be built in a way that its frame is light, its shape slender, and it flies with the least possible air resistance.

Jesus after instructing the Apostles on what they would have to do in their lives as pilgrims also told them how they would have to behave with the people they were going to meet. First of all, they were not to waste any time on unnecessary conveniences or visits; on the contrary, having chosen an honest house they would simply stay there. To move from one house to another could be offensive to those who would put them up. It would be seen as either a sign of fickleness of the spirit or a desire to seek better accommodations.

His Apostles were to be satisfied with whatever came their way; this had to be the fundamental point in what was essential to their lives, and they had only to concern themselves with working for the glory of God and for the salvation of souls, preaching the word of God. Only if people they encountered would not receive them were they to show their disapproval, but this they would do *as testimony to them* and not out of spite or hatred; it would be the last effort to conquer their hearts, acting openly and publicly, as for example, by shaking off the dust from their feet, to indicate that they were rejecting all interaction with them, and all responsibility, and to make clear to them how awful and dangerous it was to be against the word of God, calling down His punishment on themselves.

Since the Apostles in this first mission did a great number of healings, popular support certainly grew in the area in which they traveled, and thus it came to Herod's attention. The tetrarch was not so much concerned about the Apostles, but about this Jesus that they were announcing. This fact makes it clear to us just how great the faith and

enthusiasm of the Apostles was when they spoke of the divine Master. They attributed all the miracles they worked to Jesus, and therefore entire towns echoed His name, among great benedictions.

Herod, because of his own evil cunning and for fear of losing his kingdom, monitored everyone, as is common in authoritarian and tyrannical regimes; he made many inquiries to many different people and in different ways to find out who this Jesus was. The answers were very varied, some answered saying that he was a resurrected John the Baptist, which Herod thought absurd because he was sure he had had him beheaded. For him, an unbelieving evildoer, impure and materialistic as he was, it was inconceivable that a beheaded man could return to life. Therefore he was even more worried and was seeking to see Jesus, but he wanted to do it without showing it to be of any importance. This is the reason for which he was overjoyed when Pilate on the day of the Passion sent Him to him. Finally, he would see Him, because it was the moment of the power of darkness and he was all darkness full of crimes and iniquities, but he was not able to hear any word from Him because he was incapable of doing so.

The Lord does not let himself be found by those who seek to see him out of curiosity or with evil dispositions, nor does He go to people who are not open to receive His word. In order to seek Jesus and to find Him, it is necessary to be repentant, penitent and pure and to run to Him to receive life from Him. How many hearts gone astray, like Herod's, who hear about Jesus in various ways, want to take Him into account but only out of an historical curiosity and draw their knowledge from falsified and biased sources, and become even more confused!

The Apostles, coming back from their mission, reported to Jesus *all* they had done. It is a psychological need of those who return from a trip to relate in great detail everything that happened to their loved ones. When one goes far away (such as on a trip), his soul becomes as if compressed in his affection, by being deprived of seeing his loved ones, he comes to appreciate them all the more, and he feels the need to open up to them as soon as he sees them again, and to tell them *all* that happened.

The Apostles loved Jesus immensely; and if it seemed that they were coarse and superficial when dealing with Him on a daily basis, when they were far away from Him their affection revived, because they had time to realize more fully what Jesus meant for them, and what it was like to be without Jesus. Moreover, during the mission they had just accomplished, they had the opportunity to see the many miracles that they worked in His Name, which revived their faith and therefore also their love for Him, and so they openly told Him *everything*.

**Tell everything to Jesus,
visiting Him in the Sacrament.**

O how beautiful it is to tell everything to Jesus, reporting to Him all things that are deep in our hearts when visiting Him, entrusting our soul to Him at the end of the day! Is not our daily labor a mission given to us from God? And do not those who labor especially for His glory come back, so to speak, to Jesus every night from a segment of their apostolate? It is so nice, after the long day, to come to the Sacramental Jesus and tell Him everything, entrusting ourselves to Him! Jesus listened to the Apostles with great

affection, and because He saw them tired and *because people were coming and going in great numbers*, without giving them even the opportunity to eat, as it is written in St. Mark (Mk 6:31), He took them with Him, as a most loving father, and withdrew with them to a deserted place in the territory of Bethsaida that they might be refreshed physically and be with Him in prayer.

3. The first multiplication of loaves.

When the people saw that Jesus was leaving, they looked in which direction He was going, as St Mark says (Mk 6:33), and they saw the boat heading toward the deserted region of Bethsaida. His word and His divine countenance were so fascinating and the miracles he was doing were so great that the people did not want to be separated from Him. According to St. Mark (Mk 6:33) they ran, arriving before Him in the place where they supposed He would be landing. They lived days of enthusiasm and sincere faith, because the hostile propaganda of the Scribes and Pharisees had not yet poisoned them.

It seems we can almost see this devoted crowd, inflamed by the speeches of Jesus, running with great joy, racing each other, crossing the hilly mountain road, and finding themselves once again with Jesus. They were oblivious to everything else, they were attracted by the Lord and had run along a long road, without thinking that they were getting further and further away from the town centers from where they had come. Even the sick strove to make the long journey, in the hope of being healed.

When Jesus saw that huge multitude of people, which numbered five thousand counting only the men, He was moved, welcoming them with infinite tenderness, and He spoke to them of the kingdom of God, and healed all who needed to be cured.

As can be noted from this context, while Jesus was talking to the multitudes and healing the sick, the Apostles took this opportunity to refresh themselves. They in fact retired from the people, and going to a deserted place to pray, had brought with them enough food for themselves. To only have five loaves of bread and two fish, when Jesus told them to provide for the people, makes us think that they had already eaten. It is possible that when they were eating, they noticed that dusk was approaching and it was necessary for the crowd to leave to find food and lodging in nearby towns.

One naturally tends to take notice, in fact, of the needs of others when they correspond to what one would want for himself, and to feel sorry for others that suffer what one has suffered himself. The Apostles, tired by the journey and in need of food, sitting down with enough to eat, clearly had a better appreciation for what it means to be tired and hungry, thus they went near Jesus and urged Him to send the people away, that they might provide for themselves, because the day was coming to an end and they were in a deserted place.

Jesus answered their insistence by saying that they should give the people food to eat. As they only had five loaves and a couple of fish, they thought His command was a joke. The Redeemer, instead, was not being hypothetical: He truly wanted them to provide for the needs of the crowd with an act of faith in Him.

Did they not already do miracles in His Name?

Had they not experienced already how fruitful had been their trust in Him in their accomplished mission?

He would have liked that they would have done the miracle in His Name, since he wanted to increase their stature among the people for the good of the apostolate. But they were not yet at that level, and Jesus, sympathizing, wanted that at least they would renew their faith in Him and told them to have everyone sit down on the grass in groups of about fifty. It was for this reason that they could approximately count how many men were present, because in arranging one hundred groups of fifty people, the Apostles noticed that the majority were men, even though among them were also many women and children. Jesus wanted them to witness the grandiosity of his miracle, to heal the weak faith they had in Him, since they either wanted to send away the people or they did not believe they could feed them in His Name.

When the people had all sat down, the Savior asked that the five loaves and the two fish be brought to Him; He raised up his eyes to Heaven to show all that He was praying, and then He blessed the bread and the fish. Afterward He began to break the bread and the fish, putting them in the baskets they had with them or someone had provided for them. This is evident from the context, because it would have taken too long to distribute the bread and fish piece by piece, and also because the Sacred Text clearly states that the leftovers were put in twelve baskets.

Jesus broke the bread, and the bread regenerated, and from each loaf He drew more than a thousand servings, and from each fish more than two thousand five hundred servings.

The bread distributed was fresh and delicious, because when Jesus changed the water into wine at Cana of Galilee the resulting wine was of exquisite quality.

His infinitely generous nature meant that he gave excellent food, like God did in giving the Jewish people manna in the desert, when they emigrated from Egypt. Maybe it was Jesus himself who took a large piece of bread and put the portion of fish on top of it. In His omnipotent Hands the bread and the fish were almost like living seeds and they grew instantly. Each particle obeying the will of its Creator begot another one, almost, so to speak, as cells in nature generate new ones through cell division, and at an even faster rate than that of the giant Equatorial mushroom growing enormously in one night.

Given the huge amount of leftover bread, it can be said that Jesus made equal portions for every one; the women and the children and whoever had less appetite, ate less and so left aside some of it. Maybe He tore each loaf in half to make it easier and then did the same with the fish, giving half of each with the other half regenerating in His hands. The final halves He gave as they were.

If this is correct, it follows those ten portions of bread and four portions of fish came from the leftovers of the Apostles, and so were natural, all the others were miraculous. God, even though He is most generous, does not do unnecessary things, and Jesus certainly made use of the bread and fish He had at his disposal.

The miracle was grandiose, but it was done with such quickness and in such a natural way that the people and the Apostles themselves right then and there did not realize what was happening. The miraculous food, moreover, had in itself the great benediction of Jesus, producing spiritual fruits in some of the souls which were best disposed to receive them.

Certainly in that moment in that place there was a great peace that had come over everyone, and so Satan, keeping his distance, could in no way touch those souls.

When Jesus spent time alone in the desert, Satan thought that He would have lazily

changed the stones into bread; in this other desert he would have liked to have changed that bread into stones, because his jealousy rages when God is charitable toward us: the omnipotence of Jesus, however, confused him and most likely he chose to sink back down deep into hell.

Jesus Christ did not want to work this miracle without the cooperation of the Apostles, so instead of having bread come down from Heaven, He multiplied what was there. We could almost say that He gives to us a multiple of our cooperation to his grace, which can be expressed as a ratio: one to one thousand or better one to two thousand five hundred in this case. To expect that He acts in us without a minimum of our cooperation is an illusion.**

Jesus multiplied the loaves of bread and the fish as food for the body, but it can be said that before this he had multiplied also the spiritual food, by having himself heard by this huge number of people. Naturally, His voice would have been difficult to hear in that desert, to say nothing of the hum of the large crowd, the noise caused by children and others that would tend to mute it as well; instead, it is evident that everyone heard Him, otherwise they would not have followed Him with such persistence. These people went to listen to the divine Word, putting aside their needs, and Jesus took care of them, showing concretely with his actions that those who seek the kingdom of God and his justice are given, in addition, temporal things by Divine Providence.

The living “Bread from Heaven”.

Jesus Christ, multiplying bread and fish, symbolized a more beautiful multiplication, that of the Eucharistic Bread, his Body and his Blood as our food in the desert of our lives.

During the last supper He worked a miracle like the one in the desert: He raised his eyes to Heaven, broke the bread, gave it to his Apostles, multiplying in them his sacramental presence, and gave them the power to give that Bread of life to endless multitudes in all parts of the world for all time. Every day we witness this miracle in the Holy Mass: Jesus speaks to us from the altar in the desert of our lives through the great voice of the liturgy; after speaking to us He asks us to sit at his table, and He feeds us of Himself.

There should never be leftovers of this food of life, and the ciboria should always become empty. Certainly, if the people had really understood fully the miracle they received, would they have left over twelve baskets of leftovers? Everyone would have treated the bread as a most precious thing and taken the excess miraculous bread with themselves to eat more of it later.

The ciborium remains full when souls are empty, and when the immense grace of the Eucharistic Gift is not understood. O dear Jesus, do not let us be ungrateful; give us a great hunger for the Bread of life!

4. You are the Christ of God: The solemn confession of St. Peter.

After the multiplication of the bread and fish, both St. Matthew and St. Mark say

** A beautiful consideration on how the Lord operates.

that Jesus went to a mountain to pray and told his Apostles to go by boat to the opposite shore of the lake. While on their way they were surprised by a storm, and Jesus reached them walking on the water. St. Matthew tells of the particular incident in which St. Peter, at the command of the Teacher also walked on the water (Mt 14:22 and following; Mk 46 and following). They arrived to Genesaret, where Jesus did many miracles and from there they went in the vicinity of Tyre and Sidon, where there took place the meeting with the Canaanite woman (Mt 15:22 and following; Mk 7:25 and following).

When Jesus came back to Galilee, where He healed many sick people and, in particular, a deaf-mute (Mk 7:32 and following), the crowds again surrounded Him and Jesus fed them again with a second multiplication, starting with seven loaves of bread and a few fish (Mt 15:22 and following; Mk 2:25 and following). This time there also remained an overabundance of it, notwithstanding the more than four thousand people assembled. After this multiplication of food there occurred a dispute with the Pharisees and the Sadducees (Mk 8:11-13). Going again to Bethsaida Jesus healed a blind man (Mk 8:22-26), and then He went with His Apostles to the vicinity of Caesarea Philippi where He asked them what people were saying about Him.

St. Luke does not record all of these events and from the first multiplication of the loaves he goes on immediately to speak of the question that Jesus put to his Apostles regarding the rumors about Him. To many, this gap in St. Luke seems inexplicable, and they assume that some pages of his manuscript were lost; but it is evident that the Evangelist, having been told these facts by others, felt that he did not have enough clear information on these events or that his information was fragmentary, and so he thought to not include them in his book. Besides the Evangelists do not tell everything of the life of Jesus, and thus it is not surprising to find this gap in St. Luke. It can also be that Jesus asked his Apostles more than once what people were saying about Him, and after the first multiplication of the loaves, alone with them in prayer on the mountain, where he had gone for this specific purpose, he put this question to them to reinforce in them the faith of who He really was.

To us, this second possibility seems the most likely, and also from a psychological point of view: Jesus, in fact, gathered the Apostles after they accomplished their mission to give them the possibility to eat and rest and especially to give to them, in their gathering for prayer, a stronger feeling of humility and to nullify any temptation they might have to boast of what they had done. With the crowd surrounding them on the mountain, He could not take care of the Apostles; but after the grandiose miracle and after sending the crowd away, He called the Apostles to prayer, and then He asked them what the people were saying about Him.

It is evident from the context, and also from the other Evangelists, that the Apostles had understood little or nothing of the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves, and Jesus wanted to draw their attention to who He was. They, in fact, had not yet fully abandoned themselves to Him or had full faith in Him. They worried excessively about temporal things, they thought of their own exaltation and argued with each other over who was the greatest because they did not reflect on the fact that He was the Son of God.

Why Jesus prohibits the Apostles to reveal his divine identity.

The Apostles answered Jesus' question by relating the various opinions of the people: someone said that He was John the Baptist, others said He was Elijah, others said that He was a prophet of old who had come back to earth. Then Jesus asked: Who do you say that I am?"

Simon Peter immediately answered for all of them: You are *the Christ of God*. His faith was complete; in the exuberance of his love he spoke in the name of the others, anticipating, without thinking but by divine disposition, the days of his leadership in which he would enlighten the whole Church with his infallible faith.

It was the truth, but Jesus firmly commanded his Apostles not to say this to anyone, adding that His Passion and death were necessary, and then the resurrection.

At first glance, it would seem that Jesus wanted purposely to remain unknown by his enemies, to ensure the occurrence of his Passion and death, and it would seem that they would not be at fault if they did not recognize him, since He did not want to be known for whom He was. Jesus Christ, instead, was well aware of the bad disposition of his enemies, and He also knew that an explicit and premature confession of his Divinity, proclaimed by the Apostles, would have incited his enemies far more greatly against them and against Him, making his enemies more guilty. He had to suffer and to be rejected; this was a necessity of his design of love to use the perversity of his enemies, but He did not give them the pretext to do so; in his mercy He waited for them to be moved to repentance by the evidence of the events that he was accomplishing and wanted to accomplish.

How great and admirable is the patience of God with sinners in making it possible for them to understand: He knows what they will do and does not deprive them of all help to do good; He knows that they will abuse it and so He gives them a way to minimize the responsibility of their consciences. He hides himself, not to prevent their coming to their senses, but to make them less guilty.

Moreover, He knows that his chosen people shall each receive a treasure of glories at the hands of the evildoers and, in order to enrich them with eternal rewards, He does not want to appear unjust and so allows evildoers to continue in their ways. His Divine method however shall soon be revealed; the passing centuries of the world are less than seconds for Him and thus His great charity, justice and mercy will soon become evident.

Let us not grumble at God

We are too little to be able to appreciate the marvelous order of the physical and spiritual world, and we are extremely foolish to doubt and to complain against God. We consider Him responsible for what we think is unjust in the world because we are not able to accept our own responsibilities; for this reason we become miserably lost in the mazes of our lives and have a very poor faith.

For instance, if a hard rain falls with hail during a spring day damaging the whole countryside that is teeming with delicate flowers, we do not immediately think this unfortunate circumstance to be the fruit of our spiritual misery; we blame it on God, about whom we are always ready to grumble and thereby play Satan's game, who lays traps for us to demolish our weak faith.

How very painful and strange it is that we never blame Satan! Yet, if we think about it, it is precisely he who is the cause of such calamities, when we give him the freedom to act with our sins. Satan hates us, he hates all that is the splendor of life, because he is death.

Countryside in bloom, in the wondrous harmony of its colors and its fragrances, as a peaceful paean to the Creator and as a promise of abundance for men, irritates Satan. He lies in wait and when our sins make us worthy of punishment, and the prayers of good souls are not enough to counterbalance the sins, he comes out from his lair, uses his terrible strength, conjures storms over the flowers, lays waste to the countryside, and then he unleashes his sinister agents towards men that they may curse God.

This is something we should ponder, in order not to be always such foolish critics of Providence; instead of grumbling and complaining we should be sorry for our sins and we should make reparations. O if we would get used to being always in adoration before God, and repeat with our eyes closed: *Omnia in sapientia fecisti!* (*You did everything with wisdom!*)

O if we would ponder just how far we are from God! The Angels are so close to Him; and yet, if we would consider only their limited nature and not the love that unites them to God, they would appear to us immensely more distant from Him than we are from the stars in the sky. And if the Angels are but little flames before Him, what are we? How far we are from Him! How can we dare complain about Him?

We must oppose the complaining voices of men about God with the loving voice of our faith to and repeat with St. Peter to Jesus, our Redeemer and King “*You are the Christ of God*”.

We are among thousands of voices that rise to God from earth, and they are not voices of wisdom and love, but of foolishness and hate.

There are those who say He is a dead man resurrected by our tales; or He is a personification of the ego, coming alive from of our misery; others say that He is a terrifying blind force, coming from the irrational forces of nature; others, that He is the resurrection of old ghosts and fantasies, just as what was said about Him, that He was John the Baptist resurrected, or the impetuous Elijah, or some other prophet arisen, like shadows straying from their tombs.

**To us God asks: and you,
who do you say that I am?**

Today there are even those who believe that Jesus is a harmful evildoer (He is terrible! He is terrible!) and fight against Him more than against an enemy; and God, with the impetuosity of His love, asks of our faith, *who do you say that I am?* How do we answer Him? Would we still dare to grumble against Him, or to remain undecided on His infinite reality, on His wisdom and love? Do we still dare to judge Him influenced by the suggestions of Satan or of our wretched pride?

Let us answer with the force of our love:

You in essence are Truth, Wisdom and Love. You are the Eternal One, the Infinite One, the Omnipotent Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

You are Power, Providence and Charity, and everything You do is with power, tenderness and love, O Most Holy Trinity!

What does my intellect say? “I believe!”

What does my will say? I obey You!

What does my heart say? I love You!

What do I say to You in the darkness of my life? I adore You!

What do I say in my suffering? I thank and I love you!

What do I say in my deep fears and sorrows? I trust in You.

What do I say when You call me to do Your will? *Ecce Ancilla Domini fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum. (Here is the handmaid of the Lord may it be done to me according to your word.)*

What do I say when my life becomes more troubled? I am a sinner, I deserve a thousand times more tribulation; I offer everything as reparation for my sins!

What will I say when I am dying and everything shall leave me? *Ecce venio ad Te quem amavi, quem quaesivi, quem semper optavi! (Here I am Lord, the one whom I have loved, whom I have sought, whom I have always desired!)*

I want my whole life to be an act of faith, hope and love, even at the cost of dying for it; I want Your glory to mean so much to me that I shall defend it against everything and everyone.

Never have my lips uttered a word of complaint against You, and with your help I will never do so, even if these lips of mine would rot, o my God! And if Satan tempts me, his temptations shall never conquer my spirit, but I shall suppress them with my faith and love, that their stench will not infect others.

I want written on my forehead: “God is my glory”; written on my mind, “God is my light”; and written on my heart, “God is my love!”

I want to mock whatever does not come from Him, for Him, and with Him; I want to hate it, even if it seems to be very appealing and good, because only You, o my God, are the source of beauty, truth and goodness!

A book that would have even a hint of being against the glory of God would be for me filthier than a tomb and more disgusting than limbs eaten away by leprosy.

An object tainted and disgraceful because it is against His will and contrary to His Law is for me a greater abomination than a demon.

Knowledge that does not bring me to know God better and love Him more, is darker than a deep abyss!

My God, my God, what can I say of You, I, who am such a tiny creature of Yours? I shall make of my intellect a drum of light to cheer Your eternal truth; I shall make of my heart a cymbal of love, to sing my love to You; I shall make of my body a harp with ten strings, attuned to Your commands, to sing to You all of my faithfulness!

What can I say of You, I that am created by Your omnipotence, cleansed by Your mercy, vivified by Your love? I shall say that I am Yours, that I sing Your mercy forever and run to You like a deer runs to rushing water!

O please do not tell me that I am dwelling too long on one word of the Gospel, because the protests that are made against love by the foolish voices that roam the world against God are never deemed excessive!

Ponder what men of God say about Him, and see if there does not spring out—and actually will spring out from our hearts, as if struck by a rock in the desert—a river of love, a devastating, forcefully flowing river that attempts to drag all the ugliness of human ingratitude into the abyss.

O how could it be considered excessive to give witness to that which is infinite?

Can ever a heart that moans be stopped or is it possible to curb the passion of a wounded love? I moan, my God, because of the most vile human worms that interfere with Your glory, and my love is wounded by the injuries You receive from them! Why do You not give me wings that I may become a flying beacon, why do not I become a flame, why I do not soar to where Your Name is disowned and why can I not consume with my love all that opposes your Love?

**Ask me again, my God,
And you, who do you say that I am?**

Ask me again, my God, “Who do you say that I am?” Ask me again, because I cannot get tired to repeat the answer: You are charity!

What do I say about You? My entire being shall answer, as victim of love for You, through the suffering endured by my miserable body as evidence of love for You: You alone are worthy of all love, only You!

What do I say about You? My sister, death, shall answer for me: extinguishing my mortal flame, in the midst of my anguish and agony: You are life!

What do I say about You? The putrefaction that dissolves my body in the tomb shall answer for me: everything grows old like an old cloth, but You are the Everlasting one!

What do I say about You? The harmony of eternal glory, where I hope one day my soul shall be and praise you in eternity shall answer for me: Holy, Holy, Holy are You, God of glory, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Power, Wisdom and Love... O Most Holy Trinity!...

5. The way that leads to God: Christian self-denial.

Announcing to them very clearly His Passion and death, Jesus presented a new understanding to the Apostles. They too had dreamed of a glorious and triumphant Messiah, who would have restored the kingdom of Israel, and this hope did not even end after Jesus’ resurrection. The Apostles had hoped that He would subdue in a sensational way the hostility of the Rabbis, the Scribes and the Pharisees; now to hear from Him that *it was necessary*, that is, that it was inevitable, for Him to suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and from the scribes, their minds must have become greatly disturbed, especially because they did not understand entirely the meaning of His words. Their dreams of greatness were failing, and they felt they were looking ahead to a dark future. It is true that Jesus had said that after being killed He would resurrect on the third day, but to them what could the promise of a miracle, that to the average mind seemed inconceivable, signify given the terrible prospect of persecution and death?

Jesus saw that they appeared disoriented and also He saw the deep disbelief they had in his words; they absolutely did not want admit this possibility and for this reason they could not understand it, as can be seen also in the other Gospels in their description of this point. The bewilderment they were experiencing, and the vivid hope they had in a glamorous triumph, was also influencing the multitude of people with whom the Apostles

had been in contact. Thus Jesus exclaimed to them and to everyone: *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.*

To take up the cross, also in the common language of the Jewish people, meant to suffer; thus there was no possibility of the illusion of immediate triumphs and the material advantages deriving from them; whoever wanted to follow Him had to first deny himself, accept the inevitable pain of his own sorrowful life and the inevitable hurts and contrasts with evil. *To deny himself*, means to deny one's own ideas, aspirations, views and one's own will; however, to deny oneself is not useless nihilism, but embracing the thought and the will of God, which means to deny oneself in order to elevate oneself, to change into a new creature, and to no longer live naturally but supernaturally.

Jesus says: Who wants to save his life, will lose it.

Jesus Christ therefore added: *Who wants to save his life, will lose it.* This means that those who pretend to serve Him, keeping their natural way of living, selfish, centralized, hungry for honors and material advantages, will not achieve that which is true life; but instead, those who deny their own way of thinking for the sake of Him, and deny their aspirations thus dying to self, will save the real life of their own souls, reaching perfection and eternal salvation.

How worthwhile, in fact, are the things of the world and its material advantages compared to eternity? They only detract from the true life, because they do not constitute merits but rather demerits: it is impossible to live a worldly life without staining the soul, and it is impossible to allow passions to enflame us and not to plunge into the deepest abyss. Before the reality of eternal life, how could it be possible to hesitate, even if following Jesus would cost us our lives; for this reason, the words of the Savior also apply to the extreme witness of loyalty and love, that is to martyrdom, which is the extreme sacrifice of self. It is well worth it, then, to deny one's thoughts, will, comforts, vanity and even to immolate oneself when necessary, and to give witness to the truth to save oneself.

All this by nature is hard. It means making a complete denial of self even before the world that does not understand such a choice and scoffs at it; it means the renunciation of self, riches, honor, and even that minimum of respect that can be received from others. When going against the common current, in fact, it is easily possible to be exposed to ridicule, and be tempted to hide our own profession of Christian faith. However, all this is incompatible with the interests of our own salvation and the glory of God. Thus, Jesus declared solemnly that He, before the whole universe, when He will come to judge the world in His glory, He will be ashamed of those who were ashamed of Him and of His words.

Against human respect.

With this solemn affirmation, Jesus started the fight against human respect, a fight that is still going on, and forever shall be going on within the Church. It seems impossible that there are souls who pay more attention to a miserable joke of a vile person than to the judgment of God, and yet there are many; for much of our sorrow, the scourge of human

respect is much more common and extensive than we believe. The basis of this is the lack of a true and deep faith, the preoccupation with acquiring miserable material possessions on earth and the lack of a true love and appreciation of God; it is for this reason Jesus added that among those present there were some who would not die without seeing the Kingdom of God. He thus promised that some of His disciples would see His glory, and they would be able to judge if it was right or not to neglect such a glorious King, to be ashamed of Him, to deny Him in favor of the miserable creatures of the earth.

The understanding of these words becomes clear from what Jesus did *about eight days later*, or to be more precise six days later, according to the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Mark, when Jesus transfigured Himself in the presence of Peter, James and John. These Apostles observed Him in the magnificence of His glory, in the company of Moses and Elijah, as we shall soon see, and so they were able to leave to mankind a real measure of comparison, comparing the darkness of the world and the mysterious and divine light of the Redeemer.

Who would dare to deny Jesus and be ashamed of Him and His words, as they were so well received by Moses and Elijah who were in deep adoration, and proclaimed by the Father to be Words of life?

We really have all the reasons to be ashamed of the world and its false doctrines which are unsurpassed in their baseness in the eyes of God, and nothing shall appear more abominable to us than these on the Day of Judgment in the splendor of the eternal kingdom.

We also believe that somehow in some part of our inner self we shall contemplate the Kingdom of God before dying. It can happen to souls taken by an interior fervor who receive an illumination that anticipates in a certain way a vision of the eternal Kingdom, or to souls who might be attracted by sudden grace to the heights of the spirit and can focus on God in truthfulness and purity. In these moments of inner transfiguration we must be careful to keep the light the Lord gives to us, and acquire new vigor in walking the path of self-denial and of the cross.

We can think of a moment of light like “a vacation of the spirit”, that in this way, takes new power in its ascent and surpasses with full interior freedom all the degrading worthlessness of human-based respect. In this illumination of grace everything appears easy to us: we are not afraid of the battles with the world, crosses seem sweet, and our total self-denial appears as it is, the complete freedom of the spirit; the soul understands that it is good to be with the Lord and to be at His service.

6. The transfiguration of Jesus Christ

The fights against Jesus were increasing daily because the priests, the Scribes and the Pharisees who did not recognize in Him a divine mission and found that His teaching of others and His making of proselytes was unbearable. These fights, hidden in the beginning, were becoming more and more open and brazen, shaking also the already fairly weak faith of the Apostles. It was necessary then, for the very glory of God, to show at least a ray of that divine majesty that entirely enveloped the Lord and that one day will shine in his most holy Humanity before all peoples of the world.

With the divine restraint that distinguishes all that comes from God, Jesus believed it to be enough to show himself before only three witnesses of the earth and two of Heaven: Peter, James and John to represent mankind, and Moses and Elijah representing those who had longed for Redemption in the Old Covenant. For in the Law it was written that in the mouths of two or three witnesses was the truth.

If Jesus had revealed himself in this way before all the Apostles it would have resulted in a movement of enthusiasm that He wanted to avoid, and his enemies would have taken this as a reason to intensify the fight. Moreover, if the three witnesses came away with only a little understanding of the grandiose revelation, the crowd would have understood even less, and in the enthusiasm of the moment the high purpose for which Jesus was revealing Himself would have been in vain.

St. Peter wanted to remain on the mountain and make three tents, to which the Apostles and the disciples would have gone, but this would have caused a movement capable of hindering the whole plan of God. Jesus, besides, worked for the Church, especially for the Church, and He wanted to leave in the Church a witness of His divine glory; in order that in future centuries it would be better understood that as He was true man, He was at the same time true God. For that time it was enough to have three witnesses to be able to ponder on the great revelation, to understand the meaning of it, and to transmit the testimony of it to the Church.

Jesus, therefore, took Peter, James and John with him and went to the mountain to pray. Since He almost always prayed during the night it is possible to believe that it was already evening when He went up the mountain with his Apostles. This also appears true since the Apostles were very tired and sleepy: after a day of hectic activity, in the quiet solitude of the mountain with its comfortable temperature and humidity, it is clear that they could easily fall asleep. However, since they had gone there with Jesus to pray, they were trying to stay awake, and this can be derived from the Greek Text, that notes *they were awake despite being sleepy* and were able to see the great scene that took place on the mountain.

Jesus prayed, and his transfiguration makes us understand what had to be his prayer.

Literally illuminated by His infinite love for His Father, entirely enraptured in His glory, His face shown with divine light, and this very intense light made all His clothes entirely white. It was the most sublime of all ecstasies; it was the Word that gave glory to his Father and enjoyed His Father's infinite love taking his assumed humanity in the splendor of His glory and the fragrance of His love; it was the Word erupting, so to speak, from His assumed humanity, rendering it almost diaphanous with light going through His body, and illuminating it.

This sight was sublime, immense, of unsurpassed glory and majesty; in Jesus now, the true God was seen, just as when God is in His normally hidden state, Jesus' true humanity was visible. The Word glorified the Father knowing Him and appreciating Him, and his assumed humanity shone in Him and through Him like a sacrificial flame. It was an anticipated reparation for the forthcoming slaughter of his divine Body and it was a manifestation of how Redemption would restore man, incorporating him in Christ and making him shine with His light.

In that mysterious splendor Jesus prayed and His prayer reached above the meager atmosphere of the earth and continued to rise into the immensity of the firmament and

beyond; those rays could not be dispersed by the vast darkness, but rather they went beyond; they shone more brightly than the brightest stars and they made the Body of Jesus as appear in the heavens as the most brilliantly shining star. If there had been inhabitants near distant stars they would have seen far away in the distance a new splendor greater than any other they had ever seen before, because the splendor of the Godhead in that moment penetrated the entire universe, as the Deity had deigned to come to earth to restore everything.

Jesus prayed and the splendor of His Soul and Body was proportionate to the humiliation that he would have to suffer during the Passion. It was in fact consistent with the divine glory that the Man-God would be slain, but it was also a requirement of the same glory that He would be recognized for who He was. He wanted to be overcome by love, but in no way appear as if He was accidentally overcome by the storm of godlessness and impiety, and for this reason Moses and Elijah came to give witness to the plan of God, thus announced by the Law and the Prophets, and they conversed with Him.

This economy of justice and order that is God's is so admirable; an event that could have maligned the Incarnate Word as an outcast, a cursed one, a worm on the wood of the Cross, was on the contrary, allowed by God as part of His plan, something confirmed by the presence of Moses and Elijah; it made clear that what men would do to Him, had already been stated previously as part of a plan of love, and that God had allowed it, He himself, for His infinite love and mercy. This solemn affirmation was therefore a requirement for the divine glory.

Jesus prayed *talking with Moses and Elijah of His departure*; it was a sublime canticle raised to God, One and Triune as a grandiose Psalm, unwinding in a most brilliant parallelism, because while Moses and Elijah exalted God for His promises, Jesus in exaltation, accepted in Himself the fulfillment of those promises and showed through His life the perfect harmony of this parallelism. The two Testaments were at once side by side, the shadows of the past becoming the light of reality and the reality illuminating the truth of the symbols and the figures of the past; in this admirable canticle all the ancient histories went by like a distant harmony, with the Man-God in the foreground as a triumphant melody of love. All this was necessary for the glory of God, because so often man had disfigured the divine plan, and most of all because man did not yet understand the plan of the Cross.

This new, admirable, sublime canticle which made harmonious the shadows of the past with the new reality became, therefore, a prayer of reparation for what man would do to the Lord, without which they would have deserved a thousand times worse fate than that of Uzzah; by laying their hands on the Redeemer, the Ark of God, they would have been swallowed by the earth.

O if we would have recorded this new song of love! The holy Church has, however, echoed it sublimely, and in all her marvelous liturgy makes a comparison, in continuous praise, between the Old and New Testaments. In a grandiose Psalm, to the voices of the Law and the Prophets, responds in a perfect parallel, the voice of the new reality, in the mercies of Redemption and in the splendor of the sanctification of souls.

While Jesus was speaking of his death and was praying with Moses and Elijah, he certainly also turned His Heart toward men, because they were the objects of his merciful love. He wanted to die for them, and in dying He wanted to incorporate them in Himself, to turn them into living praises to God; He wanted to give His merits to them, to enrich

them and to have the splendor of his mercy envelop them; but they were sleeping and even the three Apostles, privileged spectators of this incredible scene were heavy with sleep struggling to stay awake, despite the fact that the immense splendor had shaken them. Evidently their souls had not understood what was happening, even though they were physically looking at the scene; they felt a peace and an interior joy that made them feel blessed, yet they did not yet understand the nature of that joy and that consolation.

Peter, more than the others, was as if beside himself and because his thoughts remained within his earthly frame of mind, he thought it was good for them to stay there and to build three tents, one for Jesus, one for Moses and one for Elijah. He spoke like someone who is between waking and sleeping; his intellect and consciousness were not clear, and *he did not know what he was saying*. He spoke as if dreaming, and Jesus did not even answer him, because those poor human words could not rise to Him. They were a concrete example of those prayers suggested by flesh and blood that do not rise above the tenuous earthly atmosphere and do not reach God.

The great light had not yet entirely awakened the Apostles, and Peter talked in a foolish way, but when they saw a cloud enveloping Jesus, Moses and Elijah, maybe for the very sudden contrast between the intense light and the shadow of the cloud, they woke up entirely, and were taken by a great fear, because in that cloud the Father appeared pointing solemnly to the Son as Teacher of mankind. A solemn voice came from it that said: *"This is my beloved Son, listen to Him.*

The voice was not an earthly voice, it was superhuman, magnificent, and powerful and inspired a reverential terror, like the voice of the Sinai.

Mount Tabor was truly the Sinai of the new covenant where His Son was revealed, just as the Upper Room was the mountain where the Holy Spirit was revealed. On Tabor the cloud also represented the Holy Spirit that unites the Father to the Son and the Son to the Father in infinite Love. The revelation in the Upper Room was singular to the Holy Spirit, as that of the Son's was on Mt. Tabor, and as that of the Father's was on Mt. Sinai.

Thus the mystery that was accomplished that night was truly magnificent, and the three Apostles had reason to fear. It was not yet, however, the moment to disclose it and so Jesus, in St. Matthew (Mt. 17:9), ordered them not to speak of it to anyone until He had risen from the dead. They thus remained silent, although they had to be extraordinarily moved.

Transfiguring ourselves in Christ Jesus!

The transfiguration of Jesus Christ is a very important teaching for us, because we must also transfigure ourselves for Him and in Him into new creatures. He already has redeemed us and his mercy has enriched us, but we must accept it and make it the life of our lives through the Sacraments and especially through the Most Holy Eucharist. The Altar is the mountain on which we must ascend prayerfully, and on which, receiving Christ, we must become transfigured.

In the Eucharist, He comes to us and transfuses his life in ours; in those precious moments we shine before God, and if we could with our senses perceive what happens to us, we would see ourselves entirely illuminated and in splendor in a world that lies in the perennial darkness of sin. Our inner powers are, and should be, witnesses and adorers of

the miracle of love that is accomplished in us. Unfortunately our powers are sleepy and hence barely, if at all, are aware of this miracle. It is necessary to awaken them that they may become alive again and become attractive supernaturally. Like Peter, our hardened hearts expect only a tabernacle of fleeting happiness and accept Jesus in the hope of earthly gains; however, as in the case of Peter, our hearts do not know what our desires truly are, because we do not think of not belonging to this world.

It is good for us to be here, St. Peter said, which is clear: however did he forget the great lesson of Jesus on self-denial and on carrying our Cross *every day*? We cannot reach eternal peace and eternal transfiguration, if we are not first transformed by trials and sorrows. In these purifying tests our spirit is enlightened and the interior covering of our soul whitens; thus the soul converses with Heaven and truly becomes an adopted child of God for Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ.

Let us consider this carefully: our mountain of transfiguration is the Calvary of our daily life, and we have to be grateful to the Lord when He makes us worthy to be brought to these holy heights which truly elevate our lives. It is good for us to be in the height of God's Will because, doing what God wants, we become objects of his delight. Thus in doing His Will our fervor, joy, aridity or pain—as He wishes—is all accepted because He alone knows what we need to be transfigured into living songs of His glory.

O my Lord, do with me always as You want, make me do only what is pleasing to You, imbibe me with your Will and make me a new creature inflamed by your love. Amen.

7. The healing of the possessed epileptic.

The Apostles who did not go with Jesus on the mount of transfiguration, were accustomed to seeing the divine Teacher going with the three favorites to pray, and so they did not ask them what they had done that night. Besides they tended to not dwell too much on what was happening around them, because they were simple people and were occupied by basic daily tasks. They waited that morning for Jesus to come down from the mountain; meanwhile, a great number of people had assembled around them, desirous to listen to Jesus and to receive the benefits He bestowed. During this time, as is made clear from the Gospel text, a poor father who had a possessed, epileptic son, knowing that the Apostles had effected healings during their mission, had asked them to free his son, but they were unsuccessful. Maybe the crowd distracted them, and since they could not pray, Satan did not abandon his prey.

The father was devastated, but he also waited for Jesus, still hoping to obtain the great favor. In reality he went to the Apostles and to Jesus not so much to obtain a miracle but to receive a healing; he did not believe in the divine power of Jesus but believed that He had some secret remedy for sicknesses; may be this was the reason why he asked his Apostles, as His closest associates, because they would have had to know the medicines that the Master used for various ailments. We understand this by the reproach that Jesus makes to his disbelief (Lk 9:41), and also by the detailed way in which the father describes the misfortune of his son. Had he faith in the divine power of Jesus, he would have immediately asked for a miracle, instead he spoke to Him as to a medical doctor.

The poor father, as a precaution, having his son near him and fearing an outburst of his sickness, stood at the back of the crowd; this is the reason why in the Sacred Text it

is written that *he shouted to Jesus from the crowd*; he shouted from a distance, also because remaining at the back, it was impossible to approach Him. He begged for pity for his only son, telling of the pain he suffered: “He was possessed by a spirit who made him cry out loudly, who would cause that he be thrown violently to the ground; overwhelmed, he would squirm, and foam at the mouth. As soon as he would begin to recover, the spirit would again torment him relentlessly.”

Jesus Christ did not reproach the father directly for the little faith he had in Him, so as not to afflict him further because he was in such great distress; and so He spoke to all the present, because His warning was useful for all, including his Apostles, and exclaimed: “*O faithless and perverse generation, how long will I be with you and endure you?*” He had done so many extraordinary miracles everywhere, and yet they still did not believe in His divine power; He had shown the truth of his mission and yet they, stubborn, still opposed it and disowned it; how could He stay in such a place that was so false and hostile and bear it?

Jesus, looking into their hearts, knew very well that the enthusiasm of the people was based on curiosity and was superficial; He knew that the few who believed had a faltering faith, overwhelmed easily at every dark moment and upset by the distortion of reason; He knew that at the least signs of trouble or violence against Him, everyone would withdraw or turn against Him, thus He had great reason for addressing them as a *faithless and perverse* generation; faithless because they did not believe and perverse because some were actually plotting against Him.

Jesus’ heart was full of sadness; nothing seemed able to change those very hard hearts, which in the long run persisted even more in their stubborn opposition; He should have abandoned them, but instead his love supported them, and awaited their repentance!

After he had reproached the crowd, Jesus, addressing the father of the young man, ordered him to bring Him his son. As he approached, Satan threw the youngster to the ground, tossing him violently; it was Satan’s last effort to impede the young man to reach Jesus, hoping in this way not to lose his prey, and at the same time to inflict his last act of revenge on the youngster. The Lord allowed it to show to everyone that the boy was not just an epileptic but above all a possessed one; thus He reproached the unclean spirit, He threw Satan out of him, healed the child entirely and gave him back to his father.

Our generation, faithless and perverse and spiritually epileptic

The reproach Jesus gave to the generation that was contemporary to Him, can be given, perhaps with even with more reason, to our *faithless and perverse* generation. Jesus Christ came down the mountain where He went to glorify his Father with his immense love and where He had spoken to Moses and Elijah *of His departure*, that is, of his Passion and death. His heart was full of the divine truth and divine glory, and for this reason, seeing the little faith of the crowd, He called them *faithless*; His heart was full of the torments and the pains that they were preparing for him, and thus He called them *perverse*.

He benefitted them in every way, marvelously feeding them, instructing them in the eternal truths, enlightening them with divine light, and yet they did not believe and

were preparing to torture Him. Is our generation more innocent than the one of those Jewish people? Christianity has brought countless benefits to mankind, the light of truth always shines in the Church, the divine mercy sustains and forgives us and yet our generation disowns Him and persecutes Him in his body.

We have continuous ups and downs, which means we are epileptic in the spirit, because we let ourselves be roused by our passions and by unclean spirits; we *shout* because we become subjected to the spirit of arrogance and wrath; we *throw ourselves to the ground*, because we ignore eternal treasures for the greed for temporal things; we *writhe on the ground and fling ourselves*, because we forget all basic rules of charity, and we *foam at the mouth* because we have forgotten all modesty and prudence in talking; in fact, our words are filth spewed forth by the epilepsy of impurity!

The world is perpetually agitated; it does not know peace anymore and the nations are agitated by the epilepsy of weapons and wars. Today more than ever we need Jesus, we must have recourse to Him to *rebuke the unclean spirit* that inflicts that last convulsion on our epileptic social body, and to give us back to the Heavenly Father healed of our dreadful infirmity.

8. Announcement of the Passion

The miracle of the healing of the possessed epileptic moved the people and all *were astonished at what Jesus was doing*.

What was in this astonishment and admiration? They thought that the Lord was truly great, that He should reign over Israel, and that He would get rid of the Roman yoke. The Apostles were also astonished by this popular enthusiasm and had to think in their hearts that they would have a place of privilege in the kingdom of the divine Master. This appears clear from the discussion that they had with each other.

Seeing their thoughts of worldly ambition, Jesus called them around Himself and said: *The Son of man shall soon be delivered into the hands of men*, by which He meant: He is going to be taken, tortured and condemned; do not become enthusiastic with the exultation of the multitude, nor think of useless designs about your future, because now is not the hour of glory, but of the Passion and death.

The words of Jesus were certainly a little obscure, but the Apostles should have understood them if they thought about what He had said at other times and his recent exhortation on the renunciation and self-denial and of taking up one's cross. Instead, they were so taken in by their thoughts that His words did not register with them. They understood however from his attitude that He must have had some sad thoughts in mind, but dared not question him for fear of receiving bad news. Their reticence is deeply psychological, because when we make some fantastic assumptions and are taken by a paroxysm of enthusiasm, we do not want to be disappointed by the words of others and so avoid those conversations that could dispel our fancies.

The least among you is the greatest.

The Apostles, in that moment were dreaming about a kingdom on earth, and hoping to have high positions in it, shared their ideas with each other and started to argue about who among them would be the greatest. From a psychological point of view, perhaps the ones who started this debate and proposed it in the first place could have been the three favorite Apostles, who still had fresh in their minds the magnificent scene of the transfiguration. They could not speak about it, having been expressly forbidden to do so by Jesus; however, if one has a secret it is often difficult to keep it under wraps; unwittingly, it manifests itself through something that is not quite right with that person or one's attitude might suggest not everything is normal; not talking about it directly, one goes around it, so to speak, and so it cannot be helped that something slips out.

Peter, James and John did not understand the meaning of the transfiguration, but that glory was for them an indication and promise of an imminent triumph in which they hoped to have a major part; logically seeing that the crowds were enthusiastic about the works of Jesus, they thought the time was already ripe for such a triumph, and so began to discuss who would have a major part in it.

Jesus did not hear their talk, because they were far from where He was, but *he saw the thoughts of their heart*, and taking a child with Him by hand, called all of them to come near Him, and said again: "*Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me. For the one who is least among all of you is the one who is the greatest.*"

Jesus first manifested his fondness for children, and asserted to love them as Himself; thus whoever wanted to be loved by Him had to become little, and therefore it followed that the littlest received the greatest love. The reasoning was concise as a syllogism, rather as a chain of syllogisms, equivalent to this phrase: "You are disputing who is the greatest among you; I tell you, the greatest among you is the one who is loved most by me and my Father. Do you see this child? I love him immensely because he is little, I love him as another self and I consider as done to me and to my Father what is done to him; hence, become small then, and you shall become great in my heart." Thus Jesus excluded completely the ephemeral greatness that could result from any high place, not accepting anything other than the greatness obtained through the love in humility and littleness.

The apostolate is not a monopoly!

This lesson of littleness caused John to be overcome by remorse; they had seen a man who in the name of Jesus was casting out demons and they forbade him to continue because *he did not follow them*. They believed that kind of apostolate to be an intrusion on their rights and their duties, thinking that it could harm their interests and start a new movement of people away from them. Thus John understood that they had been motivated by human reasoning and a secret desire to centralize and, so to speak, have a monopoly even on good things; it seemed to him to be against that charity which was already

beginning to take hold of his heart; he felt pain and remorse and asked Jesus if He, with his authority, would decide this issue.

Jesus answered that they did not have to forbid that man to do good, *for he who is not against you, is for you*. He meant to say that if that man had wanted to form a sect opposed to the apostolate and if he had wanted to act apart from Him and according to his own whims then they should have forbidden him to continue; but if he was *not against* them, and worked in the divine Name truly casting out demons, to forbid him was the same as rejecting an indirect cooperation and putting an obstacle on the furthering of God's Kingdom.

These few words contain an important lesson, because, unfortunately, how the Apostles reacted toward the man who was casting out demons in the name of Jesus is too often repeated when doing good works and in the apostolate. It is a very common and wretched habit to impede someone who is doing good and even to persecute them only because their actions did not start from us, or even worse, because their actions establish a kind of competition with what we do.

It is awful!

Perhaps just this is the biggest injury done to the spreading of the grace and the mercy of God, because not only does it claim to monopolize good works, but it is wretched pride that furthers the notion of being singularly able to do good, and to be the sole source of how it is to be done in detail. It is, fundamentally, a desire to replace the effect of grace with our own actions thereby reducing their goodness and to subtly become a sole provider. It is important to consider that this is essentially against the greater glory of God, and glorifies only our own spiritual "good works enterprise", even if not for material gain.

It is necessary to oppose only what is in contradiction with the Church, and the judgment of this should be left to the Church; all initiatives, even the smallest, done with the approval of the Church either simply, solemnly, or sometimes even implicitly, must be encouraged, and we must be happy of the new activity that glorifies God.

Material works and activities can be monopolized, because they depend more or less on the genius of human enterprise; there can certainly be a specialist in diseases of the nervous system, a specialist in pastries and liqueurs, a monopolist of spices and tobacco, but there absolutely must not be a monopoly of the Spirit of God that goes *where it wills and when it wills*.

He who has more experience and expertise in doing good must indeed help and counsel those who know less; and he must be happy that new energies, new good initiatives and new activities will come to enrich the Church.

We could say, for instance: what is the reason for a new missionary congregation when there are so many? What is the use of a new company of victim souls, when there is one already? Is it not more useful to have only one center?

Our answer is: certainly not.

Just as God has created a great variety of species of plants and animals of the same general type, this great variety is also evident in the works of grace. Each has a special appearance and each new bud gives a greater vitality to the goodness of the Lord that is poured out, and the increased fervor of those who started it.

Some works, besides, if they were to be taken on by a large, established group, might require many formalities before anything could proceed, in contrast to the greater

agility of a just-established group; for example, to establish a religious house in a small place requires a great deal of effort, but to create an association of souls who advocate the same good works, it is only necessary to have the zeal of an interested person and the fervor of many who wish to associate with this cause.

If, for instance, a new orphanage is started near one that is already thriving, this is a very positive development and, since true goodness is a fruit of grace and not of commerce, the grace and the Providence of God is able to feed the two equally well.

Let us believe, instead, that we are truly incapable of doing good on our own and in great humility let us try to help those who are doing it.

There is nothing worse than persecuting those who do holy works; there is nothing that attracts more the chastisement of God than this.

Who does this is a slave of Satan, because Satan uses such a person to prevent another from doing good, to distress souls, and to draw evil from what is good, which is the opposite of God who draws good from evil.

It is true that all good works meet with difficulties, and these are ever more arduous in proportion to the size of the good work, but it is also true that he who initiates and perpetuates these difficulties is cursed.

The problem is that while good works are attacked from all sides, evil that spreads around the world is not equally fought, and in a practical sense, the supposed zeal with which holy works are opposed, results only in the benefit of the evildoers and the exultation of hell. Also, those in leadership roles must be very vigilant of these snares of hell, and not be led by false reports and slanderous insinuations; not only is it necessary to pay attention to those who want to prevent good works from occurring, but also to punish those against holy initiatives, and to continue encouraging the righteous to go on in their holy ways.

9. Jesus travels toward Jerusalem

Since the time of *Jesus' ascension* into Heaven after his Passion and death was approaching, *he showed his resolution to go to Jerusalem*. He knew very well that in that city He would be condemned to death, and since his love compelled him to give his life for the salvation of mankind, He was determined and ready to accept the bitter torments awaiting him. Here we are in the last seven months of his life, and Jesus, after having evangelized Galilee, started on his way to Jerusalem to preach the good news in Judea and Perea and to complete his mission on Calvary.

The Samaritans refuse to offer Jesus their hospitality.

Having with Him not only the Apostles but also a good number of disciples, Jesus sent ahead some of them to prepare food and lodging for the group, and to prepare the people to receive Him.

The shortest way to go to Jerusalem was by crossing Samaria, a region that was extremely hostile to the Jews, especially when they went to the Temple to adore the Lord. The Samaritans, in fact, had also built a Temple on Mt. Gerizim, rivaling the one in Jerusalem and claimed that would be the place to worship God instead of in the holy city.

When they knew that a Galilean or a Jew was going to the Temple, they showed such hostility toward him that it forced him either to decide against doing so or to change direction, making a much longer journey through Perea.

This was the reason that when the messengers of Jesus entered a city of Samaria to find lodging, the Samaritans did not want to receive them and drove them away.

James and John were outraged at this and they would have liked to call down fire from heaven on that ungrateful city. They had seen Jesus on Tabor in glory, and with Jesus also Moses and Elijah; the remembrance of the divine majesty of the Master provoked in them outrage against those who rejected Him, and the memory of Elijah who had called down fire against his enemies gave them the desire to imitate that action and to punish the Samaritans.

Jesus instead reproached them sternly saying: *“You know not of what spirit you are. The Son of man came not to destroy, but to save souls.”* They believed to talk out of zeal; instead those thoughts of severe justice came to them from Satan and from their own nature. They did not discern in that moment the spirit that animated them. The refusal of hospitality was rude; they were very upset; they felt insulted; and their desire for justice was a subtle and subconscious desire for revenge. Not only did they want to show the superiority of the Divine Master but also their own superiority; they imagined that a spectacular sign would have humiliated them; there was in that desire of revenge also the hostility that they felt, in particular against the Samaritans, thinking of them as excommunicated and cursed.

Jesus, however, did not want to go to Samaria to lose souls; He had gone there to save souls dearest to Him, and He only wanted to spread mercy and forgiveness; and He felt compassion for those poor people who rejected him and so He went away to another village.

Jesus does not want to force us to come to Him.

He condemned in this way the impulsiveness of false zeal and with His example He taught us to seek souls with great docility and kindness. What good is there in being impetuous? It causes only a reaction and an increased persistence of the will in doing evil. The Lord does not want us to come to Himself by force, but by love; if sometimes He resorts to healthy punishments, He only does so to appeal to souls who still have a chance to convert and to love him. His public punishments always had a character of mercy and were the final assault of his love on souls that persisted in evil, or the final purification for those who are holy. Impetuous zeal, in reality, always arises from nature, always has a character of anger, revenge or retaliation and far from saving, can lose souls more quickly.

The religious vocation.

While Jesus was walking, a man asked to follow Him wherever He went. He was a young man, or a man that, taken by an enthusiasm for Jesus' words, did not want to miss any, and he wanted to follow Him assuming thus to make himself His disciple on his own, based on a natural affinity that had come to him. But the vocation to the apostolate cannot arise from the nature, it needs sacrifices and renunciations that cannot be done without special graces, thus Jesus said: *“The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests: but the Son of man does not have where to lay his head.”* If he wanted to follow him, he had

to be ready for a life of deprivation and poverty, and obviously he did not have this interior desire, even if believing to have a firm desire to follow Him.

It is not right to go to the apostolate or religious life with a natural enthusiasm or human objectives, but only through a divine call and self-renunciation. Jesus, to indicate this more clearly spoke to another and said: "*Follow me!*" He said this to a man who had often felt the inner impulse of grace but had opposed it with difficulties because he did not have the courage to embrace a wandering lifestyle, made of sacrifices and trials; but his soul was desirous of perfection and he needed a dash of grace to follow his vocation, and for this reason Jesus resolutely called him: "*Follow me.*" He countered with an obstacle: his father was old and he wanted first to close his eyes and bury him; but Jesus replied: "*Let the dead bury their dead: but you go, and proclaim the kingdom of God.*"

Maybe in the home of that man there were many people that were hostile to God and dead to grace, so that if he had left his own vocation hanging, how could he keep it? The act of mercy he wanted to do to his father, his relatives could have done, it was not necessary for him do it, and he risked ruining his vocation and his apostolate. He had already received many graces, he listened to the words of life, and he was able to transmit them to others. Could he oppose this for an act of piety that his relatives could do? They, dead to grace, could at least do a good action; for him, called to the holy life of the apostolate, it would have been an obstacle; it was thus opportune that the dead to life would do this act of natural virtue while he, reborn to grace, proceeded to announce the kingdom of God.

To the stern words of Jesus, another who was already called, as it appears from the text, and who heard in that exhortation the duty to follow the Lord wholeheartedly, asked Him permission to at least to go say goodbye to his relatives at home; however, to go bid them farewell would have been for him tantamount to renouncing his calling, because his family environment was hostile to his vocation. Jesus, who knew this and foresaw what would happen, warned him in other words: be aware that going there you will not be faithful to me, and you shall be like the one that first puts his hand on the plow, but then gets discouraged and leaves the job unfinished. *You shall look back*, which means, you shall think of the comforts you left behind, the freedom of doing whatever you wish in your house, the tranquility you shall have if you renounce me, and so you will end up giving into nature and becoming unfaithful.

These are precious admonitions for those with a vocation to the priesthood or to the religious life: he who is guided not by the call of God but by the fervor of a fleeting moment or by fanciful, theoretical views, does not think of the sacrifices that he must embrace, and when he meets them he becomes upset, refuses them and goes back to the world, with a perturbed spirit, or stays in his false vocation with a spirit of despair.

It is important, therefore, to let the Lord call him, to beg Him for the great grace of the vocation, and embrace it only for the love of Him, in the most complete spirit of sacrifice. He who is called by God, may find it difficult to obey, due to the tenderness of his heart, or for pity toward his dear ones, or for human conveniences, and thus he may become unfaithful.

If one is to belong entirely to God, it is not possible to ponder the natural affections of the heart; on the contrary, it is indispensable to deny these openly and in everything that it is natural or human, because often relatives do not understand either the ways of God, or have an interest in his glory.

Do not those who embrace the married state do the same for the love of another? The man goes with his wife, sorrowfully leaving the comfort of his house and he loves her more than anyone else; if he fears that someone wants to take her away from him, he does not let him come near.

Who has ever considered this to be inhuman or an exaggeration?

Cannot the same be done for God?

Besides parents are not eternal on earth, they shall pass away, and it is right to first consider diligently the eternal interests of all; to leave parents and relatives for the love of God means to enrich them with great merits, because a son or a daughter consecrated to God is a great claim of eternal salvation for the parents and for the relatives; it means to provide essentially for their eternal good.

It is most beautiful to give ourselves to God when He calls us, to offer ourselves and renounce everything for His love, and to find ourselves, later on, all together in eternity in eternal bliss.

He who makes excuses when God calls and presumes to reconcile his own views and aspirations with the call of God, walks in the kingdom of death, puts his hand on the plow but then turns his face to look back at what he is missing. He follows not God but himself and his own will, and thus is not worthy of the kingdom of God.

Chapter 10

1. The mission of the 72 disciples. Parable of the Good Samaritan. Martha and Mary.

1 Then, after these things, the Lord also designated another seventy-two. And he sent them in pairs before his face, into every city and place where he was to arrive. 2 And he said to them: "Certainly the harvest is great, but the workers are few. Therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send workers into his harvest. 3 Go forth. Behold, I send you out like lambs among wolves. 4 Do not choose to carry a purse, nor provisions, nor shoes; and you shall greet no one along the way. 5 Into whatever house you will have entered, first say, 'Peace to this house.' 6 And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. 7 And remain in the same house, eating and drinking the things that are with them. For the worker is worthy of his pay. Do not choose to pass from house to house. 8 And into whatever city you have entered and they have received you, eat what they set before you. 9 And cure the sick who are in that place, and proclaim to them, 'The kingdom of God has drawn near to you.' 10 But into whatever city you have entered and they have not received you, going out into its main streets, say: 11 'Even the dust which clings to us from your city, we wipe away against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has drawn near.' 12 I say to you, that in that day, Sodom will be forgiven more than that city will be. 13 Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that have been wrought in you, had been wrought in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in haircloth and ashes. 14 Yet truly, Tyre and Sidon will be forgiven more in the judgment than you will be. 15 And as for you, Capernaum, who would be exalted even up to Heaven: you shall be submerged into Hell. 16 Whoever hears you, hears me. And whoever despises you, despises me. And whoever despises me, despises him who sent me." 17 Then the seventy-two returned with gladness, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us, in your name." 18 And he said to them: "I was watching as Satan fell like lightning from heaven. 19 Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and upon all the powers of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. 20 Yet truly, do not choose to rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you; but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." 21 In the same hour, he exulted in the Holy Spirit, and he said: "I confess to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the prudent, and have revealed them to little ones. It is so, Father, because this way was pleasing before you. 22 All things have been delivered to me by my Father. And no one knows who the Son is, except the Father, and who the Father is, except the Son, and those to whom the Son has chosen to reveal him." 23 And turning to his disciples, he said: "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. 24 For I say to you, that many prophets and kings wanted to see the things that you see, and they did not see them, and to hear the things that you hear, and they did not hear them." 25 And behold, a certain expert in the law rose up, testing him and saying, "Teacher, what must I do to possess eternal life?" 26 But he said to him: "What is written in the law? How do you read it?" 27 In response, he said: "You shall love the Lord your God from your whole heart, and from your whole soul, and from all your strength, and from all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." 28 And he said to him: "You have answered correctly. Do this, and you will live." 29 But since he wanted to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 30 Then Jesus, taking this up, said: "A certain man descended

from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he happened upon robbers, who now also plundered him. And inflicting him with wounds, they went away, leaving him behind, half-alive. 31 And it happened that a certain priest was descending along the same way. And seeing him, he passed by. 32 And similarly a Levite, when he was near the place, also saw him, and he passed by. 33 But a certain Samaritan, being on a journey, came near him. And seeing him, he was moved by mercy. 34 And approaching him, he bound up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them. And setting him on his pack animal, he brought him to an inn, and he took care of him. 35 And the next day, he took out two denarii, and he gave them to the proprietor, and he said: 'Take care of him. And whatever extra you will have spent, I will repay to you at my return.' 36 Which of these three, does it seem to you, was a neighbor to him who fell among the robbers?" 37 Then he said, "The one who acted with mercy toward him." And Jesus said to him, "Go, and act similarly." 38 Now it happened that, while they were traveling, he entered into a certain town. And a certain woman, named Martha, received him into her home. 39 And she had a sister, named Mary, who, while sitting beside the Lord's feet, was listening to his word. 40 Now Martha was continually busying herself with serving. And she stood still and said: "Lord, is it not a concern to you that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore, speak to her, so that she may help me." 41 And the Lord responded by saying to her: "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled over many things. 42 And yet only one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the best portion, and it shall not be taken away from her."

2. Jesus instructs the seventy-two disciples.

As the end of His mission approached, Jesus Christ wanted to multiply the number of ministers of his word in order that it be spread with greater urgency throughout all of Palestine. He elected seventy-two disciples to whom he gave special faculties. They were not the same level as the Apostles, but only slightly less. Since the Apostles were the first Bishops of the world, with St. Peter as their head, the selected disciples were like the priests. Jesus Himself, therefore, started to form the hierarchy under his direction: He was at the top of everything; St. Peter was the head of the Apostles and His vicar for them and for the Church, followed by the seventy two disciples who collaborated and worked with Him and the Apostles. He therefore sent them to every city where he was going to be, in fact, to prepare souls for his coming, and instructed them on how to perform this mission with appropriate teachings:

First of all, he inspired in them a real concern for the souls they would meet saying: *The harvest is abundant, but the laborers are few.* They themselves were few but the souls in their care were many, and it was almost as if there were a harvest to be gathered; therefore, they had to have a great concern for the work to be done and not to worry about their own comfort. As there were only a few of them, why didn't Jesus elect more? Because recognizing a vocation and having the attitude to undertake a supernatural mission are the fruits of graces that not everyone accepts, and in order to receive and align oneself to them it is necessary to pray intensely.

It is the Lord who sends laborers into his vineyard, and Jesus elected the Apostles and the disciples after long periods of prayer to the Father. Prayer is in our hands as our degree of omnipotence; God gives us this capability and requires it of us that we may cooperate with Him in the great works of His love. God could create the children of Abraham out of stones, but instead, He wants us to cooperate both in the election of those who will become ministers to their formation and for the salvation of their souls. This great law of love and fertility shows us how much God loves us, and with what sensitivity He respects our freedom and the great dignity that He has given us.

As sheep among wolves.

The chosen disciples had to go and preach the Divine Word to save souls, but they also had to seek among those they met their successors; to succeed in this latter effort, they would have to pray to God to multiply the vocations of future laborers. The Church, in fact, would become itself an apostolate, and in the Church there had to be, more than in the nations, the so-called spiritual *demographic problem*. It would not be enough to perform a holy work in the Church and then leave it like a ripened fruit. It was necessary to let it germinate and continue, and then to seek from God those who would be able to continue to perform it.

What would be the use of sowing a field in order to bear fruits without the seeds? The souls won to the faith are the fruits of the vineyard of God, the priests are like the seeds, because they, with the help of God, enable new plants to germinate continually.

The harvest grows not by the power of the farmer but by the fertility that God gives to the land; but if a farmer does not cultivate and harvest it, it rots. Thus to go in the Name of God to sow the Word also includes the need to preserve and multiply its fruits, and so Jesus, addressing not only the disciples, but the Church in all ages, says: *Pray the Lord of the harvest, to send out laborers for His harvest.*

In sending his disciples, Jesus made them consider the great difficulties of their ministry, saying: *Behold I send you as lambs among wolves.* They were not going to harvest peacefully like those that cut sheaves of wheat with scythes; rather, they were going to be met with souls full of miseries and agitated by passions. They had to overcome their resistance not with violence but by addressing them with humility and goodness.

This is a fundamental and constant character of the apostolate in the Church; any deviation from this approach produces only ruin in souls.

Every day experience confirms this, and it is wonderful that the Church has always been faithful in Her great and holy ministers of the apostolate and of the hierarchy.

Misguided souls have really in themselves something fierce and terrible, and it is indeed appropriate to liken them to wolves: they are unruly, aggressively greedy, arrogant, violent, and often have at their disposal the worldly means to resist, even with weapons, and push themselves to the most violent extremes.

This violent resistance took place in the Jewish nation, in the pagan nations when Christianity began to spread, and also in modern nations more or less apostate from God, and in these last mentioned, very often in far more barbaric, savage and aggressive ways than in the pagan nations.

The Church does not go to them with vehemence or with force, even at the cost of appearing overwhelmed or defeated, even at the cost of alienating the feelings of those who would love to see in Her the power of Her strength.

She is in diametric opposition to the modern generations, who are accustomed from an early age to violence: She remains faithful to the fundamental, and I would say constitutional precept of her divine Founder, advancing steadily as lambs among wolves.

And besides, one of the glories of the Church is the calm and solemn voice of the Pope in tragic international times and the serene objectivity of Vatican diplomacy. The world She faces is certainly a wolf, a wolf capable and bloodthirsty, but it is true that in the end it is always overcome by the gentle and quiet dignity of the Church.

**For the missionaries, poverty, simplicity,
trust in Providence**

After succinctly making known with divine words the nature of the mission of his disciples—and therefore of the Church itself—Jesus Christ gives them recommendations regarding the attitude that they should have and how they should comport themselves. His instructions are given according to the mentality the disciples had; and basically told them to give no consideration to anything that is related to human prestige or to hope in their own abilities: *Carry no purse, no sack, nor sandals; and greet no one along the way*, which means to not go about as merchants or traveling salesmen, carrying their wares, and to refrain from stopping to chat with others as tourists might; but rather they should travel austerely, be collected and in silence, like those who have to fulfill a sacred mission.

The disciples were still of simple minds and so Jesus tells them, giving them examples, to not bring anything superfluous, as it is clear from the context, nor replacements items, trusting entirely on Providence. It is obvious that they could keep what they carried on themselves for personal use, and they could greet the people who they met out of charity or kindness but not to engage in unnecessary idle chatting with people.

If you compare how austerely the Catholic missionaries undertake their journeys with the comforts sought by the propagandists of sects, it is possible to understand well the deep reasons behind the exhortations of the Lord. A missionary travels as a poor man and brings with him the treasure of divine riches. The others travel like rich people and bring with them the poor baggage of their mistakes and their aversion to the Church. They travel as tourists, bringing with them wife and children, seeking all the comforts of life. This alone should be enough to distinguish them from the true messengers of the truth and of the Gospel.

Jesus Christ wants his disciples to go as carriers of peace and with a plan of charity. They must save souls, reconcile them to God and give them back their peace of conscience. Sacred ministry is fundamentally a question of peace, and its fruits are fruits of peace. Those who refuse it, refuse peace; and this peace shall return to the preacher, and thus he can be in peace by having done his duty and is happy to receive the merit of it.

This expression of Jesus may seem a little obscure, but it is instead psychologically very deep. He who is involved in an earthly mission hopes for glory or material gain; he obviously tries his best to succeed and grieves or even despairs in case of failure. All that he has done, or anything he makes, he considers lost if he does not

achieve what he had planned; although maybe through no fault of his own, he believes that he deserves a reprimand, and he regards himself as a failure.

It is not this way in sacred ministry, however. The man who engages in it, does so principally for the glory of God and for the salvation of souls. His work of peace is becomes fruitful for those who accept it and profit from it and this peace remains in them. His work is not lost whether people profit from it or refuse it, because it remains meritorious to him who does the work, and it can truly be said *that it returns to him*. Thus, he does not fail, and he has no reason to be regarded as useless in the house of God: he wanted to work for Him and he indeed glorified Him, he wanted to obey the mandate he received, and he has done so, in as much as it depended on him; he wanted legitimately to earn a merit for his eternal life, and he did so; hence he can only be at peace, though grieving because of the rejection of those souls he wanted to save.

The minister of the Divine Word, consequently, must always and constantly have the thought and the desire to glorify God in his apostolate if he does not want to waste his time; and he should not lose hope if he is not successful with certain souls, but instead should content himself with praying intensely for them so that the mercy of God may conquer and save them.

Souls put thousand obstacles and difficulties in the way of their salvation, and to enlighten them or to renew them is very hard work, and truly an epic struggle. Pride drives people to resist the invitation of grace. Stubborn ignorance or bad faith makes them illogically resistant; personal whims, and each has many, sometimes make them unbending. If one talks to them when they are taken by something in a fit of passion—regardless of its nature—and especially if pertaining to matters of impurity or anger, most of the time they are unwilling to listen and may even go so far as to become violent; if one wants to instill in them the desire for a perfect act, they will not accept it at all, when it does not agree with their inclinations. Sometimes their intellect is clouded by any imbalance and no amount of reason can convince them, their will petrified and unswerving in a false aspiration that does not tolerate any words to the contrary; their heart is entangled in a web of deceit and does not wish to be unraveled from it, they are slaves and want to remain so. For this reason, an eagerness to save them hurts them, an insistence makes them angry, kindness in their regard seems to them intolerable, because of their hostility, they despise all that is done for them and they would rather run away from the paths of salvation.

In these difficult battles, which are able to consume the soul and the body of a minister of God or a person dedicated to the apostolate, the word of Jesus is of supreme comfort: what is done is not lost; on the contrary indeed, in the economy of grace, it returns to those who do good; it returns, in the strictest sense, as an experience, as an impetus for an increased vigilance over oneself, as a greater desire to pray, to be humble, to have self-control, and also to try again; to return to the task better prepared to evangelize other souls.

Pilgrims of God in the apostolate

It is impossible to take on an apostolate while seeking our own comfort, or while retaining a multitude of personal habits or whims. These are irreconcilable with a transient, pilgrim way of life which is eminently and necessarily flexible and adaptable to

everything; this utterly flexible way of life is completely appropriate to the pilgrim who is dedicated to doing good works. Just as it is inconceivable in the life of a soldier to dwell on individual needs and whims, so much more so is it inconceivable to have the apostolic life subjected to requirements of one's own nature. Thus Jesus added: *And remain in the same house* that has hosted you, *do not move about from one house to another*, as those people who are looking for distractions, earthly friendships, or more comfort, you *eat and drink what is offered to you*, without demanding anything special or exotic, *for the laborer deserves his payment*. Wherever you are welcomed, continues Jesus, *eat such things as are set before you, cure the sick in it and say to them: "The kingdom of God is at hand for you"*.

What deep wisdom is in these words and how apt they are to produce in the life and social interactions of an apostle that right balance that does not distract his activities from the mission he has!

Those who are hosted, in fact, may fall into two sorts of excesses: one is to constantly regard oneself as a burden, or oppositely, to believe oneself to deserve regal treatment.

A disciple can be excessively formal, which is annoying, or too demanding which is tasteless and rude; he might count to the penny what he consumes and may require special care, believing that what is done for him is not enough. In general, food received for free often seems insufficient or not good enough to those who have a demanding nature; it seems a heavy weight to bear for those highly conceited who would rather give than to receive, to show independence or superiority.

The optimal rule is holy simplicity united with a spirit of penance: those who work are worthy to receive support from those for whom they work, and in working for God they must regard all as a gift from God whatever they receive, without too much quibbling and without too much calculation.

As this is the word of Jesus, as such it is able to destroy by itself all of the ways that pride, under the form of apparent respect and generosity, or selfishness, disguised as requirements and needs, try to interfere with the work done for the glory of God.

The Lord's work must be done joyfully, with the spirit of pilgrims and hearts of penitents; what is given must be received with simple humility, and material generosity is to be paid back with spiritual generosity. As an example Jesus Christ said two things: *cure the sick and say to them, "The kingdom of God is at hand for you"*, that is, do good to those who suffer, and give thoughts of spiritual happiness to those who seek the Lord; heal the sickness of the souls in need of spiritual help, and help ascend the path of holiness those who seek it; give back spiritually what you have received materially in being hosted.

The disciples had from Jesus the power to heal physical infirmity and, naturally, He naturally urged them to make use of it. In fact, he strongly urged them to use it as He had given it to them for that particular mission; we have the great power to beg for graces for those who do good to us and who help us in our apostolate, and we must use it. If one ponders the immense superiority of a spiritual benefit to a material one, one cannot feel awkward in receiving a physical gift for the glory of God.

It is obvious also, that Jesus speaks of the hospitality received from strangers and not from family members; those who belong to the same spiritual family must feel at home when they are received in one of the houses of their own religious order, but always

with a spirit of simplicity and mortification without complicating their lives in useless entanglements, with needless formalities or excessive demands.

**How to behave with those
who reject the Word of Truth.**

Jesus Christ warned his disciples on how to deal with the cities where they would not be well received, and also in this exhortation He gave them a sense of proportion in how to react. At one extreme, they could act with indifference to the rejection, almost as if they did not care for the salvation of their souls, or on the other, they could be so upset as to invoke the chastisement of the Lord on them. Jesus, instead, encouraged them to show publicly their disappointment and in so doing try at least to move them to repentance, reminding them that with their refusal they would risk more serious punishments. *Whatever town you enter and they do not receive you, go out into the streets and say: 'The dust of your town that clings to our feet, even that we shake off against you.'* However, they were to do this not because they wanted to invoke punishments on them, but to testify that they had evangelized them; therefore Jesus added that they had to proclaim the truth once more in going away, thinking that those cities *at the day of judgment* would be treated more harshly than Sodom.

An apostle cannot remain indifferent to those who refuse the Word of God, and will not convert; he must show his sorrow for their lack of acceptance, insist as much as possible, although, of course, not to the point of forcing someone to accept. If he is driven away he will leave, but leaves with a protest, saying a last good word to attempt to overcome their obstinacy. Afterward he remains silent and leaves everything to prayer.

Jesus Christ with this example shows the pain caused to Him by those cities He loved, that remained unfaithful to his mercy, and with immense pain He reprimands Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum, predicting the severe judgment that they would receive and their total ruin; afterwards, to seal with divine authority the mission of the disciples and those of their successors, and to explain the reason why the cities that had driven them away would be punished, He exclaimed: *Whoever listens to you listens to me. Whoever rejects you rejects me. And whoever rejects me rejects the One who sent me.*"

To reject a Priest, therefore, means to reject Jesus himself and to reject Jesus means to reject God himself. It is a severe warning not only to all men, but also to the nations that call themselves civil: when a nation despises the Church, in some way or another it always ends up despising the Redeemer, and when it despises the Redeemer it falls into theoretical and practical atheism and goes to ruin.

The terrible words of Jesus against Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum are directly applicable for the same reasons to cities of our time that used to be Christian but have fallen into apostasy, have become heretical or effectively embrace pagan atheism.

Today the nations are obsessed by a strong desire for greatness; they want to rise up to heaven through domination and theft, regardless of any moral or legal laws to the contrary, however as happened to Capernaum, these will be thrust *down to hell*, that is, to suffer the most serious humiliations and calamities.

All men shall be convinced, by their own sad experience, that no one can exclude the Church with impunity, and thereby exclude the Savior and God; they shall see the

passing of the plow upon these great cities, just as it passed over the three cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum, of which nothing more remains.

The disciples return from their mission.

The Sacred Text does not say anything of what the disciples did during their mission; it relates only of their joy in having witnessed the power of the Name of Jesus, before whom the demons had also trembled.

They spoke about it to the divine Teacher with exultation, believing to announce to Him something of which He was not aware, but He showed them that He had followed them with His omniscience, and added: "*I have observed Satan fall like lightning from the sky*" which means when you threw him out, I saw him deprived of his dark power and plunge downward like lightning. Satan tumbled down like lightning from Heaven when he fell miserably from his glory, but with his dreadful pride he still presumes to rise and he uses his natural powers to assert his supposed greatness.

How many phenomena, that we believe to be purely natural, are caused or intensified by him, who tries to harm the bodies of men with disasters and catastrophes and to entangle them spiritually in material concerns! We laughed at our elders who saw the wretched hand of Satan in so many discoveries and modern inventions, and yet they might have been right. A famous modern French writer, who, to his own shame was an unbeliever, said: "Only the simplest mind may fail to notice the terrible work of Satan in all modern discoveries that all seek to steal men away from their spiritual lives."

Mankind is being increasingly captivated by material things, and is so besieged by Satan through many of the modern inventions, that it is becoming impossible to see how to break loose from these steel barbs and regain freedom of the spirit. Our appalling superficiality keeps us from considering this: cinema, radio, television, luxury cars, airplanes and so on, are or at least can be tools that Satan can use as means of steeping human beings in materialism. For idolatry, given to simple and primitive peoples as a means of inclining them to material things Satan now substitutes the powerful, compelling attraction of formidable discoveries.**

The illusory power in the idol that was supposed to impress man and make him to adore the object, is now manifested in the application of material things which inspire modern men to such wicked idolatry as to make temples dedicated to machines, to engines and so on, as happens in Soviet Union. Satan in these short-lived triumphs has the illusion of a high role in our world, almost as ruler, and every time he is defeated by the spirit and by grace, he falls *like lightning*, because his supposed power is like an electric shock that makes him sink into the earth as it makes contact with the other pole.

If we think how electricity is the secret behind so many discoveries that Satan has exploited against God, it becomes easier to understand why Jesus Christ has compared the evil spirit to lightning; Satan almost simulates the spirit through electricity, and induces in men the fatal, ultra-materialistic idea, that the spiritual and the divine manifestations are

**The discoveries made by men, from movies to atomic energy, should be used for the common good of human progress; instead often, unfortunately, they become diabolical instruments to do evil (as for example in the cases of pornography, the atomic bomb, and so on.)

mere effects of the electricity and in this way makes it possible to induce so many men and false scientists to the most vile and degrading idolatry.

It is necessary to be extremely vigilant and to remain strictly with the Church in our present times, in order not to deviate from the right path. Even if Satan would make us fear that we are falling behind the times, or even if, hypothetically, we would mistakenly refuse to accept some new research or scientific discovery, it is a thousand times more important to safeguard in ourselves the sacred collection of eternal truths, more than any natural truth, because eternal truths bring us to God and to His immortal glory, while natural truths bring us, at the best, to a sterile speculation or a poor application that will disappear as time goes by, and one day shall be consumed by fire.

**Jesus rejoices because the Lord
reveals himself to little ones.**

The disciples of Jesus Christ returned delighted by the good and marvelous results they achieved during their preaching, because they had attracted the crowds and thereby enhanced their prestige; but the Redeemer immediately makes them understand that this must not be the reason for their joy; the powers that they exercised did not come from them nor gave them any merit: *Behold, I have given you the power to tread upon serpents and scorpions and upon the full force of the enemy*; all this comes from Me and is of no use to you in attaining your eternal life; it makes you immune to any bodily harm and truly with these powers *nothing will harm you*; however, you are not to exalt yourself *because the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice because your names are written in heaven*, and they are written in Heaven because of your faith and the good works that you do.

At that moment Jesus saw the greatness of the souls that, despising the world, live supernaturally; He saw them shining in the splendor of faith, immensely above all human understanding, He saw them despised by the wretched world but preferred by the Father, saw the true reverse of what the world sees or believes to see and *rejoiced in the Holy Spirit*, that is, He rejoiced in the love and glory of God, and exclaimed: *"I give you praise, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike. Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will."*

These are sublime words, as a true judgment of the proud world all full of itself in its folly and in its ephemeral conceits. The so-called wise and thoughtful men of the world believe themselves to be its only great ones; and instead they become fossilized in their ideas, despising all that does not look wise to them, according to their own views; instead they are the actual foolish and imprudent people, trading divine wisdom and the eternal good for nothing. *"Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will"* and not on a whim but for a most wise plan of justice, and for this reason Jesus Christ, admiring its wisdom and its harmony said: *"I give you praise, Father"*.

O, how different is human appreciation from the divine, and how miserable and wretched shall appear those who on earth were extolled as geniuses or great artists and scientists, but had no faith!

And to what end all their knowledge?

They know the stories or the small facts about the earth, if they even know these, and all this science, learned with difficulty, is still nothing compared to all human

knowledge; their souls are completely ignorant of all that is true science and true goodness, and they are not able to move even an inch past material things. Sorrowfully, their souls shall leave this life and find themselves in the disordered, gloomy abysses of perdition. Confronted with these abysses, no science, power or greatness of the world will count for anything, and too late they will come to understand that what they had embraced in life was only misery and utter nothingness.

Continuing His marvelous talk, Jesus determines the real axis around which everything must converge, the true center that radiates life in all creatures: *All things have been handed over to me by my Father*, everything, with no exception, including science, and including everything that is great on earth, and nothing can be great without Him, or even worse, against Him. Therefore to know, to love and to serve Him is the very essence of the greatness of man; to know Him not in a worldly way or because of historical tradition, but to know Him in the divine light of revelation, drawn from the same divine depth, because *no one knows who the Son is except the Father*.

From the Redeemer, the center of everything, we ascend to the Father; the Son is the mediator between man and God; He descended to earth to reveal to us the mysteries of God; thus we cannot go to God without the Son, who reveals Him to us and *anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal Him*. He revealed it first of all, and above all, to His Church, and for Her to the Pope; thus we do not go to God without the Redeemer and the Pope, to whom the Redeemer has given the deposit of revelation.

This is the great way, the immense way traced by Jesus Christ for mankind, this is the whole axis of history, it is the center around which all ages are oriented. Today as the nations so foolishly fight against God, against Christ, and against the Church, it is important to consider that every deviation from this center of gravity brings ruin and unhappiness, as we see around us every day.

The beatitude of life does not lie in the dreams of the unbeliever nor in the enjoyment of the material life; it is not found in shutting one's eyes to faith and opening them to the most trivial and disastrous errors, which arise from the depths of hell; the true beatitude is found in the light of Faith, in the fear of the Lord and in the eternal hope, not only for individual persons but for all nations.

It is for this reason that Jesus, in addressing His disciples who were already oriented towards supreme spiritual goodness in Him and for Him, exclaimed: *"Blessed are the eyes that see what you see."* The ardent wishes of the Prophets and the Kings of Israel had been accomplished in them, and what these Prophets and Kings—in vain—yearned to see and hear, because the fullness of time had not yet been reached, had now been revealed to his disciples. This must be the reason for their immense joy, because they were personally present for the great revelations of God, and for the accomplishment of His mercies.

The ideologies of the world.

Today more than ever, the world is trying to attract people with ideologies and odd ways of thinking, often cleverly disguised, presuming to create new beliefs and new guidelines for mankind; it is an incredible foolishness, is the cause of catastrophic error, and is a diabolical trap for poor souls who are ignorant and unable to examine the

absurdity and evilness of these ideas. Anyone who succeeds in gaining access in any way to the levers of power of a nation, pretends to create a new axis of rotation for all human energies. Dragged into this vortex are unsuspecting souls and the youth. It is a crime that leads to ruin, if God does not intervene.**

With diabolical manipulation, today it is possible to directly influence the information given to the public: in schools, through the press, through cinema, etc. and in so doing giving the impression that new heights have been reached, these new ideologies seem to be colossal breakthroughs and achievements, when in fact they are nothing but appearances and fictions which hide obliteration and chaos.

Man destroys more than he builds and has the illusion that greatness is in extending his reach or in demonstrations of strength, without thinking that the extending of his reach diminishes the richness of life, and the showing of strength is incredibly wasteful.

Whoever is able to live comfortably in four rooms and yet demands a forty-room apartment will spend his day cleaning them, and the maintenance costs will consume the income of his family.

This proud greatness is only useful for the glory of a few maniacs and results in abject poverty that consumes and ruins the people.

Leaders beat the bass drums in parades of strength while the populace plays the viola in the parades of misery. O if mankind had not separated itself from God, there would be prosperity in the land and since this is the true wealth of a people, mankind would have had, in the name of God, that wellbeing that is good for a peaceful life and a true elevation of the spirit.

4.To love God and one's neighbor: the great way of salvation and peace.

A doctor of Law—a scribe—who was following Jesus to scrutinize him and perhaps even to control him was listening to his allusions to the fulfillment of the hope of the Kings and the Prophets and the beatitude of those who would be part of it. The man *stood up to test him*, that is, posed Him a clear spiritual question because he wanted to see what new theories He had taught as a comparison to the older ones. The scribe's psychological approach at that moment, so to speak, was the following: Jesus was speaking about the fulfillment of the messianic kingdom but did not explicitly say in that instance that He was the Messiah; the scribe wanted to scrutinize what His precise thoughts were and so asked: *what would he have to do to inherit eternal life*, concealing his intention to scrutinize Him and to see, after this first question, what new ideas He had on the triumphant reign of Israel and how He would declare Himself to be the propagator of them.

** Don Dolindo was writing during the time of Fascism, as we already said in another place.

Thus he asked: "*Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?*" He expected Jesus to give a novel exposition on the wandering ways of salvation and he expected Him to say: "You should believe in me, follow me and serve me." The words of Jesus—repeating them for greater clarity—alluded to new revelations given to little ones, to the knowledge of the Father for the Son and of the Son for the Father and of the beatitude of those who helped in the accomplishment of the old promises; the figures and the prophecies seemed to him to be extremely presumptuous, and the scribe hoped, with this question on eternal life, to *put Him to the test*, that is to put Him in a tight spot, to make him confess his true thoughts, and then force him to recognize his falsity, according to him.

Jesus however, had not come to destroy the Law, but to fulfill it. Thus instead of announcing new things to him, He Himself asked the scribe what was written in the Law, making him to go back to what God had already said. Thus He said: "*How do you read it?*" What is written in this fundamental question, and how do you read it and interpret the Word of God? The scribe answered citing the precept of the Law that the Jews used to pray morning and evening and that he knew very well: "*You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.*" (Lv 19:18) And Jesus replied to him: "*You have answered correctly; do this and you will live.*"

The parable of the Samaritan.

The scribe perhaps felt humiliated to have asked such an elementary question, and he felt humiliated especially because he was amid the populace, who would think him ignorant; therefore he wanted to justify himself, adding that he had asked that question to know *who was his neighbor*; that is, toward whom would he have to exercise charity. It is clear from the context that he, confused at having to answer something so elementary, changed the subject with a new question, which actually he had not intended to ask in his first interrogation.

Jesus Christ answered him with a parable that most likely recounted an incident that had recently happened: an Israelite, going from Jerusalem to Jericho fell victim to robbers. The road he needed to take ran for about 28 kilometers [about 17 miles] and passed through a desert that even today is infested by robbers. Thus this unfortunate instance of misfortune was sadly not an extraordinary occurrence. The robbers not only stripped the man of everything he had but also beat and wounded him, leaving him half dead on the ground.

A priest also was coming from Jerusalem after serving in the temple; he saw that unhappy man so battered, but he continued on his way with no pity for him. He did not want to assume responsibility nor take the trouble for someone he did not know, forgetting that, as a minister of God, he should have pity on him. A Levite also did the same: he stopped a moment out of curiosity, maybe with some words of pity, but then he too went on his way.

After that a Samaritan went by; *he was a traveler*, says the Sacred Text, maybe he was traveling for business; nevertheless, he stopped by the wounded man, bandaged up his wounds pouring oil and wine on them, to soothe the pain, as they used to do in ancient

times; then he put him on his own beast and brought him to a public inn, located on the outskirts of Jericho, for the convenience of pilgrims.

In that place he remained overnight and personally took care of the wounded man; in the morning he had to continue his journey and left him in the care of the innkeeper, paying him two silver coins promising to give him more when he came back to cover any additional expense incurred. When He finished talking, Jesus asked the scribe: "*Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the robbers' victim?*" and he answered: "*The one who treated him with mercy.*" Jesus then said to him, "*Go and do likewise.*"

The Redeemer wanted delicately to give a lesson to the scribe.

The Samaritans were hated by the Jews who paid them back with equal hostility, and yet a Samaritan took care of a Jew; would a Jew do the same for a Samaritan?

Certainly not, since neither a Priest or a Levite had any pity for their fellow-countryman, even though they should have taken care of his soul because of their sacred ministry.

He who has mercy and helps another who is suffering is his neighbor, as also is a man who regards as neighbor anyone who suffers without any distinction of nationality, race or religion. Suffering establishes a holy brotherhood among men: that is of mutual charity, and because in exile the pain is stronger, it is necessary to break down the barriers of social divisions and to give each other the embrace of charity, which is the strongest feeling of peace among nations.

We live in cruel and hypocritical times, where empty words abound, social assistance and initiatives to practice it are plentiful, but charity is lacking because services which should be provided become bureaucracy and are limited to the privileged few leaving in poverty those who really are suffering from it and shunning those considered outsiders.

The social services given are virtually a joke—although not deliberately so, because they lack the very basis of charity that is inspired by the love of God. If the Lord is not loved, charity is not done for Him and under the inspiration of His grace. It is not possible to see the reason why one must help one's neighbor without this inspiration because, if we do not see a person through the lens given to us by God, our neighbors in reality are strangers, and they could even be our opponents.

O if only the world, instead of wasting time in useless man-made initiatives to diminish human suffering, would love God, they would then receive from above the life-giving dew of charity! If only men would be persuaded to see that any initiative inspired by secular norms of society and not by God is inexorably destined to be devoured by fraud and selfishness!

Social assistance programs proliferate based on tax receipts and not on loving charity; they truly yield very poor results and sometimes they even achieve the opposite of what their purpose is, because opportunists and embezzlers take advantage of them.

The earth is illuminated by the sun during the day, and the moon is the splendor of its night; the sun in our lives is our love for God and the moon during the night of our troubles and misfortunes is lit with the love for neighbor, which is a reflection of the love for God. It is not possible to conceive a different life or claim that peace and spiritual welfare, both corporeal and eternal, can come from other sources. There is no substitute for the love of God and where it is not there, there is only desolation and the night of eternal death.

Mankind and the nations have attempted thousands of experiments of all kinds to attempt to attain a certain acceptable standard of happiness, but have not yet tried in earnest to turn truly to God, loving Him with their whole hearts, and glorifying God in all the activities of their lives.

O Lord raise this shining sun over our desolate valley, light in our hearts a true and deep love for You, so that among men charity, peace and temporal and eternal goodness can flourish.

You must come, o Jesus, to heal us; but you cannot come if our love does not call on you.

You are the merciful Samaritan who came to heal us, redeeming us and leading us to your Church to find salvation and you can come again our way, to heal our wounds and restore us to life in your Church.

Once You paid the price of our redemption and You continue to pay it for us to free us from the wounds of our corrupt nature. You can still save us if we truly love you, demonstrating our love for You with a full, Christian and holy life, fully aligning our will to your adorable Will.

5. Porro unum est necessarium. Only one thing is necessary. The profundity of this phrase.

While Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, He went into a town called Bethany and stayed in the house of a family devoted to Him: the family of Lazarus. Lazarus had two sisters: Martha, perhaps the elder, who mainly took care of the housework, and Mary, commonly identified with Mary Magdalene, who was already converted by Jesus. Martha, wanting to properly receive Jesus as an honored guest, was preparing the meal but noticed that her sister was seated at Jesus' feet listening to Him in delight; she became upset and complained to Jesus.

To her it looked like Mary was being selfish and lazy, as there were so many things to do. But Jesus rebuked her gently telling her: "*Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her.*"

These words seem very simple and yet in them there is an entire valuation of human life on earth and an admonition to men to never be anxious of that which is ephemeral. Those words: *There is need of only one thing, porro unum est necessarium*, should be engraved on our hearts and become the rule of our activities. Worldly people, in fact, living for this world alone, without thoughts of eternal life, believe it not only of utmost importance to look after one's temporal affairs but that taking care of spiritual matters would be considered a waste of time and useless. Even those who believe they have consideration for spiritual things, still greatly value an active lifestyle and busily try to help those unhappy people in their temporal suffering, and consider a life of prayer and contemplation to be useless and futile.

And yet it is completely the opposite.

The natural, temporal life and its concerns, is only a means for the spiritual life, and the spiritually active life is only the fruit of the contemplative and interior life; it is foolish to forget the soul and only to take care of the body, as it is equally foolish to indulge in external good works without empowering them with an inner life of prayer.

If we think that ultimately everything comes to an end in life, how can we think or suppose that something ephemeral can have importance, or conversely, who can believe that something that lasts forever is worth nothing? It can be said that all the confusion in our lives is based on just how little or even no value we impart to eternal treasures and to those things that lead us to them. Prayer, the Holy Mass, the Sacraments, the Word of God—these are always last on the minds of most men.

For instance, for parents, school is of paramount importance for their children, in directing them to any profession they will choose to pursue, but often their spiritual life is given no weight at all although it directs them to their eternal life.

If a daughter is to marry, nothing is ever enough: her dowry, her trousseaux, expenditures on luxuries; but if she has to enter the monastery everything seems to be too much. If the daughter marries it does not matter if she will settle far away, and her tears of separation will be dismissed as just short of being hysterical; but if in giving herself to God she must live far away, it becomes an unbearable pain and the parents try every way to prevent it.

If a son is to face very serious dangers in a profession that he has chosen, it does not matter, but if he must do a little renunciation to become priest, it seems like madness.

It is very painful to note the unconscionable attitude toward what is eternal, as if we were only for this life and this earth. Let us shout to the world that wants to attract us with its lures and attractions: *Porro unum est necessarium*, only one thing is necessary; what is temporal is taken away from us and what is eternal is never taken away. He who gives himself to God chooses the best part, even in the present life, and this part never offers disappointments but is full of peace and unparalleled satisfactions.

The true values of life.

One could argue that with this principle and with this valuation of what is necessary, all present lifestyles would end and civilization with all its works would have no reason to exist. To respond to this we reverse the argument, that the principles of the world virtually eliminate all spiritual life and what occurs is deemed completely random and so fabulous civilizations are led inexorably into barbarism. If this were not unequivocally the case throughout all—yes all—human history, if there were but one—yes *just one*—exception, the illusion of a civilization without spirituality could be even tolerated as possible; but unfortunately it is well known where all the great empires end and will end. The appalling savagery of the Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Romans and today's contemporary modern empires is well known.

Who disagrees with this is either blind to the overwhelming evidence or believes that civilization is the cause of murder, oppression, the corruption of morality, legalized theft, abortion, divorce, prostitution, infanticide, and so on.

As corruption is manifested in the body with swelling in its wounds, in its tumors, and, in the best cases, in its obesity, the corruption of the nations is manifested in imperialism that culminates in death.

Today the boasts of imperialism are everywhere, everyone is focused on their own personal gain, and no one thinks that this exaggerated pride is a warning sign of the death of the nation.

Porro unum est necessarium, only one thing is necessary: to live honestly, devoutly as Christians, and in a holy way.

Whether or not great monuments exist is perfectly incidental; many countries do not have them and they live better.

Whether or not there are eminent scholars, is completely secondary, because even without poets and novelists, the world would continue to go on.

Whether or not townspeople can hang their clothing up to dry in the sunshine depends on the prevailing civic ordinances of that town; however, it is outrageous that it can be forbidden to hang clothing out to dry, but that the dirty laundry of moral degradation can be on full display; that garbage is hauled away and removed but the impure rot displayed in storefronts is not; that it is forbidden for an innocent goat to go down an elegant city street, but a corrupt and corrupting woman is able to do so freely.

We are not saying to go back to a primitive form of life, which in many respects might be very desirable, but we say again that it is necessary to remember: *porro unum est necessarium*, only one thing is necessary. To seek the high elevation of the spirit is the true apex of civilization, and civilization truly progresses when it encourages and helps the spirit to be independent from material things.

Chapter 11

The Our Father and the persevering faith in prayer. The possessed mute and the evil spirits. The sign of Jonah. Reproaches to the Pharisees.

1 And it happened that, while he was in a certain place praying, when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples." 2 And he said to them: "When you are praying, say: Father, may your name be kept holy. May your kingdom come. 3 Give us this day our daily bread. 4 And forgive us our sins, since we also forgive all who are indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation." 5 And he said to them: "Which of you will have a friend and will go to him in the middle of the night, and will say to him: 'Friend, lend me three loaves, 6 because a friend of mine has arrived from a journey to me, and I do not have anything to set before him.' 7 And from within, he would answer by saying: 'Do not disturb me. The door is closed now, and my children and I are in bed. I cannot get up and give it to you.' 8 Yet if he will persevere in knocking, I tell you that, even though he would not get up and give it to him because he is a friend, yet due to his continued insistence, he will get up and give him whatever he needs. 9 And so I say to you: Ask, and it shall be given to you. Seek, and you shall find. Knock, and it shall be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks, receives. And whoever seeks, finds. And whoever knocks, it shall be opened to him. 11 So then, who among you, if he asks his father for bread, he would give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he would give him a serpent, instead of a fish? 12 Or if he will ask for an egg, he would offer to him a scorpion? 13 Therefore, if you, being evil, know how to give good things to your sons, how much more will your Father give, from heaven, a spirit of goodness to those who ask him?" 14 And he was casting out a demon, and the man was mute. But when he had cast out the demon, the mute man spoke, and so the crowds were amazed. 15 But some of them said, "It is by Beelzebub, the leader of demons, that he casts out demons." 16 And others, testing him, required a sign from heaven of him. 17 But when he perceived their thoughts, he said to them: "Every kingdom divided against itself will become desolate, and house will fall upon house. 18 So then, if Satan is also divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that it is by Beelzebub that I cast out demons. 19 But if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your own sons cast them out? Therefore, they shall be your judges. 20 Moreover, if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then certainly the kingdom of God has overtaken you. 21 When a strong armed man guards his entrance, the things that he possesses are at peace. 22 But if a stronger one, overwhelming him, has defeated him, he will take away all his weapons, in which he trusted, and he will distribute his spoils. 23 Whoever is not with me, is against me. And whoever does not gather with me, scatters. 24 When an unclean spirit has departed from a man, he walks through waterless places, seeking rest. And not finding any, he says: 'I will return to my house, from which I departed.' 25 And when he has arrived, he finds it swept clean and decorated. 26 Then he goes, and he takes in seven other spirits with him, more wicked than himself, and they enter and live there. And so, the end of that man is made worse than the beginning." 27 And it happened that, when he was saying these things, a certain woman from the crowd, lifting up her voice, said to him, "Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you." 28 Then he said, "Yes, but moreover:

blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it.” 29 Then, as the crowds were quickly gathering, he began to say: “This generation is a wicked generation: it seeks a sign. But no sign will be given to it, except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 30 For just as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of man be to this generation. 31 The queen of the South will rise up, at the judgment, with the men of this generation, and she will condemn them. For she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon. And behold, more than Solomon is here. 32 The men of Nineveh will rise up, at the judgment, with this generation, and they will condemn it. For at the preaching of Jonah, they repented. And behold, more than Jonah is here. 33 No one lights a candle and places it in hiding, nor under a bushel basket, but upon a lamp stand, so that those who enter may see the light. 34 Your eye is the light of your body. If your eye is wholesome, your entire body will be filled with light. But if it is wicked, then even your body will be darkened. 35 Therefore, take care, lest the light that is within you become darkness. 36 So then, if your entire body becomes filled with light, not having any part in darkness, then it will be entirely light, and, like a shining lamp, it will illuminate you.” 37 And as he was speaking, a certain Pharisee asked him to eat with him. And going inside, he sat down to eat. 38 But the Pharisee began to say, thinking within himself: “Why might it be that he has not washed before eating?” 39 And the Lord said to him: “You Pharisees today clean what is outside the cup and the plate, but what is inside of you is full of plunder and iniquity. 40 Fools! Did not he who made what is outside, indeed also make what is inside? 41 Yet truly, give what is above as alms, and behold, all things are clean for you. 42 But woe to you, Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, but you ignore judgment and the charity of God. But these things you ought to have done, without omitting the others. 43 Woe to you, Pharisees! For you love the first seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the marketplace. 44 Woe to you! For you are like graves that are not noticeable, so that men walk over them without realizing it.” 45 Then one of the experts in the law, in response, said to him, “Teacher, in saying these things, you bring an insult against us as well.” 46 So he said: “And woe to you experts in the law! For you weigh men down with burdens which they are not able to bear, but you yourselves do not touch the weight with even one of your fingers. 47 Woe to you, who build the tombs of the prophets, while it is your fathers who killed them! 48 Clearly, you are testifying that you consent to the actions of your fathers, because even though they killed them, you build their sepulchers. 49 Because of this also, the wisdom of God said: I will send to them Prophets and Apostles, and some of these they will kill or persecute, 50 so that the blood of all the Prophets, which has been shed since the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation: 51 from the blood of Abel, even to the blood of Zachariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary. So I say to you: it will be required of this generation! 52 Woe to you, experts in the law! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You yourselves do not enter, and those who were entering, you would have prohibited.” 53 Then, while he was saying these things to them, the Pharisees and the experts in the law began to insist strongly that he restrain his mouth about many things. 54 And waiting to ambush him, they sought something from his mouth that they might seize upon, in order to accuse him.

2. The prayer taught us by Jesus, admirable directive of all our prayers.

Jesus Christ, as He usually did, went off by Himself to *a lonely place* to pray, and one of His disciples who noticed the great elevation of His spirit and the great kindness which emanated from His whole person had a great desire to pray like Him and so asked Him: "*Lord, teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples*". It is clear from this question and from others like it, that the Apostles recognized that they did not know how to pray but that they had an increasingly strong desire to do so, in particular in seeing how fascinating their Master was in prayer.

When Jesus prayed, He shined with love and majesty and many hearts were conquered; He awakened in them a desire to be united with God; His transfiguration on Mt. Tabor was certainly one of the most beautiful manifestations of his way of praying, which gives us an idea of the great majesty that He must have had when speaking to the Father.

He was not, in fact, Son by adoption but consubstantial with the Father; He did not pray because of a need to ask the Father for anything, but rather to praise Him, bless Him and love Him for all of us, and so He established in this way a basis of worthiness that was lacking in our prayers.

He interceded on our behalf, through His love, in a most perfect union with the Father, admiring and adoring His plans in equal measure with His infinite Wisdom and He shined with a singular and mysterious beauty that fascinated and conquered.

As man and mediator of mankind, Jesus begged the Father for our needs and His face shined with a ray of charity; as Son of God He praised, blessed and loved the Father, and He shined with eternal Light. He had the majesty of God and a singular tenderness: standing, his eyes raised to the sky, with open arms in an expression of love, he was smiling from His deep intimacy with God, while at the same time He was anguished because of our needs; thus it created an indescribable sight for the Apostles, although they did not yet fully appreciate its value.

It is evident that Jesus Christ, in answering the request of His disciple and all others who made and make the same request, gave him a prayer that echoed His very prayer. Saint Luke does not describe it in its entirety, omitting some of the questions and making it shorter, perhaps because it was a well-known prayer and was commonly used; however in this formulation, brief as it is, there is the substance of that prayer, and in this shorter form itself the Lord wanted to warn us that He did not want to give us a strictly *exclusive* formula for prayer, but rather He wanted to lay out guidelines for all our prayers. The *Our Father*, we can in fact say, is like a compass that steers all our prayers in the right direction, and for this reason the Church always makes us recite it at the beginning and at the end of all the canonical hours, almost determining before God the precise meaning and intention of all her petitions.

The Our Father.

Father: this is how a soul must approach God. God should not be viewed with the superstitious fear that the pagans had of divinity, often expressed in form of idols; nor

with the servile fear of the Judaism of old, which had deviated from the spirit of the Patriarchs; God has to be regarded as a Father, thus the creator of everything and one's own creator, supremely provident, and most loving.

A biological father gives life to his son with love, and through his life he loves him, as long as he is not reduced to a brutal state from vices.

God gives life through an act of his infinite Will which is Love; He preserves it with the Providence that is love; the soul then prays confessing the reality of God, his Love and his Providence, confessing it in an act of living faith. Where this faith that enables us to speak with God, to His infinite existence, and to His wise and loving Being is not present, if one does not have an intimacy with Him that comes from faith, true and practically felt, then the prayer does not rise above our poor atmosphere and becomes more an outburst of personal impotence than a confident request to God.

The emptiness of so many prayers that we recite is the absence of a sincere faith in God. Many people, a vast number in fact, when praying still have the spirit of idolatry; they believe and they do not believe in God, they accept and do not accept Him, and they are hesitant in their hearts; subconsciously they want to test Him, as one can test the effectiveness of a medicine.

Father, hallowed be Your name. Here is the second absolutely necessary directive for our prayers: to consider everything in the light of giving glory to God and to want everything according to His Holy Will. Oftentimes, instead, we arrive to the heights of folly by wanting to impose our views and our human interests upon the Lord; and therefore we remain inept and impotent, relying only on our poor human strength. When the soul truly believes and appreciates the Lord for who He is, and asks in full submission to His greater glory, then mercy and goodness for all is spread.

How could we receive the heat of the sun if we try to avoid its rays, or pretend to reduce them with our own narrow-mindedness? The triumph of the light of the sun, and consequently the removal of the obstacles that prevent its diffusion, is also our whole desire to receive its life-giving warmth.

When we pray we must, then, give God His place, to desire life and its necessities only for His greater glory and for the triumph of His love within us, in the fullness of His kingdom: *Your kingdom come.*

If we truly ponder the miserable aspirations of our prayers, always turned to fulfilling our selfishness, and when we think that the vast majority of people almost completely ignore what it means to love God and to desire His glory, it is no wonder that so many of our prayers remain with our miserable selves, and are thus unfulfilled.

In outlining the directive for our prayers, Jesus Christ clearly distinguishes the requirements of the life of the soul from those of the living body in our natural condition. For this reason the *Our Father* has two distinct parts; what is necessary for the life of the soul is the filial intimacy with God, for the grace that makes souls His sons or daughters: their *Father*. In this simple word there is the marvelous synthesis of the elevation of the soul to the splendor of the grace that restores, elevates and sanctifies it. The intimacy with God is love in its many gradations and shades and this love is fully synthesized in the desire to glorify God and make Him reign in our own lives.

Therefore we ask to God for this state of grace, for love for Him, for zeal for His glory, for the sanctification of all souls, and for His kingdom to reign in all of them, a kingdom of most tender love.

All the greatest manifestations of the life of sanctity and the life of the Church are in these brief and marvelous words.

For the life of the body, in line with that of the spirit, we need food and everything that is required to govern the temporal mission that is our very life: *Give us each day our daily bread*. We need peace, an absolute essential requirement for a life that is not constrained, as it is today, by an exasperating bustle of tyranny and oppression.

However, peace is not outside the soul, and can certainly not be considered an oppression of the stronger over the weaker; it is *the tranquility of order* and this tranquility is the harmony of the conscience and that of charity: *forgive us our sins*, as we *ourselves forgive everyone in debt to us*. We are all miserable, and no one can expect to be greater than another; we confess to be sinners, we ask for forgiveness, and we promise forgiveness to those who wrong us. In this way the root of all that disturbs peace is destroyed.

The grace of God in us and charity toward our neighbor are the two spiritual gifts on which depend the peaceful prosperity of our temporal lives; sinners never have peace, even though Satan does his best to make them appear successful; but where charity is not there, the blessing of God is not there either. Satan takes advantage of the situation of someone (actually very few fall into this category), who can no longer receive eternal gifts; he allows this person to collect miserable worldly goods as a small token for some work of his; Satan presents these people as happy in their evildoings to the world, but the apparent peace in these individuals is a lie, because they are actually very unhappy in their hearts, and besides it is an even greater lie to make people believe or suppose that sin brings prosperity.

No, the sinful masses live with a thousand tribulations, and the arrogant masses are very unhappy in the pangs of their remorse and interior anguish that remove their inner peace. What benefit are temporal, material goods without peace? And how is it possible to have peace without the forgiveness of God and His grace? And how can one have grace and forgiveness without forgiving our debtors?

When our prayer for earthly goods is not aligned to these precise guidelines, it is a useless prayer; that is, when we do not ask for what is necessary for life and not more, and not ask for it in harmony with grace and charity, then the prayer becomes useless and can sometimes make us believe, in a diabolical illusion, that it has the opposite effect. How many, with their souls filled with greed, hate, envy and sins of all kinds, ask God not for what their body needs for their spiritual lives, but instead for what their body needs for their material, temporal lives, and then lament that they have not been heard!

How many are weighed down by impure sins that bring disorder to their lives, even if concealed and without anybody knowing, and yet they lament the misery of their bodies, which is the immediate consequence of these sins! How many are ruthless in judging and even more ruthless in inveighing against their neighbors, and expect that from this chaos their prayer will resound in the Heavens, where everything is peaceful, harmonious and of sweet charity!

Life is a test of a few years, and during these years we must deserve, by the grace of God, the eternal reward. This test comes to us from the very condition in which we live and also by the snares and attacks of Satan. There is then a third element to help our earthly life: *defense from danger*. Without this providential defense, which we can only have from God, the life of our soul is overwhelmed by guilt and the life of the body from

misfortune. For this reason Jesus Christ makes us ask God: *do not subject us to the final test*, which means do not allow us to be defeated by temptations but, in testing us, give us, o Father, the strength to remain faithful, reducing the perils due to our fragility.

It is, above all, an act of humility that reconciles us with the mercy of God, because it is the confession of our weakness with an act of trust and abandonment to the mercy of God. Those who believe too highly in themselves, thinking that they can face the ordeals of ordinary life and the even harder ones of sanctity, can be overcome by them; those who are aware of their own fragility, instead, ask God only for the grace to resist temptation and not to fall, also begging that He may shield them from everything that, because of our misery, could overcome us.

With this last request, the directives for our prayers given to us by Jesus are completed: to believe firmly in God, to trust in Him as children of His, and to be His friends by grace; this is the foundation of all true prayer. We have to ask for graces for our souls, not for the fulfillment of our selfish desires but as an answer to our true purpose in life, and we beg for the glory of God and his kingdom because this is the way that we can receive those graces.

Any requests that are apart from the glory of God and his kingdom are sterile prayers for us and can even harm us. For our temporal body we need only to ask for what is needed to sustain us, *our daily bread*, without adding unnecessary things, and ask for the gift of peace, which is the fruit of justice and charity.

Finally let us consider ourselves fragile in regard to the tests that serve for the attainment of our eternal lives and ask God to defend and preserve our spiritual lives.

As we said before, Jesus Christ gave to the Apostles the directives for all prayers through the formulation that He taught them, and in doing so gave them a marvelous view into the model of his own prayer life: He, the Son of God, came on earth to proclaim the divine adoptive paternity of all men, and to raise all creatures to Heaven: *Our Father who art in Heaven*. He prayed for the exaltation of the name of God, and in the human nature that He had assumed, for a resounding of the praises that from all eternity He gave to the Father: *Hallowed be Thy Name*.

Jesus had come to establish His kingdom over all creation, and proclaimed His kingdom through this great prayer, that would culminate with His Sacrifice on Golgotha: *Your kingdom come*. He established the kingdom of God by completely fulfilling the designs of His infinite Love, that is his Will, and implored that on earth this loving Will would be the bond and source of harmony of all human activities for the Glory of God, as in Heaven it eternally bonds the Father and the Son: *Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven*. He, therefore, Son of God, turned to his Father; He who was His substantial glory, glorified Him and established his triumphant kingdom, doing his Will, becoming obedient until death, and loving Him in His Infinite Love.

Being true man as He was true God, Jesus, our mediator and pilgrim on earth, asked on our behalf for temporal goods: nourishment, peace and defense from every danger—in other words for that basic prosperity that helps a life to orient itself to God and not to result in a miserable struggle for fleeting goods, a confusion of contrasting desires and a brutal race for power, all of which only renders one a slave to Satan and a victim of those very tests that must direct life towards God.

This was the great prayer of the life of Jesus Christ on earth, and therefore it is clear that to the disciple who witnessed Him in one of His great elevations of His spirit

and who begged Him for all of us how to pray, Jesus gave a sublime formula of prayer that was a model of his prayer, and a directive for all of our prayers.

3. Conditions for receiving an answer: perseverance in praying and full abandonment to the mercy of God.

When children ask for something, they want to have it immediately and without listening to any reasons, and start to cry desperately if they are not granted what they want. If they had common sense, they would submit to the discretion of their parents, since only they can judge what is good or what can harm them.

We ask God for so many graces with the same thoughtlessness of children, but not with the same insistence because of a lack of confidence and trust. As soon as the prayer is uttered we want to see its results, and to see it answered in accordance to our thoughts and our desires; then when it seems to us that we are not heard, we become disheartened, do away with all prayers, and grumble over Divine Providence.

Jesus Christ, to complete his instruction on prayer, expressed with a parable and an analogy the need to persevere in prayer and to abandon oneself to Divine Mercy. The parable has a very deep meaning, even though, at first glance, it does not seem that it directly applies to the relationship between the soul and God: a man receives at midnight a knock on the door from a friend who, because he was traveling, now asks for hospitality.

The Jews, when the weather was very hot, used to travel at night, thus it was not unusual for this traveler to ask for hospitality at midnight. Since in Palestine it was not common to keep reserves of bread, as it was freshly prepared daily in sufficient quantities for that day, the friend of the traveler not having bread in his house and not wanting to be remiss in his offer of hospitality, went to ask an acquaintance nearby to borrow some bread and so, in turn, knocked at his door. The other answered that he was already in bed with his children, did not want to be troubled, and *he could not get up* because he would wake up the children. His friend did not lose heart at that rejection, but continued to knock with such insistence that the other, not so much out of friendship but to make him go away, left his bed and gave to him the three loaves for which he was asking.

Jesus Christ adds, when he finished telling this parable: *And I tell you, ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.* Thus this parable had this basic meaning: *insist to receive, insist with the faith to obtain, insist because God wants to hear this insistence from us.*

The general meaning of Jesus' argument goes from less to more: since the friend who did not want to be bothered and did not have the will to give anything, did, in fact give at the end, if not out of friendship but because of insistence on the part of the other man, how much more will God, who wants us to ask and is delighted by our filial insistence, hear and answer our persevering prayers.

God does not become annoyed by our supplications, he cannot become bored, but in order to answer them He wants to be asked with such insistence to the point that another would be annoyed.

The Lord wants this for our own good, because only the persistent prayer gives us the habit of talking to him like sons and puts us in communication with him. If He

answered our requests immediately, our prayers would have no meaning for us.

We are like motors that cannot get put in gear unless they are first allowed to warm up; we need to insist in asking, to inflame our hearts and get them used to those outbursts of love that make us able to be heard. In his divine kindness, the Lord does not want to give us what we ask of Him as a mere handout; rather He requires our insistence to be our contribution to the grace that we will receive.

We *ask* of His power, we *seek* for his wisdom, and *knock* for his love. *Asking* insistently, his power supports our weakness; *seeking*, his wisdom leads to our strength; *knocking*, his love opens for us the doors of his mercy and makes up for what our faults demolish.

Heaven is very distant from us, and our insistence is not needed to bend His mercy toward us. Just the opposite—it elevates us to Him; God knows what we need. Jesus says on another occasion, we are the ones that do not know what God wants from us; praying with insistence establishes between Him and us that intimate familiarity that makes us, little by little, able to do his Most Holy Will.

When it seems to us that our prayers are not heard.

Jesus Christ assures us that he who asks receives, and yet this assurance notwithstanding we feel at loss because it seems to us that almost always it is the opposite: we ask and nothing is given to us, we seek and we do not find, we knock and it is not opened to us, and this is what we tell Him before and after we pray to Him. It is rare, actually very rare, to find a person that does not retain a minimum of skepticism on the efficacy of prayer, and it is equally rare to find someone that will confess to have prayed poorly and thus not to have deserved the grace asked for. This is a most sorrowful situation, exploited thousands of times by Satan to move us away from prayer.

At the same time Jesus Christ enlightens us further on this interesting question with the same words that He uses to show us the certainty of the positive outcomes of prayer: *What father among you would hand his son a snake when he asks for a fish? Or hand him a scorpion when he asks for an egg? (Lk 11:11)*

Thus, it is evident, that the Heavenly Father hears us when we ask for what is good, the true good, as Jesus added, *the good spirit*, which is the grace of a holy life and the graces for the soul.

The Redeemer could not contradict himself and if once He said: *Seek therefore first the Kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be given you besides (Mt 6:33)*: Jesus could not promise the efficacy of prayer if done only for the receipt of temporal benefits.

Besides we are ungrateful children, and so we ask for *the stone, the snake and the scorpion*, instead of *the bread, the fish and the egg*, and if the Father answers the son who asks for what is good, He does not grant the request of the other who asks Him for evil. Therefore this expression of Jesus works both ways.

The true and deep reason for which we often are not heard in our prayer is because of *our evil spirit*: we do not have faith, we do not trust in God, we do not love Him. We are seriously burdened by our past sins, almost always sins of impurity, or present sins,

causes of unfulfilled graces. We have no charity toward our neighbor in all things, and we do not think that God deals with us as we deal with others; there is no simplicity in us and no abandonment to Him, and in truth when we ask, we always conceal some preconceived ill-feeling against Him.

We pray but without getting outside of our own misery, we are like roaring airplanes that cannot take off from the ground, or like stripped gears, which spin uselessly and do not impart forward motion to the vehicle.

We speak a lot to ourselves and very rarely to God, because we say words that our distractions and our boredom render devoid of meaning.

If we truly spoke to God, as the saints did, we would see even miraculous effects from our prayers.

Instead of saying that our prayer is useless, we should instead recognize in humility that *we do not ask, do not seek, and do not knock*. We must ask with the insistence of children, we should seek with the confidence of friends, we should knock with the humility of subjects, and we go to God with the certainty of His mercy, to God *One and Triune*; we cannot ignore this and it is necessary that in us there is something that will bring us closer to Him, to His Power, His Wisdom and His Love.

We must believe that He can do everything, effectively and completely, and that He does it all with wisdom and love and wants our true well-being. For our soul to deviate from this position means to subvert the prayer and render it useless—as useless, one could say, as trying to put in a two prong outlet a three prong plug.

What are harmful to our prayer are these paradoxical situations: we assume we can go to God but remain in ourselves; we beg for His intervention but trust only in our own strength or in those of other men; we would like to draw on His power but deny it; gain His wisdom but grumble about it; and receive His love but stifle it. How many times we pray with this spirit, almost without realizing it, and *do not ask, do not seek and do not knock*. If however, Jesus Christ tells us with certainty that those who pray are heard, when we are not heard, we must have the absolute certainty that we did not pray: to assert the opposite, is the same as to declare false the Word of the Eternal Wisdom, and that is absurd.

The continued insistence in prayer, a precondition to be fulfilled, is not necessary for God but it is for us, as we have said before, and it is a need of our soul to orient itself to Him. We must *insist* and not *desist*.

We have, in fact, the habit of starting to pray with a natural enthusiasm, which we believe to be faith, with a certain presumption, which we believe to be hope, and with a little fervor which we consider to be love. As the days go by these dispositions wane and so the initial enthusiasm gives way to fatigue, the hope to mistrust, and the fervor to apathy; the prayer little by little diminishes, as a lit wick does without oil: it gives off smoke in impatience and very often dies in acts of real disbelief. Let us ask God for *the good spirit*, fruit of the infusion of the Holy Spirit, and let us turn to Him with our whole lives.

Our prayer should not come merely from our lips, or from a weak heart; the whole soul must pray, or better all our being, remaining faithful to our duties and seeking the Kingdom of God and His Justice above all things.

We must have our eyes fixed on eternal life, especially our eternal life, because God listens to the majority of our prayers in relation to that supreme goal. In Heaven we

shall see the embroidery of his love and we will see that none of our prayers were lost, even those that did not rise above our small temporal existence, and we can add even those that have been infected by the light of passions. In fact, even if these prayers do not reach God, God hears them and He comes to us, accepting them as cries of our sick nature. He then answers us with the reverse of our petitions and with this reversal straightens them and changes them into requests for good and supplications for eternal life.

You ask for the healing of a person who binds you to the earth and God listens to you taking her away from you; you ask for the recovery of another who is very sick, and God listens to you by taking him safely to His heavenly home.

You ask for prosperity and receive poverty, because poverty is good for you; you seek glory and receive the humiliation, because it takes you to the real glory.

How many of these false beliefs does God straighten out, and how much we need to be grateful in the very disappointments that we believe we have when we pray!

One last difficulty: sometimes we indeed ask God for precisely *the good spirit*, for virtues and perfections but we do not believe to have been heard; is then the word of Jesus incorrect? We respond first of all with a comparison. A vacuum pump removes water from the hold of a boat, but although the sailor uses the pump to get water out the hold is nevertheless remains flooded. Is the pump useless? No, it is just barely sufficient to offset the leak and consequently the water that gushes into the hold. A brush can be used to clean clothes, but if the cloth is too greasy or muddy a quick brushing is not enough: it will be necessary to work on the stain and that requires some time. The hot stove warms water; but if instead of water there is ice in the pot a hot stove is barely enough to dissolve the ice, but the water remains cold. A shutter opens by pulling a rope, but if there is a compression spring that counteracts the movement, the shutter closes again.

We might desire *the good spirit*, however we do not consider the evilness that counterbalances it; we want to purify ourselves, but we shy away from those radical and energetic means that would truly make us become good; we want fervor but we do not measure how thickly frozen are our inner beings.

Yes, we want perfection for our use and consumption but without the sacrifices and without self-restraint; we want to treat our wounds without cauterization but with the balm that caresses our pride and our nature; we can tell ourselves of our own insolence but we will not tolerate others to note it to us, not even if ninety-nine percent less critically than what we say; we surely want to ascend, but we want to remain where we are and not part with any of our baggage. Therefore the prayer is not useless, but it is like the vacuum pump that fights the rising water in the hold; it does produce results but they are not visible until there is formed a difference between nature and grace.

Who knows where some souls would go if the people to whom they belong would not pray, and who knows where their nature would take them if they did not ask God for the good spirit, even in a markedly reduced capacity!

On what true flights of sanctity would a soul embark if, in asking for the good spirit, it truly abandoned itself to the action of grace! Nature sometimes deceives us and we, even praying to be perfect, have in the spirit some areas into which we do not want grace to penetrate; we do as Jonah did, embarking on a ship in a storm to flee from the face of God, we sleep on our repulsion to the Divine Will and complain of not advancing. If we could throw ourselves fully into the ocean of Divine Love who could say where His

grace would take us and what holiness we would be able to reach! Pray, pray without ever getting tired, and let us leave to God the care to answer us when and how He thinks. We can also pray for temporal things if we want but leaving to him the care to measure the ration according to what these are useful for our eternal life.

Let us be convinced that God is our Father and whatever our prayer is, He will always hear us and give us what is good.**

4. Liberation of the possessed mute.

They presented to Jesus a possessed man who was mute, and according to Matthew was also blind (Mt 12:22). The Redeemer began to drive out Satan, the real cause of the man's infirmity, and after He had driven him out the man spoke and saw. From the Sacred Text it is clear that Jesus had to vie with Satan to strip him of his prey, since it is written that He was: *driving out a demon that was mute*; the expression *driving out*, assumes that this took some time to do and the resulting amazement of the crowd shows that the liberation of the possessed man was extraordinary to behold.

The blind, the deaf and the mutes of Satan.

Satan generally spoke for those he possessed, trying to ward off the irresistible power of Jesus; this time he did not speak but instead greatly agitated the unfortunate man who had to have been lashing out in a terrifying manner. The infernal spirit knew by experience that to the exclamations of his possessed people Jesus replied by commanding them to be silent and hence liberating them; thus, by making this possessed man deaf and mute, he tried to avoid or delay the powerful order of Jesus. He further made the unfortunate man also blind to impede him from seeing Jesus utter the imperious words which He would use to cast Satan out.

Satan, in his foolishness, believed to have closed in this way all the windows, so to speak, through which the man could receive grace, and had made him the clear image of those he holds tightly into the snares of evil; blind to the evidence of the truth, deaf to the words of life, and mute, stubbornly mute, to the words of prayer. They do not see, do not hear and do not pray, and their ruin becomes irreparable, without a miraculous intervention of grace. Whatever you tell them is impenetrable for them and the stubbornness of their will becomes so tough as to seem invincible.

Unfortunately, the earth is full of these blind, deaf and mute individuals, and to win them over the intervention of Jesus Christ is necessary, because only He can, by grace, enter into their hearts and conquer them. The Sacred Text does not say how Jesus freed the possessed man, but it is clear that He did it with an act of power, maybe touching him with his hand; certainly He had to do it with such majesty that the crowd was completely amazed.

** Beautiful meditations on the tenuous connection to grace.

Beelzebub and his kingdom.

Some of those who followed Jesus only wanted to find ways to accuse Him, thus, unable to deny the evidence of the miracle that had just occurred and seeing the great excitement of the people said, with deep malignancy, that He drove out demons by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of demons. They knew full well that it was a meritless and absurd assertion, but in their depravity they hoped it would sow doubt in the crowd of people and diminish their faith in Him. Others, not daring to deny the miracle, attempted to diminish its importance by asking *for a sign from heaven*.

By simply asking for a more impressive miracle they could have devalued, in the minds of those present, what they had seen, considering it no big thing; they did not care in reality, to have a new sign, because they would not have believed even a sign from heaven; however, knowing the mentality of the people, they knew that the simple question could generate in all of them a sense of distrust. They also were hoping, and actually believed that Jesus could not give a sign from heaven, unlike the prophet Elijah, commanding perhaps fire to descend from the sky, because they supposed maliciously that His acts were either mere tricks or were diabolical. In reality, for these perfidious people to ask for *a sign from heaven* was only a way to persuade the crowd to their evil beliefs and ideas. This perversity is concealed in the hearts of men when they obstinately do not want to see the truth!

Jesus Christ, *delving into their thoughts* and knowing the wicked intentions of these scheming questions, started by refuting the allegation that He worked on behalf of Beelzebub with an irrefutable argument: He drove out Satan; He drove him out specifically in order that he not harm the soul and the body of those he possessed; therefore, He worked directly against Satan's goals, and in doing so was dismantling his dark domain. If He had worked in concert with Beelzebub, Satan would not have used Him to destroy his own kingdom, that kingdom he tried to keep and maintain in many ways; for then he would be at odds with himself, which would show that his kingdom was already crumbling due to interior collapse, as a ruined nation collapses when it is wracked by internal discord.

It was an irrefutable argument, but Jesus completed it with another one. Among the Jews there were already many exorcists, *sons*—that is—disciples of the Priests, Scribes and Pharisees, who drove away demons, knowing very well that they could drive them away only in the name of God and after many prayers. It clearly would have been preposterous for his opponents to drive them away in the name of Satan, because the contrast between Satan and God was too obvious; on the other hand the difficulties with which the exorcists met in driving away demons, a subject about which they often spoke about amongst themselves, was already a testament to the ridiculousness of their slanderous and evil assertion, and they themselves having this experience would have been the best to judge it as complete rubbish.

In saying that Satan would drive out Satan, the work of the exorcists in the Temple was per se devalued and, with that perverse insinuation, they were going against themselves, throwing a sinister shadow on their ministry. Since it was absurd for Satan to drive out Satan and since it was demonstrated, by the same experience of the exorcists, that this could not happen, the result was that Jesus drove out demons *by the finger of*

God, that is, by His divine power, and in driving Satan out He defeated his kingdom, and as a consequence the Kingdom of God was now upon them.

Satan, until then, was in the world like a strong armed man *guarding his atrium*, that is, the entrance to his house, believing himself able to keep his possessions safe until one stronger than he comes to defeat and rob him. Only a stronger man can defeat another that is armed and is resolutely determined to defend his possessions at all costs.

Hence it was also evident from this fact that Satan had been defeated not by himself but by someone stronger than he.

With a veiled phrase Jesus turned the accusation his enemies had made against them, so that they could ponder the situation that they were in: *Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters*. If He drove away Satan by divine virtue and declared Himself to be his enemy, it was evident that those who declared themselves His enemies, were friends of Satan; if He, in driving away the infernal spirit defeated his kingdom and ushered in the kingdom of God, it was evident that those who opposed Him in this work were great collaborators of Satan and enemies of the Kingdom of God. If they were not enemies of Satan, they would have been in harmony with Jesus who crushed Satan driving him away; since they instead were enemies of the Redeemer, the evil spirit possessed them.

It appears clear from the context that among those who opposed Jesus there were some that had once followed Him in the past but had now been re-possessed by Satan, although they pretended to continue to follow Jesus. At that time, when they had been freed from Satan, the evil spirit had gone off to search tirelessly in the desert of perdition for other souls. Afterwards, he returned to attack these liberated men with seven worse spirits than he had and regained possession of them, reducing them to an even more awful state. For this reason they should have been careful and vigilant because they acted under diabolical suggestion and therefore were in danger of eternal and irreparable ruin.

Blessed are they who listen to the Word of God.

While Jesus was talking, a woman raised her voice among the crowd and said: *“Blessed is the womb that carried you and the breasts at which you nursed.”*

Evidently the woman heard in the words of the Redeemer the voice of truth, made aware because of some sorrowful personal experience she had with those who opposed him.

From a psychological standpoint, in fact, we applaud a speaker with much more spontaneity and warmth if his words coincide strongly with our personal experience. When those who have been victims of oppression by bullies without the possibility of reacting hear someone who has the courage to face these bullies and confuse them, they applaud and shout with expressions of praise and blessings, showing the great satisfaction their souls feel and indirectly allow them to vent their own resentment.

The exclamation of the woman, after a rather obscure speech by Jesus, would not be explainable without admitting that she had feelings of resentment against the scribes and the Pharisees. This is why Jesus, without contradicting the praise that she gave to His Most Holy Mother, rather confirmed and supplemented it, and answered: *“Rather, blessed*

are those who hear the word of God and observe it.” He meant to say: yes, My Mother is blessed because She has begotten and nursed Me, but She is even more blessed because She listened to the Word of God and practiced it; therefore do not take comfort in the reproaches made to your oppressors, but listen to the Word of God and put it into practice using charity.

Besides, that woman addressed Mary as a common mother, and Jesus with His words declared Her covertly Mother of God. She in fact, heard the celestial message and believed in it, She welcomed in Her bosom the substantial Word of the Father, kept it with Her love, and listened to the Word of God from Him and practiced it.

She did not conceive and nourish Him as just any woman, but she had conceived the Word incarnate by the Holy Spirit and so took care of the God-Man not as any other child conceived by the flesh would have been. The woman exalted Mary as the Mother of a Prophet and Jesus in his reply exalted her as the Mother of the Word.

As can be seen, the interpretation of this verse of the Gospel is very different from the arbitrary interpretation of the Protestants who want to see it as a diminishment of Mary. Considering that St. Luke in his Gospel chose to underscore in a particular way the praise that someone gave to Mary, makes it even more clear how absurd the erroneous hypothesis of some Protestants really is.

The reply of Christ to the woman that exalted Him was also directed against the insinuation of the scribes and Pharisees, who wanted to portray Him as a friend of Satan; we would say that it was a public exclamation of the love that Jesus has toward His Father, a desire to ward off the praise that He received thereby showing that He cared only for the glory of the Father and to better convince the crowds that He was against Satan. Moreover, psychologically speaking, when we are wrongly accused of wickedness, it is natural for us to seize every opportunity to show our piety and devotion; some feelings that would remain hidden in our hearts are expressed with greater energy and become manifested as our singular concerns.

Jesus Christ wanted to show the people how much He appreciated the Law of God and how far He was from performing diabolical tricks to gather personal glory; therefore to the woman who exalted Him in magnifying the beatitude of His Mother in conceiving and nursing Him, He forcefully spoke extolling the blessed nature of those who listened, kept and practiced the Word of God.

5. The sign that Jesus would give to His mission.

Jesus Christ did not give an immediate answer to those who asked for a sign from heaven, but waited till *still more people gathered in the crowd*, because it was too important to dispel the illusion of wanting to see a physically impressive miracle when they already lived in the fullness of a supernatural one, which exceeded any past manifestation. For that perverse generation, what would a sign from heaven have meant anyway? And since they had come to call the defeat of Satan himself a work of Satan, what more could matter to them?

It was absurd to think that Satan could cast himself out, but it was not absurd to ponder that he could produce a striking phenomenon; therefore, a sign from heaven would

have become occasion for new evil insinuations. God would give an unequivocal and definitive sign of the truth, not from the heavens but from the depths of the earth, making Jesus rise from the dead, a sign that would not be like the sign of Elijah, a manifestation of terrible justice, but like the sign of Jonah for the Ninevites: an invitation to penance and salvation. When Jonah was expelled onto the beach at Nineveh by the whale, with this event he became for the Ninevites a messenger of penance and mercy; so too Jesus Christ, emerging from the darkness of the tomb after being killed, would show that He was the victor over death and hell.

He himself, therefore, would be the miracle, and actually He already was, because all his life was a living and speaking embodiment of his mission.

This is why Jesus Christ added that *the queen of the south*, that is the Queen of Sheba who came from far away to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and the men of Nineveh who did penance at the preaching of Jonah, would rise like judges and would condemn this unfaithful generation who had in their midst one greater than Solomon, hearing words of truth that were even more clear than those of Jonah.

The pure eye understands the way of the Lord.

But why did this ungrateful generation, witness of the biggest miracle done by God on earth, not believe? Because it had extinguished in itself the light of God.

Celestial gifts cannot be received only to remain empty and God does not grant them for this; but as a lamp is kindled and put on a stand that it might give light to those who enter, so also the gifts of God are lights that must steer the whole soul towards Him, as long as a soul is simple and looks at Him with good intentions.

When the inner intention is pure, the soul sees illuminated what God reveals, but when it is false and dark, the soul sees only darkness. In that case even the most resplendent and miraculous light becomes useless and the most impressive miracles do not shake it. God has given us reason as lamp for our interior life, to make us see the light that comes from Him; our reason must always be put onto a higher plane, as a lamp is put on a lamp stand; if our reason becomes dull and coarse from being hidden in the darkness of human miseries or becomes oppressed by errors it becomes only a source of darkness for our soul.

The inner eye sees darkness where there is light when it is not pure, and it becomes clouded by prejudices and errors.

Also in the business of the world, one with a pessimistic eye, obscured by malevolence, sees everything as wrong and evil around him. Even more, he sees everything wrong in the ways of God, which exceed his capabilities immensely, when he embraces a false point of view.

Today mankind is blind and lacks the light of God.

The lesson that Jesus Christ gave to the scribes and the Pharisees is extremely important for our generation, which is accustomed to first blind all reason, bury it under a

detritus of falsehoods and then thus marred, claim that it is the only light and guide for life. Sorrowfully, the way the education is set up today, it has resulted in an impenetrable darkness in every field, and most deeply dark in those fields that are purely speculative. We absorb the pagan errors from infancy, and we nourish ourselves with the darkness of ancient literature; when reason should start developing and then awaken, we cover it with the pile of garbage that is thoughts of ancient and modern philosophers gone astray, and continue to obscure it. If that were not enough, we soil with a thousand impurities the eyes of the spirit and direct all of our bodily activities toward a false and illusory goal.

In a time that was most ironically called and is still called the “*enlightenment*” we, in reality, lit just a few smoky candles *under a bushel basket*, that is on the ground floor. It is no wonder then that it is difficult for this generation to accept the supernatural, and rather readily throws itself into the abyss of ridiculous and irrational thinking of the deranged evildoers.

We live amidst the splendor of the light of the Church and her Saints, but we see darkness everywhere because our eyes, interior and exterior, are impure.

Intellectually we are blind and morally we are in the darkness of impurity.

May the Lord give us the grace to look only to the Church, the true lamp that is always raised up and purify our eyes from the smoke of impurity. Our only salvation is in our Catholic Apostolic Roman Church, and without her mankind will only hurtle downward to the bottom of the abyss. It is shameful that after twenty centuries of Redemption, we are still dealing with errors, while we should all be in the light of the truth; it is a tragedy that living amid the miracles of the life of the Church, we are still searching for extraordinary miracles in order to believe. We are a thousand times guiltier than the ancient Jewish people and we must beg in a loud voice that the Divine Mercy resurrect us.

6. Jesus reproaches the Scribes and the Pharisees.

While Jesus was talking on this very important subject *a Pharisee invited him to dine at his home*. From the severe words the Redeemer used in addressing him it can be noted that the Pharisee was not conscious in the least of a moral problem on which depended his salvation or perdition. It is essential for every soul that seeks perfection and the ways of God, to orient its ability to reason towards God, to seek Him with all the inner forces of the spirit, to be able to appreciate the moments of grace and respond to grace with great rectitude; but to the poor Pharisee these things seemed like complicated ideals and as it was already time to eat, that is lunchtime, he invited Jesus to his house, maybe to put an end to the talk.

The poor man most likely was accustomed to give only a rapid passing thought to his interior soul; he lived a life of appearances and believed that perfection consisted of these. Most likely he was one of those who participated in the insinuations against Jesus, or at least had witnessed them, and so possibly to mitigate the impact that, he believed, had upset Him and to lessen the confusion that his answer had produced on his enemies, he invited him to have lunch at his house with a familiar gesture of ostentatious cordiality that is used when someone wants to end an argument in friendly terms, without confessing his wrong.

To say in fact that Jesus cast out demons by virtue of Beelzebub had been enormously repulsive, and Jesus' refutation of this was a very severe blow to the prestige of the scribes and Pharisees, who believed themselves to be excellent men of reason; the invitation to lunch cut short that very severe instruction on the righteousness of reason and intent, and it was like wanting to give a happy ending to a very insulting insinuation.

Jesus Christ accepted the invitation because of his immense love toward those souls He was pressed to enlighten, and doing so without belittling them too much in the presence of the crowd; in a private home He could speak more clearly and more strongly—something which was necessary to do in order to counter the pride that made them feel as if they were perfect when in reality they were in the depths of perdition. To have attributed the most powerful manifestations of the divine goodness to Satan was a horrendous insult to God, and so to let them reflect on the misery into which they fell was an act of mercy to shake them up and push them to repentance.

The strict language of Jesus must be considered in this light in order to understand it: He looked at the glory of God and the miserable state of those who tried to attack it; He burned with zeal and charity, and the severe character of his speech was restorative and medicinal for their souls. Besides, He ended the ancient age and started the new one, and of course He had to show the scribes and Pharisees the serious responsibility of their fathers, knowing that it would culminate in His death. Jesus wanted to make them understand that they were on a false path and that they needed to convert rather than conspire against Him.

Jesus Christ entered the house of the one who had invited him and sat immediately at table. The Pharisee was shocked that he had not made the usual ablutions before the meal, because they used always to wash their hands, not so much for cleaning and hygiene as for the purification of any legal uncleanness that they might have contracted. It was logical that Jesus, the Holy of Holies and the purest lily, would not wash himself with this particular intention, but he did this because he was very sorry for the injury done to God and also to have the opportunity to educate those dining with Him. The Pharisee did not dare to scold him, but Jesus reading in the depths of his heart and responding to his thoughts spoke to him sternly, to rebuke him and some of the others present of the injustices they had done and the serious sins they consummated. *"Oh you Pharisees! Although you cleanse the outside of the cup and the dish, inside you are filled with plunder and evil. You fools! Did not the maker of the outside also makes the inside?"* Evidently his divine gaze had noticed that all the items on the table had been bought by greedily harassing the sellers at the marketplace, and those shady and evil practices had been used to purchase things for the house or at least to pay poorly for them.

These injustices weighed heavily on His most delicate Heart. It was weighed down by those acts in which the Pharisees indulged without scruples, and weighed down by those apparent acts of charity, like when they ate, which were done only for outward appearances. The Jews kept their doors open when they dined and often the poor came to ask for something. The Pharisees, after committing their hundred injustices at the market, if they had an audience, would give leftovers to the beggars, but with a contemptuous gesture that ill-concealed their interior disappointment in doing so.

This is why Jesus, after reproaching them for their *robbery and iniquities*, and having witnessed perhaps at the very moment one of those alms-giving moments made for show, added: *do it rather with what is left to you*, that is from what you did not acquire

from evildoing—from your own treasure, or, according to the Greek text, *what is inside you*, that is from what you give out of genuine charity and not for outward appearances or custom. You give alms out of what you have unjustly obtained from others, and this does not purify you from the injustice; you have to give from what is legitimately yours, and do so with the sincerity of supernatural charity, because only this can purify you from your faults.

That this is the true sense of the words of Jesus is clear and also from what He adds: *Woe to you Pharisees! You pay tithes of mint and of rue and of every garden herb* even in becoming obsessively exact for the sake of scruples which the Law does not command *but you pay no attention to judgment and to love for God*. To give to the Temple more *tithes of the seeds of the earth*, that is ears of wheat and the fruits of trees, as prescribed in the Law (Lv 27:30, Dt 14:22) including the smallest products, this is good in itself, because it is a sign of love and subjection to God; but to be content with this and to not look after the duties of justice and charity is to seriously misconstrue the Law of God. You, however, adds Jesus sorrowfully, you are not scrupulous in your tithing for the love of God; you do it as an outward display of sanctity, rejoicing to be honored by others as being righteous, and in so doing you are only like hidden tombs, whose decay is not seen and is unnoticed by passersby.

To these very severe words, one of the doctors of the law revealed himself and said forcefully: *“Teacher, by saying this you are insulting us too.”* The scribes and the Pharisees, in fact, formed a single party, and what the scribes claimed to practice was taught specifically by the Doctors of the Law; to condemn those who practiced was the same as reproaching those who taught. And because the great deviations from the Law of God depended on the false teaching, Jesus answered: *“Woe also to you scholars of the law! You impose on people burdens hard to carry, but you yourselves do not lift one finger to touch them.”* You, scholars of the Law are the first among the unjust, because you invent duties that do not exist, and only for those who are subject to you; you are strictly demanding in regard to others, but you yourselves are really are the most lax and negligent in the service of God and use every kind of injustice against your neighbor.

But the main fault of the scribes was in systematically refusing the special mercies that God sent to His people to convert them. They reproached and persecuted all the messengers sent by the Lord. However they did build monumental tombs to the prophets whom their fathers persecuted and killed, thus showing that the special mission of those sent by God was not only possible but also true. You honor the Prophets killed by your fathers, Jesus meant to say, but you do not say a word about those who killed them, and even today you continue in the same way, thus showing your agreement in how they acted.

You killed them to silence them, and you built monuments for them because they cannot speak anymore; if you built the monuments to make up for the wrong of your fathers, you would not continue to do the same with those messengers that God sends you.

You inherited the sins of your fathers and combined all of them in yourselves with increased malignancy because you see great signs that your fathers did not see; for this reason the blood of the Prophets, from Abel to Zachariah shall be upon this generation.

All of the Prophets were sent to announce or prefigure the Redeemer and to prepare his people to receive Him. Those who killed the Prophets committed a most serious crime, but stopped short of committing the most terrifying evil which would be to

suppress the Redeemer Himself. Only the generation contemporary to Jesus arrived at this singular excess and so its crime was the sum of all the past crimes.

Abel was the first to prefigure the Redeemer, killed because of envy, and Zachariah, the High Priest, was stoned to death by order of King Joash between the Holy of Holies and the Altar of Holocausts; he was the last one, prefiguring the killing of the Redeemer, High Priest and Victim, killed before the Father to expiate our sins, and before Jerusalem, the Altar of God on earth, the only center where the Lord was worshiped.

Zachariah is called son of Barachiah, but instead he was the son of Iddo, maybe because his father had two names, which was common among the Jews; but also in this he prefigured Jesus Christ who was the true Son of God the Father and was believed to be the son of Joseph, husband of Mary Most Holy.

Jesus, as Son of God, was generated by his eternal *knowledge* (prefigured by Iddo); but on earth he appeared as son of the humble carpenter, who lived obeying the Lord, *kneeling* before his Will and *blessing* Him in his sufferings (prefigured by Barachiah). He came to accomplish the Law and the Prophets, and the Doctors of the Law should have brought the people to recognize Him, explaining the true meaning of the Word of God. But they, even though they had the *key of knowledge*, that is, even knowing that the real reason for all the Scriptures was to announce the Redeemer, and even having in their possession the secret of the interpretation of the Scriptures and the *key* to their mysteries in this fundamental sense, they nevertheless committed the unimaginable crime of not accepting the truth and preventing others from accepting it.

To Jesus' just and severe indictment of them, the Pharisees and Doctors of the Law instead of recognizing their faults and converting, colluded with each other and harassed Him with many tendentious questions to try to catch him and have an opportunity to condemn Him. In this way they confirmed with facts their hostility to the Redeemer, and once more they rendered themselves unworthy of the Divine mercy.

Jesus reproaches also us.

The whole history of mankind is a history of iniquity, ungratefulness and foolishness; but maybe no other time is so worthy of reproach as our times, wherein we pretend to be so illuminated precise and exact in our knowledge and in our lives. It is a fact that, when it comes to our judging supernatural events, the criterion used is the one of the Pharisees: people try to look for the slightest nit to not believe; on the other hand when it comes to judging the most trivial lies, the most unlimited faith is used supported by arguments cloaked by wise-sounding big words or with the endorsement of people with public eminence.

God visits us in so many ways and enlightens us with His great mercy through the Catholic Church, but the poor unbelievers do not accept her light and the least bit of reporting by the newspapers of any new scientific "finding" or historical "interpretation" designed to deny the true Faith causes them to rush to believe in some new scientific truth or way to live. The Church is always targeted by the hypocritical human sciences and her truth is always the first to be attacked. How many lies are taken as absolute truths, how much truth is thrown out as tall talk, how many deceptions pass as miracles and how many miracles pass as deceptions!

If a supernatural fact is reported we see the stupid smile of the foolish supermen of the cognoscenti ready to portray it as a tall tale; on the contrary just tell a foolish superstitious fact and we see the same men very attentive, ready to swear to its truth! These are Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, who pretend to brand as falsehoods the most real facts and drink as truth the most stupid nonsense.

The history of all the tales of the famous critics and super-critics of mankind would be most amusing: we will mention only one episode, just one, to show of what we are capable, even we the most civilized critics, the day we leave the light of the Church and allow ourselves to be guided by a fallen reason from the most simple-minded prejudices.

In 1870, at the expense of the State, in a most elegant edition, *Le Livre des Sauvages* (Book on Primitive Peoples) was published in France. The book reproduced about 200 folders containing signs made by American Indians, which constituted the single compendium of the literature of primitive men.

In the publication, the most eminent scholars of the time were represented, such as Duke of Walenski, Paul Lacroix, the Chief Librarian, Mr. Domenech and others. The folders containing the signs were studied by the most competent scholars who attempted to interpret them; they were divided into chapters, and their meaning was determined. Yet those famous folders, as it was discovered later, were just rudimentary doodles and sketches drawn by the son of a German immigrant, who shepherded herds in the forests of Canada!

Unfortunately, our human culture is full of these stories and others even more ridiculous, while the Faith is always triumphant in its truths, and its supernatural facts are always timely and appropriate to our times.

In practical matters of life, how many sacrifices is our generation capable of, when deceived or dragged by a few troublemakers or a very few authentically paranoid leaders? And unfortunately, our same generation is not able to do little sacrifices for God, nor does it know how to obey His Law of love and that of the Church! If the Lord calls us and sends us Saints, true Prophets of our times, they are ridiculed and persecuted; if the Lord does miracles they are being dismissed as tales; if He punishes us, the most oppressive and draconian laws prevent us from recognizing the voice of the Lord with the excuse of needing to keep up the prestige of the nation or the morale of the people.

In short, under the hypocritical disguise of science, power, civilization and greatness, the Redeemer and His Church are denied, and we proceed rapidly toward ruin!

May the Lord set us right and give us the grace to remain faithful to Him, and only to Him, in the Catholic, Apostolic Roman Church!

Chapter 12

1. The hypocrisy of the Pharisees. The sin against the Holy Spirit. Greed and the self-assured rich man. Confidence in God. Jesus came to bring fire and war. Reconciliation.

1 Then, as great crowds were standing so close that they were stepping on one another, he began to say to his disciples: "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. 2 For there is nothing covered, which will not be revealed, nor anything hidden, which will not be known. 3 For the things that you have spoken in darkness will be declared in the light. And what you have said in the ear in bedrooms will be proclaimed from the housetops. 4 So I say to you, my friends: Do not be fearful of those who kill the body, and afterwards have no more that they can do. 5 But I will reveal to you whom you should fear. Fear him who, after he will have killed, has the power to cast into Hell. So I say to you: Fear him. 6 Are not five sparrows sold for two small coins? And yet not one of these is forgotten in the sight of God. 7 But even the very hairs of your head have all been numbered. Therefore, do not be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows. 8 But I say to you: Everyone who will have confessed me before men, the Son of man will also confess him before the Angels of God. 9 But everyone who will have denied me before men, he will be denied before the Angels of God. 10 And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of man, it will be forgiven of him. But of him who will have blasphemed against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven. 11 And when they will lead you to the synagogues, and to magistrates and authorities, do not choose to be worried about how or what you will answer, or about what you might say. 12 For the Holy Spirit will teach you, in the same hour, what you must say." 13 And someone from the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to share the inheritance with me." 14 But he said to him, "Man, who has appointed me as judge or arbitrator over you?" 15 So he said to them: "Be cautious and wary of all avarice. For a person's life is not found in the abundance of the things that he possesses." 16 Then he spoke to them using a comparison, saying: "The fertile land of a certain wealthy man produced crops. 17 And he thought within himself, saying: 'What should I do? For I have nowhere to gather together my crops.' 18 And he said: 'This is what I will do. I will tear down my barns and build larger ones. And into these, I will gather all the things that have been grown for me, as well as my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul: Soul, you have many goods, stored up for many years. Relax, eat, drink, and be cheerful.' 20 But God said to him: 'Foolish one, this very night they require your soul of you. To whom, then, will those things belong, which you have prepared?' 21 So it is with him who stores up for himself, and is not wealthy with God." 22 And he said to his disciples: "And so I say to you: Do not choose to be anxious about your life, as to what you may eat, nor about your body, as to what you will wear. 23 Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing. 24 Consider the ravens. For they neither sow nor reap; there is no storehouse or barn for them. And yet God pastures them. How much more are you, compared to them? 25 But which of you, by thinking, is able to add one cubit to his stature? 26 Therefore, if you are not capable, in what is so little, why be anxious about the rest? 27 Consider the lilies, how they grow. They neither work nor

weave. But I say to you, not even Solomon, in all his glory, was clothed like one of these. 28 Therefore, if God so clothes the grass, which is in the field today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, how much more you, O little in faith? 29 And so, do not choose to inquire as to what you will eat, or what you will drink. And do not choose to be lifted up on high. 30 For all these things are sought by the Gentiles of the world. And your Father knows that you have need of these things. 31 Yet truly, seek first the kingdom of God, and his justice, and all these things shall be added to you. 32 Do not be afraid, little flock; for it has pleased your Father to give you the kingdom. 33 Sell what you possess, and give alms. Make for yourselves purses that will not wear out, a treasure that will not fall short, in heaven, where no thief approaches, and no moth corrupts. 34 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. 35 Let your waists be girded, and let lamps be burning in your hands. 36 And let you yourselves be like men awaiting their lord, when he will return from the wedding; so that, when he arrives and knocks, they may open to him promptly. 37 Blessed are those servants whom the Lord, when he returns, will find being vigilant. Amen I say to you, that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, while he, continuing on, will minister to them. 38 And if he will return in the second watch, or if in the third watch, and if he will find them to be so: then blessed are those servants. 39 But know this: that if the father of the family knew at what hour the thief would arrive, he would certainly stand watch, and he would not permit his house to be broken into. 40 You also must be prepared. For the Son of man will return at an hour that you will not realize.” 41 Then Peter said to him, “Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or also to everyone?” 42 So the Lord said: “Who do you think is the faithful and prudent steward, whom his Lord has appointed over his family, in order to give them their measure of wheat in due time? 43 Blessed is that servant if, when his Lord will return, he will find him acting in this manner. 44 Truly I say to you, that he will appoint him over all that he possesses. 45 But if that servant will have said in his heart, ‘My Lord has made a delay in his return,’ and if he has begun to strike the men and women servants, and to eat and drink, and to be inebriated, 46 then the Lord of that servant will return on a day which he hoped not, and at an hour which he knew not. And he will separate him, and he will place his portion with that of the unfaithful. 47 And that servant, who knew the will of his Lord, and who did not prepare and did not act according to his will, will be beaten many times over. 48 Yet he who did not know, and who acted in a way that deserves a beating, will be beaten fewer times. So then, of all to whom much has been given, much will be required. And of those to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be asked. 49 I have come to cast a fire upon the earth. And what should I desire, except that it may be kindled? 50 And I have a baptism, with which I am to be baptized. And how I am constrained, even until it may be accomplished! 51 Do you think that I have come to give peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but division. 52 For from this time on, there will be five in one house: divided as three against two, and as two against three. 53 A father will be divided against a son, and a son against his father; a mother against a daughter and a daughter against a mother; a mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.” 54 And he also said to the crowds: “When you see a cloud rising from the setting of the sun, immediately you say, ‘A rain cloud is coming.’ And so it does. 55 And when a south wind is blowing, you say, ‘It will be hot.’ And so it is. 56 You hypocrites! You discern the face of the heavens, and of the earth, yet how is it that you do not discern this time? 57 And why do you not, even among yourselves, judge what is just? 58 So, when you

are going with your adversary to the ruler, while you are on the way, make an effort to be freed from him, lest perhaps he may lead you to the judge, and the judge may deliver you to the officer, and the officer may cast you into prison. 59 I tell you, you will not depart from there, until you have paid the very last coin."

2. The hypocrisy of the Pharisees.

A great multitude of people was gathered around Jesus, and He felt moved, thinking of how the Pharisees were exposing these souls to many dangers who were being led along false paths by them; for this reason He turned to his disciples, who would themselves become shepherds of souls and the guides of a new people, saying: "*Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, that is their hypocrisy*". Fermentation leavens the mass of the bread, and the Pharisees, by their example, taught the people to live a life full of pride and appearances. They deformed the Law of God with their hypocrisy, misrepresented the words of Jesus and with their hidden agenda tried to prevent God's word from yielding fruit. The apostles, therefore, had need to be attentive and vigilant because the time was coming when they would have to preach the Gospel to the whole world, and preaching it integrally, without worrying about the opposition of their enemies.

Everything they heard, in familiar and intimate conversations with Him, would have to be told publicly, and God himself one day would expose all the snares of the Pharisees in the universal judgment. Jesus Christ preached to them the future of the apostolate, and warned them against opportunistic reasoning that, under an appearance of prudence, could make them reluctant preachers of the truth.

Do not be afraid to confess the faith.

The Pharisees would try to intimidate them, and eventually the time would come when they would persecute them till death; but they had no need to fear those who could kill their bodies, after which they could do no more; they had to fear God, who could not only kill them in their present life, but condemn them eternally in hell, if they were not faithful to their mission. They had to be strong before persecutions and trust entirely in God, in whose hands is the destiny of men, and from whom everything depends.

Five sparrows could be bought at that time for two assaria, that is for about 14 cents[†], and nobody thought, in buying them, that they had been forgotten by God. He created them and so did not abandon them to chance, but instead He took account of their little lives, not allowing that their lives be taken away from them without some reason. If God takes care of sparrows, how would He not take care of men? Who would dare say that He would abandon men to their own devices if He even knows the number of hairs on each one of their heads and does not let one single hair fall out without His will?

The apostles would find themselves in very trying circumstances; they would have to deal with the evil of men and the harassment of persecutors without weapons or other means of physical defense. Their only defense had to be the Lord God and they were to put their trust only in Him.

[†]Translator's note: Today (2014) approximately \$1.

They had the very strict duty to propagate the faith and to propagate it to the whole world; thus to confess or deny it could not be an indifferent act for them, and they would have to give very close account of how they did on Judgment Day.

To implant this sacred duty in their minds, Jesus announced what would happen to those who confessed or denied His Name: They would have from Him, *before the angels*, that is, at the universal judgment, a sentence of blessing or a judgment of condemnation.

The sin against the Holy Spirit.

With these stern words Jesus set the foundations of Christian character, in perfect contrast to the world which is eminently servile and opportunist. The world drifts along transported by fads and self-interest; the world shouts hosannas to those in leadership roles and changes flags (and loyalties) at every new gust of wind.

The Christian, and particularly the apostle, cannot let himself be carried away by flattery, nor intimidated by threats but should always advocate the truth at all times and before all peoples, aware of the crime he would commit if he did not—*the sin against the Holy Spirit, which is to deny the light that He gives from above to propagate and support the truth in the world.*

The scribes and the Pharisee sinned against the Holy Spirit when they attributed to Satan the signs that God gave to confirm the truth, and their sin could be called unforgivable because it put them in a position from which it was virtually impossible to return to God (Mt 12:31-32; Mk 3:28-29); thus the denial of truth by those who had to witness and propagate the truth, was an equally grave sin, the same as a *blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, that is the denial of those revelations that He gives specifically to spread the truth.*

Afterwards, Jesus Christ taught from which source the apostles - and more generally all Christians - would have to draw strength and support to confess the truth before those people who were in power over the land, saying that they had to expect, in the very moment of danger, the help of the Holy Spirit and the inspiration on how to answer. The history of the martyrs of all times, including in most recent times, is a clear confirmation of the promise of Jesus, because the martyrs, brought before tyrants, have always given admirable answers, and have confused the arrogance of the wicked.

The martyrs, heroes of the Church.

Sadly, we live in a time where it is very difficult to speak the truth, because those who impose by force a political regime presume to impose their errors with the same aggression, almost as if it were a new Gospel*. The Church, heir of the word of Jesus Christ, resists the wicked currents and undauntedly proclaims the truth, even at the cost of martyrdom. If men at least had an appreciation of human dignity, they should be grateful to the Church that keeps her torch high even during raging storms and in the face of human cowardice. Before tyrants of thought and conscience, just as before those of true

* The author Don Dolindo writes during the height of the Fascist period, with uncommon courage in those day.

freedom and morality, the Church supports the right of truth and goodness, and remains alone in confronting the waves of persecution, increasing the number of her confessors and her martyrs.

It is a wonderful display of divine love and human dignity that can be considered unique today amidst so many aberrations of thought and politics. If you could pass all of the essentially legalized wrongdoing in the world that waves its flags and keeps high its long extinguished torch through the sieve of truth, nothing would remain except small clusters of fanatics and fools: the rest would slip through the small holes and the mesh of opportunism.

Only in the Church do we have the opposite phenomenon, because only the Church supports truth and goodness; when a persecution comes to torment her, and Satan conjures up a most bitter war against her, she retains her true witness, character, strength, dignity and true heroism, with no raids, no batons, no castor oil, no swords, no bombs, no punitive sorties; she evinces the heroism that enlightens, forgives, dies, and leaves in blood the shining trace of truth and the comforting perfume of goodness.

The Church is a solid wall that no bomb has been able to break down, because the words of Jesus have made of his children a phalanx of heroes.

Today, in so many parts of the world the old pagan persecutions seem to have become almost trivial and inconsequential when compared to modern barbarism. Today the Church fills her martyrology with thousands of new martyrs: 770,000 martyrs in Spain alone for example. Before the tyranny of thought and life, She keeps Her head high, confesses Jesus Christ, proclaims the truth, and receives admiration and sympathy even from those who would be against her.

Tyrants may have been able to shatter the power of great armies, but they could not crack the unarmed power of the Church, strong in its fear of God, and only concerned with His judgment.

3. Not worrying about worldly possessions and living trusting in God is the strong foundation of a Christian character.

While Jesus was speaking to His disciples to instill in them and in His Church the granite foundations of a strong Christian character in the face of struggles and persecution, a young man from the crowd interrupted Him, asking Him to intervene with his authority in the division of an inheritance with his brother. Often Rabbis were called to be judges for questions about wills and inheritances, and that man wanted to appeal to Jesus, as to the most authoritative of the teachers.

At that moment, our Redeemer was looking into the future at the coming centuries, He was considering the path His church would take in the world, and was forming the foundations of Christian character in the face of earthly life; it could be said that He was completely taken by this great idea and this is why he refused to judge by saying "*Friend, who appointed me as your judge and arbitrator?*"

He is the judge of all mankind. Thus, He could have been the arbitrator, but in that moment He was occupied with His great mission of Redeemer, He was thinking of His Church and retorted that He did not come to deal with base issues of greed and interest nor was He head of humanity for this.

Evidently this young man was not contending with his brother for a question of justice but rather one of greed, and he was asking the intervention of Jesus not to have Him as the absolute arbiter but to receive from Him a favorable judgment for his own greed; however Jesus was not appointed as judge and arbiter for justifying greed and injustice. Moreover, He was looking further into the future and in answering the young man He wanted to lay the foundation for another element of the Christian character, saying to everyone: *"Take care to guard against all greed, for the life of a man does not consist of an overabundance of possessions."*

Material goods do not constitute *the life* of a man, nor should they or even less the greed for them be his goal; to focus only on these material preoccupations causes cowardice of character, because in so doing a man loses the courage to face the world and all its tyrannies because he wants to preserve his temporal interests, his place in society, his employment, and one's situation in the world*.

He then becomes a slave, condescends to the arrogance of the wicked, hiding his faith and his duties, and practically he is an apostate to truth and goodness. It is essential to the Christian character to not put one's trust in earthly things and to not worry about them, because the preferred weapon of despots is to steal and to starve: for this reason Jesus explained with a parable how foolish it is to put hope in material goods that must be left behind, and how foolish it is to compromise one's eternal life by choosing fleeting things that cannot be preserved.

If what we possess on earth could last forever, it would be much less foolish to be attached to such things, but knowing that they will inexorably pass away and that they for us are only temporary things, it is foolish to place our hearts on them.

The parable of Jesus

Jesus then recounted a parable, which applies to all people: a rich man's land had become incredibly fruitful. The abundance of the harvest gave him an unshakable confidence in his future, and he thought to protect his wealth and make it stable. Therefore he decided to demolish the old barn, cramped and confined, and to build others that were much bigger. This was his idea of safety, and he already fully expected to have a rich and abundant life for years to come when the voice of God came to him and said in that very night he would die.

What would be the use of all he had accumulated if he had to leave it? And who would enjoy the fruit of his labors? Since he had not thought of the good of his soul, what would he bring with him to the next life, standing before God?

Most men busy themselves with procuring material goods, an elegant house, secure sources of income, comforts and luxuries, and often sacrifice themselves greatly in order to succeed, even to the point of compromising their own souls. However, material goods do not lengthen one's life, let alone make it eternal; years go by, or months, or days, and then everything must be left behind. It is a terrible thought and it should make us wiser.

* The comments of Don Dolindo show, unfortunately, a reality that still has not yet changed.

There are many who accumulate money, houses, works of art, jewels, gold coins, rare books and become very attached to these things; but to what end? After they die others consume their goods and their only heredity is the tomb! Those who are attached to these things only worry how to preserve them, but if one does not have a heart free for God, he does not have a character that is able to resist evil and, when something happens, he falls into the abyss of sin or even apostasy. Many times people are more afraid of the loss of material goods than of death itself, and in face of the risk of losing their position in life, they are ever anxious and seek any means necessary to preserve opportunistically their material goods.

This is the real cause of why good people submit to the arrogance of despots and the reason why these despots end up having the upper hand. The people are brought to the lowest levels and accept the greatest wrongdoing for fear of losing their position, of not doing well in school, of the material future of their children and so they give in to the most pernicious and vile anti-Christian laws. And yet it would be enough to trust in God and deal with unbelievers with absolute intransigence thereby forcing them to surrender.

**Everything is precarious in life
except to trust in God**

Jesus Christ with most tender words and wonderful comparisons exhorts his disciples and Christians of all times to have such a trust in God, with complete and unlimited confidence as to make their character strong and unshakable in all circumstances: *For life is more than food and the body more than clothing*; then, would not God who gave life and the body, also give food and clothes *to those who trust in Him*? He shows his providence even to animals and provides them with food, although they do not harvest or sow and do not have storerooms or barns. This is a fundamental point about God's providence, because it is clear that no animal fails to find its food even though it does not have a special aptitude for accumulating reserves; an animal moves about, looks for food and God enables it to find it. If there are some exceptions to this rule it is only among the animals that live with men who should be more attentive to their livelihood.

For this reason Jesus gives the example of the raven that lives freely in the fields. Faith in providence does not come from man but from God, and it is proportionate to the trust we place in Him, and not on the amount of wages or income we earn.

The Lord wants us entirely abandoned to Him, and He shows us how we will fail in all our efforts to secure a position in the material world. Our real assurance is only in God, because our lives depend on Him.

No one can grow taller by intensely thinking about it over and over again; at most he might become shorter, consuming his health with worry; how then, as this small matter cannot be achieved, can we expect to do what is much more difficult: providing for ourselves a stable position in life? What position can be stable forever?

If you have a job you may get sick or lose it; if you own fields, they may become barren; if you own houses they may collapse or be burdened with taxes; if you have income generating securities, they may become impaired; if someone close to you provides for you, he may not be able to continue.

Everything is uncertain in this world except to trust in God, and follow His will, serving Him and expecting from his goodness our livelihood and the necessities for our

lives.

Look at the lilies of the fields: they do not toil or spin, and yet they are dressed by God as not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed; now if God takes care of plants, would He not care even more for all men who serve and trust in Him? Why *torment your spirit* with material things, as do those who do not believe in God? To provide for your own needs under the eyes of God is not an evil thing, but *tormenting your spirit*, or, even worse, going against the divine will presuming to know by yourself the best for your own future, is not that truly foolhardy?

Jesus goes even further and teaches us to not only not torment the spirit with the thought of accumulating or obtaining a position, but to expand the spirit through charity and generosity done through a pure love for God; to seek the eternal goods and thereby becoming confident to receive also the goods of the world. This is a sublime law of life, which makes the soul truly superior to all earthly things, and heroic in keeping those goods and those eternal treasures that never end. To think that God was pleased *to give us the kingdom*, constituting us as masters of the world, trusting in Him, and to ponder that *He gave the kingdom to us*, directing us toward eternal life; this will give us such a freedom and security of spirit to make us rulers of the world, triumphant in life, and instruments of divine providence for others.

Being detached from everything, always living with a transient spirit on this earth, depending on God for everything and working not so much to make money but rather to accomplish God's will in the mission He gives us: this is the wonderful secret of having a calm superiority of character and achieving a deep peace that nobody can disturb or overwhelm.

What a profound thought: God takes care of me, even of the hair on my head! Seeing a hair fall from our heads and thinking, *it does not fall without the divine will*, makes us truly feel in the arms of divine providence and our lives no longer seem like a jumble of random or haphazard events.

To live not only abandoned to divine providence, but to also be its instruments through generosity, alms giving and help given to others, and looking toward the eternal reward that no one can take away from us, means to put our hearts in heaven, seeking our eternal treasure, and to give little consideration to the violence or abuses of men.

4. The strong foundation of a Christian character: to think of ourselves as travelers on this earth, as servants waiting for their master and being stewards of his possessions.

In those times long garments were typically worn, and so traveling people would raise and tie them with a belt around their loins to enable them to move more freely. If they were going to a nuptial feast, since it was celebrated at night, they carried burning lamps. Jesus wants us to live on earth *with girded loins*, that is as travelers, and that we are to be like servants who are waiting for the return of their master from a wedding and, not knowing at what time he comes, are vigilant in the night.

Life is a continuous expectation of death, and death is the solemn moment in which Jesus, the bridegroom of the Church, comes to pick up our soul, and introduce it to the eternal wedding feast. He will come suddenly, when we least expect it, since nobody

knows the moment of death.

Life on earth is like a long night, because it does not have the true light of joy, and it is a test. It may be almost regarded as divided into three vigils, as the ancients divided the night: youth, manhood and old age. The Lord can come during any of these three vigils, and it is necessary that we be vigilant to welcome him, if we want him to make us partakers in the eternal glory, almost like a master who girds himself, has his faithful servants sit down at table and gives them food. The Lord in his glory gives us his own happiness, and it may be truly said that He *surrounds and nourishes us*, because *in his greatness He makes himself proportionate to each soul, according to its capacity*, and He feeds it with eternal goods.

During the night that is our life, thieves can also come to steal our soul, because demons are always ready to ambush us, and we must be vigilant to avoid being robbed of our eternal goods. The Lord comes very suddenly and, as we are vigilantly waiting for Him, we must also be on guard against the incursions of demons that try to compromise the moment when the soul meets God.

Here is a perspective on life that cannot accept illusions and cannot make a Christian hesitant to meet his obligations: since he is a traveler, he lives in a transient situation and he cannot be at all interested in what is temporal and even less in what could deprive him of his eternal goods.

Peter, listening to this teaching, asked the Teacher if it was meant for everyone or only for the apostles; he would have liked to understand better what it meant to be vigilant and to

wait for Him, and so he asked for clarification. Maybe he thought that Jesus spoke of the temporal kingdom they were expecting. Jesus Christ did not answer him directly, because it was clear that the instructions were for everyone, but He added to his talk what pertained especially to the apostles, and in general to the ministers of God. They, in fact, must not only be vigilant for themselves, but also for all others, as faithful and wise stewards of the gifts of God to souls.

Jesus Christ expresses this thought with a question: *Who, then, is the faithful and prudent steward*, and so on. He spoke in this way because He was surrounded by the scribes and the Pharisees, who were violent and unfaithful stewards. He wanted to tell him: “Do you believe that there are faithful and prudent stewards who give to everyone what God grants for the good of souls?” And without going into detailed reproaches, He insists that a minister of God must watch over all souls and perform with great care and fidelity the offices received from the Lord toward them, keeping in mind the final account. Those ministers who believe that life consists of having fun or is just a search for material comforts, and hence mishandle souls instead of healing them and give themselves to a disordered life, what in the final judgment will be considered unfaithful and will be punished.

The Priest and his mission.

With a divine gaze that embraces the future, Jesus looks at each priest and compares them to those under the Old Covenant; those under the Old Covenant are

mitigated in their miseries, but the others, having known the will of God, and having had much more, will be punished much more severely on the Day of Judgment if they have the misfortune of being unfaithful. The strong character of a priest therefore depends on the idea that he aligns himself to the mission he has received from God. We are all travelers on earth and must be vigilant in waiting for the hour of God; but the priest, besides being a traveler, is also the steward of the heavenly goods and is responsible for each soul entrusted to him; thus, much less than other people can he think lightly of his life, or lead it carelessly, almost as if he did not have to give an account for his lifestyle; he received more than all others, and so more than all others he will be punished for his infidelity.

This thought alone should be enough to enable him to be very vigilant over his duties and to give him a strong character so that he can be firm in the face of the difficulties of life and of the apostolate.

What is unfortunate is just this: many times the ministers of God forget their responsibilities and the account they will have to make of them on the Day of Judgment, and they lose their sense of duty. If they would consider that a bad example, lack of compassion, and even a simple missed opportunity to educate could produce irreparable harm to a soul, how would they dare lead a bad or superficial life?

The priest is the teacher of the peoples; he is their only educator, because only with the light of God can he move souls towards goodness; if he does not know how to transmit this wonderful light or even pose obstacles to its spreading, he will be responsible before God for all the sins of the peoples entrusted to him.

This is a truth that must be weighed carefully, in order not to find very sad surprises and to not be irreparably held to account in eternity.

5. True love and heroic sacrifices in true charity and forgiveness.

Many have waxed poetically on the name of Rome, saying that it is a name for love: *Rome equals love**. However they do not consider that during the period when it was ruled by pagans, Rome was love reversed literally, which equates to implacable hatred. Imperial Rome especially has littered the world with ruins and slaughters, enslaving everything under its imperialistic tyranny and the fatuous glory of a few leaders. In fact, all the histories of human conquest have this sad legacy of hatred and bloodshed.

Jesus Christ instead proclaims himself the conqueror of love with his bloody sacrifice and He places love, heroic sacrifice, and charity as the basis of a Christian character. He has come to bring *fire* to the earth, not the fire of destruction but that of charity, and He only desires this fire to be lighted; He came to bring this fire submitting himself to a complete sacrifice and suffering that flowed over Him like a baptism; and His love made him anxiously desire this suffering, keeping Him distressed until He had suffered all the pains He was to endure.

He leaves this love and sacrifice as a beautiful inheritance to his followers, since the conversion of the world will bring them persecution and pain even by their closest family members.

* “Roma” spelled backwards is “amor” which means love in Latin.

Thus do not be deceived; the preaching of the Gospel, in addressing human passions, will produce violent reactions that shall be the cause of great suffering for the apostles of the Divine Word and all their successors.

This was already announced by the prophets and to see its fulfillment must be for everybody a proof of its veracity. The scribes and the Pharisees condemned themselves by rejecting the truth, because even though they knew how to understand the changing weather patterns by observing the clouds in the sky or the blowing of the wind, they did not want to distinguish the unmistakable signs of the coming of the Messiah in the very persecution that was moved against Him and his disciples. They themselves were fulfilling the predictions of the prophets, and did not want to realize that its fulfillment was the sign of the accomplishment of the divine promises.

The allusion to the obstinacy of the scribes and Pharisees in denying the truth is like a subtext in the discourse of Jesus. He soon continues his prophetic proclamation of the great persecution that his followers would suffer, exhorting them to meekness, prudence and charity. This was the great single force to which they would have to appeal to defend themselves, because Christians are children of peace and messengers of charity. They should look for agreement, peace and charity, prudently avoiding what would embitter their opponents, which could produce more violence in them.

This is the program of the Church, to which she has remained faithful throughout the ages: faced with the brutality of her enemies who would suppress her, she always seeks to bring peace and harmony, and Her diplomacy is always inspired to seek the glory of God and the good of all souls.

That must be the spirit of all of His ministers and all His faithful, since finding agreement with adversaries, or at least being prudent in dealing with them when they show themselves unable to reach an agreement, saves the good from extreme destruction. From the parable that

Jesus tells (verses 58 and 59) it is evident that He does not want his followers to be fond of quarrels, because in disagreements there are dissensions, aversions, and hatreds that are the antithesis of goodness toward souls. Even when we are right, in a clash that does not affect the soul or the conscience, it is necessary to yield to avoid the risk of encountering obstacles in doing good, and to avoid being worse off even before judges, as often happens.

The various epochs of the Church.

This chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke implicitly outlines the various epochs of the Church, and the attitudes that the faithful should have: the Church was born in the Jewish nation, between the opposition and the corruption of the scribes and Pharisees, and had to be aware of their spirit of hypocrisy and disloyalty. At her birth, the Church would be made a sign of persecution, in which she would feel lost; she had to go on trusting God, discounting the dangers ahead and refusing to accept any restrictions in confessing the truth, even at the cost of martyrdom.

After the epoch of persecutions and of martyrs followed a triumphal time in which the Church had to be careful not to be absorbed by temporal pursuits and putting Her trust in the hands of men.

The attitude of Jesus toward the young man who called on Him to be a judge in the matter of an inheritance and the parable of the rich man who put all of his trust in himself, say it clearly. The Church must abhor material and temporal struggles, and her life must not be focused on the enjoyment of the super abundance of material goods but *to store up treasures in Heaven*.

During the age of her material prosperity, the Church would be enriched by hosts of souls, abandoning themselves to God as do birds of the air and flowers of the fields and these souls would really own the kingdom of God within them. The establishment of the great religious orders fully realized the program of the Redeemer instilling a complete trust in God in the Church and preserving in her the sacred fire of poverty and love for the eternal reward, even amidst the deviated spirit of the world.

After the epoch of the religious orders, in an age of general decline, Jesus exhorts us to be watchful while awaiting the return of the divine Bridegroom to come and reign, and in particular that his ministers be faithful to their duties; it is the announcement of the preparation of his reign which is now carried on through the apostolate of groups of Catholic laity and for a the rebirth of zeal in the spirits of the many ministers of the Lord. This is the time in which Jesus lit the fire that He came to bring upon earth, and He did it right in the middle of conflicts, amidst the very excesses of rampant wickedness of these last and most bloody persecutions.

We already see the dawn of the wondrous apostolate and the dawn of the bloodiest persecutions, which will see the dissolution of the traditional family and fierce hostility erupt between its members.

Amid the vicissitudes of life, our attitude is outlined by Jesus with wonderfully penetrating words: be loyal without pretense; propagate the truth without fear of man or human respect; strive for eternal things and trust only in God; wait for the kingdom of God on earth, trust in the restoration of all, and wait for Him in the heavens. Finally live as pilgrims, with peace in the soul, vigilant and in the harmony of charity. Living in this way we will not be overwhelmed by evil, we will love and serve God and we will reach happily our heavenly destination.

Chapter 13

1. The need for penance. The barren fig tree. Healing of a crippled woman. The mustard seed and the yeast. The number of the saved. Hostility of Herod. Punishment of Jerusalem.

1 And there were present, at that very time, some who were reporting about the Galileans, whose blood Pilate mixed with their sacrifices. 2 And responding, he said to them: "Do you think that these Galilean[s] must have sinned more than all other Galileans, because they suffered so much? 3 No, I tell you. But unless you repent, you will all perish similarly. 4 And those eighteen upon whom the tower of Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they also were greater transgressors than all the men living in Jerusalem? 5 No, I tell you. But if you do not repent, you will all perish similarly." 6 And he also told this parable: "A certain man had a fig tree, which was planted in his vineyard. And he came seeking fruit on it, but found none. 7 Then he said to the cultivator of the vineyard: 'Behold, for these three years I came seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I have found none. Therefore, cut it down. For why should it even occupy the land?' 8 But in response, he said to him: 'Lord, let it be for this year also, during which time I will dig around it and add fertilizer. 9 And, indeed, it should bear fruit. But if not, in the future, you shall cut it down.' " 10 Now he was teaching in their synagogue on the Sabbaths. 11 And behold, there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity for eighteen years. And she was bent over; and she was unable to look upwards at all. 12 And when Jesus saw her, he called her to himself, and he said to her, "Woman, you are released from your infirmity." 13 And he laid his hands upon her, and immediately she was straightened, and she glorified God. 14 Then, as a result, the ruler of the synagogue became angry that Jesus had cured on the Sabbath, and he said to the crowd: "There are six days on which you ought to work. Therefore, come and be cured on those, and not on the day of the Sabbath." 15 Then the Lord said to him in response: "You hypocrites! Does not each one of you, on the Sabbath, release his ox or donkey from the stall, and lead it to water? 16 So then, should not this daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound for lo these eighteen years, be released from this restraint on the day of the Sabbath?" 17 And as he was saying these things, all his adversaries were ashamed. And all the people rejoiced in everything that was being done gloriously by him. 18 And so he said: "To what is the kingdom of God similar, and to what figure shall I compare it? 19 It is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and cast into his garden. And it grew, and it became a great tree, and the birds of the air rested in its branches." 20 And again, he said: "To what figure shall I compare the kingdom of God? 21 It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of fine wheat flour, until it was entirely leavened." 22 And he was traveling through the cities and towns, teaching and making his way to Jerusalem. 23 And someone said to him, "Lord, are they few who are saved?" But he said to them: 24 "Strive to enter through the narrow gate. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and not be able. 25 Then, when the father of the family will have entered and shut the door, you will begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, open to us.' And in response, he will say to you, 'I do not know where you are from.' 26 Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.' 27 And he will say to you: 'I do not

know where you are from. Depart from me, all you workers of iniquity!’ 28 In that place, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, yet you yourselves are expelled outside. 29 And they will arrive from the East, and the West, and the North, and the South; and they will recline at table in the kingdom of God. 30 And behold, those who are last will be first, and those who are first will be last.” 31 On the same day, some of the Pharisees approached, saying to him: “Depart, and go away from here. For Herod wishes to kill you.” 32 And he said to them: “Go and tell that fox: ‘Behold, I cast out demons and accomplish healings, today and tomorrow. And on the third day I reach the end.’ 33 Yet truly, it is necessary for me to walk today and tomorrow and the following day. For it does not fall to a prophet to perish beyond Jerusalem. 34 Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You kill the prophets, and you stone those who are sent to you. Daily, I wanted to gather together your children, in the manner of a bird with her nest under her wings, but you were not willing 35 Behold, your house will be left desolate for you. But I say to you, that you shall not see me, until it happens that you say: ‘Blessed is he who has arrived in the name of the Lord.’ ”

2. Without repentance we go to perdition. When God calls we must answer if we do not want to be cut off from life as a barren fig tree.

While Jesus was speaking, some people came to tell him of a massacre ordered by Pilate in the atrium of the Temple to suppress a rebellion of the people, and specifically of Galileans. Often these rebellions took place during religious festivals, when large groups of people gathered, and therefore the Romans had stationed a permanent garrison at the Antonia Fortress to suppress them quickly and brutally. History does not record this specific massacre inflicted by Pilate, which had to be one of those many bloody repressions commonly ordered by the Roman rulers, but it is clear from the context that those who gave news of it to Jesus were still terrified.

Jesus Christ did not take into consideration the political cause of the massacre, but rather the moral cause of it—damning sinfulness—and He called everybody to repentance. Rebellions are useless when they are caused by infidelity to the law of God; instead of rebelling it is necessary to make reparations for sins and to reconcile with God's mercy.

Perhaps some of those who brought news of the massacre ordered by Pilate also had the intention to incite Jesus into condemning it, thereby creating a pretense to accuse Him before the governor; but the Redeemer, with His divine answer, did not give them an excuse to malign Him, but on the contrary, He called them to the duty of penance and reminded them of the responsibility that they had in that public tragedy as well as in the destruction of the tower of Siloam, which, according to tradition, was also caused by Pilate.

The public calamities.

The words of Jesus open a new perspective on how we need to consider public social tragedies, wars, oppressions and tyrannies; their natural or political causes seemingly accidental; in reality, they are entirely caused by sin, and they produce all their

disastrous effects when they are not counterbalanced with reparation and penance. Viewing public tragedies any other way is wrong. Also personal tragedies have the same sorrowful cause, especially and the worst of misfortunes—eternal perdition—and therefore Jesus said in general terms: *If you do not repent, you will all perish as they did!**. If we do not orient our souls towards God and do not subdue our senses and our passions for the sake of our souls, we move against the Divine Will, and we go towards perdition.

Public calamities that afflict nations and the trials we experience in our lives are in effect penances that the Lord sends to save us. Public disasters punish or purify nations

Sorrowfully, we must recognize that we are all sinners and we all must feel the need for reparation. Penance must, first of all, come from our interior, eliminating false praise from ourselves and recognizing the Law and the Divine Will as our guides; we must punish our will and our rebellious senses, voluntarily depriving ourselves of what attracts us and makes us lose control of ourselves; moreover there must be a contrite and filial abandonment to the infinite mercy of God through the Sacrament of Penance by those that are immersed in sin, and at the same time they are for each soul a great penance, perhaps the most grave and purifying of penances, because they are inevitable. For instance as a war approaches, a most terrible scourge especially in our time: we see cities preparing themselves in a funereal way: they dim the lights, evacuate strategic sites, minimize the so-called civil lifestyle and give themselves to a military lifestyle.** The overall atmosphere is one of sadness, mothers wailing, brides moaning, and young people, even though they try to hide it, feel death behind them and they understand that their lives could end as well.

What is all this apparatus of sadness?

It is God's call to repentance, the sorrowful but inescapable expiation of sins that have been committed. If souls hear the voice of God in time and anticipate their penance like the Ninevites did, the scourge will stop; but if they continue down the path of sin they shall be caught in the whirlwind.

To many people life sometimes seems like a cruel fate, but it is a serious mistake to think this. Every disaster is rooted in sin, and it can be healed with penance. Unfortunately many souls often follow the opposite direction; they stay with their own sins and in fact increase their rebellion against God. Certain despondent attitudes arising from not understanding suffering can become blasphemous, thereby opening the gates to one's life to Satan; then goodness can no longer be found, and one falls from abyss to abyss possibly even arriving to extreme temporal and eternal ruin. Therefore, when we find ourselves in a tribulation, let us think of it as a call from God, let us examine our faults, let us eliminate them through Confession and repair them with penance; let us go on God's way once more, and the Lord will forgive us also in our present life, giving us again peace and prosperity.

*How appropriate is this call to do penance today!

**We remember the dramatic period when it was announced that Italy, too, would enter into the war (World War II) and so streetlights were darkened and people were told that no light could be visible in their windows to avoid air strikes.

The parable of the fruitless fig tree.

Sometimes the Lord sends us a tribulation but the prayers of others or of the Church eliminate it giving us, by the grace of God, a little more time to do penance. In this case, however, we must not be dismissive of the divine mercy and believe that the situation has been somehow rectified.

The parable of the fruitless fig tree very eloquently makes this point and so we must not take its message lightly: the Lord seeks fruits—holy works—from our lives, and if we do not produce them, He shall inflict on us a scourge.

It is not enough then to have a weak and temporary resolution of repentance in order to avoid the scourge. We must change internally and begin a new life, a Christian holy life.

Certain habits, certain vices, certain miseries must be radically eliminated from our souls by appealing to the grace and mercy of God. If we do not do this, our lives become even more entangled with tribulations each passing day and, becoming prey to Satan, we become extremely unhappy.

When they notified Jesus about the massacre of the Galileans, He certainly thought of the future destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans and saw in that massacre, as also in the ruins of the tower of Siloam, a first warning of God to the ungrateful populace. Those heartfelt words, *If you do not repent, you shall all perish as they did* on his lips had a much broader meaning than a simple call to individual repentance; He called the entire nation to renew itself in the face of the threat of imminent downfall.

In the end, the parable of the fruitless tree completed His sorrowful appeal to the ungrateful people: already for three years He had preached repentance and the coming of the kingdom of God but in vain; He looked at this ungrateful nation for the fruit of so much mercy. There was nothing left for the Lord to do but to cut it off from all the other nations and let it go to ruin; and yet He himself prayed to obtain at least a deferral from this most serious scourge: but would the nation have benefited?

After the death of Jesus, a forty year period of merciful delay went by before Jerusalem was destroyed, but the people did not repent; when finally the day of accountability came, justice was inexorable, not for revenge but because there was nothing more to do; the fig tree had been resistant to the last treatment of the farmer, and now could be only used as firewood.

The story of Israel as the story of many nations and individuals.

It is most sorrowful that the story of Israel is repeated both in the lives of individual people as well as in the history of many nations, and we can certainly say that it continues to unfold even under our own eyes. What are these rumors of war that terrify us without outbreaks of war? The Pope prays*, good and faithful souls pray as well and

*Pope Pious XII continually offered prayers and begged Benito Mussolini several times not to go to war (as it is written also in the diary of Ciano, who was Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Mussolini's son-in-law) but he was not heard. The words of Don Dolindo, who wrote about it well in advance, were truly prophetic.

the fearful terrible scourge seems like a hurricane that is moving away. But where is the

repentance of the people?

Indeed, we can say the opposite: that life instead is becoming ever more disorderly and daily rouses the wrath of God. At this rate the scourge shall inevitably come, and many arrogant nations will painfully be reduced to tatters, together with the idols they erected. The scourge will have the character of a hurricane of fire and steel, and the nations that rely on their brute strength to build themselves up against God and the Church will be swept away like straw in a tornado.

Let us listen to God who calls us, let us amend our lives, make reparation for our faults and reconcile ourselves with the divine mercy. Let us not sin anymore—not sin anymore; this is the secret of the revival of our own prosperity and that of the nations. Any other precaution or initiative is just an illusion leading to the ruin of mind and body.

3. Healing of a woman who could not look up and a rebuke to the Pharisees who always looked down.

Jesus was teaching in a synagogue on a Sabbath about the kingdom of God. The sacred scriptures do not say explicitly what He was teaching, but He threw out in the synagogue, so to speak, a new seed on the old field and the yeast in the mass of flour to clear out what had passed and to raise souls to heaven.

While He was speaking to the people assembled there, along came a woman who was crippled and bent by a diabolical possession, and was *completely incapable of standing erect*, so much so that she was bent down and faced the ground. She was the living image of the Jewish people and the entire human race, so bent down under the weight of the slavery of Satan because of their sins that they could not look up to heaven and instead looked only upon the things of the earth.

The poor woman did not come to the Synagogue to be healed but to listen to the divine Word; she did not ask anything of Jesus, and it was Jesus himself who called her to come closer to Him, told her that He would heal her, and then straightened her by laying His hands on her.

Satan, who possessed that poor woman, at the touch of the vivifying hand of Jesus, could not pose any resistance and immediately left her, freeing her nerve centers that had been in his possession, and immediately her body resumed its natural position. The woman, now straightened, started to glorify God. It was a most beautiful scene that should have moved the rabbi of the Synagogue deeply, having witnessed firsthand a miracle, but instead he became indignant against Jesus because He had healed her on the Sabbath.

Clearly his mind had not even registered the fact that he had been present at a miracle; already prejudiced against Jesus by the envy and hatred now traditional for the scribes and Pharisees, he believed the healing to be a purely natural phenomenon, and thus he viewed it as a violation of the Sabbath obligation against work.

However, even considering it merely a natural phenomenon, he still would not have the right to complain since Jesus Christ did not do any material work—He only imposed his hands on the sick woman—but the rabbi of the synagogue did not want to miss the opportunity to rebuke Jesus and, not daring to do it directly, posed himself as a defender of God's Law before the people, scolding the woman in seeking treatment on the Sabbath day. The bitterness of his soul was manifested through his words in an expression

that was seemingly balanced and dispassionate, since he could not have ignored the fact that to cure an infirmity was an act of mercy and not a menial job.

Jesus Christ responded not only to the rabbi of the Synagogue but to all the Pharisees there present, and with an “*ad hominem*” argument showed the foolishness of their being scandalized and the duplicity of their souls. In fact they admitted that it was permissible, on a Sabbath day, to untie an animal, move it from the stable and lead it to drink. If one wanted to quibble, then, to move an animal was a job, and yet according to them, it was permitted to give relief to the animal. How then could it be considered work to heal a creature bound by Satan, and to heal her with a word and a simple act of laying hands on her? The argument was so obvious that the Pharisees became very embarrassed and were unable to come up with any answer, while the people rejoiced for the wonderful things that Jesus did in their midst.

The poor woman physically could not raise her eyes up to heaven and the Pharisees could not do it spiritually, because they always kept their eyes fixed on the earth; the Redeemer, with the touch of his divine hands physically straightened the woman, and He also tried to spiritually straighten the Pharisees, but they were too proud and evil minded, and did not raise their eyes to God and to the marvelous plan of Redemption. Absorbed in their meagerness, they remained tied to Satan, and believed themselves be able to block the way of the Redeemer and of His divine mercy that was already spreading throughout the earth.

The kingdom of God.

For this reason Jesus added that the kingdom of God was like a mustard seed, which once it is planted grows and develops or was like yeast that leavens the whole loaf. Far from being stifled by the malignancy of men, it would grow more and more and would be the refuge of souls, just as a tree is a shelter of life for birds. He would be the leaven of the new life renewing all humanity.

Today more than ever men are bent towards the earth, bound by Satan to modern civilization and only interested in material things, unable to look upward.

This bending of all human activities toward earth is a truly sorrowful state of affairs, even when these activities seem to have an appearance of spirituality, or perhaps, even more, when they are colored with a rotten pagan spirituality. Only Jesus can raise us upward with the touch of His most holy hands, and only Jesus can once again reopen for us holy eternal horizons.

The Pharisees were scandalized that Jesus healed a sick woman on a Sabbath but believed it to be perfectly lawful to heal beasts on a Sabbath, because it was in their interest to do so. In fact, they even had a kind of love for animals which trumped true charity, as we see in our modern civilization. Animal rights groups are eagerly promoted while at the same time major investments are made to find ever more refined means of human destruction during war; many times the needs of animals are taken a ridiculous extent at the expense of the poor, and also we see the obsession to maximizing humanity’s physical well being through debauchery and corruption at the expense of its spiritual well-being.

The true and worst kind of hypocrisy is to worry about preventing diseases of the body while at the same time promoting or encouraging spiritual corruption; it is pure

hypocrisy to make laws restricting the stench that comes from a heap of dung but then have laws freely allowing moral dung heaps. May the Lord, in His mercy, extend to us His Hands and let us again raise our heads, our hearts and our souls towards God that we may truly live as His children and not become coarsened to the level of beasts!

4. We have to strive to get to heaven, regardless of the pitfalls of evil.

While Jesus was walking towards Jerusalem, a man asked Him if only a few would be saved. Why did he ask Him this question? Maybe because getting closer to Jerusalem he considered the sins of that ungrateful city, or because he was thinking of the ruins caused by past wars; perhaps he asked the question because coming closer to the city the lax morality and corruption of its inhabitants were more obvious to him.

Jesus Christ did not answer the question directly, because it was not a question that concerned men, but God. How is it important for us to know if there will be only a few or many who will be saved? For us it is necessary to be saved and because we are not predestined to perdition or salvation, to be saved depends on our efforts in doing good and in our filial appeal to the divine mercy.

More than knowing the number of the elect, we need to make an effort to belong to that number, not presuming to be able to have a privileged position in Paradise because we had it on earth, as being part of the chosen people. This is the basic meaning of the answer of Jesus. He exhorted them to enter in Heaven *through the narrow door*, that is, through the path of renouncing our disordered passions and being faithful to the divine law.

The world thinks this path to be narrow and oppressive, and Jesus calls it *narrow* in this sense, but in reality the true narrow and oppressive door is the one of the evil, because it ties the soul to the toils of a most awful slavery. The gate of heaven appears narrow, but in reality it is immensely large and beautiful, it is enough only to enter it in order to understand.

The *narrow door* can also be seen as the epilogue of one's life, when one carries to God what one has done, and since the time of the test has passed, one cannot do anything to change one's condition.

The divine justice then is like something *narrow*, in the sense of a precise assessment of a life, self-evident and therefore irrevocable. Many would like in that moment *to enter* and to change their condition, but they will not be able to do it because *the door will be closed*, their life in time is ended, and it is not possible to begin again. To think, as many foolish people do, that after death there can be another way and in a new earthly existence to resume the path of life, is just a dangerous fantasy; when one has arrived, one has arrived; and when the door of earthly life is closed there is no other alternative: either to stay inside with the Father of the family and rejoice, or remain outside to suffer, in eternal perdition.

Speaking directly to the Jewish people, Jesus pointed out that their position of privilege among the peoples of the earth did not constitute a claim for the attainment of eternal glory. If they did not do good works, they too would be far from God in eternity, just as surely as the master of a house is far from someone who is completely unknown to him; they will purely and simply be considered as committers of iniquity, and will be

condemned to eternal damnation, away from the saints and away also from all the persons who are saved and will come from all parts of the world.

Then it will be realized that *the last called* by God to His kingdom will be first, and the first, that is many who are part of the chosen people, called by God first, shall be last.

The way of salvation is narrow, because there are many who plot against it and try to put obstacles in its path. There is in the world a strange enmity against all that is good, an enmity that comes from diabolical suggestions, and sometimes even ensnares good people, making them involuntarily instruments of the evil one.

It is necessary to continue to walk straight ahead and to look towards the ultimate goal we must reach.

Evil cannot ruin the plan of God.

Evil is not able to destroy the plan of God, and the evildoers, as much as they try, are not able to stop its unfolding. Evildoers may for a while appear to triumph over the good, but then the justice of God intervenes and sweeps them away.

This great truth, a necessary support for those who take the narrow door, was proclaimed by Jesus in front the people, when some Pharisees went to tell him to leave because Herod wanted to kill him. Jesus proclaimed that above Herod was the irresistible power of the divine Will, and He answered those Pharisees who had cunningly, with that provocation, wanted to frighten Him in His ministry, "*Go and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out demons and I perform healings today and tomorrow, and on the third day I accomplish my purpose*". Jesus called Herod *a fox* because he was cruel and cunning in his evil and also called him this way as a warning to the Pharisees for the conniving nature of their words. Herod did not want Jesus to go to Jerusalem because he feared that He would proclaim himself King of Israel there thus dethroning him. The greatness and the power of Jesus were now too greatly known, and His miracles proved that He was the awaited Messiah; Herod would have liked to kill him or at least to force him to retreat to small towns where it would be impossible for Him to promote a revolution and take over the centers of the national life.

This cunning and evil plan, however, was entirely in opposition with the divine Will, and Jesus declared that He would accomplish to the very end what God wanted and he would die *in Jerusalem*, that is He would be condemned by the supreme religious authority of that city, as in the past all the Prophets had been condemned.

Jesus Christ was crucified outside Jerusalem, on Calvary, but He was condemned by the High Priest, who led the Romans to condemn Him, and this crime filled the measure of iniquity of the ungrateful city and the chosen people, condemning them to complete, extreme destruction.

Jesus Christ in announcing his own death, considered the love that moved Him to sacrifice Himself and the great love that moved Him to try in so many ways to save his people from destruction; His heart was deeply distressed and with heartfelt sorrow He turned to the holy city saying with great love: "*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how many times I yearned to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were unwilling! Behold,*

your house will be abandoned.” Jesus deeply grieves and He announces the punishment, but also proclaims mercy to all Israel in the last times.

Israel *would not see Jesus again*, that is, would not have Him as protector and defender until the time when, recognizing Him as Messiah and Redeemer, would hail Him saying: *Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord*. These words Jesus Christ said with absolute firmness, prophesying, and they certainly will have their fulfillment.

Israel, more than ever today is persecuted from all sides, and sees its house *deserted*; it is trapped in terrible tribulations and does not have anywhere to go, disliked as it is by the peoples; this, however, looks like the first indication of its conversion, since abandoned by all people, it will feel the need to orient itself to the Catholic Church, finding the way to salvation.*

When we do good and the evildoers intimidate us because they want us to give up, we will respond as Jesus did: Behold, I shall work today and tomorrow, and I shall finish only when God shall will it. No man can put an end to our holy activities, and especially those which are the unavoidable duties of our ministry; the more Satan moves wars on us the more we must act, lest we be admonished by God and go to our eternal perdition.

*The Catholic Church did a lot during the war to save the Jews, especially under the guidance of Pope Pius XII. In fact at the end of the war the Rabbi of Rome felt it to be his duty to publicly thank the Pope. After the Council, Catholics as well now have a more brotherly attitude toward the Jews, who are the descendants of the ancient Patriarchs and they also, at a time known only to God, shall enter into the Church.

Chapter 14

1. The healing of the man with dropsy on the Sabbath. Do not seek the first place. Practice of charity. Parable of the banquet. How to follow Jesus.

1 And it happened that, when Jesus entered the house of a certain leader of the Pharisees on the Sabbath to eat bread, they were observing him. And behold, a certain man before him was afflicted with edema. 3 And responding, Jesus spoke to the experts in the law and to the Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to cure on the Sabbath?" 4 But they kept silent. Yet truly, taking hold of him, he healed him and sent him away. 5 And responding to them, he said, "Which of you will have a donkey or an ox fall into a pit, and will not promptly pull him out, on the day of the Sabbath?" 6 And they were unable to respond to him about these things. 7 Then he also told a parable, to those who were invited, noticing how they chose the first seats at the table, saying to them: 8 "When you are invited to a wedding, do not sit down in the first place, lest perhaps someone more honored than yourself may have been invited by him. 9 And then he who called both you and him, approaching, may say to you, 'Give this place to him.' And then you would begin, with shame, to take the last place. 10 But when you are invited, go, sit down in the lowest place, so that, when he who invited you arrives, he may say to you, 'Friend, go up higher.' Then you will have glory in the sight of those who sit at table together with you. 11 For everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted." 12 Then he also said to the one who had invited him: "When you prepare a lunch or dinner, do not choose to call your friends, or your brothers, or your relatives, or your wealthy neighbors, lest perhaps they might then invite you in return and repayment would be made to you. 13 But when you prepare a feast, call the poor, the disabled, the lame, and the blind. 14 And you will be blessed because they do not have a way to repay you. So then, your recompense will be in the resurrection of the just." 15 When someone sitting at table with him had heard these things, he said to him, "Blessed is he who will eat bread in the kingdom of God." 16 So he said to him: "A certain man prepared a great feast, and he invited many. 17 And he sent his servant, at the hour of the feast, to tell the invited to come; for now everything was ready. 18 And at once they all began to make excuses. The first said to him: 'I bought a farm, and I need to go out and see it. I ask you to excuse me.' 19 And another said: 'I bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to examine them. I ask you to excuse me.' 20 And another said, 'I have taken a wife, and therefore I am not able to go.' 21 And returning, the servant reported these things to his lord. Then the father of the family, becoming angry, said to his servant: 'Go out quickly into the streets and neighborhoods of the city. And lead here the poor, and the disabled, and the blind, and the lame.' 22 And the servant said: 'It has been done, just as you ordered, lord, and there is still room.' 23 And the lord said to the servant: 'Go out to the highways and hedges, and compel them to enter, so that my house may be filled. 24 For I tell you, that none of those men who were invited will taste of my feast.' " 25 Now great crowds traveled with him. And turning around, he said to them: 26 "If anyone comes to me, and does not hate his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brothers, and sisters, and yes, even his own life, he is not able to be my disciple. 27 And whoever does not bear his cross and come after me, is not able to be my disciple. 28 For who among you, wanting to build a tower, would not first sit down and

determine the costs that are required, to see if he has the means to complete it? 29 Otherwise, after he will have laid the foundation and not been able to finish it, everyone who sees it may begin to mock him, 30 saying: 'This man began to build what he was not able to finish.' 31 Or, what king, advancing to engage in war against another king, would not first sit down and consider whether he may be able, with ten thousand, to meet one who comes against him with twenty thousand? 32 If not, then while the other is still far away, sending a delegation, he would ask him for terms of peace. 33 Therefore, every one of you who does not renounce all that he possesses is not able to be my disciple. 34 Salt is good. But if the salt has lost its flavor, with what will it be seasoned? 35 It is useful neither in soil, nor in manure, so instead, it shall be thrown away. Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear."

2. The healing of a man suffering from dropsy and about charity.

Jesus Christ entered the home of a leading Pharisee on a Sabbath, to dine at his house. He had invited Him, perhaps because he was seeking an occasion to find a reason to accuse Him, since the Sacred Text says that *they kept their eyes* on Him.

It would not be surprising that at the house of a leading Pharisee many among them would have been hostile to the Redeemer and ready to accuse Him. They knew that He did not give importance to their customs regarding eating and because this might enable them to find something with which to reproach him, they invited him to dinner.

The banquet hall, as usual, was open to all and thus it was easy for a man suffering from dropsy to enter unsuspected and to present himself to Jesus. He did not ask Him for anything, for fear of the Pharisees, maybe recalling the recommendation of the head of the synagogue (Lk 13:14) to not be cured on the Sabbath day, but stood before Jesus and waited for his mercy. From the context it is noted that the dropsy-afflicted man was not introduced at the banquet by the Pharisees and that he also must have believed in Jesus, because he was healed.

The Redeemer, speaking to the scribes present and to the Pharisees, asked: *"Is it lawful to cure on the Sabbath or not?"* With this question He put them in a dilemma, because they knew that to heal was not servile work, and they also knew that to condemn an act of charity on a Sabbath day was the same as condemning themselves. Therefore they remained silent. It is evident from the words of Jesus that, even though they did not speak, they remained contrary to the idea of healing someone on a Sabbath day, and not so much for the love of the Law, but for their hostility toward the Lord. Seeing that He indeed healed the man suffering from dropsy, they made signs of disapproval, murmuring in their own hearts. Thus Jesus *answering* their thoughts said *"Who among you, if your son or ox falls into a cistern, would not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?"*

In those times, wells did not have guardrails and were covered only by a stone when not in use; therefore it was very possible that an ass or an ox could fall into one. Thus how could it be said that to save a beast from the waters of a well was permissible, but to save a man from dropsy (which is an abnormal swelling of the body because of the retention and accumulation of fluids) was not?

The first places at the table

The Pharisees could not answer Jesus, but they indicated how disturbed they were by the humiliation suffered in how they placed themselves at the table, almost to make up for it, carefully sitting at the most important places. It is possible that maybe one of them at that moment was asked by the head of the family to yield his place to another guest of more importance, and maybe he had complained, because Jesus, addressing everyone there, began to encourage them to take the last places, if not because of virtue, at least in order to not lose face in front of the others.

Certainly Jesus would have preferred to encourage them to seek the last place because of true and sincere humility, but his guests were not capable of this, and so He was content to convince them at least for human reasons. With this He wanted in a way to promote good manners, which are a sort of preparation and disposition toward true virtue because they always represent a power over one's own weakness and a first attempt at charity towards others.

It is important, in fact, even for the purposes of seeking virtue, to temper one's actions through a sound education and proper etiquette. True virtue always results in a graceful and gentle way of doing things, but when virtue is missing or has not yet formed, a graceful and gentle way of acting produces in the soul a natural disposition that may facilitate, later, the action of grace. Jesus Christ, obviously, does not exhort anyone to act for a natural purpose, but rather to understand that a lack of virtue will lead to a lack of external behavioral forms that in turn will awaken the contempt of others. Hence to the Pharisees who, after all, were only interested in being honored in front of everyone, it was enough reason to encourage them to stop being so proud and arrogant—attitudes that were so harmful to their souls.

Etiquette, a basic virtue.

Perhaps if souls who are beginners in virtue were taught proper etiquette and civil behavior, they would gain virtue itself. Etiquette is like a fine garment put on a poor commoner; it is a motivation to exchange certain bad habits, maybe acquired since birth, with more decent habits. It is then used by the Lord for elevating the spirit. It is the first refinement of disposition that gives itself to God, a stroke of nobility taught to those who are not habitually genteel.*

In teaching them to choose the last places at the table, Jesus noticed that at the table of the Pharisee all the guests were distinguished, and therefore there was a race to take the top places.

It was a vain, ostentatious display of their importance: lavish ceremonies done for self-serving purposes. Jesus, looking into their hearts, saw what went beyond those invitations made for pure opportunism, for returning an obligation, or for indebting others, and He felt in that room the chilling absence of any acts of kindness or spiritual motivation; thus He turned to the Pharisee, who had invited him and asked him to next

*This is a very opportune reflection, because not infrequently, in the name of spirituality, we neglect those standards of civil behavior and propriety, which are also the result of a Christian sensitivity that does not want to make others uncomfortable, but calls for a treatment that respects each person.

time give a dinner inviting the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind, and in so doing to receive merits before God for his eternal life.

Exhorting him in this way, Jesus gave him a spiritual benefit directing him to the path of true good, and so giving him a precious return for the invitation He had received on that day.

The banquets and the parties.

The exhortation of Jesus to the Pharisee is very precious to us and is a guide for a very common habit among all peoples: the giving of banquets and parties during holidays and solemnities. Jesus does not condemn giving a banquet, which is usually done to increase the joy of a celebration, but urges us not make it a poor reflection of pride or personal interest. He wants the poor and the unfortunate also to participate in our celebrations, not necessarily by literally inviting them to the dinner—though this would be commendable—but to nevertheless include them in our joy.

A meal cannot be reduced to a gorging through, that of course would be a shameful thing to do; rather, it is a larger gathering of family members and dear friends in an outpouring of generosity, because joy naturally extends itself to others.

Now, as we are all children of the celestial Father, it is right that we share and are generous with those less fortunate. O if only the value of our charitable alms could be understood, and we could see the many blessings the poor bring to our celebrations, we would never omit them from our alms giving and charity. In this way our banquets will not be reduced to essentially a disguised Epicureanism and our simple joy on earth will be changed into the joy of Heaven.

3. The great meal prepared by God for His people in their Redemption, and the way to acquire Redemption.

When Jesus exhorted the Pharisee to invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind to the banquet, He was thinking surely of the great invitation of the Heavenly Father to His people in their Redemption. His words had such deep tenderness that one of the guests was so moved, and understanding His thought exclaimed: *“Blessed is the one who will dine in the kingdom of God.”*

He must have heard Jesus talking of the eternal kingdom as a feast (Mt 22:1-14) on other occasions, and now remembering this, he reminded Him of it in his exclamation because he wanted to hear Him utter another beautiful parable. There is a deeply psychological element to this situation: we love to listen again and again to those who are great speakers especially when they talk about matters that transfuse their lives, and about those subjects that most interest them. Jesus, who knew that He had come to give mankind the celestial banquet, certainly could not speak about this subject without infusing in his words and in his Heart all his tenderness.

In the heart of the man at his table He saw the desire to listen again to the parable and exclaimed: *“A man gave a great dinner to which he invited many”*. As they were all at table, the parable took on a more immediate character and Jesus willingly repeated the story to give a timely lesson from the banquet.

Invitations to a banquet, among the Jews, were made long beforehand; and when finally the hour of the banquet approached and everything was ready, the servants were sent to call and accompany the guests. For this reason Jesus added that the master of the house at dinnertime sent a servant to call the guests, to tell them that the dinner was ready. However all the invited very rudely began to make excuses; they had given such little thought to the banquet that, when the hour came, they decided to go on with their business and one of them even got married on that day.

One said he had bought a farm and had to go to see it; another that he had purchased five yoke of oxen and needed to evaluate them; another said more flatly and more rudely that he had taken a wife *and therefore I cannot come*. Some made an attempt at proper form in refusing and told the servant *I ask you, consider me excused*; but the one who had married, overwhelmed with preparations for the nuptial banquet, said flatly *I cannot come*.

The owner was enraged. One who prepares a feast with love undergoes unusual expenses and becomes tired from the additional work; thus he is pleased if his guests come to eat. Sometimes he even prepares a surprise, offers especially refined food, and eagerly awaits praise for his efforts from guests that enjoy his fare. In his displeasure, not wanting to waste what he had prepared, he said to the servant to go into the streets and alleys of the city and to gather the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind and invite them to come and eat; only those poor people at mealtime, in fact, would be so needy as to be found in public roads at that time searching for charity.

The servant went to call them, and as there was still more room, the master ordered him to go and invite other poor, abandoned people he found along the highways, the hedgerows, and affectionately prod them to come to the banquet. In fact by the hedges there could be found the more desperately poor, who were ashamed to appear in public or who feared harassment for any of their problems, and so they would have had to be forced to enter.

Finally the banquet hall was filled, and the host exclaimed that none of those who had refused the invitation to the dinner would taste the meal.

This exclamation may have appeared useless, since the invited guests had already rejected his invitation, but Jesus meant to say that those who reject the banquet of life, in the final judgment will come to realize they have made the wrong choice, but by then the time of trial will have already come to an end.

The conclusion of the parable concerns its spiritual application, an application that Jesus did not make, maybe because He had made the connection at other times and also perhaps because He did not want to clash with the Pharisees who were present.

The man who offered the great banquet is God, who prepared great graces for His faithful with the Redemption. He first invited all the chosen people. However, Israel, distracted by its material aspirations and earthly and sensual pleasures, did not accept the invitation and refused the graces. God then sent his apostles all over the world among the Gentiles and invited those who were poor for their lack of graces, those who were crippled in their lives, those who were blind because they did not have the truth, and the lame because they were unable to move supernaturally, and from these formed a new people to invite to the great banquet. The pagans responded to the invitation, but since there will be still be room to complete the number of the elected, God will send his servants in the end times to call to the faith the most poor and distant people, savages who live in forests and

those who are most abandoned, and will unite them to the Church, the banquet of life, and to his Kingdom, the banquet of eternal glory. God will *compel them to enter* not with violence but with great graces and will make them enter, not against their will, but winning them over through mercy and charity.

God's invitations.

We have, therefore, three invitations to the banquet of graces: one given in friendship to the chosen people; one given mercifully to the Gentiles and one given from an excess of goodness to the most savage of peoples. God, who loves to give himself to his creatures to make them happy, and who gives respecting their freedom, is limitless in His mercy, and continually calls all to life bestowing on other peoples the graces rejected by those who were invited first.

Modern civilization, considering only material aspirations, commerce, and wanton pleasures, apostate from God, rejects the Banquet of life. The Lord then calls the so-called uncivilized peoples, makes them share in the graces to show that before Him there is no difference between race or condition, and that He considers each equally.

The great banquet of the Lord is the Eucharistic banquet, the awesome banquet of graces to which He calls souls. How shameful is the attitude of these souls before so great a gift! Some, taken by the preoccupation of worldly living, say that they cannot go, and waste their time in the insatiable purchase of material goods; others absorbed in trade can only deal with cattle, pigs, fabric and merchandise, and lose the ineffable treasure of Holy Communion; others, finally, are swept up in the maelstrom of the sensual, and cannot appreciate the priceless treasures of the Eucharistic life.

It is extremely distressing to see the Altar deserted; this banquet of immense happiness; and it is extremely distressing to see poor souls lost miserably in the most meaningless and often fatal earthly joys! When the span of a person's life is considered, it is truly heartbreaking to see countless unhappy souls that go through this life tearing themselves to pieces. How many men are away from the Sacraments, how many seek comfort for their lives from what tears them apart, and how many live desperately both in this temporal life and in eternity! We, who have the fortune to serve our Heavenly Father must never tire of inviting souls to the Feast of Life and we must not ever fail to accept the daily invitation to the celestial Table, to be able to one day join the eternal Table in glory.

Jesus left the banquet of the Pharisee sorrowfully, thinking of how different the thoughts of the men were from his own, and of the reasons for which so many do not accept the invitation of God. Therefore, to the large crowd of people gathered around him He began to say openly that it was impossible to reconcile their thoughts and interests with the thoughts of God and the eternal interests, and thus He exclaimed: "*If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.*"

It is evident that Jesus does not mean to *hate* one's dear ones, but to have them in no consideration when they are an obstacle or they hinder our path to Heaven. He speaks of one's closest relationships, and even of one's very life, to describe those things that we care about the most, as can be care for one's father, mother and so on up to our own very

lives. In the same way, He said at another time, pluck out your eye, cut off your hand or your foot and so on if they are the cause of scandal.

It can happen that parents or people that are close to us could be against the interests of God, and then it is necessary for us *to hate* them—that is to stand opposite to their ways, and to follow a life completely opposite to theirs; however, more generally, Jesus wants to say that if what is dear to us or what we are attached to is in opposition to the precepts or the will of God, these must be rejected and opposed by us as one who hates another.

Hate, in fact, in establishing a complete separation between two people making them irreconcilable, is the most effective expression of how our separation should be from the world and from the spirit of the world, and from all that draws us in opposition to the precepts and love of Jesus.

It is necessary to deny oneself, and be convinced that you cannot embrace the Law of the Redeemer, without embracing the cross and following Him on the way of immolation and Calvary. This is essential and fundamental for whoever really wants to be perfect and attain Paradise.

The careful and serious response to the invitation of God

With two parables Jesus illustrates what is the Christian life, and with how much careful consideration and seriousness it must be embraced. He who builds a tower plans its construction carefully beforehand, *sitting at the table*, and with great precision calculates the nature and extent of the expenses that are necessary to complete it, in order not to be exposed to the derision of others, and to avoid starting a job that he cannot complete. A king that wants to move in war against another king first must see if he is strong enough to defeat his opponent, otherwise he tries to engage in peaceful negotiations. Christian life is then like the construction of a building and a war that is fought and requires great fortitude and reflection; fortitude and reflection are obtained by the divine Goodness, repudiating and giving up everything that draws the soul to earthly desires.

Whoever does not detach himself from everything and does not persist to fight the world, the devil and the flesh becomes like insipid salt that is no longer good, *fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile*—that is, cannot even be used as waste, either to enrich the soil directly or to be mixed with fertilizer—but rather *is thrown out*, is rejected by God, and he will lose his eternal life. Jesus adds, *Whoever has ears to hear ought to hear*", addressing especially his disciples who would have to build up the Church and fight the great battle with the world, with the devil and with the flesh; they, more than anyone else would have to repudiate themselves and renounce everything for the love of God.

The apostles could not be expected to attain places of honor in the world, nor could they aspire to make arrangements for their families; the apostolate required a complete renunciation of any bond with the family and any material interest, because they had to go into the world to preach the good news with great tribulation, and even at the cost of losing their own lives. Jesus, in saying "*Whoever has ears to hear ought to hear*", perhaps turned particularly to Judas, who already had begun to dislike the company of the Lord, and in carrying the bag of charitable donations thought only of making a profit, to

ensure for himself an independent lifestyle having all necessities and being free of worries.

Our path, too, on this earth is a path of self-denial and sacrifice if we want to follow Jesus and to work to spread His kingdom. Almost always, those who understand our great aspirations the least are just our closest relatives; it then becomes a necessity for us to counteract their ideas or their views in order to follow Jesus faithfully.

We are not for this earth, and so we should not have material comforts, lofty careers, honors, great residences, not to speak of wanton pleasure and revelry as goals for our lives. Let us abandon ourselves to God, seek His Will and His glory, following Jesus faithfully and persevere in serving Him until the end, and in so doing attain eternal happiness.

Chapter 15

1. The lost sheep. The lost coin. The prodigal son.

1 Now tax collectors and sinners were drawing near to him, so that they might listen to him. 2 And the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, "This one accepts sinners and eats with them." 3 And he told this parable to them, saying: 4 "What man among you, who has one hundred sheep, and if he will have lost one of them, would not leave the ninety-nine in the desert and go after the one whom he had lost, until he finds it? 5 And when he has found it, he places it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 6 And returning home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them: 'Congratulate me! For I have found my sheep, which had been lost.' 7 I say to you, that there will be so much more joy in heaven over one sinner repenting, than over the ninety-nine just, who do not need to repent. 8 Or what woman, having ten drachmas, if she will have lost one drachma, would not light a candle, and sweep the house, and diligently search until she finds it? 9 And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying: 'Rejoice with me! For I have found the drachma, which I had lost.' 10 So I say to you, there will be joy before the Angels of God over even one sinner who is repentant." 11 And he said: "A certain man had two sons. 12 And the younger of them said to the father, 'Father, give me the portion of your estate which would go to me.' And he divided the estate between them. 13 And after not many days, the younger son, gathering it all together, set out on a long journey to a distant region. And there, he dissipated his substance, living in luxury. 14 And after he had consumed it all, a great famine occurred in that region, and he began to be in need. 15 And he went and attached himself to one of the citizens of that region. And he sent him to his farm, in order to feed the swine. 16 And he wanted to fill his belly with the scraps that the swine ate. But no one would give it to him. 17 And returning to his senses, he said: 'How many hired hands in my father's house have abundant bread, while I perish here in famine! 18 I shall rise up and go to my father, and I will say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. 19 I am not worthy to be called your son. Make me one of your hired hands.' 20 And rising up, he went to his father. But while he was still at a distance, his father saw him, and he was moved with compassion, and running to him, he fell upon his neck and kissed him. 21 And the son said to him: 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. Now I am not worthy to be called your son.' 22 But the father said to his servants: 'Quickly! Bring out the best robe, and clothe him with it. And put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet. 23 And bring the fatted calf here, and kill it. And let us eat and hold a feast. 24 For this son of mine was dead, and has revived; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to feast. 25 But his elder son was in the field. And when he returned and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 And he called one of the servants, and he questioned him as to what these things meant. 27 And he said to him: 'Your brother has returned, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him safely.' 28 Then he became indignant, and he was unwilling to enter. Therefore, his father, going out, began to plead with him. 29 And in response, he said to his father: 'Behold, I have been serving you for so many years. And I have never transgressed your commandment. And yet, you have never given me even a young goat, so that I might feast with my friends. 30 Yet after this son of yours returned,

who has devoured his substance with loose women, you have killed the fatted calf for him.’ 31 But he said to him: ‘Son, you are with me always, and all that I have is yours. 32 But it was necessary to feast and to rejoice. For this brother of yours was dead, and has revived; he was lost, and is found.’ ”

2. The infinite mercy of God in searching for sinners and welcoming them, in an overview of the parables of Jesus.

Sinners and tax collectors were coming from everywhere to listen to Jesus. The Greek text says that *all* sinners and tax collectors approached Him to point out that all of them were attracted by the goodness of Jesus, even those who did not convert because of their guilt.

In fact the Redeemer was powerfully attractive; He had come to earth to regenerate the people and in himself He had the delicacy of a mother, the loving care of a pastor and the warmth of an affectionate father. Sinners too, in approaching Jesus felt interiorly to become better persons because their souls would spontaneously humble themselves before that immense light of sanctity.

The Pharisees and the scribes did not tolerate the goodness of Jesus because it was in vivid contrast with the hardness of their souls; solicitous as they were of their own fame and glory, they despised sinners in order to show their feigned sense of righteousness and disapproved of Jesus’ attitude not because they did not like it, but to point out to the people that He was not as righteous as they were. They believed that his familiarity with sinners depended solely on his superficiality, and they wanted to point out that since He was not able to recognize them, He was not a Prophet.

Their true natures were revealed through a mixture of pride, malignancy and dislike that they evinced.

In answering, Jesus Christ did not expose their true natures, however, as he could have, but instead He revealed the mercy of God and of his own Heart; in this way He opened the souls of sinners of all times to a greater trust and made known the great secret of His divine mission. He did this by telling the people three parables to show the goodness of God in searching out and welcoming sinners, revealing that He was seeking also those sinners who had gone astray, not for a superficial evaluation of their sins, or out of simple, natural compassion, but because He was God and He searched for sinners to give them mercy. Moreover, these three parables show His clear consideration for sinners of every nation in every age, looking upon them as little lambs gone astray from the flock of God; as human values, lost with damage to everyone, and as distant children far from their Father's heart.

A shepherd searches for the lost sheep out of compassion, a woman searches for a valuable object out of interest, and a father’s most tender love longs for the rebellious son who has left him.

These are the three great moments of the Divine Mercy.

The Lord calls sinful mankind as a shepherd calls lost sheep. He redeems mankind by paying the ransom, and welcomes it with immense fatherly love, restoring its original splendor. He welcomed Israel and sought to find it in the wilderness of the world just as one seeks a lost sheep, carrying it Himself through the ways of life as a shepherd carries

his sheep on his shoulder. He came to earth from Heaven to give it light, to search for lost mankind, to restore its greatness, lost because of sin; His heart awaits humanity gone astray and apostate, immersed in the filth of impurity, reduced to a state of extreme squalor, and welcomes it with fatherly love, rehabilitating it.

God's mercy always includes a loving search, a divine evaluation of a soul, and an immense love with which to welcome it. It can be said that the three parables proposed by Jesus were an indication of the three great manifestations of the mercy of God One and Triune: first, that of the Father, given to the chosen people, his flock; second, that of the Son, given for our Redemption, and as the One who pays the price of our ransom; and third, that of the Holy Spirit manifested in the Church everyday, and in a marvelous way at the end of the times, receiving into His Heart the corrupted and apostate children gone astray from His paternal love.

Jesus talks of the joy of the shepherd in finding the lost sheep, the happiness of the woman in finding her lost coin, and the joy of the father embracing again his once misguided son, but this was not to imply that God loves sinners more than the righteous instead it was to make clear His mercy is so full and so complete that He welcomes repentant sinners as if they were righteous. He tells of *the great festivity in Heaven* that occurs for a repentant sinner, to let us know that the joy of the Blessed is greater for a soul who is saved, than for those who are already saved or righteous; the same can be said of a father who rejoices *more* for a son who was sick and is now healed than for his other sons who are in good health. This does not mean that he has a greater appreciation for those who are sick than for those who are in good health, but rather precisely because he values good health, is why he rejoices that his sick son is now cured.*

Repentant sinners also always have more humility, gratitude and love, which render them dearer to the Lord making it easier for them to receive the flow of graces.

Sin is an awful sickness that is always loathsome to God; but true penance can bloom in the heart of sinners even more than in the righteous, and the tenderness of God is particularly drawn to this blooming of love and virtue. It should be noted that Jesus is brief in relating the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin, while instead He tells the parable of the prodigal son in great and beautiful detail, to emphasize the love by which God as father accepts the sinners *who come to Him repentant*.

His divine Heart's tenderness had no boundaries when He spoke of what the soul does in seeking God; in the exuberance of the parable, He revealed the exuberance of God's love. We might say that in His profound charity towards us He wanted to give more emphasis to the need of a sinner in seeking God than what God does for a sinner; His love for us in his search for us is infinite and His love to welcome us again is supremely tender. Hence the divine psychological reasoning of the Redeemer in taking more time to describe the parable of the prodigal son; because the magnitude of this parable can also make us understand how exceptional the mercy God will be in the end times toward His apostate children returning to His Heart.

* A very clear and appropriate reflection about the father who cures his son's sickness and loves his healing precisely because he loves health, well-being and justice.

3. The three parables of the mercy of God: the lost sheep.

The Pharisees showed themselves ruthless against sinners because their salvation did not interest them. They loved God so little that they did not mind losing His love, and instead were extremely venal and interested in everything that concerned their possessions and their money.

Jesus, in order to render most intelligible the delicacy of divine goodness to them, appealed directly to their material interests, and in particular to the sheep of their sheepfolds which constituted real wealth in those times. From a psychological standpoint there is a very loving retort in the brevity with which Jesus answers the Pharisees: "*What man among you having a hundred sheep and losing one of them would not leave the ninety-nine in the desert and go after the lost one until he finds it?*" His divine Heart is wounded by their murmuring, however to get their attention He does not tell them a story, but rather goes directly to a topic that would interest and move them, thus saying in essence: why, do you not know that all sinners are my sheep and I love them, in a way, like a shepherd loves his sheepfold? You take care of your sheep and if one of them is lost, you do not rest until you have found it, and yet I should let one of my sheep perish, lost in the ravines of their guilt? It is a forcefully strong argument, which shows all the love Jesus has for poor sinners; and in fact Christian charity has welcomed this parable and, we would say, developed and made it one of the tenderest symbols of the merciful love of the Savior.

A shepherd has one hundred sheep and leads them in *the desert* to graze—that is to say in an untilled parcel of land, away from houses and used for grazing. As the sheep are grazing he finds that one of them is lost. Thus to notice this, it implies that he does not lead his sheep around carelessly, but rather, takes care of each of them and counts them one by one. In this way he realizes that one of them is lost. Full of anguish, he then secures the ninety-nine sheep and runs all over the hills to look for his missing little sheep, calling for it as his loving spirit moves him. Finally he finds it, entangled among the thorns; he untangles it; he sees it is tired, hungry, frightened; he kisses and caresses it and puts it on his shoulders as it bleats. Then he runs home happily to tell his friends and neighbors the good news and to celebrate with them.

His love thus communicated to his friends the grief he felt at losing his sheep making his misadventure a source of concern for all of them. Everyone in fact heard his joyful call, came from their houses, ran and congratulated him and celebrated with him, caressing the once-lost sheep.

The Lord is not indifferent to the sinful soul, his gaze lovingly follows it as it strays, He is so loving that it seems that He does not have any other care but for this one soul. He does not cease to run after the little sheep, runs after it with gifts of grace, with tribulations and the voices of his crucified love.

It belongs to Him, it is His little sheep, and when He finds it, *he sets it on his shoulders*, because He carries and supports it with the very special help of His grace, and regards it as a trophy of His victory before the Heavenly Court. Men are not able to fully appreciate the return of a soul to God; there are good men who rejoice in it but they do not grasp its value; only in Heaven can the loss of a soul and its return to a state of grace be fully appreciated and for this reason Jesus says that the feast is done *in Heaven*.

To lose God is a terrible misfortune; to find Him again is an immeasurable grace, because it is the finding of our first principle and our ultimate goal. In Heaven, charity is perfect, and for this reason there is immense rejoicing over one sinner who returns to God. This shows us the wonderful communion of the Saints who are with us and who are especially concerned for our eternal salvation as we journey here on earth.

The lost coin that was found.

The scribes and Pharisees were exceedingly interested in and were greatly attached to money, so Jesus continues His great teaching of God's mercy with another parable that could convince them a little more easily; he does not directly involve them this time, as he did in the case of the lost sheep, as He was moved by an extreme delicacy of charity, because while it would be commendable a search for a lost lamb, it was not equally commendable to search eagerly for money.

Jesus Christ reminds them gently of their venality, with a parable about a poor woman. Within this context, in fact, He is able to more pronouncedly stress the extreme care with which the poor woman searched for her lost coin. The coin was the equivalent of about 0.87 Italian Lire today; the woman had ten of them totaling what would correspond to about 8.70 Italian Lire[†]; thus to lose one of them, was not to be taken lightly for her. The Jewish homes did not have much light and even today often have few windows, thus the woman lit a candle to look for the coin and not finding it, she began to sweep the house carefully checking every possible place. Her anxiety did not escape her friends and neighbors who were very sorry for her loss, thus, as soon as she found the coin, she quickly called them to share her joy with them and that they may rejoice with her.

Jesus wanted to say to the scribes and Pharisees: “How is it that you do not find peace if you lose but one coin and yet you complain if I seek sinners who are my own inheritance? In fact He searches for them with the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of Sinners, and with the Church. *Mary lights a lamp*, enlightening souls with inner inspirations*, and the Church *sweeps the house* with spiritual exercises, with missions and with daily means of spiritual resurrection that she offers to her faithful. Jesus in this way finds souls, riches of priceless value for Him, his love exults and all the Blessed rejoice with Him because they also were saved by the infinite mercy of God.

The prodigal son.

To the Pharisees it seemed impossible that God would welcome sinners and so they tried to find something in Jesus' familiarity with them that could be a reason against His Divinity, and because of this the Savior showed, in a most tender story, the way God welcomes sinners and indirectly proclaimed Himself to be God, because that was the way that He welcomed them, in the excess of His merciful love, not for acceptance of their

[†]Translator's note: the Italian Lire values reflect the time when Don Dolindo was writing. However, each coin in today's (2014) U.S. dollars could be worth about \$17 - \$20.

*Most delicate and moving consideration on the mission of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

actions. The parable of the prodigal son with which Jesus Christ manifests fully God's and His mercy, is most beautiful and touching; it is more than a story, it is a detailed description of the degradation and resurrection of a sinner. The One who reads hearts wanted to illustrate the particular positions of the sinners. Therefore we must meditate carefully on all the circumstances of the parable, because each has a profound psychological value.

"A man had two sons, and the younger son said to his father, Father, give me the share of your estate that should come to me." Children were entitled to their father's inheritance at that time; the eldest, in the Jewish tradition, was entitled to double the share of the other children in terms of the division of the estate which could be done when the father was still living or after his death. Thus the younger son of this father requested his part of the inheritance. Why did he ask for it considering that he had such an immensely wonderful father? It is evident from the context: he wanted to enjoy life on his terms; the house looked too empty to him, parental supervision was too overwhelming, he did not see eye-to-eye with his brother, the only company he had at home, and he wanted to look for friends and diversions far away.

At that moment, the father could have denied him his part of the inheritance and postpone the division of the estate to such a later time as after his death; but instead he agreed to do it then and there because his son demanded it with the arrogance of the wicked that is not practically possible to challenge. Theoretically a father can always object to his children's demands, but some offspring are so unruly that to have them near is unbearable and their leaving can be seen like a blessing. Thus the father, although suffering a great deal for his son's departure, gave him the part of the estate due to him and could not do otherwise.

After a few days the wild young son put together the money and everything else he had, and went away to a distant country. He wanted to be completely independent, did not want any sort of restraint, and so chose to go to a faraway country. Perhaps the father, in greatest anguish, was not even able to say goodbye to him before he left, because his son slipped away, as happens in such cases, as if he were an enemy; this can be noted from the painful expectation of a return that the father hoped for.

The young man believed to have achieved his happiness and when he was far away from home it seemed to him that he could finally breathe. He believed now to be in charge of himself and gave in to a dissolute life, consuming everything he had. At that time there came a great famine to the country where he was, and he found himself in the most abject poverty. He searched for a job and was reduced to be a servant, he who was of noble birth, and to be a servant of a pagan who sent him to take care of his pigs. A Jew would not have kept a herd of pigs and that master, putting the young man in charge of these unclean animals reduced him to a state of great dejection. Further, he kept the unfortunate young man in such poor conditions that he longed to eat the pods, or according to the Greek text, the carrots, that were given to the pigs, but no one gave them to him. He was reduced to the level of a slave and his great humiliation took away the courage to at least ask for the food that was given to the pigs. What bitter days the unhappy young man spent! As a keeper of pigs he had plenty of time to consider his current state because that kind of work did not occupy his mind and therefore forced him to constantly reflect on his situation; at the same time the lives of those filthy beasts were an image and reminder of the debased life he had recently led. He remembered the days in

the peace and cleanliness of his father's home, he remembered the way their servants were treated, with respect, affection and provided for with plenty for all their needs; he remembered above all the goodness of his father and thus he was hopeful that he would at least receive him as a servant.

One of the effects of sin, and especially of that of impurity, is indecision and despair, and so the young man remained for a time to feed the pigs without rebelling against his present state of life; he who had rebelled against his father, submitted passively to a harsh and severe man and did not say a word. But the idea that it would be possible for him to serve in the house of his father began to seem feasible, and one day, having thus decided he said to himself: *I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers."* He was so depressed that he did not have the strength to stand up without forcing himself: *I shall get up and go*; he was so confused that he prepared what he would say to his father; he was still far from loving his father, his motivation to go was mainly in light of the harm that his dissolute life had caused him and the awful state in which he found himself as a result. It was his father's love that rehabilitated him and made it possible to change his repentance from disappointment into perfect contrition.

The father had not forgotten his son and everyday he looked sorrowfully at the road on which his young son had left, it made him so sad! The sun seemed duller, the loneliness more desolate and people going by gave him continuous pangs of loss.

He looked far away and wept silently, crying tears of love and even of anger, blaming in his heart his son's failures. The ingratitude that he had shown him could not but deeply disgust him.

Then one day he sees a young man advancing, worn out, all ragged, leaning on a makeshift walking stick because he was so weak and tired. He recognized him at once: it was his son! He felt so moved that forgetting everything, he ran to him, threw his arms around his neck and kissed him in a flood of most loving tears. The son, also weeping, said what he had prepared to say and what he repeated to himself along the way: *Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.* He did not complete the phrase he had prepared and did not say that he wanted to be a servant in the house perhaps because the father did not give him the time to do so, but also maybe because that expression did not seem appropriate anymore in the face of so much love and so much mercy.

The father seeing him all ragged quickly called his servants and ordered them to dress him in the best, most beautiful clothes after bathing him; he also ordered them to put a ring with the family seal on his finger as sign of special honor, and sandals on his feet, as befitted a free man. Slaves went barefoot, and the poor young man returning from a state of slavery, had no sandals.

Afterward the father ordered that the calf, that had been fattened up with special food and that was being saved for some great circumstance, be killed and that a banquet be prepared, because *this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.* These last words of the father reveal all his love and all his joy; while the young man protested that he was not worthy to be called his son anymore, the father calls him with great affection: *this my son.*

A banquet was prepared and among joyful songs and music people started eating. The father's eldest son was not there because he had gone to the fields to supervise the workers. Coming home he heard from a distance the music and dancing of the feast and calling one of the servants asked him what was happening. Upon hearing the reason he became very angry and would not enter.

In all happy feasts there is always someone who is discordant, but this time the anger of the eldest son could have degenerated into a fight, and so the father wanting to avoid this ran himself to implore him to enter. He could have imposed it, but how would that have helped? Instead, he begged him to enter the house with the same merciful heart, having pity on his son's displeasure. But the son reacted angrily saying that he had always served him faithfully without ever having had the gift of a little goat to feast with his friends, and added scornfully: *But when your son returns who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf.* He did not call the returning young man *brother*, but being angry, called him *your son* almost as if he did not belong to him anymore and expressed directly and contemptuously the guilty state of his brother: *who swallowed up his property with prostitutes.* It seemed to him beyond the pale to kill for him, above all else, the fatted calf.

In deep sorrow the father tried to appease his eldest son bringing him to consider that he should not feel hurt by this act of mercy, because it did not diminish his rights: *everything I have is yours* but adding, he remind him of the brotherly love, that it was right to have a banquet and a party, *because your brother* was resurrected and found.

The son had called his brother *your son*, and the father instead of calling him *son*, called him *your brother*, to make him think that the person for whom the banquet was given was not a stranger to him, but rather was his brother, and that he should have been much more happy, because it was as a dead person resurrected and one led astray who had changed for the better.

Jesus Christ could not describe in a more moving and tender way the state of a sinner and the infinite mercy God in taking him back into His grace when he truly repents. He could not express in a deeper way the mercy of God towards the whole of mankind, towards entire nations and peoples when they come back to Him. There are two different applications of this parable that we need to meditate upon: the father who has two children is God who has, among His children, those who are good and those who are bad, and He has among nations those who are faithful to Him and those who abandon Him.

God is a father who has given His creatures freewill which they may exercise virtuously in a positive way or if they choose, in a negative way, even if such actions—of their own doing—are abusive and harmful. When a man sins he leaves God, his Father; he leaves His loving company and abandons himself to debauchery, destroying grace and all the good qualities that God had given him; sin brings him to the most squalid misery, and from serving God he becomes a slave to the most awful passions. The characteristics of this state are degradation and hunger, since the soul does not ever feel satiated, and lives in a state of the greatest spiritual and physical unhappiness.

The same happens when entire nations apostatizing move away from God: living lustfully, they reduce themselves to be slaves of Satan and slaves of their own awful agents, and they become miserably despondent. Most sorrowfully the pigsty is the natural ending of being far away from God, and misery is the natural consequence.

Under the impetus of great punishments the sinner comes back to his senses and

has a first inclination of returning to God; he considers the brevity and the nullity of his false joys, considers the peace and happiness of those who do good, he feels ashamed of himself and decides to return to the Heavenly Father, going to those who represent Him on earth. *Father I have sinned*; here is the humble confession that the sinner makes at the foot of the Confessor; here is the humble confession of the apostatized nations when they see their ruin.

God is infinite mercy and right away embraces the sinner who truly repents in his heart; he commands to his servants, that is the Priests, to put on, with the absolution, the clothes of grace; He does not put them on him directly but he calls his servants and they must put on his finger the ring of new graces and on his feet the sandals of freedom, commanding afterward a banquet of love, that the repentant may partake of all this goodness.

To each single penitent soul God gives the delights of the Eucharistic banquet and to nations that do not have an eternal future, God grants an abundance of material goods and prosperity.

The end of the parable applies particularly to the Jewish people and to the scandal of the Pharisees in seeing Jesus being always kind toward sinners. They were refusing to be part of the kingdom of God and the banquet of life because they saw that Jesus welcomed sinners; and yet they should have exulted and rejoiced because that familiarity converted and saved those people.

The Heavenly Father not only have one first “son,” namely, the Jewish people; He had also a younger one: the Gentile people; if Jesus searched for publicans and sinners, He was seeking to bring them, the younger “son,” back to the Heavenly Father with his first-fruits of mercy. This should have given them a great joy, because all men are children of God, Jews and Gentiles, and the Jews should have rejoiced to see the younger son welcomed in the merciful arms of God and be a part of the banquet of life.

The parable of the prodigal son, as we have said before, also points to the return of the apostate nations to God in the end times.

We cannot dismiss the timeliness and accuracy of this very vivid story which we are already living today: God has two children: the Jewish people and the Gentiles. This latter “son”, younger in age, after being in the family home, claims his share of the inheritance—all material claims—to use in his own way; he uses these gifts of God at his whim, thus, and turns away from Him living a dissolute life.

The famous Declaration of Human Rights during the French Revolution was the official act by which the people, rebelling against God, claimed the rights distorted and misrepresented as their own inheritance*. God never forces anyone to do what is good and for His high purposes he let them freely choose their own way.

In disordered possession of their full inheritance, the nations turned away from God and took up a systematically dissolute life that marks today our so-called modern civilization.

*This is in reference to the aberrations, the crimes and so on, that were done in the name of freedom—as a revolutionary woman condemned to death said: “Freedom, freedom, how many crimes are committed in your name!”—However not all the ideas of the revolution were wrong.

Our contemporary history is a true horror. It is true that in every age many nations, and also Christian nations, have been burdened by awful crimes, but when we think of the good that reigned in them, the many saintly kings, all the many manifestations of faith, of mercy and of charity, it must be recognized that following this latest apostasy, the nations have fallen into a depth of corruption beyond what our fathers ever imagined. Deeply characteristic of this corruption is a ubiquitous impurity, which is pushed little by little to the most degrading excesses.

Distance from God produces misery, and misery leads to the most degrading forms of slavery. Men who were created to live in Divine Providence and to be in holy freedom, see their resources dwindle to nothing, become poor and starving, and have to endure the harsh demands of a cruel ruler. The economic state of modern nations is frightening, and with the excuse of military needs they go towards a complete internal slavery. Men in these nations are slaves of the State—a demanding, cruel, ruthless ruler—and have nothing to eat.

They tend to the pigs, but the pigs do not even share with them what they have. Ultimately, the apostate peoples live to tend to the corrupted herds of their leaders, as can be seen everywhere, and do not obtain anything from their slavery. This is how the apostasy has reduced the peoples! No further proof of this is needed as we see it every day.

But a time of rebirth will come and it will come because of the very harshness of the crisis that tortures the people. Almost as if awakening from sleep, they shall say: *I shall get up and go to my father*. A period of resurrection of the Christian conscience will take over the apostasy, and there will be a period of return.

The Heavenly Father, full of mercy, will come to meet the peoples, will embrace and kiss them and endow them with special graces to introduce them anew into the Church. His servants shall dress souls anew, putting them back into the grace of God, putting on their finger the ring of new promises and of a new filiality with God; they will prepare the banquet with *the fattened calf*, that is with the exuberance of Eucharistic gifts. There will also be at the time, no doubt, discordant voices present because in the ever changing world complete harmony is not possible, but the goodness of our common Father, the Pope, shall know how to reconcile these divergent voices in order to maintain unity among the Christian people.

The father, on the other hand, who invites—indeed begs—the older brother to enter into the banquet, can symbolize the Pope of Love who with great fondness will invite the Jews to be a part of the joy of the Catholic world, and his loving insistence will move them to conversion, thus forming a single fold under one shepherd.

Writing these pages and contemplating upon the mercy of God moves one to tearfully beg the Lord for mercy for us and for everyone.

How sad it is to see souls that are in the most abject poverty and in the most painful grief because they are far from God! How tender it is to see God who despite such ingratitude welcomes all!

O Lord, we have really sinned against heaven and against you and we are not worthy to be called your children! Welcome us as your servants, give us holy freedom in our hearts, clothe us again with your grace and invite us to partake in your banquet of love on earth and in heaven.

Chapter 16

The dishonest steward. The hypocrisy of the Pharisees. Indissoluble marriage. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

1 And he also said to his disciples: "A certain man was wealthy, and he had a steward of his estate. And this man was accused to him of having dissipated his goods. 2 And he called him and said to him: 'What is this that I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship. For you can no longer be my steward.' 3 And the steward said within himself: 'What shall I do? For my lord is taking the stewardship away from me. I am not strong enough to dig. I am too ashamed to beg. 4 I know what I will do so that, when I have been removed from the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.' 5 And so, calling together each one of his lord's debtors, he said to the first, 'How much do you owe my lord?' 6 So he said, 'One hundred jars of oil.' And he said to him, 'Take your invoice, and quickly, sit down and write fifty.' 7 Next, he said to another, 'In truth, how much do you owe?' And he said, 'One hundred measures of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your record books, and write eighty.' 8 And the lord praised the iniquitous steward, in that he had acted prudently. For the sons of this age are more prudent with their generation than are the sons of light. 9 And so I say to you, make friends for yourself using iniquitous mammon, so that, when you will have passed away, they may receive you into the eternal tabernacles. 10 Whoever is faithful in what is least, is also faithful in what is greater. And whoever is unjust in what is small, is also unjust in what is greater. 11 So then, if you have not been faithful with iniquitous mammon, who will trust you with what is true? 12 And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is yours? 13 No servant is able to serve two lords. For either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will cling to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." 14 But the Pharisees, who were greedy, were listening to all these things. And they ridiculed him. 15 And he said to them: "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the sight of men. But God knows your hearts. For what is lifted up by men is an abomination in the sight of God. 16 The law and the prophets were until John. Since then, the kingdom of God is being evangelized, and everyone acts with violence toward it. 17 But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away, than for one dot of the law to fall away. 18 Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery. And whoever marries her who has been divorced by her husband commits adultery. 19 A certain man was wealthy, and he was clothed in purple and in fine linen. And he feasted splendidly every day. 20 And there was a certain beggar, named Lazarus, who lay at his gate, covered with sores, 21 wanting to be filled with the crumbs which were falling from the wealthy man's table. But no one gave it to him. And even the dogs came and licked his sores. 22 Then it happened that the beggar died, and he was carried by the Angels into the bosom of Abraham. Now the wealthy man also died, and he was entombed in Hell. 23 Then lifting up his eyes, while he was in torments, he saw Abraham far away, and Lazarus in his bosom. 24 And crying out, he said: 'Father Abraham, take pity on me and send Lazarus, so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water to refresh my tongue. For I am tortured in this fire.' 25 And Abraham said to him: 'Son, recall that you received good things in your life, and in comparison, Lazarus received bad things. But now he is

consoled, and truly you are tormented. 26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been established, so that those who might want to cross from here to you are not able, nor can someone cross from there to here.' 27 And he said: 'Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, 28 so that he may testify to them, lest they also come into this place of torments.' 29 And Abraham said to him: 'They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them.' 30 So he said: 'No, father Abraham. But if someone were to go to them from the dead, they would repent.' 31 But he said to him: 'If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they believe even if someone has resurrected from the dead.' "

2. The dishonest steward and the necessity of using wealth in a good way for eternal life.

With the parable of the prodigal son, Jesus had shown the moral and material ruin that the abuse of wealth could produce; with the parable of the unfaithful steward He shows how wealth can be used positively. The argument of the Lord is *'from least to most'*: if a dishonest steward using richness that were not his but only entrusted to him could provide for his future using a little shrewdness and generosity—although not entirely without fraud—how much more can one who uses the wealth he receives from the Lord by acquiring friends in eternity provide for his eternal salvation through good works!

Jesus obviously did not intend to propose an unjust act as a model of behavior, but in telling this beautiful parable, he wanted to show that indirectly riches almost always bear the brand of injustice and iniquity on them. This is why He called them *"mammon iniquitatis"* (unrighteous riches) and made no distinction between just and unjust riches. If a chart were made describing the "journey" made by a piece of money, it would clearly show that at some point there would be an unfortunate act either from where it came from or where it was going in the future. We never think that the money that we have in our pockets is perhaps the price of a sin or of very bitter tears, and thus in order that it might not hurt us, we almost always should reconsecrate our money through giving alms. We could even have in our pockets the price of an impurity or a murder, and those funds, even though passed to us lawfully, carry germs of a terrible infection with them. Many people, after handling money wash their hands, and they are right to do so, because it is the most dirty thing there is, passing through many hands; but in taking that money we should also make an act of reparation to God, and put aside a little percentage of it, however small, for charity, to disinfect it spiritually.

The parable of the dishonest steward.

The parable that Jesus told was probably something that really happened and which He used for teaching a truth: a rich man, a man so rich that he was not angered by the ultimate discovery of a fraud committed against him, had a servant to whom, according to the translated Greek words, he had entrusted the administration of all his property. This total control that had given to him explains the ease with which this steward was able to siphon off the goods of his master for his own benefit, to the point that other employees began noticing it, and reported his fraud to the master. The master after examining the situation clearly saw the veracity of this accusation, and calling the

steward told him to prepare a full accounting and to leave immediately thereafter. The master, notwithstanding the fraud he had suffered, still had a bit of confidence in this servant, and also, since the servant had been managing his administrative affairs up to that time he naturally had to go to him to get to the bottom of the situation. He had also must have had some affection for the poor steward, and since he was very rich, wanted to give him a chance to get his affairs in order.

This man did not think of the goodness of the master, nor was he sorry for the fraud he had done to him to the point that he even committed further frauds at the last minute. He was worried for his own situation and he thought: "Here I am about to fall very soon into the most abject poverty. What will I do for a living? I could work hoeing the earth, but I do not know how to; I could beg, but coming from my present position I would be too ashamed; the only option I have is to be rescued by others without being put to shame." And he thought immediately to make the debtors of his master obligated to him by remitting to them of a portion of the debt they owed his master.

Thus he summoned them to clarify their outstanding debts, asking each of them how much they owned to the master. The first replied that he owed him a hundred barrels of oil, or in the Hebrew measure, one hundred *baths* of oil. A *bath* was about 10 gallons thus he owed the master 1000 gallons of oil. The steward asked him to bring the promissory note, and reduced the debt in half. To the second he asked the same thing and the man replied, "A hundred measures of wheat". According to the Hebrew measure he owed him a hundred *kors*, and since one *kor* was 12 bushels, he owed 1200 bushels of wheat.

The steward reduced this to eighty for him, because if he had reduced it in half, it would show a generous adjustment that could make his master suspicious, thus he could discover the new fraud. Also, even though the second remittance was 20% rather than 50%, he actually forgave more to the second debtor than to the first in absolute terms. He proceeded in this way with all the debtors, as is obvious from the context of the parable. When the master discovered the steward's new fraud and his reason for doing so, *he commended him*; he did not approve of the theft but he admired the cunning with which he had operated to save himself from the complete ruin that threatened him. In fact Jesus added, "*For the children of this world are more prudent in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light.*"

With these last words Jesus indirectly justified the reason for which he had proposed this parable: the men of the world, *the children of this world*, all dedicated to things of the earth, know much more how to look after their own interests using human prudence and even using evil ways to protect themselves and to secure their future; the children of the light, instead, who possess eternal truth and aspire to things eternal, do not think of their future, and often exchange it for nothing.

Jesus' aphorism, within the context of the parable, means that *the children of this world* in seeking temporal things do much more than what *the children of light* do for their spiritual good and for their eternal future. The first group tries to obtain the greatest temporal benefits from their wealth, while the latter does not draw even the least spiritual benefit that could increase their spiritual goods. This is why Jesus exhorts us to make friends in heaven even with "unjust" wealth, that is, as said before, a wealth that comes from things gone wrong by their very nature, and to collect spiritual goods through works of charity; and Jesus adds that the fidelity that one has over *a little*, that is over what is

transitional and temporal, makes one faithful *in much*, because it corresponds to the graces and to what leads to eternal life.

Comparatively speaking, temporal wealth is nothing compared with spiritual wealth which buys us eternal life; thus if one is dishonest in small matters and does not know how to make good use of his wealth through charity, he will be unjust also in larger matters and will squander the graces he receives and his spiritual wealth. If he does not know how to make good use of something of so little importance, as temporal wealth is, how can God give him spiritual wealth? Spiritual wealth is the true wealth, and is the treasure of the soul which is truly *owned*, because it gives one the right to the eternal reward. Temporal wealth had previous and will have future owners, and so is never truly *owned*; if we can't be trusted with what we do not own, how can we be made owners of something much greater? The Lord cannot give graces to a soul who does not know to use well what is given to him only temporarily.

We are all “stewards” of our Celestial Father.

These maxims of Jesus are very precious and give us a new understanding of life: we need to interpret these sayings in the light of this parable that He related: during our lifetime we are all “stewards” of our Celestial Father, because we each have a role and a mission in the complex harmony of His Providence. We must perform our roles and receive from Him the patrimony of graces that we need to merit eternal life. Some of us have a wealth of intelligence, others have strength, and still others have riches and material goods.

These are small things before the treasures of grace, of Faith, Hope, Charity and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The present life is to be lived always keeping in mind how it relates to the eternal life. He who accomplishes well his mission receives from God, as part of his patrimony, all of the graces that will prepare him for the possession of the eternal reward; for this reason it is of the utmost importance for those who have riches to change them into the wealth of eternal glory through charity, in order to compensate for the deficiencies and faults that are committed in the administration of what is temporal and cannot be considered truly owned.

The foolishness of those who pretended and demanded to put the world on reckless social bases, arrived to the point to call material wealth a theft from the population at large, only to steal it for themselves on a large scale in truly felonious ways, with all the dire social consequences of which we are spectators and victims. Jesus Christ, with divine wisdom, gives the true meaning of what riches are: they are *mammona iniquitatis* (unrighteous riches)—unrighteous from all the injustices that stain them, and from all those for which they are used.

Since man's time on earth is temporary and having to leave it eventually, he cannot say that riches are truly *his*; and he administers them not on behalf of the nation or society but for God, supreme and eternal Goodness, and supreme and eternal charity. Only charity done for God, keeping in mind the responsibility that we have before Him, can really balance the use of wealth; any other human device leads necessarily into oppression and arrogance, making as law that violent disorder that before was only sporadic and individual. There are, in fact, individuals who misuse wealth and oppress others, but when

the State replaces the individual, the State itself becomes the overbearing and oppressive despoiler and, above all, it has the brutal and uncontrolled force to assert itself.

Jurists unanimously agree that the State is the worst administrator and in its hands the wealth of private individuals goes to waste and is destroyed. And this is logical, because those who represent the State are interested in their own self-interest and do not care about what does not belong to them. There is therefore the phenomenon of theft on a large scale and the wasting of private property.

He who possesses riches, in other words, is only a steward of the riches of Providence, a responsible steward before Him who reads the hearts and the consciences of all. When death comes, the Celestial Master says to the rich man *Give Me a full account of your stewardship because you can no longer be steward*. Then the rich man must now present to God his works of charity and goodness, and in order to present them he must have already done them in his lifetime. All riches then, be they the result or instrument of iniquity, can become instruments of eternal friendship. It is evident, then, from the very context of the parable, that if works of charity make possible for the unjust steward to find friendship in Heaven, the holy use of owned riches changes them really into eternal wealth. It is then, that loyalty in small matters produces loyalty in great ones, and this means that the loyalty to God in material things produces the loyalty needed for spiritual graces and the eternal life.

In conclusion, it is God that we must serve, and those who want to use wealth for their own sake presume to serve two opposing masters. However, it is not possible to become attached in a disordered way to temporal goods and to seek eternal goods, to love personal gain and to love God, to seek personal advantage in a disordered fashion and at the same time seek the advantage of one's neighbor by means of charity.

Those who consider wealth and money as an end and not a means of life and who do not use it to do good, are miserable servants of Mammon; they are men who consume and sacrifice themselves as slaves for what does not belong to them, strictly speaking, as at God's summons they must leave it all at their death.

Even outside the context of the parables, it is universally true that it is not possible to serve two masters, not only for the fact that material riches are in opposition to spiritual rewards, which is true; but for everything that constitutes the material life of the world that is in opposition to the spiritual life, the Christian life.

How is it possible to unite together error and truth, impurity with purity, arrogance with humility, oppression and peaceful justice? Who can follow the law of the world, condemned by God, and at the same time the law of God? Jesus sets out the contrast between the two masters in terms of love and hate: *He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other*.

Therefore the contrast is not superficial, it refers not to a diversity of views, but it is radical and absolute, it does not recognize nor can it accept any alternative. In truth, he who is not totally of God, belongs to the world or to Satan, and a token act of charity does not change his attitude towards God. This person, in reality, does not love Him, and that little love he accepts is for his own advantage, or because interiorly he does not want to ignore the Faith and the Religion of his forefathers.

There is nothing more incomplete and miserable than a Faith accepted only as an ancestral tradition: Faith must be love, and total love; it is not possible to love with the heart of one's ancestors, or to believe because they believed. We believe by the authority

of God who reveals it to us. We obey not because of an old habit, but we obey a divine Law always current and always gently imposed by his adorable Will.

3. The false righteousness of the Pharisees and the deep divergence between what is human and what is divine.

The Pharisees, in hearing the words of Jesus concerning wealth, scoffed and sneered at Him because they were avaricious. Their scoffing created a grave scandal for the people, and Jesus rebuked them with a severe reprimand. The context makes it clear how the Pharisees mocked Jesus: they said that riches were a priceless gift because they served to make life enjoyable and furthermore, the hope of eternal happiness was an illusion, since in life there is money and pleasure. And making a mockery of the proclamation of the kingdom of God of which Jesus continually spoke, they despised Him in opposing, to the announcement of the divine Law, their materialistic and carnal kingdom of happiness to the one that the Messiah would bring. From the answer of Jesus it is clear that they had to make some references to the supposed happiness of changing one's wife and the need to have plenty of money to enjoy life.

With their jokes and their sneers the Pharisees had the ability to separate the people from the truth and the kingdom of God, and for this reason the Redeemer unmasked their true intentions in the light of the same Law and of the same Prophets, in whom they gloried themselves, and whose words they carried written on their clothes, while in fact completely ignoring them.

Their shameless mockery revealed their hearts, and since they were eager to be considered holy by the people, Jesus wanted to attract the attention of all the people on this involuntary revelation saying: *You justify yourselves in the sight of others, but God knows your hearts.* Thus what he meant was: you Pharisees who speak in this way, you who want to be considered righteous before the people; behold, you deceive many, and you even appear superior before men, but this superiority in truth *is an abomination in the sight of God*, as what you deem of high value in the present life is an abomination. Honors, pleasures, riches are the things that you hope for in the coming kingdom of God, interpreting the Scriptures in your own way; I tell you that the Law and the Prophets *lasted until John*, and you cannot, in this light, question the very clear announcement that John has already made about the Messiah being here among you and the Kingdom of God.

You believe yourselves to be righteous and you want others to believe so as well, but you are not, because while the proclamation of John has resulted in many people trying very hard to enter into the Kingdom of God, you are not entering at all, twisting the meaning of the Law in your immoral lives, as if you had the power to change it at your own whim.

Behold, you speak of pleasures, and you believe you can change your wife, paying for another one with your money, while at the same time pretending to be righteous before the people; and I tell you, you are adulterers before God, because *everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and the one who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.*

Psychologically it is difficult to mock what is good and holy without slipping into lewdness; the Pharisees had fallen into it alluding to the necessity of money in order to have a wife for their whims. Jesus, exposing their corrupt hearts, put back into place the

holy law of marriage, confounding and condemning forever the abuses introduced by the human misery.

How profound and widely applicable are Jesus' words: *for what is of human esteem is an abomination in the sight of God!* These divine words illustrate just how meaningless that which is valued from a purely human context and what is socially esteemed is compared to the eternal life, and the plan of God. Everything that is appreciated or praised by the world is most objectionable before God. One can endlessly debate how certain temporal riches are valued in daily life, one can dismiss as pointless that which does not apply to the present life, but one can never destroy the word of the Eternal Truth that calls such concerns an abomination.

**Today goodness is despised
and evil is exalted.**

We can see this, during these unhappy times of intellectual, artistic and moral decadence: today only brutal power is appreciated with an irresponsibility that is frightening; the present life is only satisfied through the triumphs of pride, the abuses of manipulating others for personal gain, the basest pleasures of the senses, and everything that is instant gratification.

Abominable men, full of criminality, have risen to the throne of proud arrogance, and are considered as new messiahs of humanity; the fundamental ideas of Christianity have been distorted, and the true meaning of life is considered outdated; humility, goodness, patience, and even charity are all despised; all that is virtuous seems boring, and the old shining examples of the Saints are cast aside as obsolete, while instead those so-called heroes of the world are exalted with holy words, that are thereby desecrated and blasphemed.

It is in this way that the wretched, vice-filled life becomes glorious, and Paradise is replaced by meaningless immortality of earthly glory. It is truly deeply distressing to see the subtle and overt manners with which the Church is persecuted, almost as if people wanted to remove it from the land as a false conception of how life should be lived. All this is abominable before God and we must convince ourselves of this, those of us who follow the Lord, because we ourselves could be taken and conquered by the spirit of the world that whirls everything about like a hurricane.

Even we may subconsciously despise poverty and believe that worldly elegance is good; we may aspire to be esteemed by our fellow men, hating the way of humiliation and contempt; we may believe mortification and penance to be madness or a mental imbalance and regard the desire to seek God alone and rejecting the things of this world as immoral; we may even believe to reject what is of the world to be simple-minded.

We could gradually forget the Gospel and form a new Christian law, revised and corrected in our own way, believing the poisonous ideas of the world. Jesus Christ has given us an infallible criterion of evaluation that we must not forget: *for what is of human esteem is an abomination in the sight of God.* Here there is no illusion, and in the light of these words, we cannot fall into the snares of the world. We must one day stand before God, and be in harmony with Him, not with the world. The laws of life as conceived by men are false, and we should not expose ourselves to the danger of losing ourselves

forever in order to follow them. Come now! Can we be afraid to make a bad impression in front of men, and not be afraid to make a bad impression before God?

4. The Parable of the rich man.

To impress better in all hearts just how opposed earthly wealth and pleasure are with what is valued in the sight of God, and to describe more effectively how riches must be used, Jesus told a most beautiful parable, which is a true revelation on the mystery of the afterlife in reference to the life we live on earth.

There was a man so rich that he dressed like a king, in purple and fine linen of Egypt, called byssus. He was a bon vivant, and every day he gave splendid banquets. At the door of his sumptuous palace there was a poor man named Lazarus, an abbreviation for Eleazar. He was sick, exhausted, starving and from where he was he could smell the food of the rich man and hoped to get at least some of the leftovers; but no one gave him anything. Dogs came to lick his wounds, maybe dogs from the rich man's palace, which shows that they were better looked after than the poor man. Lazarus did not even have the strength to shoo them away, and maybe they relieved the itchiness of his wounds.

So from an earthly standpoint we have a splendid life on the one hand and a most sorrowful one on the other; but for God things are completely different. The poor man, in fact, died and was brought by angels *to the bosom of Abraham*, that is, to Limbo, where the righteous, in the company of Abraham waited for the Redeemer to open the doors of Heaven. It was a place of happiness and natural peace, far superior to any condition of earthly happiness. Shortly afterward the rich man also died, and he was buried in hell. His dissolute life had produced its fruits of death, and in the fire of hell he suffered horrible torments.

From that place of torment, God allowed him to see Abraham and Lazarus *in his bosom*, far off, together, and in happiness. What a contrast to the miserable life that the poor man had lived, and the life of torments that the rich man was now living! He hoped to have at least some relief from the pain he was suffering, and turning to Abraham, the head of the people to which he belonged, he begged him to send Lazarus to him that he would dip the tip of his finger in water to cool his tongue, as he was being scorched by the flames. Abraham answered with unimpeachable words: the rich man had received immense treasure in his mortal life and had done no holy works; Lazarus received tribulation and suffered in peace for the love of God. Now the situation had changed irrevocably, because in eternity the state is immutable and it was impossible that Lazarus could change it, because of the unbridgeable gulf separating the state of salvation to that of perdition.

The poor rich man, seeing that he could not change his situation, worried about his five brothers and begged Abraham to send Lazarus to alert them to the danger they faced. Abraham did not say that Lazarus could not go to them, but answered that they already had Moses and the Prophets, and that they could save themselves with the light of their words. The unfortunate man insisted that if they had an appropriate warning from a dead man they would repent. It seemed to him that the appearance of a happy soul like Lazarus warning them of their own perdition would have shaken them. However Abraham said

flatly that if they did not believe Moses and the Prophets, they would not believe even the words of a deceased man returning from the dead.

Illusions and realities of life

This is precisely the situation of life and eternity: On this earth we undergo a test during which we must not be concerned with pleasures and enjoyment, but do good works. The pains that we suffer are not misery, but a means to deserve, and to produce in their proportion, eternal happiness. He who suffers in the manner of Lazarus is not a wretch but rather, is a privileged person, and those who greatly enjoy riches in the temporal life have the terrible surprise finding perdition in the other life. The rich man despised the poor, and yet he was the one worthy of pity. His life was reduced to a continual feast, while that of Lazarus was a continuous accumulation of merit for his suffering and patience.

Those who are suffering, therefore, should not despair, but must lift their eyes to the eternal life, and to have as a goal the eternal happiness which is the only true joy, and those who have plenty in this life should not forget the eternal life and should endeavor to make friends in heaven with works of charity. The rich man from the place of his torment wanted to help his brothers; it was not an act of supernatural virtue, of which he was unable, but a natural act of compassion towards his brothers, because also the damned may have similar feelings since natural bonds persist in eternity; but what benefit would there have been by his concern and what would have been beneficial to his brothers even from the vision of a dead man who came back to life? They did not believe the words of Moses and the Prophets, so they would dismiss the apparition of a dead as an illusion.

This happens to those who stubbornly lead a disordered life: they are hard and insensitive, and neither take notice of, nor attribute anything to the supernatural; they believe their fatuous lives to be the only reality, and believe what is divine and eternal to be an illusion.

It is necessary to worry about these poor, unfortunate people and pray wholeheartedly for their conversion.

Let us never envy the fate of these pleasure-lovers, but let us embrace our cross with resignation and thank God when our life does not give us anything.

How important can a few years of passing pleasures be, which are nevertheless always sprinkled with bitter gall?

What worth is there in being honored on earth compared to the eternal glory we await in Heaven?

It is noteworthy that in this parable only the name of the poor man is remembered, while the name of the rich man has been forgotten by time.

In fact, if on earth we can remember a glorious name, it is not the one of someone considered great in the world, but those of the Saints in Heaven, dispossessed and despised by the world.

To conceive our life in an all-material way means to conceive it in an animalistic way. The animals, not having an eternal life, do not have aspirations that transcend their lifetime. If you notice, there is not a single animal in creation that does something that could exceed the bounds of its life, or accomplishes something, even in a very

rudimentary way, to leave consciously something of itself behind after it dies. They worry about their lives and the preservation of their species, which are only instincts God gives them; they eat, drink and work only for this.

Man, instead, shows his desire for eternity in the very works that he does, and he leaves something of himself in his work, to keep his memory alive. This is a symptom of the immortality to which he aspires*.

Is there a greater way to become immortal than to save one's own soul? It is not wealth that saves us but our own good works and our deeds of charity. We need, therefore to live a holy life, and when God gives us wealth we must change it through charity into treasures for heaven. If rich people would consider carefully the dangers of their condition, they would not glory in being rich, and neither would they aim to increase their material possessions, but they would become, as they are, stewards of the Heavenly Father, helping the poor and the suffering! What a gift it is on earth the life of holy poverty and docility in the face of suffering which opens to us the gates of heaven!

* This feeling is so strong that it is found also in those who call themselves materialists and who say they do not believe in the afterlife. The strength of the spiritual life that goes beyond time and space is immutable.

Chapter 17

1. Things that cause sin. Correcting one's brother. The power of faith. Our duty. The ten lepers. The kingdom of God and the return of the Son of Man.

1 And he said to his disciples: "It is impossible for scandals not to occur. But woe to him through whom they come! 2 It would be better for him if a millstone were placed around his neck and he were thrown into the sea, than to lead astray one of these little ones. 3 Be attentive to yourselves. If your brother has sinned against you, correct him. And if he has repented, forgive him. 4 And if he has sinned against you seven times a day, and seven times a day has turned back to you, saying, 'I am sorry,' then forgive him." 5 And the Apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith." 6 But the Lord said: "If you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you may say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted, and be transplanted into the sea.' And it would obey you. 7 But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, would say to him, as he was returning from the field, 'Come in immediately; sit down to eat,' 8 and would not say to him: 'Prepare my dinner; gird yourself and minister to me, while I eat and drink; and after these things, you shall eat and drink?' 9 Would he be grateful to that servant, for doing what he commanded him to do? 10 I think not. So too, when you have done all these things that have been taught to you, you should say: 'We are useless servants. We have done what we should have done.' "

11 And it happened that, while he was traveling to Jerusalem, he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. 12 And as he was entering a certain town, ten leprous men met him, and they stood at a distance. 13 And they lifted up their voice, saying, "Jesus, Teacher, take pity on us." 14 And when he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And it happened that, as they were going, they were cleansed. 15 And one of them, when he saw that he was cleansed, returned, magnifying God with a loud voice. 16 And he fell face down before his feet, giving thanks. And this one was a Samaritan. 17 And in response, Jesus said: "Were not ten made clean? And so where are the nine? 18 Was no one found who would return and give glory to God, except this foreigner?" 19 And he said to him: "Rise up, go forth. For your faith has saved you." 20 Then he was questioned by the Pharisees: "When does the kingdom of God arrive?" And in response, he said to them: "The kingdom of God arrives unobserved. 21 And so, they will not say, 'Behold, it is here,' or 'Behold, it is there.' For behold, the kingdom of God is within you." 22 And he said to his disciples: "The time will come when you will desire to see one day of the Son of man, and you will not see it. 23 And they will say to you, 'Behold, he is here,' and 'Behold, he is there.' Do not choose to go out, and do not follow them. 24 For just as lightning flashes from under heaven and shines to whatever is under heaven, so also will the Son of man be in his day. 25 But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. 26 And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of man. 27 They were eating and drinking; they were taking wives and being given in marriage, even until the day that Noah entered the ark. And the flood came and destroyed them all. 28 It shall be similar to what happened in the days of Lot. They were eating and drinking; they were buying and selling; they were planting and building. 29 Then, on the day that Lot departed from Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and it destroyed them all. 30 According to these things, so shall it be in the day

when the Son of man will be revealed. 31 In that hour, whoever will be on the rooftop, with his goods in the house, let him not descend to take them. And whoever will be in the field, similarly, let him not turn back. 32 Remember Lot's wife. 33 Whoever has sought to save his life, will lose it; and whoever has lost it, will bring it back to life. 34 I say to you, in that night, there will be two in one bed. One will be taken up, and the other will be left behind. 35 Two will be at the grindstone together. One will be taken up, and the other will be left behind. Two will be in the field. One will be taken up, and the other will be left behind." 36 Responding, they said to him, "Where, Lord?" 37 And he said to them, "Wherever the body will be, in that place also, the eagles shall be gathered together."

2. There are things that cause sin, but woe to those who enable them!

The Pharisees, making a mockery of Jesus, shocked the people in a horrible way because this sort of mockery prevents one's faculty of reason to understand the truth, and even removes it, due to the contempt of those who proclaim it. Laughing stupidly at an essential understanding puzzles and paralyzes all interior movement of grace in a soul. For this reason Jesus, saddened by the ill effects that the mockeries of the Pharisees had on the people, said to his disciples: *"It is inevitable that scandals occur, but woe to the person through whom they occur."* The world being a place of trial, with the consequence that the good and the bad are comingled, it is inevitable that there are scandals caused by bad people; however, the responsibility of these people before God is great indeed, and the punishment that they shall receive will be equally great; so great, in fact, that Jesus does not hesitate to add that it would be better for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone around their neck. Death would prevent them to scandalize further and would thus reduce greatly the account that they will have to give of themselves to God.

If we would ponder the value of a soul, the priceless value of its supernatural life and its eternal salvation, the deep meaning of the sorrowful expression of Jesus would become very clear, and so no one would dare to harm others with scandals for any reason, especially the young, in their education and faith. Scandals destroy morality, they are evil blows inflicted on those who cannot or do not know to defend themselves, a betrayal of those who fight the most bitter fight with Satan and with the flesh. It is a sin that attracts the curse of God on him who commits it, regardless of the excuses he brings to reduce his responsibility. Facing a temptation or a new occasion of sin, every soul is small and weak, and it is the greatest cruelty to put it in danger of losing the greatest good of its life: Faith, Hope and Love of God.

It is necessary, therefore, to be very vigilant over our words and actions, and to not be a cause of spiritual ruin for others, albeit unwittingly or carelessly, especially in dealing with children. These tender souls easily absorb what they experience, and much more easily experience evil; a word can ruin them forever, an obscenity can throw them toward the slopes of the evildoers, an error can derange them forever in the ways of God.

Scandal and occasions of sin, today.

Today the world is full of scandals and unfortunately there are snares for souls at every step. If a woman, for example, would think about the evil she does with her immodesty, how could she sleep at night? And how does a writer, heretical or lewd,

peacefully rest while liberally spreading the seeds of error and corruption in souls? Journalists have a terrible responsibility before God, because every day they spread scandals with their newspapers and, except for a few who are good, they become poisoners of public opinion.

People talk, write and work with a superficiality that is frightening, they distort the values of life, they take souls away from Jesus Christ, and deforming the spirit in a thousand ways, they throw the creatures of God into the most horrifying depths of corruption and eternal ruin. If we consider how difficult it is to repair the harm done by a single scandal, it should make us tremble.

The bad seed germinates, multiplies, and spreads; and just a single corrupting word could be the cause of countless faults. This is why death is preferable, and a death inflicted by the authorities upon those who commit scandals.

Many shed and have shed crocodile tears on the severity with which the Church punished scandalous heretics; they pity the offender and have no compassion for the victims; they shed tears on the death of an evil man and do not care about the spiritual death of the innocents. And yet they do not dare to condemn the severity of the State for imposing and applying the death penalty for lesser crimes* the Church, with her severity has been a true mother of souls and far more delicate than a surgeon who, with metal instruments, severs the gangrenous limb from the body so that the infection may not lead to death.

Jesus Christ not only commands us not to give scandal or be the cause of scandals, but also to help spread goodness through brotherly correction; with this, He does not lead us to ruthlessness but to forgiveness. With the admirable balance of His divine words, He first exhorts us *to watch ourselves* that we may not become occasions to hurt others; then He exhorts us not to remain indifferent in the face of a scandal but to reprimand whoever is guilty, and finally not to be ruthless but to forgive without limits those who show remorse.

We often, in fact, search for scandals, and in doing so, the doors are opened to them, and they spread. This is one of the reasons for the real inundation of scandal in the world. If people hear, for example, that there is a showing of a scandalous film, everyone deplors it, yet all or most, while deploring it, go to see it.

People try to pry into what others are doing and have a morbid taste to know all the most unsavory details, thus turning into a fountain of mud those putrid waters that would have stagnated within a single person. For this reason Jesus, with His divine wisdom, says: *Watch over yourself*. We cannot possibly avoid scandals if we do not run away from them, and we cannot flee from them if we do not *watch over ourselves*. Does it matter that others are bad? What is the use to know their perversity, to ruminate upon it and to talk about it? We must be concerned with our own soul, taking care to protect it from evil, keeping it away from scandals, keeping ourselves in a holy inner isolation, which saves our soul from dangerous situations.**

*At the time of Don Dolindo also Italy imposed the death penalty for certain crimes.

**These reflections are very current; they would be very useful in fact to journalists, reporters, TV personalities—if they would read them—who for soliciting attention and spreading the news and selling newspapers, give detailed accounts reconstructing murders, robberies and so on, with a wealth of minute detail and technical descriptions which stimulate not only the readers, but also those who are still inexperienced in the arts of theft, murder, and so on. Human psychology states that many people are highly influenced by pictures and descriptions. Also the lack of any moral condemnation of evil by those in the media is reprehensible.

If a scandalous situation is upon us and threatens to hurt us, *if it is a sin directed against our soul*, in that case we must not remain indifferent but reprimand the guilty person and forgive him when he repents. We should not be derogatory and ruthless with those who spread evil, but instead we should try to bring them with charity to make reparation, and to forgive them when they repent. A sincere and explicit repentance is already reparation for a scandal, and the charity in forgiving reassures the heart of the sinner and moves his will again on the path of goodness.

3. The power of faith and the duty to serve God.

Talking about scandals, Jesus Christ alluded primarily to the Pharisees who turned souls away from their faith in the kingdom of God; yet also speaking of forgiveness, He wanted to avoid that the apostles would have an unrelenting resentment against them. He wanted them to regard the evil with horror but not to become isolated as if they were members of a party or sect. The Church is universal even though she banishes from her heart those who leave her; all the Church wants is to save and to give generously her forgiveness to sinners.

The apostles understood that Jesus was protecting them against scandals because scandals indeed shook their faith, and actually feeling a decreased faith, they asked Him to increase their faith in their hearts. Among the scandals, in fact, the worst of all is the one that removes faith from the soul; it is a real interior assassination, since a soul without faith is dark, confused, desperate, and dead.

Sometimes a single word or a foolish statement of contempt can throw a soul into doubt, and a positive and voluntary doubt of the eternal truth is already a loss of Faith. Even a sneer can deflect souls from the truth thus producing great destruction. If people would reflect upon the nature of this dangerous fact, they would not be so quick to report on the perversity of others, nor would they dare spread such ignorant and outrageous propaganda against everything that is supernatural, under the pretext of maintaining critical and historical accuracy. Even if they might be justified on occasion in describing an evil action, no one should ever sow doubts in the souls of little ones, doubts which later spread over the totality of their Faith, plunging them miserably into the whirlpool of errors and losing the grace of God.

Faith is an immensely valuable treasure for souls in everyday life, because it is a beacon of light and an immense consolation in all time of distress; it must, therefore, be guarded jealously in one's heart as well as in the hearts of others. The apostles, asking to grow in faith, desired to see wonderful deeds accomplished in order to confuse the Pharisees, and probably wished to do these works themselves. This is why Jesus said to them that if they had the faith the size of a small mustard seed—a bare minimum—but that faith was alive and able to grow, they could *uproot and plant a mulberry tree in the sea* with a command*.

* Jesus repeated often the same teachings, adapting them to the circumstances in which He found Himself in order to make them more alive; in the parallel passage in St. Matthew when they were in front of a mountain He said that faith could move the mountain; here, being in front of a mulberry tree, He said that the faith could transplant it into the sea.

With His divine insight Jesus foresaw the great works and miracles that the apostles would perform thereby spreading the Faith in the world, and so to prevent them and their successors falling prey to vanity or presumption, He added, with His divinely penetrating style, that they would indeed one day work a great deal of miracles, but they would never have a reason to grow conceited; on the contrary they should regard themselves as *useless* servants, meaning that they were not needed by God, because it would be God who would do the miracles with His omnipotence.

The useless servants

It is clear from the context that the apostles had also asked to grow in faith for a faint and subconscious sense of vanity; they desired that miracles would confuse the Pharisees, and they believed it to be necessary that the Master defend Himself against the plotting of His enemies. For this reason Jesus subtly and through a parable said, that they should consider themselves like the servants of a master, plowing his fields and grazing his flock, and even if they would do wonders for the apostolate, they should never think to take the glory for themselves, but to think of themselves only as *useless* servants who were simply commanded to perform a task as part of their duty.

Those who understand just how much pride inflates one's sense of self and how easily our fallen nature feels vain for a job well done, in turn understand very well the timing and the truth of Jesus' cautionary remark. Sincerely believing oneself to be nothing, gives one an immense interior joy while the inner feeling of humility protects the good that has been done, and gives it back to God who makes it more fruitful with His grace and multiplies it in souls.

In every age the words of Jesus have been a defense against vanity for the messengers of the divine Word. Those who work for an apostolate, in fact, being instruments of God's grace, often witness the wonders of His power and the divine mercy in their work, and subsequently they can also attribute it to their virtues and skill.

The Lord, in His mercy, works great wonders with minimal means and through inept men; but also when His intervention is obvious in works done well, the person who has been the instrument may feel personal satisfaction for this work, and could also demand recognition of his efforts before God. The word of Jesus immediately brings him back to reality, and recognizing that he only did his duty, and that he is a *useless* servant because he did it imperfectly, he humbles himself, he prostrates himself, he appeals to the divine mercy, and then it is possible for the good work done to bear fruit.

Those who have a little experience with the true apostolate know how deadly proud satisfaction can be, and know that it is a sure sign of not having produced the true fruits of eternal life. It is necessary, therefore, to have humility and not to seek personal satisfaction but only the glory of God and the true good of souls.

The healing of the lepers

Passover celebrations were approaching, and Jesus took his last trip to Jerusalem to accomplish His divine mission. *He traveled through Samaria and Galilee*, that is, between the borders of Samaria and Galilee, heading for Perea. As he was approaching a village, still in the countryside, ten lepers went to meet Him; they stopped far off so as to

not have contact with the people, and they shouted loudly begging for mercy. Their faith was at that time an act of trust; they knew Him to be powerful and hoped that He would ease their pain; it was not a faith of complete abandonment, and Jesus wanted to resuscitate this in them with a command to which they could only obey with a full faith. *Go, He said, show yourselves to the priests.*

When lepers were healed they would go to the Rabbis to obtain from them the confirmation that they were in fact healed and make their offering to the temple (Lv 14:10-21). However those lepers were still sick, and only by an act of living faith and obedience would they have gone to Jerusalem. As they were going, they became healed and thus continued on their journey. One of them however, a Samaritan, aware of having been cured, retraced his steps and glorifying God with a loud voice, prostrated himself at the feet of the Redeemer, thanking Him. The other nine, exhilarated at having been cured and concerned as they were to re-enter immediately society from which the terrible disease had excluded them, did not think of going back to thank Jesus and glorify God. Jesus lamented this act of ingratitude which prevented their cure to be made known to the people around Him and exhorted the people to be grateful for all divine blessings; He pointed out that only a Samaritan had this disposition, even though he was despised as a heretic and schismatic.

The leprosy of sin

Going through Samaria, Jesus wanted to do an act of pure mercy toward a people so much despised by the Jews, and He pointed out the gratitude and the faith of the Samaritan. By this He wanted to show that the Samaritans were not an inferior people—on the contrary—it could be said that in this moment they were superior to the Jews. In this way He wanted to eliminate, going through Samaria, the sense of contempt felt by his fellow Jews, prevented all recriminations and indirectly called all people to the unity He had come to establish on earth. Jesus Christ went to Jerusalem to give His life for all and himself become like a leper of love. He went to sinners, who truly have leprous souls; He wanted with a miracle to manifest symbolically what was burning in his Heart. He would give His blood to save us; nevertheless, He would not apply the price of redemption without the mediation of a priest.

It is a most sad illusion to think that only because He can save us without mediators, He wants to do so. In instituting the priesthood He told to everyone to "*Go show yourself to the priest.*" It is obvious, by the way, because since He saved us by His obedience and even by His death on the cross, He wants us to have the benefit of salvation by obedience and humiliation of ourselves at the feet of a priest, so that our miserable sin may die.

We are indeed lepers when we sin, and we have lesions that consume our soul; we cry out to God for mercy and go to the priests to receive it. When we are sincerely sorry and have a deep conviction of the evil we have done in having offended God, then we too experience that *while we are going to a priest we are cleansed* because perfect contrition wipes our sins away immediately; however, it is necessary for us to go always to the priest, because this is the condition put in place by Jesus to be forgiven as we cannot be sure our contrition is perfect. The lepers also had a duty to go to the temple so that their healing could be officially and legally recognized.

The gratitude of men

The Lord lamented the fact that only one of the ten healed lepers had come back to thank Him and to give praise to God, and so He wanted to teach us the great importance of being grateful for the blessings we receive from the Lord. The act of gratitude is the recognition of the glory of God, it is a confession of His power and a filial abandonment to Him that He may bless us as the most loving of fathers.

The Lord does not require our gratitude to benefit Himself, although our praise increases His glory adventitiously, but because our act of gratitude opens to us new sources of mercy and graces. Jesus Christ, in fact, though the Samaritan leper was already healed, on seeing him prostrated at His feet, said with great care: "*Stand up and go; your faith has saved you.*" With these words He wanted to show that new graces were poured on his soul and body, and that the faith in Him, the most precious gift among all others, was strengthened in him with this special mercy.

Each time we thank our Lord we receive from His goodness new graces. For this reason the early Christians used to greet each other with these lovely words: *Deo gratias*. These words seemed foolish to the Gentiles, because they were more a conclusion than a greeting; and yet the early Christians they indeed greeted each other in this way, thanking God to have met again and grateful that Jesus Christ had redeemed them.

We, the ungrateful

We must confess that we are ungrateful towards God, even though we live constantly surrounded by His continual spiritual and physical gifts, which we do not consider, because they are innumerable. If we would only reflect on the main ones, which are the life of our soul and body, free from danger, or the natural and supernatural beauty that surrounds us, we would live prostrated with our face on the floor, filled with gratitude. Instead we are not only ungrateful, but we complain of even the most beautiful gifts of God: our life, the purification of our life through crosses, and the tender love with which He delivers us from evil, moving us in the direction of our eternity.

We have at our disposal the Sacrament of Penance that cleanses our spiritual leprosy and not only we do not thank God for it, but many times we regard it as a burden. We have the Eucharist, the gift of gifts, and yet we are so cold before the Tabernacle, even expressing boredom. We have a thousand riches in the Church and yet go on living like the downtrodden, almost despising the life we have received, attaching ourselves miserably to the vanities of the world! How much pain we give to Jesus with our ingratitude!

5. The Kingdom of God and its fulfillment

The healing of the ten lepers greatly attracted the attention of some of the Pharisees, who thought, at least at that time, that something really extraordinary was happening in Israel. Thus they asked Jesus when the Kingdom of God would come. They were not thinking explicitly that He was the promised Messiah, but the possibility that He could be the one

did cross their minds, and they posed Him this question to probe His thinking. It does not appear from the context that their question was insidious, they were genuinely shocked, and hoped that Jesus would enlighten them on it. They wished that He would preach to them on the awaited glorious political realm. They still did not believe at that time that He would be its leader, but that He could be its herald.

Jesus Christ responded by rectifying their ideas on the political realm they were awaiting saying: "*The coming of the kingdom of God cannot be seen, and no one will announce look here it is, or, there it is. For behold, the kingdom of God is among you.*" Jesus excludes the kingdom of God from the apparatus of external forces and material splendor. The Divine King shall not be described as an earthly king who shows himself with the splendor of his ministers and his armed forces; He will be the universal King of the hearts and will be present to everyone, reigning in them with faith, hope, and charity and with His sacramental presence.

There is certainly an allusion to His Eucharistic kingdom in the words: *the Kingdom of God is within you*, as there is reference in all His answers to His real presence in the whole Church in the divine Tabernacle; He is not only here and there, but He is everywhere in the sacred Host, and from the Host of love He reigns in hearts; He reigns *without attracting the eyes*, hidden in the great mystery of the Eucharistic species. It is to be noted that here Jesus does not speak of the Church but of the Kingdom of God. The Church is the tangible manifestation of this kingdom, it is like its vital center, and it does have also an external apparatus of greatness; but the Kingdom of God in the Church has nothing to do with luxury or appearances, it is in our hearts because it is the inner life that animates it.

The whole history of the Church is proof of this inner kingdom, because the Church only aims for the salvation of souls. Her external appearance, inevitably because She is also a perfect society on earth, aims to carry on her teachings and to minister to souls; therefore, it will always remain true that the *kingdom of God is within us*.

Upheavals, revolutions and death

After answering the Pharisees, Jesus turns to His disciples and tells them the various phases of the Kingdom of God until the end of times and briefly touches on His imminent Passion, the infinite price that He shall pay for the conquest of His kingdom of love. Jesus alludes to the persecution that they will have to endure after His death, for which they shall wish *to see one of the days of the Son of man*, recalling with nostalgia the time spent with Him during the days of His mortal life, but will not see Him.

In the middle of the first wave of persecutions, which they shall suffer at the hands of their fellow Jews, certain disruptions will occur that will lead to the destruction of the holy city, and during those times of revolutionary upheaval many will proclaim themselves be the Messiah. It will be said at that time, by the partisans of this or that group *that the Messiah is here and there* as they will be trying to get the people to fight, as if the kingdom had already come! Jesus warns his disciples against these illusions. Previously, He said to the Pharisees that the Kingdom of God would come without splendor, now He tells the disciples in another way that the Son of Man will not be here nor there; when His final triumph comes it will come like lightning, shining above all

peoples as the judge of all. Therefore they must not let themselves be deceived by insurrectionists, who will arise to instigate rebellion, because the Son of Man will not come at that time. He shall first suffer greatly, and then be rejected *by this generation*, not only by His contemporaries during His Passion and death, but also by their descendants in the global apostasy of the last days.

The transition that Jesus makes between the tribulation that is going to befall Jerusalem and the one to befall the world before the universal judgment is clear: He speaks obscurely of the last events, because they would not directly affect the Apostles, and He speaks more clearly about what they should do during the imminent destruction of Jerusalem; He merges together these two events, because they characterized the last cataclysm in the world.

And here He describes the typical attitude that men will have when these end times occur: they will go carefree as at they did during the time of the Flood and of Sodom; they will eat and drink as if nothing would happen and, despite the clear warnings of the cataclysm, they will continue to live freely their material lives, taking care of their affairs, without caring for their soul.

By comparison, Jesus warns us too that the cataclysm will be so sudden that there will be no time to go from one place to another, and with this same comparison He warns his disciples that at the first signs of the destruction of Jerusalem to waste no time even to secure the tools of their trade but to flee for their lives, remembering Lot's wife, who having stopped for a moment, died in the catastrophe of Sodom.

Returning to the topic of the end of the world, Jesus added: *Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses it will save it*. He alludes to the terrible persecution of the last days, in which those who will want to save their physical lives will lose the life of their soul because they will be forced to apostatize, and those who will let themselves be killed for the love of God will save their soul. The impetus of the persecution will be such that the apostasies will multiply, that people who live together in their intimacy of love *two people in one bed*, or who share a common effort *like a person in the field*, will be divided, one will remain loyal and the other will apostatize. This is the most obvious sense of the mysterious words of Jesus. *I tell you, on that night*, which is during the terrible tribulation: *one will be taken, the other left*.

The apostles did not understand the meaning of the Redeemer's mysterious words and so asked him *where* those things would happen and Jesus answered that *where the body is, there also the eagles will gather*, meaning: the massacre will be universal and thus occur everywhere in the world, because where the bodies will be, there will the birds of prey gather to devour the corpses. Maybe He also alluded to the Romans, who would destroy Jerusalem, advancing everywhere with their *eagles*, the design emblazoned on their war banners. They would not spare anyone; they would be like eagles, birds of prey that swoop down on bodies to devour them.

The Kingdom of God will not be a political triumph

To make it even more clear, when the Jews asked about the coming of the Kingdom of God, Jesus answered concisely by expressing its characteristics, its development and final epilogue on earth: the Kingdom of God would not be a political triumph but the triumph

of the heart; this feature would be constant in all times, but most eloquent in the great manifestation of the kingdom of love in souls. It was therefore wrong to think of an exterior triumph and a conquest of power, such as the Pharisees were awaiting, and so one should pay any attention to those troublemakers that would claim to be the Messiah, throwing the city into the destructive wave of revolution and ruin.

Saying to the Apostles that one day they would desire *to see one of the days of the Son of man*, Jesus said to them clearly that He would leave them by dying; but then He immediately followed this by announcing His second coming in glory. He added that after his passion and death, and after the universal apostasy from Him, He would come from Heaven *as lightning*, and dominate the whole earth with His judgment under Heaven.

Before this glorious coming, the world would apostasize from Him and would become like in the days of Noah and Sodom, paying no attention to any heavenly signs, immersed carelessly in material life, notwithstanding the great scourges that would presage the end of the world. The punishment would be terrible for Jerusalem in its destruction, and similarly for the entire world in the end times; it would come so suddenly and forcefully that there would be no time for those who would hesitate. It would be a material scourge that would leave no escape and a moral scourge of persecution so fierce that it would separate people from each other and even the ones they cared about, because of apostasy and because of death. Finally, it would be a complete scourge for Jerusalem caused by the Roman army, surrounding Jerusalem from all sides, as it will be for the whole world, filled with dead bodies everywhere.

The end of the world and the judgment of God must give our life another view and another direction; we should not strive to leave this earth long lasting monuments of our material achievements at the expense of our eternal interests, since all human accomplishments will be consumed by fire without leaving a trace.

This is of highest importance, and we are called to reflect upon it, because many people, with the excuse of providing for those who will come after them, are lost miserably. Everything will perish, everything, without exception; in eternity only the good or the evil we have done during our lifetime will remain.

How awful will it be for those who, instead of leaving holy works, will leave scandalous works! What abyss will open before those who had no faith?

Let us pay attention to our true interests and let us save our soul; let us serve God faithfully and seek eternal treasures; let us live as true Christians and beseech the Lord to be merciful to us on the last day.

Chapter 18

1. The unjust judge. The Pharisee and the publican. Jesus and children. The rich young man. Reward to the followers of Jesus. Prophecy of the Passion. The blind man of Jericho.

1 Now he also told them a parable, that we should continually pray and not cease, *2* saying: "There was a certain judge in a certain city, who did not fear God and did not respect man. *3* But there was a certain widow in that city, and she went to him, saying, 'Vindicate me from my adversary.' *4* And he refused to do so for a long time. But afterwards, he said within himself: 'Even though I do not fear God, nor respect man, *5* yet because this widow is pestering me, I will vindicate her, lest by returning, she may, in the end, wear me out.' " *6* Then the Lord said: "Listen to what the unjust judge said. *7* So then, will not God grant the vindication of his elect, who cry out to him day and night? Or will he continue to endure them? *8* I tell you that he will quickly bring vindication to them. Yet truly, when the Son of man returns, do you think that he will find faith on earth?" *9* Now about certain persons who consider themselves to be just, while disdain others, he told also this parable: *10* "Two men ascended to the temple, in order to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a tax collector. *11* Standing, the Pharisee prayed within himself in this way: 'O God, I give thanks to you that I am not like the rest of men: robbers, unjust, adulterers, even as this tax collector chooses to be. *12* I fast twice between Sabbaths. I give tithes from all that I possess.' *13* And the tax collector, standing at a distance, was not willing to even lift up his eyes to heaven. But he struck his chest, saying: 'O God, be merciful to me, a sinner.' *14* I say to you, this one descended to his house justified, but not the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled; and whoever humbles himself will be exalted." *15* And they were bringing little children to him, so that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. *16* But Jesus, calling them together, said: "Allow the children to come to me, and do not be an obstacle to them. For of such is the kingdom of God. *17* Amen, I say to you, whoever will not accept the kingdom of God like a child, will not enter into it." *18* And a certain leader questioned him, saying: "Good teacher, what should I do to possess eternal life?" *19* Then Jesus said to him: "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. *20* You know the commandments: You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony. Honor your father and mother." *21* And he said, "I have kept all these things from my youth." *22* And when Jesus heard this, he said to him: "One thing is still lacking for you. Sell all the things that you have, and give to the poor. And then you will have treasure in heaven. And come, follow me." *23* When he heard this, he became very sorrowful. For he was very rich. *24* Then Jesus, seeing him brought to sorrow, said: "How difficult it is for those who have money to enter into the kingdom of God! *25* For it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a wealthy man to enter into the kingdom of God." *26* And those who were listening to this said, "Then who is able to be saved?" *27* He said to them, "Things that are impossible with men are possible with God." *28* And Peter said, "Behold, we have left everything, and we have followed you." *29* And he said to them: "Amen, I say to you, there is no one who has left behind home, or parents, or brothers, or a wife, or children,

for the sake of the kingdom of God, 30 who will not receive much more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life.” 31 Then Jesus took the twelve aside, and he said to them: “Behold, we are ascending to Jerusalem, and everything shall be completed which was written by the prophets about the Son of man. 32 For he will be handed over to the Gentiles, and he will be mocked and scourged and spit upon. 33 And after they have scourged him, they will kill him. And on the third day, he will rise again.” 34 But they understood none of these things. For this word was concealed from them, and they did not understand the things that were said. 35 Now it happened that, as he was approaching Jericho, a certain blind man was sitting beside the way, begging. 36 And when he heard the multitude passing by, he asked what this was. 37 And they told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. 38 And he cried out, saying, “Jesus, Son of David, take pity on me!” 39 And those who were passing by rebuked him, so that he would be silent. Yet truly, he cried out all the more, “Son of David, take pity on me!” 40 Then Jesus, standing still, ordered him to be brought to him. And when he had drawn near, he questioned him, 41 saying, “What do you want, that I might do for you?” So he said, “Lord, that I may see.” 42 And Jesus said to him: “Look around. Your faith has saved you.” 43 And immediately he saw. And he followed him, magnifying God. And all the people, when they saw this, gave praise to God.

2. Persistent and humble prayer. The simplicity of children.

Having noted in the previous chapter the tribulations of the end times of the world, Jesus urged his followers to be persistent almost to the point of being bothersome in prayer to obtain the merciful justice of God against the injustices of one’s persecutors. In the end times, in fact, the iniquity of men will be so great and the apostasy so widespread that all human remedies or initiatives will become ineffectual; only the great means of prayer will remain. Jesus urges everyone to pray, relating a parable which also characterizes the nature of the heads of state in the end times.

There was a judge in a city that feared neither God nor had any respect for people. He was a skeptic; an unbeliever, with no notion of higher justice, and consequently he did not have any sense of respect or charity towards anyone. These sad characteristics are already very visible in the atheist and unbelieving chiefs that preside over our modern states; these leaders do not know true justice but only wrongdoing, corruption and oppression.

There was a widow in a city who had received some serious injury or was greatly wronged, and unable to defend herself—being a widow—she appealed to the unjust judge; however it was to no avail, because he did not care about her situation and despised her for asking. But she did not relent or tire in her pleading and thus became so bothersome that the exasperated judge, in order to stop being tormented by her insistence, agreed to rule in her favor.

With this parable Jesus made an argument from less to more: if an unjust judge, who did not care about justice, yielded to the insistent prayers of a widow, will not God, who is justice in the purest sense, listen to the prayers of those who invoke Him day and night against the oppression of the wicked?

Will not the prayer that can win over a wicked man because someone has become bothersome to him, win over the infinite goodness of God because of love? He will surely listen to those who plead with Him, and He will not delay and will quickly bring justice.

Jesus gives the reason for His exhortation and very clearly identifies the time for which it is intended, adding: *But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?*

These will be the times—the end times—in which it will be more than ever urgent to pray. The Son of Man will come with an extraordinary outpouring of grace in the Church and for the Church, but He will find souls with no faith and completely unconcerned; He will come in the end times to judge everyone, and shall appear glorious in those days when the apostasy on earth will be almost complete; the few faithful survivors, tossed about amid awful persecutions and unable to defend themselves, will have to find refuge in God alone, and they will find Him, if they pray unceasingly.

Are we near the times predicted by Jesus?

The times predicted by Jesus already have begun to appear in many nations, where apostasy and atheism are wreaking havoc, and where persecution, overt or subtle, leaves the faithful without help and without defense, at the mercy of the wicked.

The present situation of the world is such that it is impossible to discern how to correct it effectively.

Some people even hope in a global war, not considering that war is a terrible punishment that always leaves a trail of other spiritual and material punishments. Others have the illusion to be able to conquer the despots of the world, without thinking that these people have a brutal power in their hands and will not let anyone sway their minds or conquer them. There is only prayer, and for this reason the Church is intensifying prayer in these times and tries to vanquish the wicked with this great power that is almost like a bombardment from on high on their fortified positions.

Those who hear about prayer when a serious threat is looming, mockingly cast it aside as a naive illusion. It can be said, in fact, that, almost all people subconsciously, each to a greater or lesser degree, question the effectiveness of prayer, believing it to be a childish fallback during times when decisive and urgent action is needed.

This interior false state is due to the fact that everyone has experienced times where prayer has failed them; in fact these failed instances for some add up to the conclusion that their prayer efforts are a complete failure. No one considers that they may pray poorly or even not pray at all, all the while reciting many prayers. No one humbles himself sincerely when his prayer is not granted or when submitting himself to the Lord when pleading for his assistance, and so it can be said that we rarely if ever truly plead to Him. For this reason Jesus wanted through a parable to reveal the attitude of the spirit that makes a prayer effective. This is a very important thing to ponder, because prayer is more vital to us than bread.

The Pharisee and the Publican.

Two men went to the Temple to pray; one was a *Pharisee*, full of himself, proud and arrogant, and the other was a publican, that is, a tax-collector. Tax-collectors were

generally considered to be detestable sinners. The Pharisee began to pray in a strange way: he was standing with an arrogant attitude and, more than praying, he began to commend himself, thanking God with his hypocritical mind for the good qualities he thought he possessed; in reality, thusly pleased with himself, he placed himself above all others and also above the publican, with a sense of profound contempt for all. To his good civil qualities, he added his religious ones, so to speak, limiting these to fasting and to the paying of tithes but omitting completely the acts of true worship to God and the humble adoration of His Majesty.

It is not unlikely that Jesus based the parable on something that had really happened; but in any case, He distilled into the prayer of the Pharisee an attitude of false piety to demonstrate the reasons why prayer can be ineffective.

The soul *stands upright* before God, when it presumes of itself and lacks humility; it is *standing* when it claims that God hears it and, more than asking Him, the soul wants to impose itself on His Majesty, and not infrequently, in a hidden way, actually curses God. In his arrogant attitude, the Pharisee *prayed within himself*, and did not pray to God, and his arrogant words remained inside himself, and so did not go up to the throne of the Most High because no prayer of those who pray with arrogance reaches Him.

He prayed within himself, literally he mumbled to himself the words he was saying, because in fact he did not expand or elevate his soul to God.

He prayed, but in reality he was praising himself, saying that he was not like other men - extortionists, unjust, and adulterers - without realizing that his act of arrogance was rapacious of the glory of God; unjust towards his neighbors, whom he considered unfairly; and adulterous, at least spiritually, for the many grave infidelities he did against the divine Law.

How many times do we pray with a state of mind that brings us condemnation because we carry in our hearts our miserable sins, making recriminations against our neighbor? Instead of begging we contend with God, and believe the distribution of his Providence to be unjust, rebelling against Him in the very act in which we should be submitting to His mercy!

Instead of begging and recognizing ourselves to be poor and needy, we believe we deserve to have our requests fulfilled; our evil pride closes the door of grace, and the Lord cannot grant our prayer.

How beautiful and effective it is to pray like the poor publican, who did not even dare to lift his eyes to heaven, and beating his chest said to the Lord: *O God, be merciful to me a sinner!* Let us acknowledge ourselves to be sinners, because unfortunately we are sinners; let us confess to be unworthy of the divine mercies, deeply humbling ourselves, and God shall exalt us with His grace and mercy. He who relies on himself *will be humbled* and does not receive graces; he who humbles himself before God is *exalted* and finds he is immediately granted that for which he asked.

The publican begged for mercy and received mercy, leaving the Temple *justified*, which means he was restored to a state of grace; The Pharisee praised himself and left the house of God condemned, because the way he spoke showed clearly that the good works of which he boasted were done for vanity and not piety. Hence any goodness in his acts vanished, and therefore they were rejected by God.

When we pray let us first of all have in mind the desire to reestablish our friendship with God; let us ask Him to forgive us for our sins and humble ourselves for

what we did, begging for the grace not to sin anymore. When we are in the grace of God, we receive more than what we need from a temporal perspective, and the divine mercy exalts us also in our present life, giving us a life of peace entirely surrendered to His love.

During the last times, of which Jesus speaks exhorting us to prayer, there will be, as we can already see, a strong outburst of pride; everyone believing himself to be a superman, taking before God such a presumptive attitude which deserves only to be rebuked and rejected. Pride is, and shall always be, the cause of great tribulations for our lives; it is, and shall be, the main cause of the apostasy of Faith, that reduces and will reduce poor nations to entrenched warring factions. We must oppose this pride with our humility to repair the injuries done to the Lord, putting ourselves most humbly before Him and begging for His infinite goodness: *O God, be merciful to me a sinner.*

The children and the Kingdom of God.

While Jesus was speaking on the necessity to humble ourselves before God, some children were brought before Him, in order that He might bless and touch them. Since they were making a lot of noise, the Apostles were shouting at them and tried to send them away. Jesus instead, calling them to Himself, said: *Let the children come to me and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.* He added: *Amen, I say to you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it.*

The crowd of children arrived just in time to make it possible for Him to complete His great lesson of humility: it is not possible to go to God with arrogance, thinking to be important; it is necessary to go with the humble and simple heart of a child.

He who presumes to approach the divine without humility finds himself falling into darkness; he does not enter into what is heavenly, and is lost in the confusion of his own reason. If we would go to God as little children of a very loving Father, o how our life would become calm and full of light and blessings!

Today instead we attempt to make children into adults, destroying the simplicity of their age, cramming their heads even with political ideas* and leading them astray with violent aspirations. It is an awful crime of our times, and Jesus condemned it with His divine words: *Let the children come to me.* They cannot but to go to Him, because only Jesus knows how to form them and to draw from their innocent hearts their hidden treasures. The modern world claims to form a generation of heroes, and instead forms gangs of criminals; it believes to discipline the youth and instead makes them strongly rebellious to all laws; it removes from the children the joys of their innocence, giving them a heavy and unhappy life right from the beginning.

Faith blossoms and flourishes in the simple and innocent soul like the one of a child. When man attempts to contend with God, he loses his moral direction, falls into the confusion of his own ideas, fantasizes upon a thousand inane “modern” ways of thinking, loses his peace and the truth, and lives a very unhappy life.

Proposing children as model of simplicity and submission, it is clear that Jesus did not suggest an unbridled childhood but one in which the child *went to Him* and lived with His blessings.

* As it was mentioned before, Don Dolindo was writing at the time of the Fascist regime.

He presented to us the natural qualities of childhood as a model, but not the deviations that may occur at that age; He spoke about childhood, in other words, without reference to individual children, who very often are not at all examples of simplicity, virtue and submission to the Divine Will.

Let us keep this most precious gift in our hearts, which is our Faith, greatly preferring to leave our poor reason in darkness rather than soaking it in the exasperating lights and blazing fires of passion and folly. The holy darkness of Faith always shines like the many stars in the sky, and becomes brilliant in the humble heart; the so-called “light” of reason is instead always full of dark stormy clouds that cast the soul into an oppressive turbulent obscurity. O Lord, give us the gift of a simple Faith, and let us rest like babies in your fatherly arms.

3. The true ideal of youth. The heroism of renunciation. The light of Golgotha.

The young, growing up, are always being affected by fads, trends and other motivating forces that can become a non-stop, powerful source of enthusiasm for them; having to make their mark in life, they aspire to great things and dreams. Whatever is dashing, heroic and great attracts youth, and they are capable of both sacrifice and unbridled desire. They rush down both the paths of good and evil, because they love what is “great”, in other words, they know no limits to their aspirations, and want to see them all to their conclusion. By their effervescent nature, youth love new things, embrace them, follow them, and remain attached to those that promote them; youth are like a busy construction site in full activity, but with no real direction and guidance; like the explosion of a blind force of nature: a volcanic eruption, a storm, a hurricane, or a tornado.

The “Age” of the Youth

Jesus Christ, in answering a rich young man’s query on what he should do to have eternal life, traced for all young people the true path to their generous aspirations. His great lesson is more valuable today than ever before, which is a time that we can call the Age of the Youth. In fact, all revolutions and causes today are designed to attract young people, playing off of and building on their reckless impetuosity; there are many who try to tear them away from the Church, knowing how much the Church forms them, because they are the hope of her maternal love.

A rich young man, who belonged to one of the important families in the city, went to Jesus and said, *“Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”* The way he asked shows he was very interested in Him. No doubt he had seen Jesus’s very affectionate and patient manner with the children who crowded around Him, and for this reason he called Jesus *good*. Being of noble birth, rich, and accustomed to commanding, he did not conceive that someone could have such tolerance with simple people and much less with restless children, and he could not refrain from calling Jesus *good*.

He was attracted to His goodness by a natural sense of admiration, and he wanted eternal life not so much for a true desire for Heaven but for a vague natural ideal of something higher. There are in fact in desires to holiness and to a perfect life that arise

more from our imagination than from our hearts, and for an idealism that aspires to great things, without knowing exactly what we want to achieve*.

Jesus said: Why do you call me good?

Jesus Christ answered that young man with great love, as it is reported in the Gospel of St. Mark, (Mk 10:21) and wanting to direct him to a real, perfect supernatural life, began to correct the natural admiration that he had shown for Him—and hence his calling Him *good*—and said, "*Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.*" He wanted tell him indirectly: You call me good admiring in Me a natural goodness of heart toward little children and the poor; now I tell you *no one is good but God alone* and my goodness is not the result of a sensitive natural feeling, but rather of the outpouring of divine charity that saves all men. You then, if you want to rise to the heights of perfection, begin to recognize in Me the very goodness of God, and begin to believe in Me.

The young man did not understand Jesus's profound thought, and perhaps he may have even misinterpreted it as a negation of His real divinity.

Jesus continued by briefly summarizing the Ten Commandments of the Law, to move him toward the real path of mercy and perfection, because holiness does not consist in doing uncommon things, but in doing well what God wants from us. In God's Law, and therefore that of the Church, one is always assured of following the right, supernatural way without fear of illusions. Jesus, besides, wanted first of all to show once again that He had not come to abolish the law but to perfect it. The young man answered that he had observed those Commandments since he was a child.

It was the truth, and Jesus *loved him* for this reason, as it is said in St. Mark, and He wished to give him a much greater treasure than all the possessions he had; therefore He added: *There is still one thing left for you: sell all that you have and distribute it to the poor, and you will have a treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.* Jesus brought him, all of a sudden, to the antithesis of the spirit of the world and put in front of him the ideal of heroic youth, a life of charity, of renunciation and divine love.

How Francis of Assisi answered Jesus

To the world, the ideals of a young man are wealth, self-satisfaction, and to follow a life of leisure; for Jesus they are charity, voluntary poverty and the Cross.

That young man did not have the courage to embrace a heroic life and he was dismayed, saddened and went away discouraged, the living image of all those rich people who over the centuries did not want to be holy in their heart.

*Serious reflection and consideration should motivate one to eternal life and holiness, not an idealism that merely seeks extraordinary things.

The words of Jesus, however, were not in vain and were picked up after more than a thousand years later by another rich young man yearning for perfection, Francis of Assisi. Francis, after hearing these words, took them entirely to heart, espoused poverty, embraced the Cross, and showed in his life and in his holiness the treasure he had acquired with his heroic renunciation.

Riches are, after all, a nuisance, and if they exceed all measures they become a real burden that is carried until death and is later left to others; even though a man may lack the courage to get rid of them or even if he uses his riches to perform works of charity, he cannot fail to recognize that his possessions are not happiness but only an annoying and troubling burden.

Jesus seeing the young man leaving in dismay, with sadness in his Heart exclaimed: *How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.*" He used a proverb popular at the time to indicate the difficulty that people who are rich have to enter into the Kingdom of God and to leave the spirit of the world*. He would not say, speaking in a strict sense, that riches are an obstacle to the Kingdom of God, because they can be put to good use, as He himself had suggested to the young man; but He wanted to say that those who are entirely attached to them would find it very difficult to follow the Law of God and practice the virtues.

Those who interpreted His words in their narrowest meaning exclaimed: *Then who can be saved?* They wanted to say: Who can be saved among the rich? And if everyone is attached to wealth (because even if they do not have it, they still desire it) who can be saved?

Jesus answered that what was not possible for man, was possible for God, who by his grace can change the heart of a man, even when it seems impossible to human efforts. God, in fact, has changed the hearts of many kings and made them great Saints.

St. Peter, considering the danger of riches, felt satisfied not to have any, besides also having left what he had for love of Jesus, he felt secure that he and his fellow disciples were saved, and exclaimed: *We have given up our possessions and followed you.*

The Savior answered that not only they would have eternal life, but so too would anyone who leaves everything behind—home, parents, brothers, wives and children—for *the sake of the kingdom of God*, that is to become apostles for the Kingdom of God. They too would receive much more in this life, because they would be without burdens, in full interior freedom, trusting in the Divine Providence and they would acquire eternal life in Heaven.

Simplicity of life becomes source of interior calm, and in reducing our needs it becomes the source of true well-being. Besides, when we leave everything for the love of God, He is our Lord and He provides for all we need, as it can be seen in those people who are entirely consecrated to Him.

* The "Eye of the Needle" does not refer to the eye of a sewing needle, but rather to very small entrance doors that can still be found in some houses in the Middle East, especially in Syria. These are very narrow doors of regular height—very slit like—giving the impression of a sewing needle's eye. It would be impossible for a camel to pass through such a narrow entrance; hence the validity of this comparison (but not the more paradoxical comparison with the eye of a sewing needle). (See also the note to Mt 19:24).

Jesus predicts His Passion to the Apostles

Youth always dreams of pleasure, greatness and riches, and avoids and rejects misery in life; instead their most beautiful ideal should be the renunciation of material gain, poverty, humility and sacrifice. Jesus said to the rich man that in order to be perfect he would have to follow Him. He completed this beautiful lesson for all mankind's sake as well, showing how to follow Him. He did not speak to everyone but only to the Apostles when He was alone with them, because He wanted them to be the custodians of the wonderful mystery of the Cross, the sublime destination of all souls who are truly generous and great.

Jesus told them about his death and Passion and the fulfillment in Himself of what the Prophets had foretold; He told them in advance what was going to happen to Him, and pointed out what had to be the fulfillment of the sublime aspirations of a soul made in his likeness, in poverty, in renunciation of everything in order to spread the Kingdom of God.

The Apostles did not understand at the time the meaning of his words, because they did not know the prophecies of the Prophets, nor did they understand that the life of their divine Master would end so sorrowfully even remotely enter their minds; however, they received the divine teaching. Later, when everything was accomplished, not only did they understand but also they realized what would happen in their own lives, as they followed the divine Master to the extreme humiliation of martyrdom.

The blind man of Jericho

With Passover approaching, crowds of pilgrims from all parts flocked to Jerusalem, and the roads to the holy city were crowded with the poor, the sick, the lame, and the blind, all asking for alms. When Jesus approached Jericho, two blind beggars, as St. Matthew (Mt 20:29-30) relates, hearing the roar of the crowd, asked what was happening. They were told that Jesus the Nazarene was coming. One of them then began to scream as loud as he could: *Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me*. He shouted with such insistence, together with his companion, and so loudly, that those who were walking ahead of Jesus shouted back to them to be silent rebuking mostly the one who was the louder of the two; but he, from the depth of his misery, full of faith, sure to have mercy rendered to him, called on Him even louder: *Son of David, have pity on me*.

Hearing that they were rebuking him, Jesus stopped and ordered them to bring him to Him; his divine Heart could not bear that he was mistreated, nor wanted that one who had faith in Him to remain disappointed. As soon as the blind man was near Him He asked *What do you want me to do for you?* The blind man replied, *"Lord, let me see."* Jesus told him, *Have sight; your faith has saved you*. He asked the same question to his companion, and He healed him also. Then they followed Him glorifying God, and also all the people following gave praise to the Lord.

St. Matthew says that there were two blind men and St. Mark and St. Luke instead speak of only one blind man, perhaps because the one was more persistent in his praying, but this is an incidental circumstance to the teaching that the Gospel wants to give us.

There were two blind men in the world: the Jewish people and the Gentiles, and both aspired to have the light of truth, but one of them shouted louder and had more faith in their renewal, that one is the Jewish people. Jesus came for both of them, gave

consolation to both, but turned especially to the Jewish people, and did His work among them. The two blind men could also be seen as only one, because they represent mankind, and their cry is the cry of man who has lost his spiritual sight; it is the cry of our generation, covered by so many mistakes, sitting along the streets of the world, begging for the true light of life.

Unhappiness and adversity are the cries of blind humanity

The cry of blind humanity comes from its misfortunes, and no one brings a helping hand; on the contrary, its cry is considered a bother and a nuisance. Only Jesus stops, calls poor humanity to Himself, resuscitates in the hearts of the people the desire to be healed, and heals them. Our poor civilization is reduced to being like a blind beggar, seeking respite along the path of life and receiving only reproaches.

Our times are cruel, without charity, without compassion, selfish and even able to stifle the cry of the poor, believing to help but in reality only hiding the problems. Poverty in large cities is appalling, even when it does not always appear evident, because of the draconian provisions against the poor, who are denied the ability to even beg for a piece of bread or some relief.

We need Jesus, because He alone can illuminate our darkness, and we must cry out to Him, despite the disbelief that tries to silence us, because only crying out for His merciful love can we have His light. When we feel blinded in life and cannot see anything other than an inexorable path of pain and misery going forward, let us cry out to Jesus: *Lord, let me see* and in the light of Faith we will see again our eternal goals, and spend our life following Jesus and glorifying God. Instead of remaining poor blind beggars we will become seers, and seers who have eyes only for God and await from Him prosperity and peace.

Chapter 19

1. Zacchaeus. The parable of the ten gold coins. Triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. The cleansing of the Temple.

1 And having entered, he walked through Jericho. 2 And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. And he was the leader of the tax collectors, and he was wealthy. 3 And he sought to see Jesus, to see who he was. But he was unable to do so, because of the crowd, for he was small in stature. 4 And running ahead, he climbed up a sycamore tree, so that he might see him. For he was to pass near there. 5 And when he had arrived at the place, Jesus looked up and saw him, and he said to him: "Zacchaeus, hurry down. For today, I should lodge in your house." 6 And hurrying, he came down, and he received him joyfully. 7 And when they all saw this, they murmured, saying that he had turned aside to a sinful man 8 But Zacchaeus, standing still, said to the Lord: "Behold, Lord, one half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have cheated anyone in any matter, I will repay him fourfold." 9 Jesus said to him: "Today, salvation has come to this house; because of this, he too is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of man has come to seek and to save what had been lost." 11 As they were listening to these things, continuing on, he spoke a parable, because he was nearing Jerusalem, and because they guessed that the kingdom of God might be manifested without delay. 12 Therefore, he said: "A certain man of nobility traveled to a far away region, to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. 13 And calling his ten servants, he gave them ten pounds, and he said to them: 'Do business until I return.' 14 But his citizens hated him. And so they sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We do not want this one to reign over us.' 15 And it happened that he returned, having received the kingdom. And he ordered the servants, to whom he had given the money, to be called so that he would know how much each one had earned by doing business. 16 Now the first approached, saying: 'Lord, your one pound has earned ten pounds.' 17 And he said to him: 'Well done, good servant. Since you have been faithful in a small matter, you will hold authority over ten cities.' 18 And the second came, saying: 'Lord, your one pound has earned five pounds.' 19 And he said to him, 'And so, you shall be over five cities.' 20 And another approached, saying: 'Lord, behold your one pound, which I kept stored in a cloth. 21 For I feared you, because you are an austere man. You take up what you did not lay down, and you reap what you did not sow.' 22 He said to him: 'By your own mouth, do I judge you, O wicked servant. You knew that I am an austere man, taking up what I did not lay down, and reaping what I did not sow. 23 And so, why did you not give my money to the bank, so that, upon my return, I might have withdrawn it with interest?' 24 And he said to the bystanders, 'Take the pound away from him, and give it to him who has ten pounds.' 25 And they said to him, 'Lord, he has ten pounds.' 26 So then, I say to you, that to all who have, it shall be given, and he will have in abundance. And from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. 27 'Yet truly, as for those enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here, and put them to death before me.' " 28 And having said these things, he went ahead, ascending to Jerusalem. 29 And it happened that, when he had drawn near to Bethphage and Bethania, to the mount which is called Olivet, he sent two of his disciples, 30 saying: "Go into the town which is opposite you. Upon entering it, you will find the colt of a donkey, tied, on

which no man has ever sat. Untie it, and lead it here. 31 And if anyone will ask you, 'Why are you untying it?' you shall say this to him: 'Because the Lord has requested its service.' " 32 *And those who were sent went out, and they found the colt standing, just as he told them. 33 Then, as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, "Why are you untying the colt?" 34 So they said, "Because the Lord has need of it." 35 And they led it to Jesus. And casting their garments on the colt, they helped Jesus onto it. 36 Then, as he was traveling, they were laying down their garments along the way. 37 And when he was now drawing near to the descent of Mount Olivet, the entire crowd of his disciples began to praise God joyfully, with a loud voice, over all the powerful works which they had seen, 38 saying: "Blessed is the king who has arrived in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory on high!" 39 And certain Pharisees within the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." 40 And he said to them, "I tell you, that if these will keep silent, the stones themselves will cry out." 41 And when he drew near, seeing the city, he wept over it, saying: 42 "If only you had known, indeed even in this your day, which things are for your peace. But now they are hidden from your eyes. 43 For the days will overtake you. And your enemies will encircle you with a valley. And they will surround you and hem you in on every side. 44 And they will knock you down to the ground, with your sons who are in you. And they will not leave stone upon stone within you, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation." 45 And entering into the temple, he began to cast out those who sold in it, and those who bought, 46 saying to them: "It is written: 'My house is a house of prayer.' But you have made it into a den of robbers." 47 And he was teaching in the temple daily. And the leaders of the priests, and the scribes, and the leaders of the people were seeking to destroy him. 48 But they could not find what to do to him. For all the people were listening to him attentively.*

2. Zacchaeus.

In going to Jerusalem, Jesus, on his way went by Jericho. The fame of the miracles He worked, and especially His restoring sight to the blind, aroused a great enthusiasm in the city and the people crowded around Him in great numbers. Now in Jericho there lived the head of the tax collectors, who, on hearing that Jesus was passing by, ran to become the first in the crowd *seeking to see who Jesus was*. He was a Jew, as can be seen from his Hebrew name *Zakkai*, which means *pure, just*; as a Jew, he too, hoped for the coming of the Messiah. He wanted to see Jesus, therefore, not for mere curiosity, but to see *who Jesus was*, that is to see if there was something extraordinary about Him that could make Him recognizable as the promised Messiah.

Zacchaeus was the head of the customs officers or publicans, who were a greedy group that collected the imposed Roman taxes, and thus abused the people in myriad ways; thus Zacchaeus was regarded as a sinner more than others. Small in stature, he had to be very clever and intelligent to have such a position of high responsibility that also had its risks because he could be attacked by the people he harassed and had to have a steady hand to keep his subordinates in order. However he had to have had a good sense of righteousness, as it appears from the way in which he received the grace of God, and also a simple soul, as it appears by what he did to see Jesus.

He was small in stature but nimble and in the fullness of his strength, as can be inferred by his actions. Since he could not in any way make his way through the crowd,

nor could he see Jesus from the distance, as the practical man that he was, he had a brilliant idea: he would run ahead to a spot where Jesus would have to pass and climb a sycamore tree that he spotted. From there he could comfortably observe the divine Master.

The sycamore lent itself to his plan as his observation point, because it has branches that are nearly horizontal and the tree itself is not very tall, so he easily found the support he needed from the branches and waited. He noted the burgeoning crowd below and from on high position perhaps the misery of the oppressed people did not escape him; it is possible to suppose this from the resolution he took, under the influence of grace, to give half of all his goods to the poor.

Grace never operates just by sudden surges in our soul, and so it may have made use of the view of that crowd of people that Zacchaeus had while on the top of the tree.

As Jesus went by, He raised His eyes and saw Zacchaeus. He stopped and invited him to come down, telling him that He needed to stop at his house. Zacchaeus overjoyed receiving this wonderful honor hurried down quickly and welcomed Him with great joy. His home must not have be too far away and the people, seeing that Jesus went to the house of a sinful man, began to murmur about it. The people instead should have praised Jesus and thanked Him, because the conversion of Zacchaeus resulted in an immediate benefit for the poor and for all those who had been bullied and intimidated by him. It is clear that Jesus went to this sinner to convert him, and He said *for today I must stay at your house*, because He wanted motivate him to repair the injustices he had committed.

Jesus did not need to talk to him, it was enough to visit him and since Zacchaeus had accepted His first invitation, he promptly also received the invitation for his soul, and said *"Behold, half of my possessions, Lord, I shall give to the poor, and if I have extorted anything from anyone I shall repay it four times over."* Coming in contact with Jesus he had a great feeling of charity for the poor, and because Jesus had come to him to plead the cause of the under-privileged and the oppressed, in his heart he felt the warmth of that flame of goodness that transformed him completely. He became lavish in charity and exuberant in justice; he gave half of what belonged to him and gave back four times what he had defrauded.

With these actions Zacchaeus not only showed that he had repented of his sins against justice, but also of all those he had committed; by his example he brought his whole family to follow Jesus, recognized in Him the Messiah, and accepted the salvation that came from Him. This is the reason why Jesus said, in a tone of great satisfaction that salvation had come to this house, forming this family head into a true son of Abraham. He had come to seek and to save what was lost, and his divine Heart exulted with joy granting salvation to his entire family.

**Oppressed by the world, we are powerless
to see heavenly things.**

Jesus passed through Jericho, a commercial city, and the man who represented, so to speak, the locus of all its business transactions, as the head of the customs officers, was too short and could not see Him because of the crowd. We can say that the focusing on earnings and temporal affairs, without considering our ultimate goal in life, makes us small in spiritual stature, incapable of rising to heavenly things, and as oppressed by the

multitude of material considerations as by a tumultuous mob. It is not possible to see Jesus from this lamentable standpoint, and one must ascend higher up, making an effort to break away from earthly things. A first act of virtue, a renunciation, a little sacrificial act, however small, offered to God, can raise our spiritual stature all of a sudden, show us Jesus, place us under His gaze and obtain from Him grace and mercy.

Jesus invites us to receive Him in our house, through Sacramental Communion. He then comes to us bringing us salvation and sanctification. With infinite love He invites us from the Holy Tabernacle, and being there as food and drink, He really says to us: *today I must stay at your house*. Let us quickly descend from the heights of our poor earthly life and come to Jesus, receiving Him *with joy*, as our only good and our only life. Let us open our hearts to charity that the goodness of God may fill us with graces, and let us repair the faults we have committed, so that His goodness may embrace us.

3. The parable of the coins and the manifestation of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus went to Zacchaeus house together with his disciples and where many other people had gathered. His face was shining with joy for the conversion of this family and in His features He evinced something immensely noble and regal. Since in the conversation he had with Zacchaeus He openly made allusions to the Kingdom of God, the people assembled there thought that He was going to Jerusalem to triumph and to open a new era of prosperity and political independence.

The thought of the beginning of the temporal kingdom of the Messiah was all the more longed for and compelling in the people because the tyranny of their oppressors was so great, especially that of Herod Archelaus and the Romans, and thus Jesus used the remembrance they had of the investiture of this tyrant and the violence of his feuds and vendettas, to clarify the situation with the idea of a similar kingdom and the Messiah, with one of his parables.

Archelaus had gone to Rome—*off to a distant country*—to get himself appointed king and the Jews who knew his treachery and that of his father had sent an ambassador to Augustus begging him not to appoint him king. Archelaus returned from Rome confirmed in his appointment, but only with the title of ethnarch, and thus he took bitter revenge upon his enemies.

Jesus, therefore, said: “*A nobleman went off to a distant country to obtain the kingship for himself and then to return.*” The man, noble by the divine nobility of the Son of God, was He himself, who in order to take possession of his kingdom, had first of all to go very far away—that is to die, and then to return on earth to judge everyone and usher in His true Kingdom. Therefore His departure from earth was imminent, but not his triumph.

A nobleman does not depart to a distant country without leaving in his land a sign of his dominion for the people over whom he would receive an appointment, and so he called to himself ten servants, that is, ten important people of the kingdom, and gave each of them a coin, equivalent to about \$300 in today’s currency, to trade with it. It was very little, but in his generosity he only wanted from the servants a sign of loyalty—a token, to be able to reward them abundantly on his return.

Jesus Christ, ascending to heaven to prepare the triumph of his kingdom, calls his servants, the faithful and priests, and gives them special graces, so that through their response they may increase them and sanctify themselves, so as to merit a special place in

his glorious kingdom.

Graces are real treasures of God Who gives them equally to everyone with no preference. Those who respond and apply them more, increase their graces and those who respond less gain less benefit. The supreme judge comes then, to consider the merits or demerits of each person, and depending on their response rewards them accordingly.

The nobleman, having received the investiture of the kingdom, returned and called his servants to see what gain they had made.

The first brought ten coins more, the second five, and each received the administration of ten and five cities respectively. The third servant presented to him the coin he had received saying that, fearing the greed of the master, he had kept it in a handkerchief in order not to lose it.

Essentially, it was fear that had made him idle, and notwithstanding having brought back what he had received, he was given a severe judgment and was deprived of the coin he had received, which was given to the one who had gained ten.

Those who go before God with an open heart, with deep love and active zeal, increase the graces received and deserve in proportion a greater glory in heaven. Those who have a less open heart, make the graces they receive less fruitful and correspondingly receive a more limited glory. Those who let themselves be dominated by a spirit of fear and thus keep God's gifts to them hidden and idle—making them unfruitful—deserve to be punished. These summarize the three ways in which souls walk in their earthly pilgrimage: the way of fervor and full trust and confidence, the way of caution and reserve, and the way of servile fear and complete inertia. Those who trust in God receive an abundance of graces and for this reason it is foolish to choose to serve the Lord on a different path.

It is evident from the parable of Jesus that the manifestation of the kingdom of God will be between these two extremes: souls who respond to the graces received and have a great exuberance of gifts, and souls who let themselves caught by a spirit of fear, form a false concept of God, and do not know how to produce anything. Today we are in precisely these conditions, because to souls full of love and zeal, there are in opposition dead souls, who do not care for God's interests or their own. Let us embrace the path of trust and let not be like those who will be *slain* in the judgment, that is condemned to eternal damnation for having renounced the kingdom of God.

4. The entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, and the expulsion of the moneylenders from the temple.

Once having clarified, through the parable of the coins, that the glorious manifestation of the Kingdom of God was not imminent as the people believed, Jesus Christ moved on to Jerusalem ahead of everyone. He went toward the climax and the epilogue of his life, moving ahead of everyone, because actually He went before mankind to lay out for them their way toward the heavenly Jerusalem, which was first the way of the cross and afterward the triumph and the resurrection.

When He approached Bethphage, a village not far from Bethany, on the eastern slope of Mount of Olives, about half an hour from Jerusalem, He sent two of his disciples to Bethphage which was opposite Bethany, telling them to take a small colt that was tethered to its mother and bring them to Him for his entry into Jerusalem. Since He had to

enter the city as a king, although in a humble fashion, He acted as the master of all things and asserted His royal rights by taking possession of a colt without asking the owner's permission. It was He who gave permission to His two Apostles to act and anticipated the opposition that they would receive from the owner, telling them to say that *the Master had need of them*.

The apostles did as Jesus said, and brought the colt on which no one had ever ridden, bringing also, as it is written in St. Matthew (Mt 21:7), the donkey that was inseparable from her colt. They laid their cloaks on the colt and some of them, as noted in St. Matthew, put cloaks also on the donkey, because they were not sure which of the two animals Jesus wanted to ride.

He mounted the colt accompanied by the donkey, and started to move forward.

His sweetness and majesty were such that people in order to do Him honor began to spread their cloaks on the road like carpets, and remembering the miracles He had done, visible signs of his Divinity, began to praise God for them, exclaiming, full of joy: *"Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest."* When He was born on earth, the Angels sang: *Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth to people of good will*; as he approached Jerusalem to accomplish his sacrifice of Redemption, the people cried loudly: *Peace in heaven and glory in the highest*. Without realizing it, the people felt that the restoration of peace between earth and Heaven already had begun because of the Redemption, and that the salvation of men gave great glory to the Lord.

The shouts of the people were a clear acknowledgment of Jesus as the Messiah, and because it was accompanied by the glorification of the miracles He had done, it was a solemn affirmation against the envious intrigues of the scribes and of the Pharisees; so they angrily told him: *"Teacher, rebuke your disciples."* They did not dare oppose directly the popular enthusiasm and wished that Jesus himself would do it, starting by rebuking the disciples who were close to Him. But Jesus replied: *"I tell you, if they keep silent, the stones will cry out!"* He meant to say that they were crying out the truth and if they would have been silent, the very stones of the holy city would have cried out the fulfillment of the promises, as witnesses of the plan of God becoming true.

Jesus weeps over Jerusalem

The hostility of the Pharisees in the midst of the enthusiasm of the people was an indication of the deplorable state of Jerusalem, and therefore Jesus approaching and contemplating from above the holy city, wept over her, exclaiming: *"O if you only knew, and in this day, what makes for thy peace!"*

He cried aloud, sobbing, as the Greek text says, because He saw the ruin toward which the ungrateful city was moving, for not having accepted the immense grace for which they had been waiting for so many centuries. Their shortsighted policy would land them in the hands of the Romans who in turn would, with a brutal siege, destroy the city along with its inhabitants. The prophecy that Jesus made weeping and sobbing shows the distress of His loving heart. What love He had for His people and how great was His mercy in visiting them! In spite of it they ungratefully repudiated Him, indeed preparing to crucify Him! It is horrible to think that after forty centuries of waiting, the chosen people had to fall into such an abyss as to deny Him who was the reason of their existence

and their history! It is alarming to contemplate that they would place themselves at the mercy of their enemies, denying their own Savior!

Jerusalem as the nations of today

And yet this is the sad story of many apostate nations and many ungrateful souls: Jesus comes with great meekness to call them to life and always chooses a humble instrument to approach them, just as He chose a little donkey to enter the holy City. The Priest brings Jesus in the trappings of sweetness and goodness; he does not storm into souls, he pleads with them; he does not threaten them, but offers forgiveness; he never ceases to call them, but continues to invite them even when they reject Him.

Jesus enters in general amid the applause and the blessings of the faithful because the apparatus of the life of the Church, which is itself an ongoing applause and song of praise for Him, can impress and conquer them. On the other hand, as for the Pharisees, many grow irritated with the praises to the Lord and rather would do away with Him from so-called daily life.

The goal of the modern nations which are apostate from God is to silence the voices that applaud Jesus Christ as disturbing noises, and as a consequence, public religious manifestations were gradually eliminated in them and an effort was made to silence everything that could be considered a call to faith.

The Pope, Bishops and Priests are chastised and told to remain silent, or at least that their voices be relegated to the sacristy, where it is known that the people, in need of their king, do not come. And then the stones speak, the majestic cathedrals, and the monuments to faith and charity—and yet modern barbarism goes so far as even to demolish these, that they may not speak of Jesus.

This is the way that many thankless souls become apostate and reject Jesus, and let Him sob over them and over the ungrateful and wicked nations!

As it was for Jerusalem, so too for these nations a terrible punishment is in store, and the alarming beginnings of destructive wars are already being seen. Nations are surrounded by barriers and trenches, because militarism has changed them into forts and barracks; already they are subjected to an oppressive regime with the complete restriction of freedom, and when they shall hurl themselves against each other, because of the devastation, not a stone upon the other will remain of the great works of civilization.

It is most painful to note the indifference with which the people consider the catastrophe that threatens them: they go on playing, gossiping, having fun and sinning; they sin as never before, while walking on a tightrope over the abyss. To see the modern cities on the brink of war, one looks with horror at the reckless way that they consider the punishment of God and their complete deafness to the appeals of the Church.*

* Several times the Popes, not only through diplomatic channels—that is through the Nuncios and Apostolic Delegate—but also in their speeches have wanted to call the nations to make plans of peace and settle their differences on the basis of negotiation. The prophetic statement of Pius XII is well known: “With peace everything can be preserved, with war all can be lost,” presaging what happened with the Nazi invaders of Europe. Strong words that do not spare anyone. With strong links to Gospel messages and with the freedom of the children of God, Don Dolindo writes to everyone, including the members of the Church.

The situation continues to be even worse than at the time of the Flood, because it is believed to be patriotic to conceal the scourge of God under the orgies of nationalism, and the trappings of pride, almost as if this could save the nation from ruin.

Jesus Christ, as soon as He entered Jerusalem, went to the Temple and chased away from the holy place those who were profaning it, making it into a market. With this He clearly wanted to show that the desecration of the House of prayer was the cause of the ruin of Jerusalem. The suffering that made Him sob over the ungrateful city urged him to eliminate the defilement of the Temple, and the love He had for souls led him to teach them every day to guide them in the way of conversion. The authorities, the priests and the scribes instead met this act of great mercy with such hostility that they wanted to kill Jesus, while not knowing how to do it because the people clung to His every word.

We see this today as well. One of the most serious causes of God's scourges is the desecration of the Churches, both by the people and by some unworthy ministers of the Sanctuary. Impurity has reached the house of God in a blatant and shameless way and it is often reduced to a market. There is in the faithful a sheer, reckless lack of respect for their duty in the presence of God, and also in the priests, many times, there is an apathy to correct what is wrong or too much concern for material issues. There is a desire not to offend the sentiment of people in order not to lose the material and temporal advantages they can provide, thus essentially reducing the House of God to a market.

There is the need for a sincere and complete repentance to God if we are to have hope of escaping the divine scourges; it is indispensable that Priests, in imitation of Jesus, teach every day in the Temple, because the faithful are so extremely ignorant.

Modern civilization, in its arrogance, believes itself to be a giant and instead has a stature smaller than that of Zacchaeus; it believes itself to be altruistic but is instead fiercely selfish; it believes itself to be fair and instead it is a bully without restraint. It needs to rise, like Zacchaeus; it must receive Jesus and must return to justice and true charity, as did Zacchaeus. Only by receiving Jesus *with joy*, that is with a sincere heart and with true faith can we find salvation. Everything that God has given to us must be put at the service of His love and for His glory. Nobody is master of the gifts received from God, but one must give an accounting of them on judgment day.

From his Tabernacle of love Jesus weeps over our ruin and we must not let His cry be in vain. Let us be converted to God and welcome the visit of His graces, corresponding to His love. How many souls let the encounter with God pass by without noticing it; they despise His inner calls thus making their own resurrection impossible! It is necessary to accept these loving calls if we do not want the enemy to besiege us and lead us toward our own ruin.

Come Jesus, into our souls, come into the world as King; come and reconcile us with God once again, through the Church; grant us peace and change us into new creatures! Overcome the hardness of our souls, O Lord, come, triumphant, and reign over a renewed humanity.

Chapter 20

1. The authority of Jesus questioned. The parable of the tenant farmers. Paying the tax to Caesar. The Sadducees and the resurrection. The Messiah son of David. The hypocrisy of the scribes.

1 And it happened that, on one of the days when he was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the Gospel, the leaders of the priests, and the scribes, gathered together with the elders, 2 and they spoke to him, saying: "Tell us, by what authority do you do these things? Or, who is it that has given you this authority?" 3 And in response, Jesus said to them: "I will also question you about one word. Respond to me: 4 The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men?" 5 So they discussed it among themselves, saying: "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say, 'Then why did you not believe him?' 6 But if we say, 'Of men,' the whole people will stone us. For they are certain that John was a prophet." 7 And so they responded that they did not know where it was from. 8 And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things." 9 Then he began to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard, and he loaned it to settlers, and he was on a sojourn for a long time. 10 And in due time, he sent a servant to the farmers, so that they would give to him from the fruit of the vineyard. And they beat him and drove him away, empty-handed. 11 And he continued to send another servant. But beating him and treating him with contempt, they likewise sent him away, empty-handed. 12 And he continued to send a third. And wounding him also, they drove him away. 13 Then the lord of the vineyard said: 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son. Perhaps when they have seen him, they will respect him.' 14 And when the settlers had seen him, they discussed it among themselves, saying: 'This one is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance will be ours.' 15 And forcing him outside of the vineyard, they killed him. What, then, will the lord of the vineyard do to them?" 16 "He will come and destroy those settlers, and he will give the vineyard to others." And upon hearing this, they said to him, "Let it not be." 17 Then, gazing at them, he said: "Then what does this mean, which is written: 'The stone which the builders have rejected, the same has become the head of the corner?' 18 Everyone who falls on that stone will be shattered. And anyone upon whom it falls will be crushed." 19 And the leaders of the priests, and the scribes, were seeking to lay hands on him in that same hour, but they feared the people. For they realized that he had spoken this parable about them. 20 And being attentive, they sent traitors, who would pretend that they were just, so that they might catch him in his words and then hand him over to the power and authority of the procurator. 21 And they questioned him, saying: "Teacher, we know that you speak and teach correctly, and that you do not consider anyone's status, but you teach the way of God in truth. 22 Is it lawful for us to pay the tribute to Caesar, or not?" 23 But realizing their deceitfulness, he said to them: "Why do you test me? 24 Show me a denarius. Whose image and inscription does it have?" In response, they said to him, "Caesar's." 25 And so, he said to them: "Then repay the things that are Caesar's, to Caesar, and the things that are God's, to God." 26 And they were not able to contradict his word before the people. And being amazed at his answer, they were silent. 27 Now some of the Sadducees, who deny that there is a resurrection, approached him. And they questioned him, 28 saying: "Teacher, Moses

wrote for us: *If any man's brother will have died, having a wife, and if he does not have any children, then his brother should take her as his wife, and he should raise up offspring for his brother. 29 And so there were seven brothers. And the first took a wife, and he died without sons. 30 And the next one married her, and he also died without a son. 31 And the third married her, and similarly all seven, and none of them left behind any offspring, and they each died. 32 Last of all, the woman also died. 33 In the resurrection, then, whose wife will she be? For certainly all seven had her as a wife." 34 And so, Jesus said to them: "The children of this age marry and are given in marriage. 35 Yet truly, those who shall be held worthy of that age, and of the resurrection from the dead, will neither be married, nor take wives. 36 For they can no longer die. For they are equal to the Angels, and they are children of God, since they are children of the resurrection. 37 For in truth, the dead do rise again, as Moses also showed beside the bush, when he called the Lord: 'The God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' 38 And so he is not the God of the dead, but of the living. For all are alive to him." 39 Then some of the scribes, in response, said to him, "Teacher, you have spoken well." 40 And they no longer dared to question him about anything. 41 But he said to them: "How can they say that the Christ is the son of David? 42 Even David himself says, in the book of Psalms: 'The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand, 43 until I set your enemies as your footstool.' 44 Therefore, David calls him Lord. So how can he be his son?" 45 Now in the hearing of all the people, he said to his disciples: 46 "Be cautious of the scribes, who choose to walk in long robes, and who love greetings in the marketplace, and the first chairs in the synagogues, and the first places at table during feasts, 47 who devour the houses of widows, feigning long prayers. These will receive the greater damnation."*

2. Confusion of humanly constituted authority before the divine authority of Jesus.

Jesus Christ taught in the Temple with great authority, as one who could make pronouncements as he pleased, and the people followed Him with enthusiasm, conquered by His words.

This could not please the chief priests, scribes and elders who were in charge; therefore, since they did not dare block Him outright, they confronted Him before the people, hoping to confuse Him. They asked Him to explain Himself, saying, *"Tell us, by what authority are you doing these things? Or who is the one who gave you this authority?"* With these words they protested that they had not given him any permission to teach or work and thereby making Jesus appear to be an intruder and a rebel; at the same time they were hoping that He would confess to have received this authority from the Father thus giving them the reason to condemn him as a blasphemer. They did not question Him in order to learn the truth, but rather, to stifle it, and Jesus, with divine charity, brought to their consciences a very important issue to help them to reflect on their hostility.

He asked: *Was John's baptism of heavenly or of human origin?* John, in fact, had not sought any authorization to accomplish his apostolate, and they had not prevented him, thus recognizing the fact that John was working like the Prophets, with a direct mandate from God. Moreover, they knew that they did not prevent John because they feared the people, for if they could have, they would have silenced him; therefore they had to confess to themselves that either they had disregarded a Prophet sent by God, or if they believed him to be a fraud, that they had failed in their duty to silence him.

Jesus Christ wanted them to consider their consciences so that they might recognize the truth in themselves, but their only concern was to not make a bad impression before the people and so they thought: “If we say that the Baptism of John was from heaven, He will reprove us because we did not believe him; if we say that it was of men, then all the people will stone us because they are persuaded that John was a prophet.” Therefore, they answered that they did not know where the origin of John’s baptism came from.

It would have been a very public confession of their inability to recognize the way of the Lord, and their incompetence to judge, considering how Jesus would have answered their question, and above all it was a manifestation of their bad faith. Hence why would the Redeemer have given the right answer to those who specifically and in bad faith sought to negate it?

Therefore Jesus replied flatly: “*Neither shall I tell you by what authority I do these things.*” It was not a spiteful retort, as it might first appear; He affirmed solemnly that in his ministry He was not dependent on their authority. He had always shown the greatest respect for that authority, in the capacities in which it represented God; and if now He refused to answer them, He clearly showed His superiority over it so that now it could be said that their authority had come to an end, because God rejected them for their infidelity. What ended their authority was their systematic and criminal hostility towards the awaited Messiah; and their refusal to accept Him was grounds for their final condemnation, as even there before their very eyes all the prophecies of the prophets were being fulfilled.

The parable of the tenant farmers

In expressing this very important and crucial thought, Jesus, however, did not want to scandalize the people, and so He told the parable of the evil tenant farmers to illustrate the infidelity that those in authority have always had toward those who had been sent by God to Israel to gather the fruits of goodness and virtue.

A man planted a vineyard, leased it to tenant farmers, and then went on a journey for a long time. God himself established the Jewish nation as His chosen vineyard, entrusting its governance and administration to its leaders so that they would produce a great deal of goodness. From time to time, to collect this goodness, He sent special messengers—the Prophets—whom, through their extraordinary ministry would get the fruits that the master expected. Clearly these messengers sent by the Master had from Him the mandate and the authority, and they came more to judge than to be judged by the tenant farmers; but instead the disloyal and rebellious farmers, far from accommodating the messengers and facilitating the harvesting of the fruit, beat them, accused them of false offenses as if they were intruders, and sent them away empty handed.

Jesus noted that three times the master sent his messengers and three times they were sent away, adding that on the last occasion the tenant farmers who apparently had had enough, beat them even more severely causing significant wounds.

This was the story of an ungrateful and wicked nation, led by its rulers, that had rejected the Prophets, abused them, injured and killed them, rendering useless that extraordinary ministry that was a singular mercy of God. The master then sent his own son to the vineyard hoping that the farmers would respect him; but when the farmers saw

the son they conspired together against him, and in order to become themselves the absolute masters of the vineyard, cast him out and killed him.

This was what the Priests, the scribes, and the elders were preparing to do to Him, the Son of God, sent by the Father to gather the fruits of the history of Israel and save the chosen nation from their ultimate ruin.

It was Holy Tuesday when Jesus spoke, as is clear from the Gospel of St. Mark (Mk 11:27) and the leaders of Israel, far from accepting Jesus as the true Son of God and the true Messiah, were already plotting to kill him in order not to see their authority diminish. They pretended that they themselves were the absolute masters of the vineyard, forgetting that God alone could do what He wished with the vineyard and had the right to demand its fruits. Making the perversity of the unfaithful tenants very clear, Jesus added: *What will the owner of the vineyard do to them?* Then He himself answered, as St. Luke says, and together with the listening crowd in chorus, as St. Matthew relates it (Mt 21:42)—since the answer to this question would come spontaneously due to the extreme perversity of the tenants—: *He will come and put those tenant farmers to death and turn over the vineyard to others.*

The leaders of the people realized that this parable was aimed at them, and so before such a decisive judgment in which Jesus made known His majesty as eternal Judge, they, frightened and angry, replied, *“Let it not be so!”* and wanted to say: let not our fate ever be so terrible, and let it never be that we reject the true Messiah. We shall never reject him, but we reject you, whom we do not recognize as such. They wanted to justify themselves by expressing their firm hope in the Messiah, and they wanted to assert that they would never repudiate him.

But Jesus *looked gravely at them*, and in an extreme act of mercy toward the hardness of their hearts, He wanted to disenchant them of their illusion; He wanted to let them reflect on the true character of the Messiah, as it had been described by the Prophets: it would be precisely that the Messiah would be rejected and put to death, because He would have been like the stone rejected by the builders.

Their own hostile position and their conspiracies, in addition to the prophecies already fulfilled brought a new note of truth to His mission. Take heed, however, that it was not enough to say, as they said, *“Let it not be so!”* to escape the harsh judgment that awaited them, because if it was written that the stone would have been rejected by the builders, it was also written that it would become the cornerstone, and that it would smash and crush those who would claim to demolish it, to ruin the new building, of which this stone was the foundation and thus its strength and stability.

And us?

Unfortunately, we have the same attitude that the chief Priests, scribes, elders and the wicked tenant farmers had when the grace of God visits us. Our will, almost the ruler of our power, hears the call of the Divine Will but does not receive it, pretending to be unsure about it. It does not recognize the voice of God in His Ministers and does not recognize the voice of its conscience, only accepting what it likes and what it wants.

Our ideas, moreover, and our poor wisdom, which are like the scribes of the soul, claim to impose themselves over God’s ideas, rejecting the light and the inspirations the Lord wishes to impart to us; finally our ingrained habits, the recalcitrant old man within

us—the real elder in our life—, refuses the invitation to conversion that comes from grace and evades its action, quibbling over the inspiration received.

We are not the masters of ourselves, we are as God’s tenant farmers in our lives; we refuse to give Him the fruits that He demands from our hearts, and many times we abuse his Ministers rejecting their ministry, and thus we sin thereby killing Jesus Christ in ourselves, crucifying Him to our passions.

The world itself has the same attitude, and in fact reaches even graver excesses of infidelity and rebellion: its leaders, its pseudo-intellectualism and its cultural ideals become factors and pretexts of apostasy and rebellion. World leaders do not recognize the authority of the Church; the scientists and intellectuals—the real scribes of the poor human intellect, reject her doctrines, and the elders of the world are those who presume to restore the opprobrium of paganism or the idolatry of barbarism to the nations; they reject the new and divine life which Jesus Christ gives us, and instead live on old rubbish and bask in the ruins and re-enactments of their primitive barbarism.

It is very sorrowful to think that man, placed on the earth by God to produce fruits of love and goodness, believes himself to be so much the master of his own life that he refuses God’s Law, and chooses to live in such great disorder remaining deaf to the Lord’s every call.

The persecutions against the Church, which have never ceased century after century, and each time with a renewed and greater ferocity, are the answers that the world gives to the Priests of the Eternal God, when they ask in His name for the fruits of our earthly lives; and the last persecution of the antichrist will be the diabolical attempt to kill even the very idea of God, and to completely destroy the Church.

We are already spectators of these ill-fated times and see the first signs of the even more serious times that will follow, after a period of triumph for the Church, at the end of the world.

Painful statistics

Let us not be unfaithful to God’s calls, that the Lord may not become tired of us, and deprive us of His graces and the very gift of Faith.

Some modern nations are concerned about the declining birth rate, and yet they keep no statistics that make them worry about the loss of Faith, which is the wretched decline of the life in the spirit. Besides, we Catholics are too accustomed to consider the statistics of what is good, allowing us to rejoice, but we do not consider the statistics of evil, the only ones that could give us a measure of our misery. If it is comforting to know that a hundred people go to Church, we should also consider that a thousand, two thousand, or ten thousands do not attend Church; if it is wonderful that ten people are converted, it is most sorrowful to think that there are a hundred, or a thousand people who have strayed and lost their Faith.

We barely notice how the Faith is gradually, but steadily—and at an increasing pace—eroding in Europe and being planted in Africa and Asia; it is the fulfillment of the warning of the Lord: *He will turn over the vineyard to others**. The loss of the Faith damages a nation immensely: it portends its return to barbarism; it marks the end of

*A very timely reflection that is increasingly coming true today.

civilization for thousands of years, and finally its extermination, because a nation's return to pagan impiety always brings a frightening punishment of God.

The stone rejected by those who build a nation will be set as the cornerstone of another, and those that fall upon this stone or are bumped by it, will be smashed or crushed. Jesus speaks of builders—*masons*—who reject the cornerstone; and in fact, we can see such individuals in the shameless Freemasons, enemies of the Church of Jesus Christ and of humanity, who take glory in being called precisely *free masons*, and have as their emblem the trowel, the square and the compass.

They are called *masons* because they have the pretense to build a new world, and in making it, they want to reject Jesus Christ, the cornerstone of the Church and of all social goodness; they do not realize that what they do instead is to demolish all good and become the real cause of clashes and conflicts due precisely to their denial of Christian principles and precepts*. Let us be very careful to not lose the grace and the friendship of God and to pray with all our hearts that the Lord will preserve our Faith and the wings of our souls that they may not be miserably clipped.

It is most sorrowful to think that the world believes it has gained its wings just when it has lost them, and that in flying in the skies of materialism, it is really wriggling like a snake in the swamp of error and passions. That airmail stamp which depicts two strong wings set on the globe[†] is truly ironic, because in reality the world is swallowed up by the tempests of materialism, apostasy and evil! The world had its wings given to it by the Redeemer but it has sorrowfully torn them off and put on the miserable wings of a civilization apostate from God; they are like the wings of Icarus that melt away miserably by the heat of passions resulting in a plunge towards ruin and death.

3. The tribute to Caesar

The chief priests, the scribes, and the elders, who were confused and angered by the answer of Jesus, continued to observe Him closely but dared not lay a hand on Him; they sent some cunning people, righteous and God-fearing in appearance, to try to trip Him up so that He would compromise Himself with the Roman authorities, and thus would then be condemned by the Governor. These treacherous people were sent to try to tempt Him on an issue that would either make Him unpopular with the populace or would compromise Him before the authorities; they would either damage His popularity or make it impossible for Him to operate.

With sugary and flattering words, they hoped to induce Him to admit more easily that He was against the oppression of the Romans. So they began by telling him that his way of speaking and teaching were righteous, without partiality towards anyone, and that he was teaching the truth of God. They hoped their obsequious words would cause Him to lower His guard and compromise himself. They were calculating their strategy from their weak human minds, without thinking that the one they were interrogating was God. They considered that flattering a man as to the strength of his character and sincerity, it would be easier to bring Him to imprudent excesses, and they hoped that He would be overcome

*Freemasons, both old and new style

[†]Translator's note: The image refers to an Italian airmail stamp of the late 1935.

by touching this delicate chord. They asked Him therefore a firm question that demanded a straight answer: *Is it lawful for us to pay tribute to Caesar or not?* They said *for us* to link what they were saying to the issue of Jewish nationalism as opposed to the Roman tyranny, and to make the matter a case of conscience. The Jews in fact, the chosen people, should not to submit to a pagan dominion.

Jesus, as God, looking into their hearts, knew their cunning minds; thus before answering He wanted to begin to confuse them showing that He had searched their hearts. He exclaimed, *Why do you tempt me?*—Meaning to say: you are not sincere, you are not asking this question out of love for the people nor out of servile deference to the Romans; you are only questioning me with an ill will, only to tempt me. This question in fact was not an easy one, because the Romans were not the legal owners of Palestine and the people suffered a tyrannical act; however, having accepted the Roman currency, according to the rabbinic theory, they were required to submit to their dominion.

Besides, the question of paying the tribute to a conqueror was not a question of whether it was legal or not; it was a obligation, because also an unjust ruler receives tributes in order to contribute to the public administration and whoever submits to it does not do an action against the law by giving the tribute, but rather one does what one is obliged to do, even when forced. The question, then, was this: who actually ruled the land of Israel? And who by ruling over it provided for its administration? The Romans did. So therefore the tribute was due to the Romans. The taxes were paid in Roman currency and the contribution to the Temple were paid in the currency of holy donations[†]; however the Roman coins given as tax were after all part of the coins put in circulation by the same people who ruled; thus in paying, the Roman Empire received its due and the holy donations given to the Temple were given to God as He had ordained as a recognition of His ownership.

Referring to these high principles, and to make His answer very clear, Jesus asked to see a coin, which was the currency for the taxes, and said, *whose image and name does it bear?* They answered, *Caesar's*. At this He added, *Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God."*

Jesus did not want to create a duality between Caesar and God, much less put Caesar on a par with God; it would be an immensely foolish to suppose this; He just wanted to say that it was necessary to render to Caesar the administrative tax for the sake of social justice, and to give to God the sacred tribute to the Temple, as the duty for the administration of religious worship; Caesar is not a power beyond God, nor can anything be such that has a relation with the State. Everything is subjected to the Lord, King of Heaven and earth, and it is subjected to the Church, which represents His authority; no government can dare look upon itself beyond the truth or the morality that the Church teaches or else believe the Church to be inferior to itself in all its manifestations of civic life*. Hence all governments are called to obey the teachings of the Church as all

[†]Translator's note: For the Temple in Jerusalem were paid in shekels

*As previously noted, the State has the duty to promote justice and the moral good, and not just material well-being. In this sense, the State is subject to the teaching of the Church, and the Church carries out this service according to God's Will for civil society. When the Church reminds everyone (even States) that violence, torture, and oppression are not licit, it carries out a mission also for the State, promoting the good of the State and of the citizenry. Hence, keeping God's commandments also benefits the State.

Christians are, and all acts of public management cannot, must not conflict, with the wise directives of the Church.

The aberrations of state-worshippers

To believe that the State is everything enslaves individuals and to consider the Church as just a very low servant is an error loaded with disastrous consequences for the world and for its very temporal prosperity. The nations can be considered childish in their activities; they pass with the greatest ease from friendship to hatred, from harmony to war, from mutual praise to insults, and they get carried away by the opportunity of the moment; they have no wisdom, stability, or common sense and go from one extreme to the other according to the needs of that most filthy thing called politics. Therefore they cannot be unconditionally trusted or idolized, because their material strength becomes hateful oppression of the conscience, thought and freedom, leading one to sure ruin.

It is right to pay to Caesar what is Caesar's but only after we give to God what is God's, because it is impossible to consider Caesar as an independent and absolute king, as he also is a son of the Church. When the Church does not rule the nations with her maternal influence, they fall into the state in which we see them today, a state of abjection that turns them into tyrants toward their subjects and bullies toward other states, as they begin sorrowful wars, of which we are now spectators and victims.

Is it lawful to give tribute... to our temporal nature?

We must consider that we have a duality in us: our nature draws us downward, and grace wants us to rise up. We can also ask ourselves: is it lawful to give a tribute to our nature or not? The answer is found in the same words of the Redeemer: which is the image upon ourselves—that is, in whose image are we made? We are made in the image of God and marked by the Blood of Redemption, and God has given all that we have to us. Thus we cannot submit ourselves to our disordered nature. Our duty is love, and this must be given entirely back to God, because the love of God has created us and has redeemed us.

However, we do also have legitimate natural needs and so to these we can give the right compensation, but this cannot be independent from the love that we owe to God, this being our first duty to do everything for the glory of God. It would be a most serious error to believe the life of the spirit as being separate from the life of the body or vice versa; body and soul, we belong entirely to God, and so we must be totally with God.

4. The resurrection and the eternal life.

Jesus's response to the question of the tribute left everyone, including his opponents in admiration, who, confused, fell silent. Some Sadducees, however, noting the embarrassment of the scribes and Pharisees believed that they could prevail over Jesus and came forward to propose a question to which they were certain He could not answer.

This attempt by the Sadducees had profound implications: they did not believe in the resurrection and represented the materialists of the time. As materialists they deeply

despised the teaching of Jesus and looked condescendingly on everyone with an attitude of unscrupulous supermen.

This is the attitude of all those who have little intellect but presume to have it in abundance.

Hence the Sadducees, seeing the scribes' and the Pharisees' confusion before Jesus, believed, as the third-rate supermen that they were, that they would be able to confuse Him; and so with arrogance, as can be seen from the context, they proposed the case of a woman who had successively had seven husbands.

In the resurrection, they exclaimed with brash confidence, to which of the seven will she be the wife? Judging materially, they supposed that the resurrection was to simply return to earthly life with all its miseries and all its demands, and as they had never seen a dead person rise from the grave, they denied that the resurrection could take place in the future or that the soul could survive the body. So Jesus in answering them, made a distinction between those living in the current age and those in the next by saying: *The children of this age marry and remarry* because, being mortal, they want to perpetuate their species; but when they pass into the other life and are judged worthy of Heaven and of their final glorious resurrection, they do not marry and remarry because they are immortal. Living gloriously in Heaven they are like Angels, and are adopted children of God, which means, children of the One who shall rise from the dead and shall give to the faithful, incorporated in Him, the grace of a glorious resurrection.

Jesus makes a hidden reference to Himself in these words: the resurrected *are children of the resurrection*; in fact He was the resurrection and the life, and his faithful had to receive from Him the glorious resurrection. Jesus did not say anything of the resurrection of lost souls, which will also take place, because it represents for them a second death, one more terrible than the first, because they will go to perdition with their bodies as well. He then replied directly to the scenario proposed by the Sadducees; and as it alluded to God-fearing people—those who made it their duty to observe His precepts, He, of course, spoke only of the resurrection of the righteous.

Moreover, if it were absurd to think that men could marry in the eternal joy of heaven, it would be even more absurd to suggest that they could do so in the eternal torment of damnation, where there is only pain and despair. Those who *are judged worthy of the other age and the resurrection from death*, the true resurrection that relieves the body from the clutches of death and gives it back to life, *are like Angels of God and are children of God, being children of the resurrection*. This means since they are children of the Redeemer they are incorporated in Him and for Him become adopted children of God, and sharers in His own resurrection.

Jesus' reasoning was beautiful to all the people to whom He was speaking, but Jesus wanted to bring another argument directly against the Sadducees, to move them away from their fatal mistake. They had appealed, when raising their objection, to the Law proclaimed by Moses; Jesus in his answer used the same wording in which God had proclaimed the Law, calling himself God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He called himself their God using the present, while if they were dead with no life any more, He should have said He *was* their God. He is the God of the living and not of those who do not have life, as is the case of animals after death; He is God and gives life, supports and blesses it, as the souls are immortal because of His grace and mercy.

To the very foolish Sadducees and to those who unfortunately follow them, Jesus manifested the true nature of our lives: we are of God and God is ours; He gives us life and calls us to life; He does not only give us life in this present age but continues to give us life in eternity; in our eternity, life is all spiritual, it is an angelic life of spiritual joy, and knowing God we delight in Him and owning Him we love Him.

Christ, the son of David

Some of the scribes found Jesus's answer very beautiful—indeed riveting—and because they were acknowledged enemies of the Sadducees they approached Jesus and said to Him: “*you have answered well*”. They willingly admitted what was in line with their thinking but did not realize that they themselves had a terrible darkness in their souls, in not recognizing in Jesus Christ the Messiah; they praised his precise response, but they were far from recognizing that it was a divine answer, and therefore Jesus, to illuminate and bring them out of their blindness, proposed another question and revealed to them the reason why they did not accept the truth.

It was not out of spite, much less impetuosity that Jesus engaged them thusly, but rather, as an act of mercy. He would never reply sternly or severely to an act of kindness offered by the scribes in praising His answer, even if they deserved it; His heart was too divinely delicate to do that; He spoke out of extreme love to warn souls against the pride of the scribes that they may not be imitated, thus separating themselves from the truth.

Therefore, in answering the scribes He asked them: “How is it that they claim the Messiah to be the Son of David? For David himself says in the Book of Psalms: ‘*The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand till I make your enemies your footstool.*’ David, therefore, calls him ‘Lord,’ so how can He then be his son?”

The argument was much stronger than it may seem at a first: Jesus Christ was in fact the only direct descendant of the family of David, and being a recognized virgin before all, He could have no offspring; as consequence He was the son of David proclaimed and prophesied. Besides, if David in spirit calls him *Lord*, he recognizes in Him a superior being, that is God himself, because he used an expression that was said only in reference to God, and if he recognizes Him as God, and there were no more of his descendants in Judah, Jesus, obviously had to be the predicted son of David as man, and his Lord as God.

The scribes had no answer to this argument, but did not take it into consideration nor confessed it to be true, as they should have done. They must have had an interior flash of its truth and been deeply shocked by it, but their pride took over and they shut off that light of grace that momentarily illuminated them. For this reason Jesus turned to His disciples and to all the people present and put them on guard against the scandal they were witnessing from the scribes. He addressed His disciples because they were those against whom most of the snares of His enemies were aiming, but he wanted to be heard by everyone so that they would not take the occasion of the scandal given by their chief priests and scribes and deny the truth.

Beware of the scribes, Jesus said, because they want to walk in long robes, love to be greeted in the streets, want to sit in the first rows in synagogues, and to take the first places in banquets; and also, under the pretense of long prayers, they devour the houses of widows; thus they will incur a more rigorous sentence.

That was the real reason why the scribes opposed the truth: they loved to keep the prestige they thought to have with the people and shunned whoever could overshadow it; they wished to receive honor and to occupy the places of honor in feasts, and therefore they made war with the One whose splendor obscured their claimed glory, while His humility threw them into confusion; they had firmly at heart their own interests to the point of even making a market of their prayers, overtaking the good faith of the widows in order to get money out of them.

Thus the obstacles preventing those poor souls from recognizing the truth and embracing it were vanity, pride and self-interest; and Jesus in his immense love wanted them to amend their ways and give to them as well the eternal life He had come to bring to all.

But do we believe in eternal life?

How many times do we say that we believe in the resurrection of the dead and in eternal life and yet we live as if everything were to simply end with the decomposition of the body—and not with the prospect of going towards a new one! We care so much about material things of a life that we shall leave, and do not worry about those things that are everlasting! How carefully, for example, do we keep our money and how attentively do we monitor it—that thieves not rob us—while on the other hand we expose the treasures of our souls, namely, grace, faith, purity, fear of God and virtue, to every danger and with shocking irresponsibility. Don't we realize that everything will pass away and end, but our own eternity will not?

Among the Jewish people, if a man dies leaving no children, his brother must marry the widow that she may give him descendants. We must do the same when we see spiritually barren souls that produce nothing for God; we should do them kindness by making up their failure with our love for God, that our activity may be beneficial to their soul and may glorify God.

The children of this world marry and are given in marriage said Jesus, but the souls consecrated to God, who live spiritually as if they were not on this earth, are like Angels of God. Blessed are those souls that in their present lives can live this great ideal and can be children of the resurrection, living in perfect conformity to the will of God.

He is not God of the dead, but of the living, Jesus said, with reference to the scriptural expression that calls the Lord the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Thus we need to meditate on these words, especially when we feel tempted by Satan and we are in danger of falling into mortal sin. God is our Creator and our Father, but if we sin we become unworthy of Him, and we find ourselves abandoned by his love, since he is not the God of the dead.

Let us humble ourselves in the presence of God and let us flee the senseless vanity of the earth. What is the use for us to wear a religious robe if the purpose is vain ostentation? And what good is the praise and approval of others if we have a bad heart?

Let us look at the true good and to the glory of God, and let us remember that earthly creatures will not judge us, but rather the Supreme Lord will, who with justice will take into account how we operate in His presence.

Let us fear the condemnation of God and live in a way that in His mercy He will receive us with Him in glory on the last day. O Lord, keep our souls in your grace, and do not allow us to be separated from You. Amen.

Chapter 21

1. The poor widow's contribution. The foretelling of the destruction of the Temple. Persecution that the Church will have to bear until the end of the world. The Ruin of Jerusalem. Signs of the second coming of the Redeemer. Be vigilant and pray.

1 And looking around, he saw the wealthy putting their donations into the offertory. 2 Then he also saw a certain widow, a pauper, putting in two small brass coins. 3 And he said: "Truly, I say to you, that this poor widow has put in more than all the others. 4 For all these, out of their abundance, have added to the gifts for God. But she, out of what she needed, has put in all that she had to live on." 5 And when some of them were saying, about the temple, that it was adorned with excellent stones and gifts, he said, 6 "These things that you see, the days will arrive when there will not be left behind stone upon stone, which is not thrown down." 7 Then they questioned him, saying: "Teacher, when will these things be? And what will be the sign when these things will happen?" 8 And he said: "Be cautious, lest you be seduced. For many will come in my name, saying: 'For I am he,' and, 'The time has drawn near.' And so, do not choose to go after them. 9 And when you will have heard of battles and seditions, do not be terrified. These things must happen first. But the end is not so soon." 10 Then he said to them: "People will rise up against people, and kingdom against kingdom. 11 And there will be great earthquakes in various places, and pestilences, and famines, and terrors from heaven; and there will be great signs. 12 But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, handing you over to synagogues and into custody, dragging you before kings and governors, because of my name. 13 And this will be an opportunity for you to give testimony. 14 Therefore, set this in your hearts: that you should not consider in advance how you might respond. 15 For I will give to you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries will not be able to resist or contradict 16 And you will be handed over by your parents, and brothers, and relatives, and friends. And they will bring about the death of some of you. 17 And you will be hated by all because of my name. 18 And yet, not a hair of your head will perish. 19 By your patience, you shall possess your souls. 20 Then, when you will have seen Jerusalem encircled by an army, know then that its desolation has drawn near. 21 Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and those who are in its midst withdraw, and those who are in the countryside not enter into it. 22 For these are the days of retribution, so that all things may be fulfilled, which have been written. 23 Then woe to those who are pregnant or nursing in those days. For there will be great distress upon the land and great wrath upon this people. 24 And they will fall by the edge of the sword. And they will be led away as captives into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by the Gentiles, until the times of the nations are fulfilled. 25 And there will be signs in the sun and the moon and the stars. And there will be, on earth, distress among the Gentiles, out of confusion at the roaring of the sea and of the waves: 26 men withering away out of fear and out of apprehension over the things that will overwhelm the whole world. For the powers of the heavens will be moved. 27 And then they will see the Son of man coming on a cloud, with great power and majesty. 28 But when these things begin to happen, lift up your heads and look around you, because your redemption draws near." 29 And he told them a comparison: "Take notice of the fig tree

and of all the trees. 30 When presently they produce fruit from themselves, you know that summer is near. 31 So you also, when you will have seen these things happen, know that the kingdom of God is near. 32 Amen I say to you, this lineage shall not pass away, until all these things happen. 33 Heaven and earth shall pass away. But my words shall not pass away. 34 But be attentive to yourselves, lest perhaps your hearts may be weighed down by self-indulgence and inebriation and the cares of this life. And then that day may overwhelm you suddenly. 35 For like a snare it will overwhelm all those who sit upon the face of the entire earth. 36 And so, be vigilant, praying at all times, so that you may be held worthy to escape from all these things, which are in the future, and to stand before the Son of man.” 37 Now in the daytime, he was teaching in the temple. But truly, departing in the evening, he lodged on the mount that is called Olivet. 38 And all the people arrived in the morning to listen to him in the temple.

2. The poor widow’s contribution at the temple.

In the enclosure of the Temple, near the atrium of the women, there was the *gazofilacium*, which was the offertory box used to collect the donations that were to be used to support worship; Jesus was there and noticed some rich people who threw coins in it. They tossed in their money with a gesture of indifference and superficiality, as those who give away some superfluous thing that is not needed. Those gestures were done without love for God; those people happened to go by through the atrium of the women and seeing the thirteen openings of the *gazofilacium*, carelessly threw in a coin. At that moment arrived a poor widow who had come with the specific purpose of giving her offering, as can be noted from the text. Her attitude was one of great devotion with a loving heart. She took from her pocket two small copper coins that she had carefully saved, and placed them in the opening with the serene satisfaction of one who gives everything that one has.

Her heart, at the same time, gave to God a gift of fervent love and then, assuming she was unnoticed, much less noticed by the Eternal Judge, she left.

It is likely that somebody noticed how miserable her offering had been, and for that this poor woman was despised, because Jesus spoke with the tone of one who wants to defend a person and said solemnly: *“I tell you truly, this poor widow put in more than all the rest.”* This statement in its abruptness might have seemed absurd, but Jesus immediately added the reason for it saying that the offering of the others had come from their surplus, while the poor widow had given all she had to live on.

What we offer to God.

The observation of Jesus on the almsgiving of the poor woman is enlightening. He gave us the measure of the offering that we owe to God, and gave us the poor widow as an example. In fact we are very used to giving to the Lord just a little bit of our surplus and to give it without generosity or true love. If we made an account of what we give to ourselves and to others and what we give to God, a great imbalance would be evident.

As we go through our day we forget God almost completely, and if we happen to think of Him we give Him only a small fraction of our time. Even this seems excessive to

us, and every day we shorten it further, even though it should be our supreme happiness to speak to the Lord.

A typical example of this spirit of avarice that we exhibit in dealing with God can be seen in our rude manners in which we always put Him in the last place when compared to others. Laws, customs of the world, and even our own habits are full of these terrible injustices.

For example if we talk to someone and another interrupts us, we do not answer the interrupter without ending the conversation with the first person; however, when it comes to God, we stop our interaction with Him for the most trivial reason and listen to others at once. This rudeness is so common! We do not fail to adhere to a fashion or a law of the world, even if it is inconvenient or evil, but when it comes to God we act always at the expense of His law or His honor.

It is awful, for example, that a lady of high society can believe it to be her duty to go to the theater and various receptions dressed immodestly and that it is right for her to follow the fashion of the time instead of observing the law of God, or that she believes that it is more important to impress the eye of the vain or corrupted person rather than the eye of God.

The socialite woman haphazardly gives God the smallest portion from what is superfluous to her; yet instead gives her whole self to the world, and nobody finds any problem with this; in fact many times she receives even accolades and the approval of good people who see *heroism* in her submitting to the world, without thinking that it is more heroic not to submit to it.

It is sorrowful to realize this, but unfortunately, this terrible mentality has frequently confused even good people. If it is against the law of God to dress immodestly, how could it be possible to reconcile the law of God with a woman's "need" to dress immodestly due to her social status?

And if it is forbidden for Christian people to watch immoral shows and performances, why should this be tolerated for those who occupy high positions, and who should be setting an example for other Christians? Rulers, the powerful and the wealthy give to God only *a small part of what for them is superfluous*, and this is very sorrowful and cannot be excused by any human social convention.

We must give to God *all that we have to live*, although before Him we are like the two coins of the poor widow; we need to give on Him all our life and should stop this strange mixture of piety and worldliness, modesty and immodesty, humility and pride, selfishness and charity, none of which brings us to sanctity but rather, undermines Christianity. It is necessary to consider that we are indebted primarily and solely to God and that any false human social convention is for Him a serious sacrilege and for us an act of apostasy.

3. The ruin of Jerusalem, the Kingdom of God on earth and the end of the world.

Jesus Christ taught every day in the Temple and the disciples had occasion to observe the magnificence of the Temple building. At the beginning they did not pay too much attention to it because they were attracted by the words of the divine Master; but seeing the majestic building over and over again, and of course, on occasion being a little

distracted from the divine Word due to listening to it every day, they noticed the beauty of the Temple and mentioned it to the Master with that natural sense of satisfaction and pride we all have for national treasures.

Jesus Christ far from discussing the magnificence of the building, with His divine insight saw the destruction and ruin that would ravage the people due to their sins and the terrible crime of deicide that was on the verge of consummation. He saw in the Temple the image of his Body, which would be destroyed in a violent death, and saw the punishment that would befall the people with the ruin of their city and of this grandiose Temple building; in that upcoming ruin, He saw also the character and image of the catastrophic end of the world, caused by the crimes committed throughout the centuries against God, His Christ and the Church, His Mystical Body, and answered by announcing these two disasters and exhorting the disciples and all people about what to do during those immense calamities. Starting by announcing the destruction of the Temple and subsequently the ruin of Jerusalem, He exclaimed: *the days will come when there will not be left a stone upon another stone that will not be thrown down.*

He said these words with such gravity and truthful candor that none of those who were listening dared to doubt Him, and therefore they asked when such a calamities would occur and what signs would precede them. In asking this question they subconsciously wanted to know if they would be among those that would be affected by those disasters and hoped to not have to witness them. They loved very much their motherland and the Temple and considered it a supreme misfortune to see its ruin. Jesus answered this interior preoccupation of theirs, to clarify the situation for the disciples as well as for those who would come after them, because the Church He was founding would always be exposed to persecution and violence would always be present in the world in every age.

To think of avoiding moments of upheaval was an impossible hope for those who would advance just causes amidst adversity; those who fight for good would always be confronted with disseminators of errors who are the true and immediate cause of persecution and punishment that follow as a consequence.

For this reason in his divinely succinct way He answered, *See that you not be deceived, for many will come in my name, as a messiah and as creators of universal renewal and will say I am he, and the time has come.*

Many false prophets will believe themselves to be those destined to rule over the world and will announce a time of prosperity for all, and also many peoples, facing the plagues and disasters that occur in every age and time, will believe themselves to be near to the coming of the end of the world. But they shall be mistaken and will only be heralding errors.

Both the Kingdom of God and the end of the world will be preceded by wars and revolutions, but these will not be imminent signs of either the end of the predominance of evildoers or of the end of the world. They will only be a preparation, and they will come in order to cleanse the earth and gather the elect.

They will not be exclusive signs of these two greatest events in the history of the world, because in any time there are wars and insurrections. The wars and revolutions that will precede the time of the Kingdom of God and the end of the world will be characterized by a universally destructive nature and accompanied by pestilence, famine, fearful signs in the sky, and *great wonders* on earth, that is, probably, some great inventions that will astonish the world. For this reason Jesus, after saying that there will always be wars and

rebellions throughout the ages, notes specifically the characteristics of those events that shall forewarn on the end of the iniquity and the end of the world: *Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom*, which means there will be a global conflagration, a global war, with the distinctive characteristic of the simultaneous deployment of groups of nations against nations, groups of kingdoms against kingdoms, involving therefore republics and monarchies.

Great earthquakes will accompany this social cataclysm, as will plagues and famines. In every age there have been earthquakes, famines and plagues to be sure but these scourges in the great conflagration occur simultaneously to the frightening universal war.

The true end time should not be confused with the usual perturbations of the world, and it will be such of magnitude as to make it clear that something exceptional is coming upon earth.

Jesus further explains the nature of these two final conflagrations, announcing the great persecution against His Church and the great harvest of Martyrs. Since He spoke to his Apostles and disciples who would be the first to encounter the persecution and be brought before Synagogues and the leaders of the Gentiles, Jesus urges them not to be afraid and to trust completely in the Holy Spirit in the disputes that they would face in the courts and tribunals.

Jesus Christ promises them special assistance particularly when they have been falsely accused and have to defend themselves—assistance that has always been seen in the passion of the Martyrs from the very earliest times to the present glorious Martyrs who were killed in Spain[†], of which, we can say, we ourselves have been witnesses.

Jesus Christ told them of the persecution that his followers would have to suffer even at the hands of their dearest family, parents, brothers, relatives and friends because of His Name, but He adds that *not a hair on your head will be destroyed*.

This expression at first seems to contradict what He says at verse 16, because it is obvious that if they were to be killed, all their bodily life would perish. What Jesus meant, however, was that every torment would produce the fruits of eternal life, and that not a hair of their heads would perish in vain. The Martyrs therefore would regain their bodies in the resurrection, and would recover all that they lost to testify to the truth, thus Jesus added *by your perseverance you will secure your lives*. The perseverance in suffering for God, patience in suffering, the generous sacrifice of what they had most dear, would give them eternal joy in Heaven and then all the pain suffered would seem like nothing and everything that seemed lost would appear to be an invaluable gain.

Are we in the historical period foretold by Jesus?

This is what Jesus promised to his followers and yet, despite having raised the bloody standard of the Cross, He had an immense number of followers, which is a characteristic of those who are truthful. False leaders either arouse fanaticism or promise

[†]Translator's note: Don Dolindo refers to the martyrs during the Red Terror in Spain in which tens of thousands of people including 6,832 members of the Catholic clergy were killed in the summer of 1936.

glory and earthly gains; Jesus Christ instead proposes a path full of thorns and sacrifices to his people, but surrounded by great peace and serenity, they walk a painful path not only without complaining, but also without having to worry about what to say to those who persecute them.

It is the characteristic of those who peacefully trust in God without being rash or arrogant; they are conscious of their own weaknesses and they surrender themselves to the mercy of God with the supernatural force that comes to them from the Holy Spirit. Can we believe that we are already in the historical period of the life of the Church foretold by Jesus? It seems possible to assume it, because among these wars and revolutions of peoples, we have witnessed and we are witnessing a great number of heroic Martyrs. Also, much to our sorrow, the war that broke out on September 3, 1939, already begins to show that it has a universal character, and the way in which wars are waged today, unfortunately, is precisely one of *nation against nation, and kingdom against kingdom*.

Not only are armies storming into battle, but also entire peoples and whole nations are being transformed into battlefields and theaters of war. By the very way that wars are waged today, a global war will necessarily have as a consequence the outbreak of famine and infectious diseases, because today we have come to the unprecedented barbarism of poisoning cities with toxic gas and rain down upon them balloons full of pestilential microbes from airplanes. Also, when the conflagration will be fully underway, every business will close down and hunger will be very widespread throughout earth. It will not be a usual famine, but rather it will be a time of general hunger, because a universal war will destroy production and wealth everywhere*. It is necessary to pray and pray, and if we were to get to the end of these tribulations, we must raise our eyes to God alone, sincerely implore His forgiveness, and beg for our eternal life.

The end of Jerusalem

After referring to the terrible time of conflagration that will precede the kingdom of God, Jesus spoke clearly of the impending doom of Jerusalem to exhort his disciples to save themselves and also to note that its ruin was a presage of the destruction that will occur in the end times. So he added: *When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, know that its desolation is at hand. Then those in Judea must flee to the mountains. Let those within the city escape from it, and let those in the countryside not enter the city, for these days are the time of punishment when all the scriptures are fulfilled.*

In fact, the destruction of Jerusalem happened in that very way: the Romans surrounded the city with soldiers, and the disciples of Jesus running away from the city saved themselves, while the Jews perished. Also the exodus by part of the population from the city was a portent of the mass emigrations of the populations living in big cities that we ourselves witness today; and the words of Jesus seem almost the same as the orders that today are given to the people living in big metropolitan centers: move out of your house, take shelter in the mountains or in the countryside, and those already away should not return.**

*Alludes to germ warfare and other weapons of mass destruction that were subsequently widely used in the last world war, including the atomic bombs.

†Translator's note: that is, during the time when Don Dolindo was writing this book, at the onset of World War II.

Jesus added: *Woe to pregnant women and nursing mothers in those days, for a terrible calamity will come upon the earth and a wrathful judgment upon this people. They will fall by the edge of the sword and be taken as captives to all the Gentiles; and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.* During the terrible tribulation that struck Jerusalem, those who suffered the most were pregnant women and those who were breastfeeding, as they would have been unable to escape easily and worried about their tender offspring. For men or single women it was easier to escape the fury of the battle and endure the tribulations caused by the terrible siege. The holy city, in fact, was surrounded on all sides without the possibility of escape, and so the ensuing famine decimated its inhabitants. The end of the war also occurred as Jesus predicted as many of the inhabitants were killed and others were sold as slaves among the nations of the Gentiles.

Jerusalem was destroyed—not one stone upon another remained; and since then the Jews have never dominated it again, nor will it ever be *until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled*, that is until the end of time. In the course of about twenty centuries, every time the Jews have tried to repossess Jerusalem, they have been sharply driven away, and even today the Zionist attempt[†] supported by armed forces from England, has failed miserably among the massacres that still cause bloodshed in the unfortunate city.

The end of the world

After the announcement of the impending destruction of Jerusalem, Jesus spoke about the end of the world and of the universal judgment. He said, *Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled*, which meant up to the time when the Gentiles would also be punished because of their iniquity; now since this will happen at the end of the world, He immediately touched upon the specific signs and characteristics that would be presage it. In fact, in addition to a new and more dreadful conflagration of nations that will ravage earth, there will be *signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars*, which means, as St. Matthew (Mt 24:29) and St. Mark (Mk 13:14) write, the sun will darken, and consequently the moon will appear a bloody red, and the universe will be shaken and disturbed. On earth there will be extremely violent earthquakes, tsunamis and atmospheric shock waves, and people will be terrified, not knowing what will happen in the midst of the thundering power of heaven.

With the frightening upheaval of all the forces of creation, the earth will be destroyed and all the works made by man will perish since he moved away from God in his miserable pride. Then Jesus Christ will appear *on a cloud* of heaven—that is, in radiant glory, and with great power and majesty; He will come to judge all men and give each one what he has deserved. The dead will rise again with their own bodies, the righteous in glory and the wicked in darkness, and appear before the Eternal Judge.

[†]Translator's note: At the time of Don Dolindo's writing, the State of Israel had not yet been established. It was established in 1948. This was the current interpretation of his words during that time period; but prophecies always have a mysterious side. In our times, Jerusalem is capital of the Jewish State of Israel.

After man's enormous desecration of the divine glory on earth, and after so many tears shed for this reason by righteous people, it will be a great act of justice to restore the will of God, the truth and the good. Then everyone shall see that in reality the wicked did not prosper, and the terrible problem of evil's seeming triumph over good will have its clear resolution. The empty vanity of the temporal triumphs of the wicked will appear before the awestruck world, and the hunger and thirst for righteousness that the righteous had throughout their lives will be truly satisfied.

Who in loving the Lord and following His Law is not troubled and consumed by seeing the injustices of the present life?

Who does not question the Lord, in the depths of his soul, and in sorrow says: why my God, do You let this happen? Well, if He answered: be at peace, because in the evening you will see the justice and glory of God, one would find peace in waiting. The time needed to arrive to the judgment of God is shorter than a day or even than an hour, and because the Lord, in His mercy, wants to harvest as much as possible from his field, down to the last cluster of grapes, He makes his righteous wait until the completion of the times of the evildoers. In this way they will not have any excuse for their doom and shall reap during their lives those wretched moments of transient satisfaction, the only reward that justice gives to them because of some minimal natural good deed that even the most perverse people have done during their lifetimes.

In the Last Judgment the centuries will appear what they are, a fleeting moment, and the triumph of the good will appear as the true triumph. It takes a little patience, because the wait is not long, and the merciful Lord has us falling asleep in death, after a few years of life, because in sleeping we are not aware of the length of time that elapses, that for us would seem endless. Let us rest in God, abandoning ourselves to Him, trusting in His justice and goodness and during the hours of tribulation let us look forward to His hour.

4. What this means for us who await the great tribulation, the Kingdom of God and the Universal Judgment.

After His unsettling declaration of the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world, Jesus turns to his followers and to all mankind to indicate what attitude they should have during the great tribulation that they will witness. The first thing they will do will be to raise their eyes to heaven and to trust in God, expecting his spiritual mercies: *Stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand*. Every punishment has a merciful purpose in the ways God operates and the final punishment will herald the Lord's kingdom and the full triumph of the Church; finally when the divine words of Jesus begin to take place, the soul must find comfort and hope in the kingdom of God.

When the fig tree germinates and produces its fruits and when the trees are laden with their fruit, we understand that summer is close; thus when the predicted great tribulation comes to the earth it will be a sign of the approaching kingdom of God.

The destruction of Jerusalem was the prelude to the spread of the Gospel in the world, the first stage of the kingdom of God; the terrible tribulations of the universal conflagration are the prelude to the triumphant reign of God over the nations; the tribulations of the end of the world will be the prelude to the glorious and eternal kingdom

of God with his elect in Paradise.

Jesus Christ spoke to all in every time period of these three great events in the history of redemption, but because He addressed His words to the Jews, His words had a particular importance to them. The destruction of Jerusalem was for His disciples a terrible disaster, that filled them with immense bitterness, and therefore Jesus comforted them, saying it was not the destruction of the Jewish nation, but the beginning of its redemption, that is, their salvation in the incorporation of the Church and their share in the fruits of redemption.

However in order that they might believe that what He said about Jerusalem was not a distant event, he added, alluding just to the ruin of the holy city: *Amen, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place.*

It would have been very pernicious for his disciples to believe that the event be far away, because it would not have occurred to them to seek safety in time, as He had suggested, and therefore He added with more emphasis: *Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.* There was, therefore, no way to be deceived; what He was announcing about Jerusalem would have taken place soon, and at the first warnings of the upcoming event they should have to look promptly for safety.

Afterwards, addressing specifically to what men would suffer in the great tribulations of the world, and for those who would live in the end times before the final judgment, but also talking to the Jews who were listening to him, Jesus added, *Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life, and that day catch you by surprise like a trap. For that day will assault everyone who lives on the face of the earth.*

In fact, it will be common during the times prior to the great tribulation that the search for pleasure and the relentless concerns of daily life will become all-consuming, which we already see in our generation. The world has become a bar, a theater and a workplace; people seek the pleasure of the senses more intensely than ever; they are distracted by the array of delights brought to their homes by radio, television and the media; and people work unceasingly and assiduously for their present, material lives to the point that they forget their spiritual lives completely. For all those who live in this unworthy manner the tribulation will come as a surprise, similar to the surprise birds experience when ensnared in a net.

People will not think that it is the voice of God, nor will they think of having to change their lives, believing the upheavals of nature to be due purely to natural causes.

Yet those times must be times of intense vigilance and prayer, because they will not be common tribulations, but rather exceptional disasters from which only prayer can offer us a way out, and the tribulations of the end times are cataclysms presaging the final judgment. How can those who think that they will have to appear before the eternal Judge live with such superficiality given these terrible phenomena that are heralding His coming? And how can anyone run the risk of going unprepared before His presence?

Jesus Christ Himself wanted to give us an example of this vigilance in prayer and the concern for matters of the spirit, and therefore the Sacred Text adds, not without special reason, that Jesus *was teaching during the day in the temple area*, to guide the souls in their attainment of eternal goods but *at night he would leave and stay at the place called the Mount of Olives*. His concern for educating the people and his divine Word therefore attracted very large crowds that went to the temple early every morning to listen

to Him.

This must be our life during the time of the great tribulations already incumbent upon the earth and which will continue until the end times: we must raise our eyes to God, yearning for his kingdom; we must be zealous for the Glory of the Lord and the goodness of souls and, without being carried away by our senses, we must mortify ourselves and pray. We cannot remain indifferent when God calls us, and if Jesus said that it is necessary to pray *always*, during the time of tribulation we must do it unceasingly for our own good and that of others.

Jesus said *be vigilant at all times and pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent*; therefore, certain hardships can be avoided or at least mitigated through prayer.

If during the times of upheaval the nations would decide to promote public prayer, how much more would this benefit the people rather than their material possessions, their weapons and their tyrannical discipline!

And if the souls consecrated to God would especially consider the responsibility they bear toward the people, how much more care would they have to preserve themselves in sanctity, with mortifications and unceasing prayer!

It is not possible to promote the common good through idle chatter, but rather we should be raising our hands in supplication and imploring God's mercy*.

* These are simple and yet profound reflections that could be very fruitful in our days if heeded by rulers and consecrated souls.

Chapter 22

1. Conspiracy of the Sanhedrin and betrayal of Judas. The last supper and the Institution of the Eucharist. The traitor revealed. The last admonitions of Jesus. At Gethsemane. Betrayal and arrest of Jesus. Denial of Peter. Jesus mocked before the Sanhedrin.

1 Now the days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which is called Passover, were approaching. 2 And the leaders of the priests, and the scribes, were seeking a way to execute Jesus. Yet truly, they were afraid of the people. 3 Then Satan entered into Judas, who was surnamed Iscariot, one of the twelve. 4 And he went out and was speaking with the leaders of the priests, and the magistrates, as to how he might hand him over to them. 5 And they were glad, and so they made an agreement to give him money. 6 And he made a promise. And he was seeking an opportunity to hand him over, apart from the crowds. 7 Then the day of Unleavened Bread arrived, on which it was necessary to kill the Pascal lamb. 8 And he sent Peter and John, saying, "Go out, and prepare the Passover for us, so that we may eat." 9 But they said, "Where do you want us to prepare it?" 10 And he said to them: "Behold, as you are entering into the city, a certain man will meet you, carrying a pitcher of water. Follow him to the house into which he enters. 11 And you shall say to the father of the household: 'The Teacher says to you: Where is the guestroom, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' 12 And he will show you a large cenacle, fully furnished. And so, prepare it there." 13 And going out, they found it to be just as he had told them. And they prepared the Passover. 14 And when the hour had arrived, he sat down at table, and the twelve Apostles with him. 15 And he said to them: "With longing have I desired to eat this Passover with you, before I suffer. 16 For I say to you, that from this time, I will not eat it, until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." 17 And having taken the chalice, he gave thanks, and he said: "Take this and share it among yourselves. 18 For I say to you, that I will not drink from the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God arrives." 19 And taking bread, he gave thanks and broke it and gave it to them, saying: "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this as a commemoration of me." 20 Similarly also, he took the chalice, after he had eaten the meal, saying: "This chalice is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you. 21 But in truth, behold, the hand of my betrayer is with me at table. 22 And indeed, the Son of man goes according to what has been determined. And yet, woe to that man by whom he will be betrayed." 23 And they began to inquire among themselves, as to which of them might do this. 24 Now there was also a contention among them, as to which of them seemed to be the greater. 25 And he said to them: "The kings of the Gentiles dominate them; and those who hold authority over them are called beneficent. 26 But it must not be so with you. Instead, whoever is greater among you, let him become the lesser. And whoever is the leader, let him become the server. 27 For who is greater: he who sits at table, or he who serves? Is not he who sits at table? Yet I am in your midst as one who serves. 28 But you are those who have remained with me during my trials. 29 And I dispose to you, just as my Father has disposed to me, a kingdom, 30 so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and so that you may sit upon thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." 31 And the Lord said: "Simon, Simon! Behold, Satan has asked for you, so that he may sift

you like wheat. 32 But I have prayed for you, so that your faith may not fail, and so that you, once converted, may confirm your brothers.” 33 And he said to him, “Lord, I am prepared to go with you, even to prison and to death.” 34 And he said, “I say to you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you have three times denied that you know me.” And he said to them, 35 “When I sent you without money or provisions or shoes, did you lack anything?” 36 And they said, “Nothing.” Then he said to them: “But now, let whoever has money take it, and likewise with provisions. And whoever does not have these, let him sell his coat and buy a sword. 37 For I say to you, that what has been written must still be fulfilled in me: ‘And he was esteemed with the wicked.’ Yet even these things about me have an end.” 38 So they said, “Lord, behold, there are two swords here.” But he said to them, “It is sufficient.” 39 And departing, he went out, according to his custom, to the Mount of Olives. And his disciples also followed him. 40 And when he had arrived at the place, he said to them: “Pray, lest you enter into temptation.” 41 And he was separated from them by about a stone’s throw. And kneeling down, he prayed, 42 saying: “Father, if you are willing, take this chalice away from me. Yet truly, let not my will, but yours, be done.” 43 Then an Angel appeared to him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in agony, he prayed more intensely; 44 and so his sweat became like drops of blood, running down to the ground. 45 And when he had risen up from prayer and had gone to his disciples, he found them sleeping out of sorrow. 46 And he said to them: “Why are you sleeping? Rise up, pray, lest you enter into temptation.” 47 While he was still speaking, behold, a crowd arrived. And he who is called Judas, one of the twelve, went ahead of them and approached Jesus, in order to kiss him. 48 And Jesus said to him, “Judas, do you betray the Son of man with a kiss? 49 Then those who were around him, realizing what was about to happen, said to him: “Lord, shall we strike with the sword?” 50 And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear. 51 But in response, Jesus said, “Permit even this.” And when he had touched his ear, he healed him. 52 Then Jesus said to the leaders of the priests, and the magistrates of the temple, and the elders, who had come to him: “Have you gone out, as if against a thief, with swords and clubs? 53 When I was with you each day in the temple, you did not extend your hands against me. But this is your hour and that of the power of darkness.” 54 And apprehending him, they led him to the house of the high priest. Yet truly, Peter followed at a distance. 55 Now as they were sitting around a fire, which had been kindled in the middle of the atrium, Peter was in their midst. 56 And when a certain woman servant had seen him sitting in its light, and had looked at him intently, she said, “This one was also with him.” 57 But he denied him by saying, “Woman, I do not know him.” 58 And after a little while, another one, seeing him, said, “You also are one of them.” Yet Peter said, “O man, I am not.” 59 And after the interval of about one hour had passed, someone else affirmed it, saying: “Truly, this one also was with him. For he is also a Galilean.” 60 And Peter said: “Man, I do not know what you are saying.” And at once, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. 61 And the Lord turned around and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord that he had said: “For before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.” 62 And going out, Peter wept bitterly. 63 And the men who were holding him ridiculed him and beat him. 64 And they blindfolded him and repeatedly struck his face. And they questioned him, saying: “Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?” 65 And blaspheming in many other ways, they spoke against him. 66 And when it was daytime, the elders of the people, and the leaders of the priests, and the scribes convened.

And they led him into their council, saying, "If you are the Christ, tell us." 67 And he said to them: "If I tell you, you will not believe me. 68 And if I also question you, you will not answer me. Neither will you release me. 69 But from this time, the Son of man will be sitting at the right hand of the power of God." 70 Then they all said, "So you are the Son of God?" And he said. "You are saying that I am." 71 And they said: "Why do we still require testimony? For we have heard it ourselves, from his own mouth."

2. The betrayal of Judas and the psychology of his betrayal.

The feast of the Passover was approaching and as it is written in St. Matthew (Mt 26:2) and in St. Mark (Mk 14:1) it would be celebrated in two days time. The chief priests and the scribes, noticing that the crowd of people that would come to listen to Jesus teach in the Temple was becoming larger and larger as the flow of pilgrims coming to celebrate the solemnity in Jerusalem increased, became worried and had a meeting to decide how they would kill the Redeemer without causing an uproar among the people. They had not believed that Jesus was so popular and that His words could attract the people so much; they became convinced of this, however, when they saw that the pilgrims coming into Jerusalem also crowded the Temple to listen to Him, and so they decided that this movement had to be crushed at all costs, as news of Him was also spreading to other regions. However as the participation of the people increased, the less courage they had to act openly against Jesus and for this reason they were looking for the best opportunity to kill Him.

The opportunity came to them from one whom they would have least expected—from Judas Iscariot, one of the Apostles.

For long time Judas had followed Jesus with a false and hostile mind; he was among His disciples in body but not in spirit, and indeed his attitude was actually secretly hostile. He was almost obsessed about his future, and because the life he was leading, going from place to place in poverty, did not give him any assurance for his future well being, and having been put in charge of keeping the alms that were given to them, he had begun to take some surreptitiously for himself.

He had started to follow Jesus with the enthusiasm of those who seek great triumphs and great temporal advantages; he had seen these illusions fade, and indeed also the pressure of the persecution against the divine Rabbi had persuaded him that he had run into a false prophet. He lost that little faith, more natural than supernatural, that he had had before, and had become a merciless critic in his heart of all the actions of Jesus and that was much more dangerous because he kept these ideas to himself.

The Sacred Text says that Satan entered into Judas, not to make him obsessed or irresponsible, but to instill in him a spirit that was distrustful, critical, suspicious and capricious and to give him an increasing obsession with his material situation. Judas wanted at all costs to create a strong position for himself and maybe in the beginning he also had the illusion of being able to make the situation less precarious for the others; he had not accepted the choice of voluntary poverty, he had no trust in God, and when he believed that the time had come for him to make a good profit, he did not hesitate to throw himself into the abyss of treason.

In a sly and dishonest way he was certainly in contact with the priests of the temple and the scribes; they had become aware of his doubts and tried to separate him

from Jesus; in the beginning Satan deceived him making him believe that after all it was the authority of the Sanhedrin that disapproved of the Rabbi. When he knew that they were plotting against Him, Satan put in his heart the possibility of making a lavish gain by betraying Him, and without any further hesitation he went to the High Priests to negotiate the betrayal. Maybe he was deceived and tried to justify himself in his own conscience thinking to get rid of an impostor; it is possible to suppose this from the desperate sorrow he felt when he realized that Jesus was a just man seeing His patience during the Passion and hearing Pilate proclaiming His innocence.

He had not asked a fixed price for his treachery but relied on the Priests precisely because he hoped to make a good profit. However since he had given him away as an impostor, in order not to appear before the Priests as a traitor, he had to accept the thirty pieces of silver they offered him that at the time was the price of a slave. He certainly was greatly disappointed for this paltry sum, but he did not show it, and maybe it was one of the reasons why when he went to give the money back he threw it on the ground, not so much because he felt sorry for his betrayal but for the anger of having received so little for it. Had he truly repented, even a little bit, God would have given him the grace to truly repent.

The act of Judas is repeated every day.

Sorrowfully, the act of Judas is repeated every day, because every day there are many souls who in their hearts betray Jesus and hand Him over to His enemies. Satan enters in these individuals with the same temptation he used with Adam and Judas: the desire to achieve a greater good. If a soul is spiritual, Satan does not attack immediately with material illusion, but tries to distort his conscience and his ways; if a soul is only interested in material goods, Satan shows him the benefits, earnings and entertainment that he can find in the evil. It is necessary to be vigilant and to pray in order not to fall into these temptations and betray Jesus in our heart.

Judas went to the Priests; but he went with a false heart, he did not turn to their authority but to their malice and thus found in this the help for his own ruin.

The same thing can happen to souls who are already being taken by Satan because of a disordered passion, an aberration, or by moving far away from the divine Will: they go to the Priests, but they go with a false heart and so find darkness, confusion and sometimes their own ruin. Moreover, if they have the misfortune of going to a bad Priest, who already betrays Jesus with his disorderly life, they go to offer him the way to kill Jesus all over again, and so together they fall into an abyss of death for the most vile price of a material pleasure or a false and wicked ideal.

How many souls, deluded by Satan, move away from the Divine Will, remove themselves from the salvific actions of Jesus, and go to the Priests to find confirmation and encouragement to their delusions!

How many souls, instead of seeking direction, presume to direct the Priests, and push them to erring as Eve pushed Adam to ruin!

Hence it is not right simply to say: *I asked the advice of a Priest*, to justify one's delusions and miseries, because it is necessary to see in what way the advice of the Minister of God is requested and to which Minister of God a person goes. In a special situation, for example, that goes beyond ordinary spiritual providence it is not enough to

go to any Priest, but rather it requires a particularly enlightened and saintly Priest; a mystic soul, for instance, cannot be guided by just any Priest; much less by one who is sorrowfully diametrically opposed to sublime elevation.

There is no doubt that God gives light to the righteous Priest and even to a not so righteous Priest when a soul goes to him in all sincerity, trusting in God.

In ordinary Providence, spiritual direction can be seen as a beam of light that depends on two vertices that must meet: the Confessor and the penitent, and the current of grace that flows through them; when one vertex is not aligned with the other, the current cannot flow and instead of having light there is darkness.

3. Preparation for the Passover supper and Institution of the Eucharist.

On the day of Unleavened Bread, that is the first of the seven days of the Passover festival, during which only unleavened bread was eaten, Jesus sent Peter and John to prepare what was needed for their ritual supper. He did not have a house—let alone a room big enough to celebrate it—and so he called upon the hospitality of a friend.

It was common, in those times, to host pilgrims who came to Jerusalem who did not have a place in which to gather together.

Judas, after making his pact with the Chief Priests, was more suspicious and careful than ever; watching every move the Master made in order to find the opportunity to betray Him; as consequence Jesus, having asked Nicodemus or someone related to the Sanhedrin most likely to host them, did not want to expose this host to reprisals, and especially he did not want Judas to do his betrayal at the Last Supper; thus he spoke to Peter and John in veiled way in order that they would be able to find his friend and Judas would not know where, until the start of the Last Supper.

With his divine foreknowledge Jesus knew everything and for this reason he gave precise directives to his two Apostles on how to find the friend who would give them hospitality: on entering the city they would meet a man who was carrying a jug of water; they would have to follow him to the house that he was going to enter which was the house of his friend, and ask him for his hospitality in the Master's name; there they were to prepare what was necessary for the Passover meal. Judas must have been very displeased from the Master's distrustful act because it was he that, being in charge of the alms purse, was taking care of all their material expenses; but he could not show his discontentment for fear of revealing himself. Further, he had to give money from the purse for the necessary expenses, and must have irritated him greatly, because in trying to derive a profit from his betrayal, he avariciously considered every additional expense unnecessary at this point.

Peter and John found everything as Jesus had told them and prepared for the supper, and Jesus with the other apostles went to the house where they sat down for the meal.

From the narrative of St. Luke it is evident that Judas was also present and participated in the dinner, but one can only imagine in what mood he had had to be in! Already a traitor, with the price of his treachery in his pocket, without faith, in a spirit full of hatred towards the Master and everyone else, he saw everything in a sinister light, and the outpouring of the infinite love of Jesus only increased his resentment and animosity against Him.

Everything that was occurring was getting on his nerves; it seemed arbitrary, stupid, contrary to the Law, and more and more the idea of putting an end to what for him looked like a boisterous gathering of fanatic and spirited souls became rooted in his mind. He was terribly out of place in that great manifestation of love and yet he was not able to prevent its effusiveness. He certainly weighed like a deadly nightmare on the Heart of Jesus and cast on the others a sense of darkness and gloom, but nevertheless he could not cancel the shining light of that ineffable moment.

Jesus was seated at the center of the table; He had an otherworldly, divine appearance. His beautiful face radiated majesty, love, goodness and peace and also a gentle and profound sadness, which gave a shadow to that awesome sight and made it more beautiful.

His Divinity, concealed by his most holy humanity, emanated from those mysteriously sculpted and beautiful features; his eyes shone and reflected Heaven, His cheeks were ruddy and His blonde beard gave a golden aura to the splendor of His goodness. That face reflected His Heart and in His composure and full modesty there was something maternal, something immensely maternal.

He was the bridegroom of the Canticles that was giving himself in that moment; and in that moment the door of his charity opened, exuding essences of love embracing the souls of all the centuries, embracing His Church and giving to Her His life.

He looked around at His disciples and with His eyes wrapped all of them up with love as the rising sun envelops a cold, bleak rock.

The disciples were narrow-minded and poor in spirit and did not even understand what He was going to do, but they were His own and He loved them immensely. He had come to earth to sustain human infirmity and gave Himself to sustain their life; the very narrow minds of his Apostles increased his feelings of tenderness and so He exclaimed: *I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer*; and to make it more clear to them that He now was leaving them, added: *for, I tell you, I shall not eat it (again) until there is fulfillment in the kingdom of God.*

He therefore was celebrating the last supper with his dear disciples; being with them once more for a supper full of love when the gift He was to give to them, in that moment *would be fulfilled in the kingdom of God*, with the complete manifestation of His love in the eternal glory. However, as He was now offering himself to remain with them on earth, that family intimacy of the last Supper, in which He gave himself unconditionally and without consideration for the lack of preparation and unworthiness of those to whom he gave Himself, would only be renewed and accomplished *in the kingdom of God*, that is, in the triumph of His love on earth once more, when He would give Himself again in a great Eucharistic effusiveness.

Jesus, therefore, with a single expression, touched upon the two fulfillments of His mystery of love: the fulfillment that would occur in the end times with the triumph of the Church, when the growth of His love in the world would be so great that He would feel to be almost at table with His children, and the fulfillment of love that would occur in the Eternal Kingdom, where He would be and will be food of eternal happiness for His triumphant Church.

The Apostles did not understand his words, nor did they want to understand them, because they did not want to accept that He was leaving them; they believed that he was talking about the temporal, imminent triumph that they were awaiting, therefore Jesus

persisted in this vein with a more overt action: He took the cup of wine that the head of the family used to drink and distribute to diners at the beginning of the Passover meal, and after blessing it, he gave to his dear disciples saying: *Take this and share it with each other, for I tell you (that) from now on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the Kingdom of God comes.*

He did not yet give them the Eucharistic cup, but that of the supper, and He gave it to announce again His death and the accomplishment of the meal of love in the triumph of the Church and the Eternal Kingdom.

It was a solemn moment, and the Angels descended from Heaven to contemplate it. At that moment the greatest miracle of God was going to be accomplished, and it was accomplished in that moment by only one word of the Humanized Word.

The Lord himself wanted to give us an idea of the magnitude of that instantaneous miracle of love that would transubstantiate the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of the Redeemer, by showing us that the material that he would transform at the most fundamental level came from transformations of matter over many millions of years and centuries! In the beginning He created the heavens and the earth, but those heavens are still evolving in their marvelous order, and earth is still changing in its structure.

Jesus Christ with one word of omnipotent love was going to accomplish something far, far greater.

He was already as if transfigured, but He was now going to transfigure himself even further... His face was mysterious, very sweet, pensive, deep in thought, ... it was like the face of God: powerful, wise and loving. He had the assurance of someone who can do everything, the brightness of one who knows all things and accomplishes all things with wisdom, and the sweetness of one who gives Himself to pure love. The Angels nearly suspended their actions completely, and the heavens nearly stopped their harmonious motion. Jesus took the bread, raised His eyes to heaven, *gave thanks*, which means He prayed ardently thanking the Father for the great gift He gave to mankind; broke the bread distributed it to His Apostles, and exclaimed with a peaceful loving voice, at which the laws of creation halted in adoration and obedience, nearly disappearing before Him: *This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me.* The substance of the bread was as if it had been struck by the almighty word and vanished, yielding to the substance of the Body of the Redeemer; and because He had not pronounced His almighty word on a specific *quantity* of bread, it, together with all its pieces, hung like a veil of that divine substance.

It was the Ark of the new covenant hidden in mystery and concealed by veils; an ark of shining gold for the Divinity of the Redeemer, true manna from heaven, bread of life, law of a new love, admirable sacrifice of the Eternal Priest. The bread was no longer bread, it was Him; He truly lived both in the dimension of his Body and in the dimension of the bread; and as He could not divide His dimensional body to give to all, He divided the bread; but because these two dimensions were fortuitous and in both the substance of His Body was totally given, each part of the bread contained Him as He is, complete, in body, blood, soul and Divinity. What a profound mystery!

He paused a moment; the Apostles were eating the bread of life; He was in them and vivified them. His love had reached the apex of His dedication, no human love could go so far, because if one could ever attempt to do what He did, he would die, and would be unable to give any life-giving love to the soul or heart, and at the very most become a

source of “food” that, at the very most, could sustain temporarily the physical life of the body. The Apostles almost did not notice this divine gift; they felt in themselves a new life but did not know yet how to discern it. As for Jesus, He was rejoicing in His love, penetrating them, enveloping, kissing them in the depths of their inner being, and going through them as current of infinite charity.

But He was not yet satisfied: He had given Himself to them as food, but He also wanted to give Himself as drink; He had given His entire body and wanted to give His Blood, sacrificing Himself for love. He wanted to separate it from His Body at all costs, to anticipate and perpetuate its outpouring through the centuries until the end of the times. Thus, He took the cup filled with wine, gave it to his beloved ones and exclaimed the same omnipotent and transubstantiating words: *This cup is the new Covenant in my Blood, which will be shed for you.* He did not shed it, but He gave it sacramentally, separate from the Body; He gave it as a sacrifice of love; it was His very Blood, not a symbol; it was the same that would soon be shed and not figuratively; it was the Blood of the sacrifice of the Cross that would shortly be consummated in the betrayal of Judas, and for this reason Jesus to remove any doubt added: behold, the hand of the one who is to betray me is with me on the table*.

4. Jesus announces the betrayal and Peter’s denial

The divine face radiating immense love darkened and became contracted in an expression of agony, in proportion to the love with which He had given Himself: He sacrificed Himself for love, and one of His beloved ones was going to sacrifice Him for hate, He gave His whole Self, an immeasurable treasure, and the ungrateful Apostle would barter Him for thirty wretched coins; He gave to save, and the unfaithful Apostle would sell Him to lose his own self! What an excruciating pain for Jesus! He therefore added: *for the Son of Man indeed goes as it has been determined; but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed.*

He would sacrifice Himself by leaving this earth, undergoing death; he would even use the betrayal of the unfaithful Apostle and let death snatch Him, but this would not minimize the awful crime of the traitor, for which he would suffer eternal ruin.

At the words of Jesus the Apostles were dismayed, and *they began to ask one another*, before asking the Divine Master who among them would commit so great a crime. However their hearts were not yet mature, and they did not have a deep understanding of the words of Jesus; it seemed impossible that one of them would betray Him and so after a moment of astonishment, they returned to their mentality: hoping in the temporal realm of the Master, and hoping to have high places in this realm, questioning even then which one of them would be considered the first.

Jesus Christ did not deny that they would have had places of responsibility in His spiritual kingdom, because in truth, He came to build His Church as a perfect society; but He also did determine the real nature of the power that He would confer upon them and what their practical duties would be.

*A very clear explanation that reminds us of the great mystery. The Eucharist contains two great signs for the sacrifice in which the consecrated bread and the consecrated wine are required: true food and true drink.

The kings of the Gentiles, He said, lord it over the people and those who are in authority over them are addressed as benefactors. They govern as dictators, that is without charity, and through the use of force; but nevertheless they are called benefactors because by dominating their subjects, they demand to be honored at all costs.

Authority in the world at that time (and today) meant being in command, and those who were high up demanded honor and money; the Apostles and their successors, on the other hand, were not to be like that; they were ministers of goodness and servants of God; they had to be like the least among their subjects, with loving charity, and had to be like servants of souls.

With a delicate act of humility and explaining his teaching with an example, Jesus added, *For who is greater: the one seated at table or the one who serves? Is it not the one seated at table? I am among you as the one who serves.* He did not clearly say that He was the very supreme majesty, but was humbly vague, almost as if it repulsed Him to say more at that time.

He was the first among all people in every century, and yet He reduced Himself to be as a servant among all of them and a servant of all souls, offering Himself to them as food and very soon as victim. This was the character of the power that He would establish in His Kingdom.

The Apostles were waiting for His kingdom, but they conceived it in a completely natural sense; Jesus did not deny that He would establish a kingdom in which they would have great power, and lovingly He told them that He had prepared it for them because they had been with Him through His trials; He prepared it as a recompense for their fidelity, but He added that it would be similar to the kingdom that His Father had given Him. They would have to, as He did, announce the truth and, like himself, they would have to suffer and to crown their lives with martyrdom, as He would shortly crown His own with His immolation on Calvary, but afterwards they would receive the eternal prize of eternal happiness, almost a banquet of eternal life, and would be exalted on the Day of Judgment as judges of the world.

With immense delicacy, Jesus did not say anything about the pains they would have to suffer, but mentioned only the prize they would have. He essentially stopped Himself from going further: after speaking in veiled terms about the kingdom that would be theirs, *just as my Father has conferred one on me*, He only mentioned the eternal nature of this kingdom. It was too painful for Him at that time to tell them of the future pains that they would have to endure.

However, He wanted to alert them to the events that were about to unfold, since the hour was approaching; He did so with great charity, little by little, turning first to Peter, who one day as head of the Church would have to strengthen the faith and courage of his companions and of all the faithful. Jesus called him two times, as a sign of loving affection because of the danger that loomed over him and over all the Apostles and said, *Simon, Simon, behold Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat*, meaning to torment and to confuse you, shaking you as grain through a sieve, *but I have prayed that your own faith may not fail; and once you have turned back, you must strengthen your brothers.*

It was the announcement of a big storm, and Peter understood that He spoke of the imminent persecution that would be unleashed against the Master, according to what He had already said beforehand; however, he did not like this veiled but accurate prediction

of his fall that he believed impossible, and therefore he said that he felt that in his soul he had the love to follow Him to prison or even to death. But Jesus sorrowfully replied: *I tell you, Peter, before the cock crows this day, you will deny three times that you know me.* And He meant to say: Before the new day begins, or as St. Mark notes explicitly: *before the cock crows the second time* (Mk 14:30), at dawn, *you will deny three times that you know me.* Not only he would not go with Him to prison or to death, he would even deny knowing him.

The infallibility of the Pope

Jesus Christ had promised the Apostles a kingdom similar to the one that His Father had prepared for Him, and this kingdom was the Church. Of course this kingdom could not be without a head and Jesus turned to Peter, designating him as such, and enjoined: *you must strengthen your brothers in the faith.* He could not have confirmed them without having the authority and the grace and Jesus gave him the authority in that command; He had already obtained the necessary grace for him, by praying for him that his faith might not fail.

It is evident that Jesus spoke on the infallibility of Peter's faith in being able *to confirm the others*, that is from the teaching authority that He conferred upon him; it is very clear that He spoke not only for that sorrowful time but for all times and for all souls, thus for every successor that Peter would have in the supremacy conferred upon him. It is also very clear, from the context, that Jesus Christ was not talking about the personal infallibility of Peter in his life, which meant that he would be without faults, because immediately afterward he foretold him that he would deny him three times.

The marvelous dogma of the supremacy and infallibility of the Pope was all in the divine words of Jesus: the Pope cannot err in confirming others by a special grace received from the prayer of Jesus; he can err in his life, as Peter erred, and may need conversion, just as Peter did convert after denying his Master. Jesus prayed that Peter's faith in Him would not fail and in fact, despite the denial, he never quite lost it in the privacy of his heart, so to speak, and especially he never lost his faith, according to the prayer of Jesus, *after his repentance*; that faith bright and infallible, a special gift of the Holy Spirit and a light of teaching for the whole Church.

Jesus prayed for Peter and was heard (Jn 11:42); thus it follows that since He prayed for him as head of the kingdom which He established—that is, the Church, He obviously also prayed for his successors, united to him in unbroken authority that will last until the end of the time. This argument is so clear that it became the basis of the definition of the infallibility of the Pope at the (*ed. First*) Vatican Council (see First Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ, Chapter 4)*.

Jesus Christ, after giving Peter the command *to confirm his brothers* and having predicted to him how he would soon deny Him, continued with care to alert his dear ones in advance of the imminent dangers and sorrows lying ahead. *Satan was seeking them*, or

* Both the mission of the supreme leader of the Church, and the infallibility in continuing to carry on this guidance for the direction of the truth of the faith (in which Peter is called to confirm his brothers) are not gifts for the benefit or personal prestige of Peter or the Pope, his successor, but are a guarantee for the people of God; otherwise among the thousands of individual interpretations of the word of God, nobody would ever know where the truth can be found; therefore the infallibility in teaching does not involve any personal privilege (and much less the impossibility to sin: Peter and all Popes can sin as any other man can), but serves only as a divine assistance for those who believe.

according to the Greek text, *had obtained with his insistence from God the permission to sift all of you like wheat* as one day he did with Job and was already lying in wait to attack them with the strongest storm of trouble. Jesus had put his ardent prayer for Peter in opposition to Satan's cruel insistence to God and had gotten for Peter and for all men, the marvelous gift of the infallible faith, capable of withstanding the strongest storms; however the storm would be severe and terrible, and so Jesus warns the Apostles, and with them also warns the Church.

However, He did so indirectly in order to not worry them too much, and He also wished they would understand it on their own. Therefore, He said to them: *When I sent you forth without a moneybag or a sack or sandals, were you in need of anything?* And they answered: *No, nothing.* Up to then He had provided them with great providence and had defended them; but soon He would not be there with them anymore, and they would have to provide and defend themselves.

With these words Jesus announced his death and predicted to them the hostility they would encounter: when He sent them to preach, He sent them without provisions, because they would always find generous families to give them hospitality as His disciples; however, after his death, everyone would be against them and they would have to not only provide for themselves, but to watch out and defend themselves from mortal dangers. Jesus told them clearly the gravity of the dangers to which they would be exposed with an allegory. He said: *one who does not have a sword should sell his cloak and buy one. For I tell you that this scripture must be fulfilled in me, namely, He was counted among the wicked.* With these words He wanted to say: *I will be taken and put to death;* in fact, to be counted among the wicked meant just that, indeed it was an allusion to his crucifixion, because only the most wicked were condemned to that infamous death.

The Apostles believed that He was referring to His being assaulted by thieves in the night, and as they appeared to have two swords at hand in the banquet hall, pointed to these possibly to get permission to bring them along, saying: *Lord, look, there are two swords here.* But Jesus answered: *It is enough!* It is possible to believe that the Apostles understood that two swords would be enough to defend themselves and took them with them.

In fact, we find out later that Peter, in the Garden of Olives, was in possession of a sword, and that he used it against the servants of the Chief Priest; it is difficult to imagine, if not impossible, that Peter, a poor and peaceful fisherman would have had a sword, and it is even more unbelievable that he had gone armed to the Passover meal; he most likely found it in the house that had hosted them and since they had taken the donkey for the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem without the permission of the owner, he probably believed to be authorized by the words of the Master to take the swords and return them later.

The Church in her fights

In announcing to the Apostles the dangers which they were to encounter in the apostolate and telling them to His Church, Jesus Christ recommended that they take care in providing for themselves for their necessities and *to buy a sword selling the cloak;* with these words He meant to say that the Church would have to procure what was necessary to fulfill its mission as well as providing for its defense *with the sword of the temporal kingdoms* when in danger *from the threat of evildoers.* To claim that the Church should

not possess anything and that life in the apostolic manner is to possess absolutely nothing is a utopian fantasy, because life on earth has essential temporal needs.

The Church lives amidst the world and therefore cannot eliminate its temporal needs, especially in those places where the people's lack of faith, or even the wickedness of men forces Her to live as someone who is abandoned or persecuted. She cannot do without *the sword*, which can include political support among the nations, without which life among human beings would be impossible.

During major political crises of nations or during times of outright persecution She is forced *to sell the cloak to buy the sword*, that is to even renounce to some external rights, to a few prerogatives that do not affect Her in essence in order to obtain *the sword*, the means to protect Her existence among the nations. Those who complain of the diplomatic attitudes of the Church and presume to dictate to Her the rules of life show very clearly that they do not understand that She is guided by the Holy Spirit and She knows better than anyone else what She must do to live on earth*.

The Church is essentially peaceful, and by the example of Her Divine Master is more willing to suffer than to react. However, there are terrible moments in the history of the nations when the Church is *counted among the wicked* and thus persecuted—sought after by evildoers to be put to death violently and diabolically by opportunists who usurp the power of the state declaring themselves the established authority, while in reality they are only imposters acting as leaders; in these cases the Church *can also have the sword*, in order to drive out violence with violence, and to affirm, even by force, the rights of a Catholic state, seized by a few self-imposed autocrats. This happened in Mexico, for example, when Catholics formed the armies of Christ the King to fight the wicked government controlled by Masons and atheists; it also happened in Spain at the time of the Bolshevik revolution, which tried in every way to destroy the Faith. In these cases not only does She have a right to take the sword but also a grave duty, because the protection of the Faith against organized violence, which has the audacity to take possession of the very organization of a Catholic state, includes the duty for the protection of souls and for the very honor of God.

Whatever modern troublemakers think and whatever they say, claiming to reduce the Church to a sect, She is and will always be the mother of the nations and the authentic representation of God over all people on earth; thus she can and must protect the people against the oppression of the wicked. When a Pope, Julius II, personally brandished the sword and went up the battlements of the walls to free the people from a foreign invader, he did not represent a conqueror, but an avenger of justice, trying to bring peace for the salvation of souls. The pygmies look from the valley at certain historical situations, while

* After the Ecumenical Council especially, there have been many discussions on whether or not the Church—for her free and divine ministry—should have the aid of civil power. It is now believed that the Church should not in any way have the care and protection of political power. This is why She does not ask for privileges, but She demands that She be guaranteed full freedom to teach the Gospel, administer the sacraments, and to be able to freely minister to believers all over the world. The cooperation of States to enact good, just and honest laws, which increase brotherhood among the people, is certainly humanly consistent and useful to the mission of the Church.

they should look at them from above.*

The conflicts promoted many times by the Popes against the Turks was a fight for true Christian freedom, similar to those brought against the heretics and were done in self-defense of the truth against the propagation of errors. In certain historical events that relate to the Popes and the Church, it is a thousand times wiser and more prudent not to risk making judgments, which are almost always wrong, and instead to praise the provisions and permissions of Providence which knows how to guide the events of the world in righteousness and truth.

The Adoration on the Mount of Olives and the capture of Jesus.

Jesus Christ regularly went to pray by Himself on the Mount of Olives at night; but after the meal and the institution of the Eucharist, the Apostles wanted to accompany Him to the garden where He often prayed. He had spoken about swords, dangers, and suffering, and they did not have the heart to leave Him alone. Besides, after the Institution of the Eucharist, Jesus who had just vivified them through Himself, showed them such kindness and tenderness that they felt an extraordinary attraction to Him. Jesus also, having become truly one with them, did not wish to leave them; so that, when *he departed from them* to go to pray, the Greek text uses an expression that purposely stresses the great effort—indeed the painfully, wrenching effort—that He had to make in order to depart from them.

The infinite love which He had already given, was already beginning to succumb to the full sacrifice that would redeem all things and save; already that divine soul, shining with infinite bliss, began to darken and the gloomy shadows of sadness were descending upon that infinite lovable heart; He felt His divine life almost fading behind a tenebrous curtain of stormy clouds and behind the mass of sins He was taking upon Himself. It seems almost, using a bold phrase but truly in accordance with his inner pain, that He felt almost a detachment from the Divinity, He felt Himself to be almost only entirely man, suspended over an abyss of pain and dreadful anguish, that took His breath away and made it hesitating; for this reason He desired the company of His beloved Apostles and had to therefore agonizingly depart from them by as much as a stone's throw.

A deadly tedium assailed Him, a fear for what loomed ahead, an apprehension that hung over Him entirely, a deep sadness for human ingratitude, and He wanted His dearest ones to be close, almost to be sustained and helped by them; this is why He recommended that they pray so as *to not fall into temptation*, that they not be overpowered by what was going to happen, but remain faithful to Him and not doubt Him.

He moved away alone, recollected in his mortal anguish, and knelt humbly before the Father and prayed.

He obviously did not only pray those few words recounted in the Sacred Scripture - the epilogue of His prayer - but rather made profuse and intense supplications for all mankind, that it be *redeemed, renewed and saved*.

*Evidently the modern historical context is far away in time and very different from that of Pope Julius II. This is the reason why the mission of the Church is limited to teaching all men and to provide encouragement to all those who pray, work and suffer for the freedom of the oppressed. Pope Paul VI spoke authoritatively on this point at the United Nations and in Geneva.

Three times He prayed, as is recorded in St. Matthew (Mt 26:39-44) and three times He went to His apostles to wake them up, expressing in His prayer that had become *agony*, that is an extreme struggle, not only the immense anguish He was suffering in his pains, but all that He felt for His Church. He prayed the first time for the Redemption of all and saw the huge suffering that was to be its cost; his humanity was seized by terror and asked the Father if it would be possible to remove the bitter cup, while offering Himself entirely to the Divine Will.

He prayed a second time and asked that the fruits of the Redemption be fulfilled completely because He saw as if pictured in front of Him the very sad spectacle of human ingratitude and the apostasies of the last centuries. Upon seeing this vision he was taken by a mortal tedium, because he did not want to suffer needlessly. However, He unified Himself to the Divine Will and prayed for the renewal of humanity and the complete triumph of God.

He prayed the third time imploring for the salvation of all souls, that is to say that they be collected from all over the earth and brought into Paradise. He prayed in this way for the three major stages, so to speak, of His work: the Redemption of all, the renewal of the Kingdom of God, and the final epilogue which is the definitive collection of all people into the eternal kingdom after the end of the world and the final judgment.

Each of His prayers culminated in an act of unity with the divine Will, and an appeal to the Apostles to give Him comfort; but He found them asleep in their great sadness. Jesus Christ, in fact, almost always finds asleep those who should comfort Him and zealously honor Him for the salvation of souls. In the midst of conflicts faced by the Church that have been started by wretched unbelievers, often His faithful are asleep, indeed weighed down by sleep, and so do very little to console Him. Also it must be noted that it was no accident that Jesus turned in particular to Peter as he slept; He looked into the future, to those times of moral and spiritual lassitude in which Peter himself and the Shepherds of the Church may fall asleep. Those few Popes that did not respond to their high mission were asleep, and to them Jesus said: *Watch and pray; could you not keep watch for one hour?* (Mk 37:38). *Get up and pray that you may not undergo the test.* Instead those that were asleep did not wake up, and Jesus did not receive comfort when the world rebelled and tried to erase His memory from the earth!... Therefore, it is incumbent upon us in our times that we watch and pray fervently to console the agonizing Jesus in His Mystical Body that is continuously assaulted and persecuted!

While Jesus was in the most severe moment of His agony, an angel appeared to Him to comfort Him; the Apostles were asleep, Peter was weighed down by sleep, and the Angel comforted Him to sustain His failing forces, as if His Divinity was being eclipsed.

He was comforted by the fact that He could to offer Himself to suffer and die before the defilement of the Divine Glory, but this caused him such personal anguish that he was overcome with agony and for the excruciating nature of His pains He began to sweat blood so profusely that the ground became wet.

Science has frequently noted and explained the condition of sweating blood by certain sick individuals, a condition called *diapedesis*; but the sweat of Jesus was exceptional and extraordinary because it was a flood of blood; his suffering did not have nor will ever have an analogue again on earth.

St. Luke, as a physician, noted this singular circumstance of Jesus's agony that he knew from the three Apostles that accompanied the Lord; they were asleep, in fact, but Jesus went and awakened them three separate times so they could not miss to see Him bloodied. St. Luke summarizes the three prayers of the Redeemer, maybe because he was attracted by this phenomenon of sweating blood, and he tells of the last time that He went to the Apostles and found them asleep.

Why are you sleeping? He said to them; *get up and pray that you may not undergo the test*; but they woke up for a moment and then fell back into a deep sleep.

O my Jesus, why do we sleep when the world prepares snares for souls who are part of your Mystical Body? Why do we not pray in those moments of great temptation for the world? The Church cries out and we sleep? Why do we love You so little? Wake us up, Lord, wake us up at least into a true and worthy apostolate of prayer. It is not an apostolate to recite almost mechanically a few prayers, but rather enable us to deepen our souls before God in the company of the agonizing Jesus, to fight against the snares of the devil and cooperate for the salvation of souls and the triumph of God.

The *spirit of prayer* is essential, not simply some prayers; it is necessary that the soul is filled completely with the agony of Jesus in His Church, and that it feels the need to be, in the silence of its heart, with the agonizing Jesus in order to truly cooperate in the glory of God and the salvation of poor sinners.

The agony of Jesus has not ended, because He still suffers in the Eucharist on our Altars. There is the agony of the silent and abandoned Tabernacles. Jesus is there to offer Himself and to have company in His prayers that He unceasingly raises to His Father; He wakes us up with the holy calls of the Church, but do we leave him alone? What a suffering must it have been for Jesus to see so many souls far from Him, immersed in the vanity of life, asleep in their miseries! Let us console Him, let us respond to His invitation and come to His Tabernacles, let us watch and pray!

6. Jesus Christ is captured.

While Jesus was waking the Apostles from their sleep the third time, an unusual noise was heard in the garden; it was the crowd of those who had been sent by the High Priests to capture Him, and leading them was Judas Iscariot.

In the night the soldiers, unfamiliar with how Jesus Christ looked, could not possibly have recognized Him; for this reason Judas would identify Him to them by giving Him a kiss. His conscience had darkened, and so he did not ponder the horror of betraying his divine Master with a kiss, and so pretended to greet Him with a loving gesture when instead he was handing Him over to thugs.

Thus he moved slightly ahead of the mob, went to Jesus and greeted Him with a kiss. The Redeemer did not speak to him harshly as the reprobate deserved, but instead refused to kiss him and seized with horror and with His Heart injured more acutely than being struck by lightning, made it clear to him with ineffable sweetness what he was doing and said: *Judas, with a kiss you betray the Son of Man!*

The moment was tragic; the Apostles had gathered around the Master and upon seeing the mob that at Judas's sign were already getting closer to capture Him, asked Jesus if they should use the sword to defend Him. Uncertain because of the divine

Master's calm, they did not dare to act violently without his permission; Peter, however, seeing that one of the servants of the chief priests was advancing menacingly and was already hurling himself toward Jesus, perhaps so that he could brag about capturing Him later with the priest, raised his sword and cut off the servant's right ear. But Jesus immediately turned to the Apostles saying: *Stop, no more of this*; and in His exceeding goodness toward the wounded man, and also to not compromise Peter, touched the man's ear healing him instantly.

At that miracle both the servant and the others should have changed their minds and asked Jesus for forgiveness; but instead they became more insolent and rushed to capture him.

St. John's Gospel notes the way in which Jesus showed those reprobates His divine Power, and that it was He who gave Himself into their hands; but also in the brief account of St. Luke it is noted that He spoke with immense majesty.

In fact, He moved forward to meet the chief priests, *the temple guards*—the leaders of the Levites appointed to be custodians of the Sacred Place—and the elders who had also come to capture Him. Venal as they were, having paid Judas the price of the betrayal, they also wanted to make sure that they had not been duped. Their faces flushed, and they felt they were in the presence of an extraordinary being, having been given direct proof; but nevertheless they continued to advance threateningly, armed and resolved to accomplish their wretched plan.

With divine calm Jesus made them note that their apparatus of force showed their weakness, and it was only God who permitted them to do it. They had come against Him armed with swords and clubs almost as if He were a thief; and yet they could have much more easily just seized Him in the Temple, where he went every day to teach; *but this is their hour, the time for the power of darkness*. With those words Jesus not only pointed out a fact, but gave permission to the iniquities and the powers of evil to rage against Him. In the very act in which He was taken, He stated his absolute mastership and had them note that if they did not capture Him while He was in the Temple, it was not because they were afraid of Him, but because He did not give them permission to do so.

Only God could speak with so much peace, dignity and majesty.

Criminals or false prophets, in fact, are either violent or disheartened when they find themselves in front of an opposing force. They try to defend themselves and when they cannot they go from boldness to cowardice. Jesus Christ, instead, met His enemies with such great, amazing dignity, and spoke to them with calm majesty, without arrogance or fear.

He was in charge of the events, and showed again to be in full control.

He could have disappeared, as He had done other times, He could have gotten rid of them with one word, as He did show them, but He gave himself up voluntarily into their hands because the time in which He had decreed to give His life for the salvation of all had come.

As soon as those wretches felt to be masters of the situation, they threw themselves on Jesus and after binding him firmly, took him that same night to the house of the high Priest. They brought him to Annas (Jn 18:12), who was the high priest elected for life and after him to Caiaphas (Mt 26:57, Mk 14:53 and following) who was the high priest for that year, and immediately there was a trial that could be called informative in nature. St. Luke barely mentions this trial in which they ridiculed Jesus, maybe because being done

during the night, it did not have legal value and thus the evangelist recounts in more detail the one done in the morning, which was a legal epilogue to the nightly event.

Peter denies Jesus

With its usual brevity, the Gospel barely mentions the mistreatments suffered by Jesus during the night; but they were exceedingly cruel and humiliating. He was in a place with people that were viciously hostile to Him; those around Him believed Him to be a dangerous agitator and wanted to get rid of Him at all costs; therefore they raged against Him and subjected Him to all sorts of mockery. Jesus remained silent and prayed. Only one person could have been a witness in His favor, but not only did He not speak out but denied Him!

Peter, after the arrest of the divine Master fled like the others; but the love he felt for Him compelled him to follow Him; however, not having the courage to follow the wretched crowd, he stood in the distance to see how things would end. Peter *followed at a distance*, that is true, because his heart was no longer close to the Lord. That mixture of fear, doubt and discouragement had begun to take root that would lead him to his denials. More than following Jesus with a sincere heart, he was following Him in the anxiety of his own human concern to see what would happen to Him. Indeed he was very far from Him!

When the crowd entered the building of the High Priest, Peter was admitted as well, but he was very careful not to show who he was, and mingled among the others that were in the courtyard, hoping to not be noticed. Weak as he was, unprepared for the ordeal, because instead of praying in the Garden he had gone to sleep, he exposed himself to this great temptation from which he came out vanquished and battered. In order for Peter to enter the courtyard, John had spoken to the gatekeeper on his behalf (Jn 18:17). The woman who was the gatekeeper had let him in but, attentive in her work, had noticed that something about his expression was amiss, and that he had an upset look which made her suspicious. Then, when a fire was lit in the courtyard due to the cold, and Peter, to pretend and blend in further, went with others around the fire, the woman, who had not lost sight of him, found him in the firelight and could thus see him better. Looking him over from head to toe, with cunning persistence, said with great self-confidence to the bystanders: *This man too was with him*. Naturally all the eyes of the bystanders turned to Peter who, pretending indifference answered: *Woman, I do not know him*. Shortly after that another person, coming closer to the fire, upon seeing him thought to recognize him, and to make certain said: *You too are one of them*. Peter, again pretending indifference in order not to give himself away, answered: *My friend, I am not*.

However both the man and the woman were not convinced and discussed their suspicion with the others; therefore about an hour later, another man, attracted by curiosity, looking at him intently, insisted with all the people present saying: *Assuredly, this man too was with him*, for he is also a Galilean. Peter replied confused and showed himself bored: *My friend, I do not know what you are talking about*. But seeing that he had been discovered, in the hope of saving himself, started swearing and cursing, affirming flatly that he had never known Him (Mt 27:74).

In that moment the cock crowed; it had already crowed before (Mk 14:68), but Peter had not noticed it, because he did not remember the words of Jesus; maybe he had misinterpreted them as a simple call to tell him that *before dawn* he would deny him.

The second time, however, that the cock crowed, Jesus Christ, who from the palace of the High Priest had been taken into the courtyard to be mocked, turned to him and looked at him. How ineffable was that look and how it would have deeply wounded the heart of the unfaithful Apostle!

It was a look that said everything, a look of suffering and mercy, a look of reproach and forgiveness.

Peter then remembered the words that Jesus had told him and unable to restrain his sorrow went outside to weep bitterly.

How many times do we also betray and deny Jesus!

Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss, transforming a sign of love into a sign of hate; and how many times do we offend God with our sins, changing those activities that He has given us to glorify Him into serious injuries to Him! We consider heinous and cowardly the act of Judas but how base do our own actions seem to us? When we turn away from God and put our trust in people, we give Him a kiss of betrayal through these people and give Him up to death in our soul!

Peter, wanting to defend Jesus, raised the sword and cut the ear of the High Priest's servant, and then fled; but wanting to follow Jesus, kept far from Him, in order not to compromise himself. This is the living image of the short-lived loyalty of some souls: they fight against passions for but a short time and are pleased with small achievements; but they run away from situations that may place their human standing among their peers in jeopardy, and are thus pleased to follow Jesus *at a distance*, without being compromised before the world. But to defend and follow Jesus in this way is the same as delivering Him to death. If we love Jesus, how can we succumb to that cursed human dignity and pretend to not know him? Every day sorrowfully we renew the denial of Peter when we misuse our faith and our mercy and show us to be ashamed of our faithfulness to the God's Law.

In front of those who, seeing us a little more morally upright, question us with evil and mocking eyes: are you one of the servants of God? We answer by joining into the activities of the others around us and descending into sin, that we do not even know Him! Every time "the cock crows" we should also remember the many times we have disowned Jesus in our life, encounter his passionate gaze, step out from the courtyards of the world and weep bitterly over our faults!

Let us console Jesus at least with a sincere repentance, and let us make amends of our infidelity to His love with bitter tears. Peter *went out and began to weep bitterly*. If we do not go out from the everyday settings of the world how can we cry? Also our repentance and reparation, sadly, are mixed with human dignity, and do not come forth from our heart if we do not move away from the occasions of sin and remain alone with God.

7. Jesus is mocked and condemned by the Sanhedrin.

Jesus Christ underwent a first trial during the night before the Sanhedrin and the High Priest; however St. Luke does not mention this trial. Having been done during the night, this trial had no legal value, and so the holy Evangelist does not mention it, being rather brief in his narrative.

The Passion of Jesus was the event most prominently on the minds of Christians and a few words were enough to renew its memory. Perhaps there were also some psychological reasons or some special circumstances that made him to write about it more briefly and succinctly, wanting to come to the end of the story. Usually when something has been worked on for a long period of time, what comes at the end is shortened; God in His goodness follows His creatures in these special circumstances and does not force them. Besides He does not do unnecessary work, and since the narrative of the first trial had already been written (Mt 26:59 and following; Mk 14:55 and following) He did not have St. Luke write about it.

After the first trial, in which Jesus solemnly proclaimed His Divinity, the ruffians and among them also members of the Sanhedrin, having to wait until morning to ratify the death sentence which was recklessly handed down against Him, pushed Him outside the atrium to wreak havoc upon Him. The spectacular condemnation of the High Priest, who had torn his robes and proclaimed Him a blasphemer, had left in the heart of everybody a great contempt towards Him, and since now he was sentenced, instead of respecting his suffering, they began to rail against him, abusing and beating him.

He had proclaimed to be the Son of God, therefore more than a Prophet, and they blindfolded Him, and beating Him they mocked Him by asking Him to identify who had beaten Him.

How many mysteries of immense pain there are in those brief words of the text and how much psychological pain!

For the mob, Jesus was not a man anymore, He was a worm; the contempt they had for Him was very deep and the depth of His patience did not have any value for them. They were mocking Him in the hopes that He would react so that they could seize the opportunity to humiliate Him further!

Who can count all the insults, the spitting, the beatings, and the instances of mockery that was inflicted upon Him that night? He remained silent, making reparation for the sins and prayed.

In Him there was all mankind even those very ones that were reviling Him; He was carrying on His shoulders the weight of our pride and our vanity; bore the blasphemous claims of the pride of the world's great ones, who believe themselves to be a little less than God, and the vanity of charlatans who have their eyes blindfolded and proclaim themselves the spirit seers!

O my Jesus how painful it is to think that in that awful night I burdened your Heart with my sins and have offended you so much! Do not allow me to be blindfolded, let me see my extreme misery and let me appreciate your love!

As soon as it was dawn the Sanhedrin assembled again and had Jesus brought into their presence. During the night they were looking for false testimony against Him, but in the morning this was not necessary; the charge was well determined and sufficient to condemn him to death; it was only necessary to confirm it. Therefore, all of them, one after another in an uproar, asked him if He was the Christ. They did not ask this to know

the truth but rather to suppress it, not for justice but to trample justice; thus Jesus answered: *If I tell you, you will not believe, and if I question, you will not respond nor will you release me. But from this time on*, that is after this time of humiliation, after His death and resurrection, *the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God*. He called Himself as He always did *Son of Man*, which means the Messiah; therefore, the Son of God; His expression far from excluding that He was God; He declared it solemnly once more. The Sanhedrin interpreted this the same way, and together, in a single voice they asked: *Are you then the Son of God?*

They were afraid that He would contradict His assertion during the night, and they did not want to start a process of testimonies again, because they were anxious to go to Pilate; therefore they were full of satanic joy when they saw that He did not deny it. They shouted in the frenzy of their malice; they shouted because each one, for their own reasons, wanted to snatch from Him the coveted statement. They were after Him like a menacing ocean wave that breaks and stops an instant before crashing down; they were waiting on His answer to drown Him in a paroxysm of hate, but temporarily held back their intense hatred to give the proceeding a semblance of legality.

It was a moment of suspense for souls, a moment in which hell itself was waiting to vomit its hate and to push those wretched ministers of Satan to deny the Son of God. Jesus answered with great calm and majesty: *You say that I am*. He meant: just as you think that I will state it, in the same sense that you give your question, *I am*. They in reality did not say this of Him, but they believed Him to be a blasphemous plotter; however their question was clearly stated and they, without realizing it, were saying the truth: *You say that I am*. Jesus gave to His declaration the tone of definitive truth that admits no doubt: *I am*.

If those wretched people had considered for a moment His divine face, if they had searched for the truth on the basis of God's testimonies, and not on the basis of those erroneous ones they had frantically searched for beforehand that night, they would have seen the truth. But as Jesus had said, they were not willing to reason: *if I question, you will not respond*, therefore they exclaimed: *What further need have we for testimony? We have heard it from his own mouth*.

They did not believe even remotely that He could be the promised Messiah, even though they themselves were precisely bringing to pass in Him the more distinctive predictions that had been heralded of Him; they started from the preconception, full of blind hatred, that He was an agitator and a dangerous plotter, and before investigating the truth, they had already condemned Him.

These are the "investigations" that the unbelievers and the wretched undertake against our Savior and His Church; they do not reason in order to know the truth but to reject it; they do not inquire into science and history to prove anything but to condemn; their conclusions are always negative because they do not look for truth but rather seek the isolated fragments that appear to support what they believe.

Today, as the world resounds with lurid claims of foolish unbelievers, let us raise the voice of our faith and let us shout to Jesus with St. Peter: *You are Christ, the Son of the living God!* Let us show our faith to the world in what we do, because if we contradict ourselves with our life, we condemn Jesus to death in our heart.

Chapter 23

1 Jesus before Pilate and Herod. Jesus and Barabbas. The Sentence of Death and the Way of the Cross. The Crucifixion. The Agony and Death of Jesus. The Burial.

1 And the entire multitude of them, rising up, led him to Pilate. 2 Then they began to accuse him, saying, "We found this one subverting our nation, and prohibiting giving tribute to Caesar, and saying that he is Christ the king." 3 And Pilate questioned him, saying: "You are the king of the Jews?" But in response, he said: "You are saying it." 4 Then Pilate said to the leaders of the priests and to the crowds, "I find no case against this man." 5 But they continued more intensely, saying: "He has stirred up the people, teaching throughout all of Judea, beginning from Galilee, even to this place." 6 But Pilate, upon hearing Galilee, asked if the man were of Galilee. 7 And when he realized that he was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him away to Herod, who was himself also at Jerusalem in those days. 8 Then Herod, upon seeing Jesus, was very glad. For he had been wanting to see him for a long time, because he had heard so many things about him, and he was hoping to see some kind of sign wrought by him. 9 Then he questioned him with many words. But he gave him no response at all. 10 And the leaders of the priests, and the scribes, stood firm in persistently accusing him. 11 Then Herod, with his soldiers, scorned him. And he ridiculed him, clothing him in a white garment. And he sent him back to Pilate. 12 And Herod and Pilate became friends on that day. For previously they were enemies to one another. 13 And Pilate, calling together the leaders of the priests, and the magistrates, and the people, 14 said to them: "You have brought before me this man, as one who disturbs the people. And behold, having questioned him before you, I find no case against this man, in those things about which you accuse him. 15 And neither did Herod. For I sent you all to him, and behold, nothing deserving of death was recorded about him. 16 Therefore, I will chastise him and release him." 17 Now he was required to release one person for them on the feast day. 18 But the entire crowd exclaimed together, saying: "Take this one, and release to us Barabbas!" 19 Now he had been cast into prison because of a certain sedition that occurred in the city and for murder. 20 Then Pilate spoke to them again, wanting to release Jesus. 21 But they shouted in response, saying: "Crucify him! Crucify him!" 22 Then he said to them a third time: "Why? What evil has he done? I find no case against him for death. Therefore, I will chastise him and release him." 23 But they persisted, with loud voices, in demanding that he be crucified. And their voices increased in intensity. 24 And so Pilate issued a judgment granting their petition. 25 Then he released for them the one who had been cast into prison for murder and sedition, whom they were requesting. Yet truly, Jesus he handed over to their will. 26 And as they were leading him away, they apprehended a certain one, Simon of Cyrene, as he was returning from the countryside. And they imposed the cross on him to carry after Jesus. 27 Then a great crowd of people followed him, with women who were mourning and lamenting him. 28 But Jesus, turning to them, said: "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep over me. Instead, weep over yourselves and over your children. 29 For behold, the days will arrive in which they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that have not borne, and the breasts that have not nursed.' 30 Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall over us,' and to the hills, 'Cover us.' 31 For if they do these things with

green wood, what will be done with the dry?" 32 Now they also led out two other criminals with him, in order to execute them. 33 And when they arrived at the place that is called Calvary, they crucified him there, with the robbers, one to the right and the other to the left. 34 Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them. For they know not what they do." And truly, dividing his garments, they cast lots. 35 And people were standing near, watching. And the leaders among them derided him, saying: "He saved others. Let him save himself, if this one is the Christ, the elect of God." 36 And the soldiers also ridiculed him, approaching him and offering him vinegar, 37 and saying, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself." 38 Now there was also an inscription written over him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. 39 And one of those robbers who were hanging blasphemed him, saying, "If you are the Christ, save yourself and us." 40 But the other responded by rebuking him, saying: "Do you have no fear of God, since you are under the same condemnation? 41 And indeed, it is just for us. For we are receiving what our deeds deserve. But truly, this one has done nothing wrong." 42 And he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom." 43 And Jesus said to him, "Amen I say to you, this day you shall be with me in Paradise." 44 Now it was nearly the sixth hour, and a darkness occurred over the entire earth, until the ninth hour. 45 And the sun was obscured. And the veil of the temple was torn down the middle. 46 And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." And upon saying this, he expired. 47 Now, the centurion, seeing what had happened, glorified God, saying, "Truly, this man was the Just One." 48 And the entire crowd of those who came together to see this spectacle also saw what had happened, and they returned, striking their breasts. 49 Now all those who knew him, and the women who had followed him from Galilee, were standing at a distance, watching these things. 50 And behold, there was a man named Joseph, who was a councilman, a good and just man, 51 (for he had not consented to their decision or their actions). He was from Arimathea, a city of Judea. And he was himself also anticipating the kingdom of God. 52 This man approached Pilate and petitioned for the body of Jesus. 53 And taking him down, he wrapped him in a fine linen cloth, and he placed him in a tomb hewn from rock, in which no one had ever been placed. 54 And it was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was drawing near. 55 Now the women who had come with him from Galilee, by following, saw the tomb and the manner in which his body was placed. 56 And upon returning, they prepared aromatic spices and ointments. But on the Sabbath, indeed, they rested, according to the commandment.

2. The trial of Jesus before Pilate and before Herod.

In the early morning hours, after the summary trial to which the Sanhedrin subjected Jesus was over and after condemning Him to death, the whole assembly took Him to Pilate to ratify their sentence since they could not execute anyone without the consent of the Roman governor. They went together in a large group to impress Pilate more, and were very careful not to mention the religious reason for which they had condemned Him. They were sure that the governor would not have agreed with them on that matter and so they viciously devised a politically based accusation.

It was a threefold accusation, and concerned what would be more directly injurious to the Roman rule in Judea; and hence they said: He incites the people, by moving them to revolt; He opposes paying the tribute to Caesar, thus hurting the Roman rule where it

would most affect it; and finally He declares Himself to be Christ the King, thus making Him seem like a dangerous revolutionary with many and a growing body of followers. This accusation could not have been more vicious and misleading.

Pilate already knew that Jesus was brought before him out of envy and malice and so began to question Him benevolently. It is possible that the two thieves that were crucified with Jesus had been dragged there together with Jesus by the same Jews to have the governor utter one only sentence over all three of them. They were hoping that in front of the sure guilt of the two thieves the governor would simply assume that Jesus was guilty as well, thus eliminating the suspicion that they were acting out of passion. But their shouts, their anger, the bitterness with which they were accusing Him, and the very condition to which they had reduced the Redeemer during the night, confirmed to Pilate what he already knew: that they wanted to condemn an innocent man to death at all costs.*

To Pilate their zeal for the authority of Caesar seemed quite suspicious, knowing how much they were adverse to him; therefore, as he was already eager to free the Redeemer, he did it in a way to stir up in the mob a sense of their own nationalism, and so he asked: *Are you the king of the Jews?* As an agent of the Roman rule, he must have already had forensic knowledge of those in the region that might cause problems and incite rebellion; getting information on potential threats is an elementary precaution that every ruling authority does when it is called to maintain rule over occupied territory; Pilate, thus, already knew that Jesus was a descendant of the royal family of David and when He answered that He was the King of the Jews, with the expression *You say so*, that is, you say it and you already know it, he showed himself to be satisfied with the answer, knowing that He did not conspire against the Roman power.

If it were not so, his unambiguous pronouncement *I find this man not guilty* would seem strange after just this one question.

Besides, the very way that Jesus answered, his face radiating peace and truthfulness, made him understand that His response was accurate and thus without any hesitation said that he did not find Him guilty of any crime.

It might have been strange to hear a sitting Roman governor admit and accept that the accused man before him was truly the King of the Jews; but he was hoping that the people, for national pride, would not have followed their leaders in their envy and hate against Jesus and would instead ask for His freedom. As an experienced politician he knew that the people shouted against Jesus because they were compelled to come by the High Priests; he was hoping to arouse in them their patriotism and put them against their leaders' request. However, this time he had not taken into account the extent of human malice and ingratitude, both of which were beyond all imagination!

The High Priests, upon hearing that Pilate did not find any crime in Jesus, insisted maliciously, and presented Him as being particularly dangerous to the Roman rule: *He is inciting the people with his teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to here.*

They meant to say that this was not just a local movement, but rather a vicious and organized insurrection; it was aiming to unify the nation against the foreign power; it started from the farthest places of Galilee and had now arrived even here at the capital.

* This is only speculation because it is not directly supported by the Gospel text.

Jesus before Herod

Pilate began to worry, not so much for the alleged charges that he knew to be false, but for the consequences that he would have to face for freeing a man explicitly accused of plotting against Caesar by the local religious leaders. It was clear from the way they were talking, that the High Priests were willing to denounce him to Rome, if he did not ratify the death sentence.

Therefore, upon hearing “Galilee”, Pilate asked if Him if He was a Galilean, and knowing that even if He were not born in Galilee but had lived there He would have been under Herod’s jurisdiction, and so he sent Him to Herod, who was in Jerusalem for the Passover. Herod, the son of Herod called the great, was Tetrarch of Galilee and Perea; he too was subject to Roman rule, but he was empowered to hold judgment over the local affairs of his own jurisdiction; thus in so doing Pilate hoped escape this thorny situation which trapped him. Besides, in sending Jesus to Herod, he flattered him very much by recognizing his power and asking him to exercise it in the capital; although Herod was his enemy Pilate had to fear his intrigues with Rome and thought this would be a good opportunity to make a friend of him, as in fact happened.

Herod, as the head of Galilee, had heard many impressive accounts about Jesus and for a long time had desired to see Him up close, hoping to be present at one of His miracles. He was, therefore, very glad to see Him, and above all was delighted that He was completely under his control. He believed in his foolishness that he would easily obtain some miracles from Him at his whim and demand, and so he asked Him many questions. Jesus, however, answered none of them.

How strange! He questioned Him not as a criminal but as a magician and in that moment gave Him all the necessary respect, hoping to induce Him to work some marvelous things! The Priests and the scribes were bewildered, fearing subconsciously that He really would work a miracle, but at the same time they despised Him as a fraud, having duped even the cruel Herod; for this reason they continued to accuse him with insistence to counteract any good impression Herod could have of Him.

In the meantime Jesus was silent, motionless, with his eyes to the ground, and silent. He could not talk to that hardened heart.

Herod in his pride believed that He did not understand him, He seemed to him as a dreamer, but looking at Him could not help but feel His awesome majesty. He was embarrassed because he could not force Him to speak, and he did not want to appear weak in front of his court; he could have condemned Him, but the memory of John the Baptist flashed before him, and Jesus’ continued silence made him recall the silent head of the Herald of the Lord on the plate; he became afraid, but wanted to conceal his fear, and smart as he was, he had recourse to an expedient, and began to mock him with a pitying tone, as if He were a poor fool. The Greek text says that he *reduced Him to nothing*, meaning that he treated Him like he was completely insignificant.

His embarrassment did not escape his soldiers, and when he began to mock Him they joined in to help Herod save face; in a short time the whole court resounded with jeers, and Herod, to show in a tangible way that he had not been made the loser, and to quash any rumors that might start that the Nazarene had the had no reason to fear him, he

dressed Him in a white tunic—the Greek text says in *shining white*, in a tunic that kings would wear during solemn festivities; then he sent Him back to Pilate. He believed to affirm the splendor of his dignity by mocking Him as a false King, and yet, in spite of himself, he did not realize that he actually presented Him as King.

It always happens this way: Jesus Christ does not rule by the pomp of human glory, but in the shame of the Passion. What could earthly glory give Him? He had come to seek us out, to save us; He wanted to come closer to us, and He can only do this through shame and suffering, rousing in us compassion, and with compassion, love.

Herod was very happy to see Jesus, but what was this joy of his? It was just the fruit of miserable curiosity!

**For souls who
constantly seek thrills.**

How many souls desire to see Jesus in the same way, out of curiosity and out of a desire to be present at extraordinary events? They do not think at all to improve themselves interiorly by seeking Him in their own hearts! Jesus never answers these souls, because they really do not love Him. They may say in so many words that they want Him as their King, but the kingship they give Him is not dissimilar to the white robe that Herod made Jesus wear. What is the use of cloaking Him in regal attire and not letting Him reign in one's soul? Is it not mocking Him to call Him King and then let the world and Satan reign in one's soul instead?

It can also happen to those of us who serve the Lord to be mocked as fools before the courts of the people of the world who, like Herod, have no ideals in their life save the pleasure of their senses and fleeting temporal glory. But what does the judgment of the world matter to us? Let them ridicule us and let us go directly to God, because at Judgment Day things will be reversed. How could we ever worry about a passing insult and expose ourselves to the danger of eternal insults and mockery? Let us be happy to resemble the loving Jesus, because there is no more beautiful glory for us than to share in His humiliation and His sufferings.

3. Jesus is sentenced to death in place of Barabbas.

The manner in which Herod sent Jesus back to Pilate did not imply a conviction; but rather revealed in the Tetrarch a sense of contempt for the accused, and it would have been equivalent to think of Him, at a minimum, as a deluded seeker of royalty and a fanatic—a harmless fanatic, however, to be derided, and exposed to the ridicule that would paralyze his prestige.

Pilate welcomed Herod's insinuation and, while he had believed until then that Jesus was completely innocent, seeing him dressed in regal white, he agreed that He had a craze for kingship that could be corrected with a punishment. He did not want, that is, to overturn his first judgment, and repeated that he had not found Him guilty of *any of the charges* for which He was accused, but, with political tact, immediately added that not even Herod had found anything resembling a *capital crime*. So with this political maneuvering he gave value to his prior proclamation on Jesus' innocence, and yet without showing a change of mind, justified his latest decision to inflict a punishment upon Him.

Besides, as he was now back on good terms with Herod, he wanted to show Herod that he took into account the judgment he had pronounced punishing the Redeemer for His attitude toward the Tetrarch.

The divine calm of Jesus struck him, as did the wretched faces of His accusers; to punish this innocent man before him now seemed like a bad idea, and since he did not believe that the people were stirred up to the extent that they were, and having to free a prisoner to them for the Passover solemnities according to custom, proposed that he free Jesus instead of a thief and murderer, Barabbas. He was sure that given a choice between a hardened criminal and someone who had been good towards everyone, the people would not hesitate in their choice; instead, incited by the High Priests, the scribes and the Pharisees, all together they started shouting: *Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us.*

Pilate was bewildered by those shouts, and when the turmoil calmed down a little desiring to free Jesus, he asked them again, but everybody once more shouted, *Crucify him! Crucify him!* And for a third time he asked the crowd: *What evil has this man done? I found him guilty of no capital crime. Therefore I shall have him flogged and then release him.* Pilate did not realize that having already conceded that Jesus had a culpability worthy of a punishment—even if he believed the opposite to be true in his heart—he had thus put himself at the mercy of the people, showing himself to be incapable, hesitant and weak. Besides, the High Priests, the scribes and the Pharisees continued to incite the crowd against Jesus, and therefore the tumult became frightening. Pilate feared a riot and, to appease the multitude, pronounced the sentenced to be carried out according to their demands.

He sat down and pronounced the sentence before the people, which to be legal and not invalid, had to be motivated truly by what he had repeatedly recognized as false and groundless. He thus released Barabbas instead who was seditious, riotous, a thief and a recognized murderer, and left Jesus to the will of the mob.

Pilate, in the centuries

During those horrible and terrible moments that even today can enrage us for their inequity, the Redeemer atoned for human injustice silently, like a tree of life dripping a balm of comfort for all those who would one day suffer the brunt of human injustice.

For two thousand years now the shameful scene of Pilate and the rioting crowd have been repeated a countless number of times, because of the multitude of innocent people that have been unjustly sentenced, not only by the courts but also in the disputes of family life.

Nothing affects us more and pains us than injustice and seeing things done in bad faith.

It is not easy to fight injustice, as it is not easy to defend against it. Most of the time one is compelled to remain in silence, bow one's head and take up one's Cross.

It is then of supreme comfort for a soul to see the innocent Savior condemned and likewise leave to God the judgment of one's own innocence. If He who is the essence of holiness suffered such injustice, how can I, a sinner, complain? And since He, condemned and crucified, subsequently rose from the dead in a blaze of glory, I also hope to have justice from the Lord here on earth and certainly in Heaven.

4. The way of the cross and the weeping women of Jerusalem.

The Gospel is very terse in its descriptions and hardly mentions the pains that our Redeemer suffered. We, however, can imagine them if we meditate upon this passage. The Priests, the scribes, the Pharisees and the angry mob did impose on themselves a certain restraint toward Jesus in the court, because the Romans treated convicted persons according to certain rules, but when they had Him at *their mercy*, as they had Him during the night, their brutality knew no limits. St. Luke did not keep a record of the scourging and the crowning with thorns, but these awful cruelties were indeed done to Him when He, innocent and unjustly condemned, was somehow under the aegis of the law; however, after His conviction, when He was left to the mercy of His enemies and of the soldiers, He suffered additional injuries, abuses and sufferings that are impossible to imagine.

The fact that on the way to Calvary they had to find a man to help Him carry the Cross is very telling in making us understand the extent to which He had been reduced by the relentless brutality inflicted on Him.

It was certainly not an act of mercy; on the contrary it was a refinement of their barbarism, because they feared He would not arrive alive to Calvary. For the Priests, especially, it was of the utmost importance that He would die on the Cross, because they wanted to nullify with a demeaning torture any prestige that He could still have among the people.

When a man from Cyrene went by, strong and vigorous, returning from the fields, they promptly stopped him and forced him to carry the Cross alongside Jesus. He certainly must have strongly resisted, because the cross at that time was a cursed and shameful sign; but in the face of violent opposition, he relented and carried the infamous instrument of torture.

What a sight that was, and how representative it was of God's plan for all future centuries! Jesus went ahead followed by the Cyrenian who represented mankind itself. Jesus carried the Cross to save us, but it was also necessary for man to carry it after Him, to participate in the salvation that He gave us; Simon in that moment represented all men who are burdened by the weight of life, and who suffer their own pains for what they lack of the Passion of Jesus Christ.

Jesus *left to the mercy* of the perfidy of the Jews, suffered carrying the Cross, and Simon denying his own will, even though he was compelled, followed him. The perfidious will was bringing Jesus to death, and the will that denied itself, helped and comforted him on the way.

It was a compendium of what would happen and in fact happens in the spirit.

He who follows his own will and not God's, brings Jesus to Calvary and crucifies Him in his heart and in his own senses.

Every time that one's human will is in opposition to God's, Jesus is left to undergo the Cross; and whenever one's will, even painfully or with difficulty, submits to the will of God, he lightens Jesus' burden and walks after Him on the narrow road that leads to glory.

Who would dare oppose the divine Will and leave Jesus under the weight of the Cross He carried for the love of all of us?

A great crowd of people including many women who cried and lamented over Him

followed Jesus. These women were not the holy women that followed Him in the apostolate, but women of the city, attracted by their curiosity and compassion. It is natural for a crowd of people to form spontaneously when a condemned man is led to death; but for Jesus, who was well known for His miracles, the crowd that formed was immense. The women, who were more sensitive and prone to pity, wept bitterly, empathizing with his suffering and his fate.

From the words Jesus used in addressing them it can be noted that in their compassion, which was entirely natural, there was also at least a subconscious feeling of disapproval because the goodness of His apostolate had brought upon Him such an incredible amount of pain and suffering. In their loving compassion they would have preferred that He would have been spared such a tragic epilogue to his life, and therefore, weeping, *they lamented Him*.

However Jesus alerted them to their reality, exclaiming: *Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep instead for yourselves and for your children;* and announcing the terrible days of the end of Jerusalem, added: *if these things are done when the wood is green what will happen when it is dry?* Jesus Christ wanted to call them to consider the sole great evil, which was sin, and not to cry upon His suffering, but rather over the crime that was presently being committed, imploring God's forgiveness.

That crime would have catastrophic consequences for Jerusalem and the whole nation, and their crying over it could mitigate these consequences. And in order that they may not have illusions, He showed them the consequences of sin through Himself: He was innocent like a green shrub, rich in leaves and fruits because he was righteous, and only because He was covered by the sins of all humanity was He now immersed in that awful pain; what would happen to those, covered by thousands sins, similar to dry wood which very easily burns when lit?

We can hear in the words of Jesus all His regret as well as the excruciating pain He felt in going to Calvary as a criminal.

The women that were crying over Him actually considered Him a wrongdoer; their compassion was entirely a natural reaction to seeing Him in such pain and agony. He was completely covered with the sins of all of us sinners; in fact St. Luke, in saying two other criminals were dragged along with Him to be executed, uses this expression: *two others, both criminals, were led away with him to be executed;* by grouping Him with the two other actual criminals, St. Luke almost says He was one of them; but even if He were under the guise of a criminal as it appeared, he could not allow Himself to be considered as such—being innocence itself—and for this reason he exhorted the women to *weep instead for yourselves*, to repent of their sins and for the sins of their children, thinking of the punishments that would strike the city and the nation. After those tears that were shed for His apparent guilt, would follow the tears of a nation that would prove His righteousness.

The divine justice, not leaving that crime unpunished, would show in the same awful punishment the innocence of the One that had been treated as criminal. This was a requirement of His righteousness, claimed by the people themselves when they shouted: *His Blood be upon us and upon our children;* it was a brilliant proof that He was truly the Son of God.

An injustice committed against a righteous man or against an innocent king has never had such an aftermath of chastisement; only for the crime committed against Jesus,

the deicide, was the punishment of the people so terrible and lasting—even to this day—a clear sign that He was not only man, but he was also the true God*. Jesus Christ in walking along the way to Calvary has traced for us the way of salvation and goodness.

The Way of the Cross in our life

Our life is a *Way of the Cross*, from the first to the last station.

We are sinners and are chastised for the original sin.

Jesus was condemned, because He asserted that he was the Son of God; man was condemned because he wanted to be similar to God. Jesus, true Son of God, thus atoned for man who claimed to be like God.

Jesus, innocent and holy, was burdened with the Cross, and we, although reborn and innocent because of Baptism, are burdened with the cross from the very beginning of our life.

We are mistreated and overwhelmed by events, and so we fall under the weight of the cross, just as Jesus fell on his way to Calvary; but we have the Blessed Virgin Mary to comfort us and Jesus himself helps us rise again and continue.

He wanted to be helped by Simon the Cyrenian in order to help us and repay all men for the charity received. Simon means the one *who listens and obeys*: the one who listens to God and obeys Him, doing His Will; he helps Jesus to carry the Cross and Jesus comforts the soul who carries its cross, giving the union to His divine Will. “Cyrenian” can also mean *encountering with reluctance and coldness*; as we approach and do the divine Will with extreme coldness; we go to meet the Lord like Simon, coerced and reluctant.

Jesus, however, helps us by inflaming us with love and gives us the sweetness of the Cross itself. He impresses His face on the marks of our sufferings, as He imprinted it on the cloth of St. Veronica, and falling in His love He raises us, giving us the understanding of our sins through His own suffering.

It is not possible to believe that committing a sin is something trivial when we see Jesus fall under the weight of the Cross; nor can we consider minor the miseries of the flesh, seeing him stripped, scourged and thrust upon the Cross.

During the course of our lives, there are those who sneer at us, strike us and strip us of our dignity, and our day is an unending way to Calvary; but we need to console ourselves in Him who wanted to take our sins upon Himself, and so willingly endure the crosses before arriving to glory.

5. The crucifixion, agony, death and burial of Jesus.

Having finally reached Mount Calvary and Golgotha, which means *skull* in Hebrew, the chosen executioners crucified Jesus and the two thieves raising one on His

* A brilliant and perhaps original interpretation.

right and the other on His left. Using these extremely concise words, the Evangelist describes the awful scene of that terrible torture. They crucified Jesus piercing each of His hands with a long nail, and His overlapped feet with a longer nail. It is not possible to imagine the spasms of pain that those nails gave to our beloved Redeemer. Today medical science can study the signs of these wounds on the holy Shroud of Turin, which is the sheet that wrapped His dead body. As He pushed his body backward into the Cross as a reaction to the nails, this sharp movement resulting in driving the crown of thorns even further into his head and neck. The pain was excruciating, but in His mercy He cared for those who were causing it, and turning to the Father exclaiming: *Father, forgive them, they know not what they do*. He did not need to forgive them, because He was giving His life for them, but He had the need to implore mercy from the Father, because of the ghastliness of their crime. Did the Father answer His prayer?

Apparently it would not seem so, because Jerusalem was destroyed, and the people were slaughtered or taken into captivity; but Jesus prayed for the souls of those who had contributed to His crucifixion and especially for the Jews, and this makes us understand that with His divine prayer He gathered those souls responsible for His suffering. How could He pray for their temporal salvation if that would only make them even more obstinate in their sin? Even in the case of the good thief, in fact, Jesus granted him eternal salvation but did not remove him from the cross, because the torments he suffered were in atonement for the crimes he had committed.

Jesus suffered and forgave and those people that were present at his death and who mocked and insulted him!

The soldiers at the beginning were simply worried about how to divide his garments, hoping to make a big gain reselling them to the disciples of the Crucified, and since the tunic was a single piece of fabric they drew lots for it; afterward they joined those who insulted Him. The High Priests more than the others and the scribes were eager to dispel his prestige before the people and with their insults wanted to emphasize His helplessness: *He saved others, let him save himself if he is the chosen one, the Messiah of God*. The soldiers echoed their words, for after seeing the inscription put on the Cross by Pilate, they said: *If you are King of the Jews, save yourself*. They said this to not only mock Him who had declared Himself King before Pilate, but also to insult all the Jewish people through Him.

Since Pilate had put that in writing, it was evident to them that the Crucified was really the deposed King; hence, with their insults and challenge to His power, they wanted to emphasize to the Jews that they were reduced to a state of complete subjugation in which their King was ignominiously hung on the Cross without them saying a single word of protest, even approving of His condemnation and death.

Those sinister Priests of the Temple did not realize that with that dreadful crime they had tightened their chains of slavery to Rome.

The good thief

The two thieves that were crucified with Jesus initially both joined the chorus of those who insulted Him (Mt 27:44); but after a while, one of them realized that his companion was relentlessly provoking the Lord, trying to get Him to show His power and dignity by freeing Himself and them from their crosses, and noticing His divine patience,

felt compassion for Him, and began to scold his companion.

This was his first response to grace that would take him to Paradise. He too was suffering excruciating pain and it bothered him to hear the voices of the Redeemer's enemies; his nerves were tense and frayed; he thought how terrible it had to be for the Lord to endure that chorus of insults and savage ironies considering His present state. Not daring to reproach the Priests, the scribes and the Pharisees, he shouted to his companion *Have you no fear of God, for you are subject to the same condemnation?* By which he meant: have you no compassion for His pains, even though you yourself are suffering the same pain, and yet continue to provoke and insult Him? And remembering the sins he committed, seeing his own sinful self as if reflected in the figure of his companion, felt a deep regret for them in his heart, because he saw and felt how Jesus was innocent, and so exclaimed: *And indeed, we have been condemned justly, for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal.*

In saying these words he looked at Him.

The compassion he had for His pains had become a proclamation of His innocence and, looking at Him in this new light, he felt that His innocence was not human, just as the patience He showed was not human. He fixed his eyes on Him, and a great peace pervaded his heart; he looked at Him again and Jesus too must have looked back at him and relieved his pains. Looking at Him intently, he saw the placid majesty of His face, and from His face his gaze spontaneously went on to read the inscription *Jesus the Nazorean, the King of the Jews*. Jesus truly had the aspect of a King; He evinced majesty, He evinced an admirable physical presence even being so battered; indeed He was a King, but He could not be one of this world. Perhaps beforehand he had heard

Him saying to Pilate solemnly: *My kingdom is not of this world*, and now those words were coming back into his mind. His faith in the Messiah renewed his soul; he looked at Him again, he felt that He was the one and thus believed, hoped, and trusted, and in abandoning himself to Him exclaimed: *Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom*. His faith was full and unreserved; he had confessed his sins and grace enveloped and vivified him; he had repented, he loved his Redeemer, he had accepted as expiation the pain he was suffering, and Jesus forgiving him exclaimed, *Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise*. This day, *you will be with me*, because Jesus would precede him in death, and in dying would redeem him, restoring him as an adoptive son of God, and giving him possession of eternal happiness.

It was an act of immense mercy, to which the Blessed Virgin Mary was no stranger. In her maternal mercy, She prayed for everybody, and prayed even more for those who were crucified with her divine Son.

She prayed, and the less obstinate sinner gathered the fruits of her prayer for his feelings of compassion for Jesus and for repenting of his sins. What flood of mercy would have descended on all the executioners on Calvary if only they would have had a moment of repentance? The good thief opened the stream of sinners who would find light, mercy and peace at the foot of the Crucifix, and he was the first who would receive the comfort and tranquility that spreads from the Cross.

How many times his brief prayer would be repeated throughout the ages by sinners afflicted by tribulations: It is right, Lord, that I get what I deserve for my sins, but remember me! And how many times has Jesus answered into the depths of the repented heart, giving peace back to sinners and promising them eternal life! I am a sinner, Lord, I

confess it, and all the suffering of my life is an act of justice, I agree; but your mercy has open arms to welcome me and I find refuge in your heart in saying *remember me*. You know well what I am, and if you would remember my sins you would depart from me; but your remembrance is mercy and You look at me to forgive me and save me.

Jesus dies on the Cross

It was about the sixth hour, which is about noon, and it became dark over all the earth until the ninth hour, that is three in the afternoon. St. Luke writes that *the sun had darkened*[†]; thus it was not a phenomenon due to fog or mist, nor could it have been an eclipse, because there was full moon. To point out that the darkening of the sun was not due to natural causes, the Evangelist also notes that the veil of the Temple was torn in the middle; it was torn after the death of Jesus, but St. Luke anticipates it happening to show that the Lord gave unequivocal proofs that He was truly the Son of God and the promised Messiah.

In this darkness a great silence descended suddenly on Calvary, and no matter how much they tried to believe the phenomenon was due to natural causes, they were all terrified.

Jesus in that silence gave out a great cry, which showed that He had mastery over His life since in his current state of intense, crippling agony He could not have spoken in a loud voice. And yet He cried loudly: *Father, into your hands I commend my spirit*. After saying these words, He expired. What a solemn moment! Expired and that breath of love gave new life to all people, like the breath that God had given to the clay molded in Eden.

He expired, and that last breath was like a defeating whirlwind for Hell. He expired and remained motionless with great solemnity, as can be seen even today in the Holy Shroud preserved at Turin, Italy.

The earth trembled, as if frightened by the murderous crime consummated at the hands of the Jews and the veil of the Temple was torn, because the old covenant was now finished and the new covenant had begun.

The Centurion that was on guard on Calvary, seeing all that was happening, recognized the truth and glorifying God exclaimed: *This man was innocent beyond doubt* or as St. Matthew (Mt 27:54) and St. Mark (Mk 15:39) record: *Truly, this was the Son of God*. Thus he was the first pagan to recognize Jesus Christ as the Messiah and to proclaim it publicly.

[†]Lk 23:45 as translated in the Italian Bible and some English language versions (such as the one used in this translation) notes only that the sun darkened, but **not** due to an eclipse of the sun. It should be noted that since the Crucifixion took place during Passover (which always occurs during a full moon) an eclipse of the sun would have been impossible, as it requires a new moon.

The crowd that had been drawn to Calvary for that unusual sight descended from that deadly mountain beating their breasts as sign of repentance and fear; instead the disciples and the holy women, who had followed Him from Galilee, were watching in the distance, for fear of being harassed by the enemies of the Crucified.

How sorrowful it is to think that His friends were in the distance and that His enemies were right on Calvary.

How feeble is our love for Jesus when we are ashamed of Him and for vile human reasons we live far away from Him! How many follow Jesus but do not want to commit themselves to Him and keep away even if not facing any real danger, but only an illusion on of such, and thus join the ranks of the wicked!

When we see that Jesus is scorned and condemned by the world, it is then that we must show ourselves to be more faithful to Him and need to cling to the Roman Catholic Apostolic Church to confess Him to be true God and true man, and to spread the good news of His kingdom.

The burial

After a brief time a member of the Sanhedrin named Joseph, from the city of Arimethea, ascended to the top of Mt. Calvary. He was a virtuous and righteous man, who had not consented to the death sentence of Jesus. Having been told that Jesus was dead, he went to Pilate to obtain permission to take His body and bury it.

It was already evening, and since the Sabbath was the next day, Joseph hastened to bury Him. He removed the Lord's body from the Cross, wrapped it in a burial cloth with a hasty embalming of aromatic resins, and he laid the body in a new tomb excavated from the rock where no one had yet been buried. The pious women observed everything, because they had in mind to attend more fully to the Body of the Lord as soon as the Sabbath was over. In fact, they prepared the aromatic resins and ointments and waited anxiously for the first day after the Sabbath to complete their merciful office.

The Liturgy of the Church regarding the burial of Jesus has a character of profound peace gathering all men in the hope of the resurrection, and still keeping the soul immersed in the suffering of the Redeemer. He descended, in fact, into the tomb not as one vanquished by death but as a conqueror, and He permitted Himself to be enclosed in the tomb in order to open its doors, as the divine first fruit of the deceased. *He slept and rested* to transform the horror of our tombs into a place of sleep and rest. He slept after the crucifixion as we sleep when the crucifixions of our lives are consummated. He wanted to be similar to us in everything, that we might be similar to Him in everything. He poured out onto our afflictions the balm of his Blood and his peace. We must keep our eyes fixed on Him crucified, to follow Him in our sorrowful way of the cross, and in dying we must look at his tomb as the sure sign of our resurrection: *In pace in idipsum dormiam et requiescam.* (In peace and into the same I shall sleep and rest).

Once Jesus was buried the Jews believed to have triumphed over Him once and for all, but instead in His very death was His triumph, and God, mocking the vain designs of men, used that evil to accomplish His purposes. The Cross, chosen purposely as the infamous instrument of torture to destroy every bit of credibility of the Redeemer, instead has become throughout the centuries the throne of His immense love; and that tomb in which he was sealed so that none would ever speak of Him again became the pedestal of

His glory forever, because Jesus in rising confirmed His divine mission and gave the irrefutable proof of His Divinity and His true humanity.

Let us adore God's plan, and recognizing in the Crucified our King who died for our sins, let us beat our breasts and say tearfully: *Have mercy on me, Lord, for I am a poor sinner.*

Chapter 24

1. The Resurrection of Jesus. The disciples of Emmaus. Jesus appears to the Apostles. The last instructions He gives to them. The Ascension into Heaven.

1 Then, on the first Sabbath, at very first light, they went to the tomb, carrying the aromatic spices that they had prepared. 2 And they found the stone rolled back from the tomb. 3 And upon entering, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. 4 And it happened that, while their minds were still confused about this, behold, two men stood beside them, in shining apparel. 5 Then, since they were afraid and were turning their faces toward the ground, these two said to them: "Why do you seek the living with the dead? 6 He is not here, for he has risen. Recall how he spoke to you, when he was still in Galilee, 7 saying: 'For the Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.' " 8 And they called to mind his words. 9 And returning from the tomb, they reported all these things to the eleven, and to all the others. 10 Now it was Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary of James, and the other women who were with them, who told these things to the Apostles. 11 But these words seemed to them a delusion. And so they did not believe them. 12 But Peter, rising up, ran to the tomb. And stooping down, he saw the linen cloths positioned alone, and he went away wondering to himself about what had happened. 13 And behold, two of them went out, on the same day, to a town named Emmaus, which was the distance of sixty stadia from Jerusalem. 14 And they spoke to one another about all of these things that had occurred. 15 And it happened that, while they were speculating and questioning within themselves, Jesus himself, drawing near, traveled with them. 16 But their eyes were restrained, so that they would not recognize him. 17 And he said to them, "What are these words, which you are discussing with one another, as you walk and are sad?" 18 And one of them, whose name was Cleopas, responded by saying to him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" 19 And he said to them, "What things?" And they said, "About Jesus of Nazareth, who was a noble prophet, powerful in works and in words, before God and all the people. 20 And how our high priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death. And they crucified him. 21 But we were hoping that he would be the Redeemer of Israel. And now, on top of all this, today is the third day since these things have happened. 22 Then, too, certain women from among us terrified us. For before daytime, they were at the tomb, 23 and, having not found his body, they returned, saying that they had even seen a vision of Angels, who said that he is alive. 24 And some of us went out to the tomb. And they found it just as the women had said. But truly, they did not find him." 25 And he said to them: "How foolish and reluctant in heart you are, to believe everything that has been spoken by the Prophets! 26 Was not the Christ required to suffer these things, and so enter into his glory?" 27 And beginning from Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted for them, in all the Scriptures, the things that were about him. 28 And they drew near to the town where they were going. And he conducted himself so as to go on further. 29 But they were insistent with him, saying, "Remain with us, because it is toward evening and now daylight is declining." And so he entered with them. 30 And it happened that, while he was at table with them, he took bread, and he blessed and broke it, and he extended it

to them. 31 And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their eyes. 32 And they said to one another, "Was not our heart burning within us, while he was speaking on the way, and when he opened the Scriptures to us?" 33 And rising up at that same hour, they returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven gathered together, and those who were with them, 34 saying: "In truth, the Lord has risen, and he has appeared to Simon." 35 And they explained the things that were done on the way, and how they had recognized him at the breaking of the bread. 36 Then, while they were talking about these things, Jesus stood in their midst, And he said to them: "Peace be with you. It is I. Do not be afraid." 37 Yet truly, they were very disturbed and terrified, supposing that they saw a spirit. 38 And he said to them: "Why are you disturbed, and why do these thoughts rise up in your hearts? 39 See my hands and feet, that it is I myself. Look and touch. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones, as you see that I have." 40 And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. 41 Then, while they were still in disbelief and in wonder out of joy, he said, "Do you have anything here to eat?" 42 And they offered him a piece of roasted fish and a honeycomb. 43 And when he had eaten these in their sight, taking up what was left, he gave it to them. 44 And he said to them: "These are the words that I spoke to you when I was still with you, because all things must be fulfilled which are written in the law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms about me." 45 Then he opened their mind, so that they might understand the Scriptures. 46 And he said to them: "For so it is written, and so it was necessary, for the Christ to suffer and to rise up from the dead on the third day, 47 and, in his name, for repentance and the remission of sins to be preached, among all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 And you are witnesses of these things. 49 And I am sending the Promise of my Father upon you. But you must stay in the city, until such time as you are clothed with power from on high." 50 Then he led them out as far as Bethania. And lifting up his hands, he blessed them. 51 And it happened that, while he was blessing them, he withdrew from them, and he was carried up into heaven. 52 And worshiping, they returned to Jerusalem with great joy. 53 And they were always in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen.

2. The conqueror of death.

The Gospel does not directly describe what happened at the moment of the resurrection of Jesus, but this follows directly from the same context; it is not reticence on the part of the author, but rather it is a sublime manner of expressing oneself; we can imagine it ourselves by going in spirit to the tomb.*

* The Resurrection: the fact and the way it occurred. Compare for instance, the case of the man born blind: "How he did it I do not know, I only know one thing, before I was blind and now I see".

- He died and now He is alive
- How can you pretend to understand God's plan in its entirety? ...you would need to be as almighty as God Himself...but this was the temptation of Lucifer.
- Do you not agree that God can do more than men?
- Do you not agree that He can do anything He wishes without asking permission, counsel or obtain any consensus with the so-called theologians... who improvise, who do not want theology to advance...but put their superficiality in desiring at any cost...they live in the past... as without knowing why, to give themselves airs ... to delude themselves.... that if only they understood and that all others who do not think as they do, do not understand anything.

Behold the tomb: the very heavy stone that had served to seal it is overturned, the linens that had wrapped Jesus are folded and put away in a corner, two shining Angels of light watch over the burial site.

One of them, as in St. Matthew's account (Mt 28:2), overturned the stone and sat on it, terrorizing those who guarded the tomb, and then later entered the tomb and stayed there to worship with the other Angel, as is mentioned in St. Luke's Gospel.

Only they (the Angels) witnessed that solemn moment, which was not at all an outburst; they shook the earth only by the power of their spirit. It was the dawn of the day after the Sabbath: Jesus was still asleep in death, but the divine Person had not abandoned his uncorrupted Body. He was truly dead, but it could not be said He was a corpse overcome by corruption; He was waiting for the time set by the Father to reconcile the divine Body and revive it.*

Jesus' soul came close to the Body, gloriously filled with divine power sublimated by the Will of God that He had perfectly accomplished. He looked at the lifeless and wounded Body and loved it because it had been the holocaust filled with love offered for the divine glory. He desired it, because He could not leave this most innocent and holy Body to corruption. He saw the Blood that still covered it and the Blood that was shed, and then put His Body and Blood back together, because the divine Person was still joined to it, being a unity. It could not be separated anymore from that unity, because the divine Person attracted the soul to the Body and Blood, and the Body and Blood to the soul. It was like a consecration: the soul said: *This is my body, this is my blood*, and the body did not change in substance but in form, recovered immediately, and from a corpse became a sleeping man, with the Blood already flowing back into the heart and in the veins, awaiting the pulse of life to circulate. It took an instant; the soul entered the Body once again informing it, communicating to it the glory that enveloped it, and the Body, as if it had vanished in a large flame, became completely spiritual. The Body was enveloped in linen; the Heart began to pulsate lovingly and like a joyful wave the Blood poured through the veins and reached the brain that re-opened praising the Father, like a flower opens again in the early morning sun and gives out its fragrance.

The Body slipped through the linen, passing through it in an instant, almost as if the Body were a cloud of light or a shining beam of rays. He rose adoring, and all His being sang like a harp with shining gold strings; He sang thanking the Father for His victory.

The Angel, like lightening, came down from Heaven, and with Him a joyful host; with an act of will he turned towards earth and it trembled; he turned towards the stone and it flipped over like a twig carried by the wind, breaking the seals.

Jesus already had passed through the stone. Glancing about the cave, He gave it a blessing so that from that point on it would be glorious, and in so doing He blessed the tombs of all men, because one day, as wheat, their lives would bloom once again.

He was the first fruit of those asleep in death; He resurrected to give us our resurrection, as He died to give us life.

*The person of the Word that keeps dominion over Himself (as we do on our body and soul).

It was dawn, and the darkness lifted like a drape wrapping itself up; the earth spun, spun around, turning on its axis, advancing so that the sun would bathe it with joy; it had a thrill of new life, because Life had smashed death and had extinguished it.

Death fled... in that hour its kingdom ended; Life was rising, beaming in the ray of glory, and engulfing the paths of empty death, and the author of mercy: *Vitam habeant* (May thou have life) opposed the condemnation of Eden: *Morte morieris* (Thou shalt surely die).

A hymn rose from the Heavens, a hymn of joy to the Conqueror of death: *Exultet iam angelica turba caelorum, exultent divina mysteria, et pro tanti Regis victoria tuba insonet salutaris.* (Rejoice, heavenly powers! Sing, choirs of angels! Exult, all creation Exult, all creation around God's throne! Jesus Christ, our King, is risen! Sound the trumpet of salvation!) (Transaltor's note. Easter proclamation – *Exsultet*).

Legions of angels descended and rejoiced like blazing bolts of lightning around the tomb of the great triumph and sang again: *Glory to God in the highest and peace to men of good will* as they did in Bethlehem.

The holy women go to the tomb

The earth was asleep and still enveloped by the shroud of night. The fields were silent amidst the splendor of an invisible joy; the guards of the tomb were silent transfixed by fear; the far off, deserted streets were silent as were the ancient trees, like disheveled giants, steeped in sleep.

In the distance a group of women were advancing; they too were silent and in pain, carrying big bundles filled with funerary aromatics; they were advancing in sorrow, without becoming aware of the joy of that hour that was enveloping them; only a wave of peace pierced through their hearts. They were alone but not afraid, going to a tomb and yet had no fear, going to embalm a corpse, yet without feeling discomfort. Their only concern was the heaviness of the boulder that sealed the tomb, hoping to find someone who could help them. They moved quickly, in a hurry to arrive... At last they reached the cliff and the cave, whose location was marked indelibly in their minds on that Friday evening... Their hearts were making efforts to rally, and yet a breath of peacefulness was spreading over their hearts as if they had been defrosted; they were warm with love, their heart beats were increasing, and their breaths became shorter...

The Rabbi is there, they were thinking, reclined, buried; yet they could not think of Him as dead, because an aura of life enveloped them even though they were not aware of it.

That place exuded life; the tomb was a monument of victory over death; there could not be a dead man there, although that was what they still thought; they felt in their hearts a new sun of love slowly rising from the mists of the morning. They walked quickly... the cliff loomed... they advanced, they fixed their eyes upon it and were startled. The sealing boulder had been flipped aside, as if a giant hand had seized and tossed it.

The cave entrance was no longer blocked; they entered with the anxiety of those who fear a sad surprise, but that anxiety was love. The cave was empty. The Body of the Lord was not there. It was a moment of tremendous anguish. Had someone removed It? Had they stolen It? Had they desecrated It? Their faith was still in darkness, and they did

not think of what had happened; they were dismayed, motionless with eyes that wanted to cry but their tear ducts were closed because of an invisible joy that was already rising up from the same cave as a scent of love.

Suddenly, a blaze dazzled them, two figures shining like suns approached them; they were men but their clothes had the brilliance of the sky at noon. The women lowered their eyes frightened, shaken...who were they? While they were thinking, one of them spoke, his voice was suave and powerful, "*Why do you seek the living one among the dead? He is not here, but he has been raised. Remember what he said to you while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners and be crucified, and rise on the third day.*" At these words they woke up as from a deep sleep; they remembered that Jesus had said that, and they were bewildered for not remembering it. But as the terrible storm of the Passion broke, they had remained disconcerted, considering only what was happening before their eyes. Hope had faded from their hearts. And now instead it lived again and changed into certainty, but they still had doubts, and as it is written in St. Mark (Mk 16:8) they were taken by fright: they were at a tomb still darkened by funereal shadows and although the light had dazzled them, they began to flee very frightened, and were almost eager to leave the place behind and return to the land of the living.

Consider the psychology of the situation: the supernatural vision had placed them in front of a certainty; but as soon as they were a short distance from the tomb the thought that it was a *tomb* dawned on them as did the terror of the inexorable mystery of death; suspecting that they were witnesses to one of many terrifying tomb-related events, they fled frightened, without having at that moment the courage to talk of their experience to anyone.

But having placed enough distance between themselves and the burial area, that natural fear one has of tombs and death disappeared from them and joy revived them, the shadows disappeared from their spirit and they went to the eleven Apostles and those gathered with them, to tell them what they had seen and heard.

The Sacred Text notes that the women who announced these things to the Apostles were Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary mother of James and some others. The women had been more faithful to Jesus and so they had the joy of being the first ones to know of His resurrection.

God confounds human wisdom and human prudence that would have believed that this great news would have been better communicated to representative men.

He chose women to be the first witnesses of the grandiose event because they had been the most faithful; moreover, there was nothing to oppose their testimony because a woman by her nature is an accurate and profound observer and critic of things truly supernatural. With the practical intuition that she has, she immediately sees through any obfuscation or deception and so it is difficult for her to believe what is truly supernatural, because she sees it with the natural light of her intuition and so does not readily accept profound truth casually at first sight.

It is an irresponsible slander to believe the woman to be an inferior being, especially regarding her intelligence and will. The only ones who say such things are those who treat her as an object of lust, or know very little of her true nature.

The woman has a sharp intelligence and a very strong will, and certainly God had a profound reason to choose her as first witness of the resurrection of Jesus, the key truth of our faith.*

They were not believed...

The Apostles, according to the common prejudice against women, which was even stronger among the Jews, believed the holy women were delirious and did not believe them. The women were certainly excited and maybe even shaken, and of course they could not relate the facts as if they were describing some ordinary event; so this only contributed to the belief the Apostles had that the women were delirious. Peter, however, as head of the Apostles, having still a great love for Jesus, ran to the tomb to ascertain what had happened, and entering he saw the linen cloths placed to one side which clearly showed that the body had not been stolen; but his faith hadn't solidified, and he returned wondering about what he saw, without being able to explain it.

As it appears from the return of the disciples from Emmaus that their faith in the divine reality of Jesus Christ had been an illusion, and therefore, far from waking up to the reality of the happening, it surprised them as inexplicable things can surprise.

This is what happens to our reason when it is overcome by unbelief: it regards as fantastical the great events that confirm the Faith believing them to be delirium, rather than considering them as a reason to believe.

The unbelievers receive the announcement of the admirable truth of the Faith from the Church, *Mistress and Teacher* of peoples, *exalted* over by all the nations: which can be represented by the witness of *Mary Magdalene*; they receive it internally by the *merciful grace of the Lord*: which can be associated with *Joanna*; and they feel in themselves the certainty, because in the *bitterness of life*, Faith *supplants* the constructs of all philosophers and is the only reality that comforts pain: which we can associate with *Mary the mother of James*; but despite these valid testimonies the unbelievers refuse to believe. Sometimes unbelievers even want to examine and study the Faith, and they *run to the tomb*, like Peter, because they study Faith not as life, but as one examines relics from the past or *the burial cloths*—that is, the vestiges of dead things.

Thus it is evident that in their souls the light of truth cannot shine, and at most they are left with a sterile amazement that keeps them in the same darkness in which they were.

The holy women went to the tomb with a feeling of love, even if not perfect, and they found light; if only poor unbelievers, instead of obsessing over trifles and too much study would humbly offer the Lord a small pledge of love, they would see the light more easily.

Reason, alas, comes up short before the heights of Faith and if it does not at least find a way, with a small offering of spiritual love, to take a leap and fly above the heavy atmosphere of the material world, it will never reach the limits of the divine grace that enlightens and carries it to the sublime heights of eternal truth.

* Today people are talking a lot about women and their role in the world. It is a good idea to remember these important facts in the Sacred Scripture: the Son of God came on Earth through a Woman. Women positively announced the Resurrection. The Apostles, as good workers and fishermen, were practical men, they would not let themselves be driven by emotion; but they would believe... after a personal assessment of the situation. They want to verify the claim and so Peter and John go to the Tomb.

3. The tender and wonderful story of the disciples of Emmaus.

The story of the holy women, far from eliciting faith in the resurrection of Jesus in the hearts of the Apostles and the disciples, was for some of them the coup de grâce, and they believed that it was all over, resigning themselves to going back to their respective occupations and resuming a life without hope of improvement. Two of them, not knowing anymore what to do in Jerusalem and considering story of the pious women to be pure fantasy, firmly resolved to go back to their village of Emmaus, which was about sixty furlongs away from Jerusalem or approximately eleven kilometers (*Translaotr's note*: about seven miles).

When the fundamental idea of a divine plan is discarded and it is claimed that everything is reduced to one's own ideas of reality and fantasy, and one believes what has been prophesied about that divine plan to be false even to the point of swearing that the words that refer to it were false, any light that may come to confirm its veracity will only seem to be a bigger illusion, and the mind, concentrated in the disillusionment, does not admit anything save its own beliefs. This was the state of the disciples of Emmaus, of which only one name is recorded in the Sacred Text: Cleopas, perhaps because his name embodied the sentiments of both of them. Cleopas in Greek means *every glory* and in Hebrew means *changing*, or *change*. Thus they who thirsted earthly *for glory* and well-being, had *changed* their minds, keeping only a simple memory of Jesus as a good man deluded by His ideologies.

Saddened, they walked on that lonely route, conversing with each other *about all the things that had occurred*. They had lived for long time with Jesus and were so filled with memories of Him that they could not talk of anything else. The story of the holy women, that should have given them clarity and light, had instead given the final blow to their faith, as we said before, yet even not believing anymore, they could not ignore what had happened, nor could they forget it.

While they were discussing the events together, Jesus approached them as a pilgrim, and walked with them. *But their eyes were prevented from recognizing him*. They believed now that Jesus was a man and above all condemned; this notion, devoid of faith, made them incapable of recognizing Him, especially after the resurrection as His body had become glorious. They remembered the Redeemer in His mortal flesh, a sorrowful pilgrim; they still had their minds and hearts full of His Passion and they could not recognize Him, because for them it was a sure fact beyond any doubt that He was dead and could not live again.

Jesus, on the other hand, offered them no special light to be recognized, because He wanted first of all to heal them interiorly in order that they would have the absolute certainty of having seen Him and talked to Him.

If they recognized Him right away, they would have remained with the doubt of having spoken to a ghost; instead along the way and in the same house where they showed him hospitality, they had the absolute certainty of talking to a true and real person.

In any case, He appeared to them as they considered Him in their hearts: to them He was a common pilgrim and no longer the Messiah, and so He manifested Himself to them in that fashion. A psychological reason can be added to this: as the two were full of grief, and subjected to the bitterest of disappointments they would have had no interest in

knowing more about a random pilgrim who was talking to them; He was for them a wanderer and that was that. Jesus Christ also made use of this inner state of theirs in order not to be recognized immediately.

He approached them first as just another person that happened to be walking on that same road, and so they did not pay attention to him, continuing talking to each other. Then he gave the impression of taking an interest in what they were saying and asked them almost out of curiosity, *What are you discussing as you walk along, and why are you downcast?* They should have merely answered with the subject about which they were discussing, but they were so involved in their subject that they reckoned everyone was aware of it, and marveled that there could be someone that did not know about the happenings that they were discussing.

In truth they had no reason to answer in that manner, because the pilgrim was just asking what they were discussing, but their answer shows the deep sorrow they felt and how much their hearts were involved in those happenings in Jerusalem. Thus to Jesus' question, Cleopas, one of the two disciples with a sense of surprise and annoyance, said: *Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place there in these days?* And Jesus as if He were completely unaware, replied: *What sort of things?* Both of them, then, even more amazed that He could be completely oblivious to what had happened, added: *The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, how our chief priests and rulers both handed him over to a sentence of death and crucified him. But we were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel; and besides all this, it is now the third day since this took place. Some women from our group, however, have astounded us: they were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find his body; they came back and reported that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who announced that he was alive. Then some of those with us went to the tomb and found things just as the women had described, but him they did not see.*

The response of the two disciples completely manifests their state of mind: they talk of *Jesus the Nazarene*, relating only His earthly origin and not remembering at all that He was called the Christ. In fact they remember Him as a *man* and recognize Him as a Prophet, powerful for the works He did and His teachings to the people; but He was merely a Prophet. Their faith, therefore, was completely extinguished in them. They remember His condemnation and His death solely to express the disillusionment that they had due to that death which had cut off their hopes in the rebuilding of the Kingdom of Israel. They deny, or more accurately, they do not recognize the redemption and salvation that come from His Passion and death, showing that their hearts, even before His death, had solely a human and natural faith in the mission he had come to accomplish. They observed in particular the fact that that was the third day from the day of His death, but they did not specify the reason for noting this fact, adding confusedly that for them was significant. All of this was told to a pilgrim who knew nothing of the events, and who could not have understood them.

The psychology of this situation is profound: they had waited impatiently for the third day, for a last spark of faith and hope in the words of the Lord who had promised the resurrection on the third day; they were waiting not so much for His resurrection but that of Israel; they dared not openly speak of their hope, so as not to be treated by the pilgrim as fantastic visionaries.

How could it be expected that a dead man on a Cross would rise again after three days?

And how could they hope that he would reconstitute the kingdom of Israel in one day?

They thought they had been too naïve to believe such things, and not wanting to appear like that to the pilgrim, they spoke reticently. On the other hand, even though they did not believe anymore, the thought of Jesus' promise was engrained in them, and since the day was not yet over, hope was reborn in the subconscious of their minds.

This too is deeply psychological: one who has believed with enthusiasm in an extraordinary deed—though now apparently obviously false and a failure—nevertheless continues to keep hoping that it is true in the back of one's mind, not because of faith but for decorum: not wanting to admit to having been deceived. They did not believe anymore; however the persistence of the earlier thought still rose in them, the last remnants of their very imperfect faith, and they still hoped that they had not been deceived. Therefore, without giving the matter importance, and rather with a tone of skepticism so not to be considered gullible, they hinted at the vision and the testimony of the holy women.

They had not believed, indeed they had even decided to go back to Emmaus, not knowing what to do in Jerusalem any longer; however, that testimony, right on the third day, had shaken them.

Clearly they had not seen any new political event occur, as they had hoped, but the fact that the Nazorean was not in the tomb anymore, and the vision that the holy women had, moved in them at least the suspicion that after all the words of Jesus might be true. The women's account had *terrified* them because it had all the character of truth, and they had regarded their testimony as a scary burial story; however, from the bottom of their hearts had come at least the suspicion that it could be true.

This was the state of their soul, and so Jesus reproachfully said: *Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into his glory?* He then began to reveal Himself, because from the uninformed pilgrim that He had appeared to be up to this point, he spoke with great majesty, as a teacher, and firmly rebuked the disciples, calling them *foolish and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke*; foolish for their thoughts and *slow of heart* for their lack of faith in the Prophets.

Jesus started from the beginning of their confusion: they had not understood that Christ had to undergo suffering to enter into His glory, according to the divine plan (Phil 2:8, Heb 2:10), and they had not read in the Prophets the announcement of this mystery; for this reason He started to explain to them those things in the Scriptures that related to Him, starting from Moses and continuing through all of the Prophets.

All the Scriptures are full of Him, and He referenced with relevant words and with great love the main points that relate to the mystery of His Passion and death.

The minds of the disciples were lit, their hearts were glowing, and they relived the truth without any thought; the darkness of spirit disappeared as shadows disappear at sunrise, their hearts lit up with unusual joy; the truth shone in their minds and hope was reborn, no longer in a temporal kingdom of the Messiah, but in the hope of eternal salvation, and the assurance of not having been deceived in following the Redeemer. Their souls did not analyze anything at that time, they did not reflect on anything in particular;

they just lived the joy of the truth and burned with love.

Meanwhile they arrived to the village that was their destination and Jesus *gave the impression that he was going on farther*; he did not pretend, but showed what he would do if they had not said anything further to Him. He went on because He wanted to be invited by them to stay, He wanted their free will in what He was going to do, and in this way their charity in giving Him hospitality would also earn them the grace of faith. He was ready to go farther and in fact he would have gone on, because before feeding them of Himself and taking them in his Heart, He wished that they would welcome Him into their home and be charitable to Him.

The two disciples, seeing Him continues on His way, held Him back saying: *Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over.*

The sun was going down, the shadows were getting longer and a sense of peace flooded those two hearts that were coming back to life. They went in. There was silence in the little house, as no one else was there. Jesus also entered and spread an aura of joy; He was glorious, even though He did not show it, and His glory filled that house like the divine glory filled the Temple. The disciples prepared a simple supper and invited Him to sit down. Jesus then took the bread, blessed it and gave it to them.

It was customary among the Jews that during a banquet when a guest was a doctor of the Law, he would break the bread and give it to the diners.

Jesus took the bread to initially declare Himself the Teacher.

It was the first sign of recognition He gave to the disciples. But He did not only make it simply to give the bread. He took it *to give of Himself*, and in breaking it he transubstantiated it into His Body and His Blood, as is obvious from the effect that it produced in the souls of the disciples.

In the act of consecrating it and giving it to them, they recognized Him, *their eyes were opened*; they felt His life in their hearts, grace flooded into them; it was their most sweet Teacher; it was He - immensely more handsome, revived—they touched him, and they had talked with Him!

Then He disappeared: He had no reason to show himself any longer; He disappeared into the depths of their souls living in them, and restored to them the faith they had lost; He disappeared so that their act of faith would be complete. In fact, now fully believing, they said to each other: *Were not our hearts burning (within us) while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?*

Two ardors had inflamed them: his Word in explaining the Scriptures, and the Bread of life; the two elements of the Christian life without which it is impossible to live supernaturally; one enlightens the mind, the other strengthens the will; one makes the heart burn with love for the understanding that it gives of God, and the other *opens the eyes* to the eternal reward. Scripture and the Eucharist, the Word of God and food for the soul are the two sources of nourishment that cannot ever be divided in the formation of a Christian soul.

The Protestant, even if he could explain the Scriptures according to the truth - which unfortunately he cannot do being separated from the Church - without the Eucharist he would still only have a food that cannot be absorbed, being painfully separated from the Church; the Christians who feed on Jesus in the Eucharist, without forming their souls with the Word of God in the light of the Holy, Roman, Catholic, Apostolic Church are not fully united to Jesus, nor have their eyes open to know Him for who He is.

Jesus Christ in order to heal the souls of the two unfaithful disciples first asked them a question, wanting to hear from their lips the confession of the deplorable state of their souls. Jesus, who knew well what they were saying and searched deep into their hearts, wanted to appear unaware, in order for them to confess the state of their souls. The confession ended with a reproach of Jesus: *Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe* to excite them to repentance; the reproach was followed by the light of truth in the explanation of the Scriptures, and finally in the food of life that is the Bread that Jesus broke for them. The Lord appears almost unaware of our actions and wants us to confess them; this is the foundation of spiritual rebirth.

The disciples confessed to Jesus, but under the guise of a pilgrim; we confess to Jesus confessing to a Priest, who is the pilgrim that accompanies us on our way of exile. To claim to confess directly to God is an illusion*, because the Lord shows himself visibly only through His Ministers. Sin makes us foolish and slow, foolish in the appreciation of the truth and slow in our will, incapable of orienting ourselves in life according to the plans of the adorable Will of God. If the soul is not first healed, how can it be fed?

Thus, preparation is essential to interior formation through the Scriptures, and confessing our own miseries and obtaining forgiveness are essential to receiving the food of life.

Charity attracts Jesus to us

Jesus Christ *goes on farther* and does not stay with us if we are not charitable toward our neighbors, charity given only for love of Him. The poor are the pilgrims that conceal Him and make Him manifest; through them He comes close to us concealed, and through them He manifests himself, because they represent Him. If you do not invite the pilgrim to benefit from your charity and if through the pilgrim you do not invite Jesus, your charity is an affectation like any other. It is your personal satisfaction. Jesus moves on and does not stay with you.

The modern world, in the midst of its display of civil service and social security, is entirely devoid of charity and for this reason Jesus does not remain with us.

Night is coming; life declines, and is it not a grace to compel Jesus to stay with us by using charity towards our neighbor for His sake? Charity is not only physical but also and above all spiritual.

* Also confession remains the sacrament of love and mercy because the Lord is always willing to forgive, and not only seven times, but seventy times seven times, which means always. He knows, in fact, our weaknesses, as the Psalmist says. And confession, this spiritual purification in the Blood of Christ is a duty. All the erroneous and false interpretations of some supposedly "avant-garde" Priests, who say that it is not necessary to go to confession, is against the true teaching of the Church and the faithful must reject these sowers of discord, even though they may be part of the clergy.

Jesus hidden in the Eucharist

Jesus is invisible in His Church and lives with Her in the Eucharistic Bread; it would seem that our eyes would recognize Him more easily if He would only show Himself to us; instead it is in this hiding that He shows Himself to our faith and if He did not hide, our interior eyes would not see Him. What a gift this Eucharistic hiding of Jesus is for us and what a light for our faith! It can be said, without exaggeration, that every truth of faith has its aurora borealis and it is this reflected light that makes its acceptance more natural; it is only in the Eucharist that reason remains completely separate, like a handmaid, and faith is complete, just as the mystery itself is complete in its hiddenness.

The disciples, as soon as they recognized Jesus, got up and, notwithstanding that it was already night, they went back to Jerusalem to announce to the Apostles and to the other disciples the resurrection of Jesus and what had happened to them. Their reacquired faith became immediately an apostolate, because a selfish faith would be impossible—one only seeking its own satisfaction and unconcerned for the spiritual good of the others. Let us not, therefore, become tired to share with the others the spiritual gifts that we receive from God and try by every means to rekindle in souls gone astray the light of God.

Joining the Apostles, called by definition *the eleven* after the betrayal of Judas, the disciples of Emmaus told them and to the others present what had happened to them along the way and in their home in the village. One of them, maybe again Cleopas, in entering said with the enthusiasm and the impetuosity of who is sure of the truth, *The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!* This exclamation should be seen from its psychological context: anxious to express the deep emotion that the truth caused him to experience, the disciple ran since he was more agile and entered first the house where the Apostles and the disciples were reunited and announced the great news, mentioning not himself but his companion: *The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!*

Speaking to people who did not believe, he did not say, in that first moment, that Jesus had appeared to him also—preferring to be the reporter of an extraordinary fact rather than a witness and participant to the same fact. He knew how the women had been treated when they had come back from the tomb, and he did not want to be branded a visionary without explaining himself. This subtle detail, preserved for us in the Sacred Text, makes us think that the companion of Cleopas was Simon Peter himself, or at least another who had the same name Simon. It is possible that Peter, after being to the tomb and being tormented by his anguished thoughts, would accompany Cleopas to his home in Emmaus, to seek a safer refuge. He might, in his troubled mind, have been afraid that the Priests and the scribes would blame the Apostles, and therefore, him for the infringement of the seals of the tomb. It would have been out of place for the disciple of Emmaus, having given account of the apparition of Jesus to him and his companion, to have alluded to another apparition to Simon at another time.

4. Jesus appears to all the Apostles. Last instructions. The Ascension into Heaven.

Having recovered a little from the emotional situation, the two disciples told what had occurred to them on the road to Emmaus and how they had recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread. Maybe their story began to arouse suspicion, as often is the case

when a supernatural fact is described to incredulous people, when suddenly Jesus—the closed doors notwithstanding—came into their midst and exclaimed: *Peace be with you. It is I, do not fear.* His glorious Body, no longer subject to the laws of matter, knew no obstacles, and much more than an electric wave, it passed through the walls and the locked door. The people reunited there, already disconcerted by what they heard from the disciples of Emmaus, were terrified and frightened, *believing that they were seeing a ghost.*

If they had believed what the disciples were saying, they would not have thought they were seeing a ghost. Jesus with very tender care, to remove their anxiety added: *Why are you troubled? And why do questions arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you can see I have.* After saying that, He showed them His hands and feet and made them touch them, but still they not believe, even though they had hearts full of joy at the divine touch.

This makes us see in just what state of disbelief they still were, and how thick was the darkness of their spirit. They touched with their hands, they saw with their eyes and still did not believe. It is terrible! They were more unbelieving than St. Thomas, whose lack of faith has become proverbial; their intellect was completely obscured, because the idea that the Master would not be able to rise again continued to remain in them.

Unbelievers with preexisting biases act the same way: they say they are open to seeing and verifying, and yet when they experience the truth first-hand, they still do not believe, because their hearts are faulty and confused. They do not seek a reason to believe but the proof of unbelief; they do not believe in the face of evidence, practically denying the same foolish positivism because of which they say they do not to believe. If only they would become humble, acknowledging their ignorance, they would receive the light of truth and Faith; but they are stubborn and do not want to believe.

In the face of the stubbornness of the Apostles, Jesus, far from abandoning them as they would have deserved, resorted to another approach. They were *beside themselves with joy*, according to the Sacred Text; they did not believe their eyes and their touch; not out of obstinate malice, but because of the extraordinariness of what they saw, as they experiencing something outside the reality of life and not knowing how to draw a logical consequence to what they were seeing. Jesus, therefore, calling them to reality and to distract them from the astonishment that prevented them to reflect, exclaimed: *Have you anything here to eat?* They Him brought a piece of roasted fish and a honeycomb*; Jesus ate some in their presence and gave them what was left so that they could eat of it and show it to others as witness of His resurrection.

Jesus Christ, although He was glorious, had a real body and could eat. The food really entered his stomach and turned directly into substance without the need for digestion. He allowed Himself to participate in our lives to sanctify them, and while before His Passion He had eaten the Passover with bitter herbs, symbol of the earthly pilgrimage, after the resurrection He ate the honeycomb, symbol of the sweetness of eternal glory.

At the Last Supper he ate the paschal lamb, symbol of Himself immolated, and after the resurrection He ate roasted fish, symbol of His Eucharistic love; the lamb lives on earth, a symbol of the pilgrim soul, and the fish in the sea, a symbol of the soul blessed in the immensity of God's glory, in which it is submerged for eternal bliss.

Seeing the food they gave Him consumed, the Apostles believed, as it is clear from the dialogue that Jesus had with them; but their spirits were still darkened by the memory of His Passion and death, and so he dissipated this darkness, calling their attention to the fulfillment of the prophecies concerning him, as He had already announced before His suffering. And in order that they could completely understand what was written about Him in the Law of Moses, in the Prophets, and in the Psalms, that is, in the whole Scripture, he gave them the intelligence with a special grace, to understand and teach these things to others, evangelizing all people.

St. Luke summarizes with a few words the recommendations and the instructions Jesus gave to the Apostles during the forty days in which He remained with them before leaving and ascending to Heaven. It was at that time that Jesus promised to them the Holy Spirit and exhorted them to stay in Jerusalem to prepare to receive this great grace that would change them into messengers of mercy, peace and forgiveness for all the earth.

At the end of the forty days He led them first to Bethany, to say good bye to Martha, Mary and Lazarus, and from there to the Mount of Olives, where He blessed them and then ascended, disappearing from their eyes, and rose up to Heaven in glory.

That time was the last and final proof He gave of His Divinity and for this reason the Apostles and those with them *adored Him*, recognizing Him to be without any doubt the Son of God.

They came back to Jerusalem full of joy for the graces received that they now valued for all their magnificence, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. They, in fact, woke up as from a sleep, and realized now that they had not sufficiently appreciated the immense gifts they had received from God, and so they tried to repair their oversights by going to thank Him continually in the Temple.

CONCLUSION

S. Luke contemplates the merciful love of God.

The Gospel of St. Luke is another brilliant lamp lit by the Holy Spirit in this poor dark valley, a lamp that dispels the obscuring clouds of our poor reason and guides our will in the ways of love of the merciful God.

The proud, presumptuous man only needs to be looked upon with compassion and forgiveness: he needs compassion for the many foolish things he says and needs to be forgiven for the sins he commits. He has no glory—none at all; if he does a good thing it is only and completely due to the goodness and mercy of God; by himself can only lie and do misdeeds. The Lord frees him from deceit and instructs him, and with His forgiveness frees him from his sins.

These are the foundations of true civilization and true progress.

Human wisdom, without the light of God, is a muddled collection of errors, and human will without divine grace and the divine law, falls below the level of beasts. It cannot seek out the truth outside of the Gospel, nor any good outside the law of God. Civilizations follow civilizations but each time they reveal themselves to be more or less disguised forms of madness, insanity and criminality.

Only one Law remains unshaken, only one source of wisdom, only one lever for

holy work: the Gospel.

In the Gospel of St. Luke we also see the way of true life traced for us and we follow it by throwing ourselves into the arms of divine Mercy; it is a simple life before which the abstruse ideas of human wisdom are a fog of thick darkness. We are deprived of all interior fecundity, grown old through evildoing, and the Lord with His grace gives us back the joy of life, as He gave it back to St. Zechariah and St. Elizabeth, giving them a son in their old age: John, *the grace, the gift, the mercy of God*.

Our life becomes a song of magnificent love, when it joins the Divine Will, and gives us fully the fruit of the grace, as He gave to the Blessed Virgin Mary with her *fiat*.

The infancy of Jesus casts beams of vivid light on human infancy, which grows in grace and virtue only with obedience and submission, and interested only in the things of God. Modern civilization pretends to educate the infant by making it an adult, and corrupts it into a mess of folly and violence, which can only prepare it for delinquency early on.

The life of young people, instead, grows and prospers in the temple of God and their reason develops and is ennobled in the splendor of faith; a young person must be with Jesus and must be with Him among the Doctors of the Law and deal with the things of God, to be able to emerge from the concealment of adolescence and accomplish the mission that God gives him. This is the admirable synthesis of supernatural pedagogy.

The struggles begin as the disagreements, but on the front door of life Jesus marks the password, the word that must guide one in all disputes: *You shall worship only God and to Him only shall you serve*. The holy freedom of the spirit is all in these splendid words of wisdom and love.

Jesus began his teaching in the synagogues of Galilee, reading and explaining the Scriptures, and he did this to make us understand how important the Word of God is for our interior formation and to remove from us the unclean spirits that haunt our intelligence and our will with their malignant suggestions, and to free us from the fever of passions.

We cannot keep anything in our lives, despite the intense work that we accomplish; our activities are fruitful only in the name of Jesus, because He is the true center of our civilization and the well being of the peoples, sailing toward the port of our eternal homeland. He heals our spiritual wounds, gives back to the soul its purpose, raises us above all worldly interests, and traces the way of the true beatitudes, overturning the fleeting concepts of life that the world offers. All miseries are overcome at His feet; all storms quieted by His presence; He is the giver of peace, He is providence that multiplies the temporal resources of life, He is light in the night of our exile; He is the good Samaritan who comforts and heals us when we are wounded by evildoers.

The word of Jesus Christ is divine; it is unparalleled wisdom in its deep simplicity, the small seed that germinates to become the greatest among the trees; the small measure of yeast which ferments our entire life, the splendor of the truth that enlightens us, healthy food that satiates us. His mercy embraces us in our aberrations, his love searches for us when we are lost, and his mercy forgives us in our infidelity.

He is everything for us: He is our King, our Savior, the victim offered for our sins, the sweetest food in our exile, the destination on our pilgrimage, the door to enter to our homeland.

He ascended Calvary burdened with the Cross to trace for us our way of suffering, ascended to Heaven to open for us the triumphant way of glory, descends onto the Altars

to give us all His life, and He lives in the Church to envelop all of us in the warmth of His mercy. Man cannot be apart from him, and each time he abandons Him he sets his house on the sand, and it falls to pieces at the blowing of the winds and the tumult of the waters.

Come, Lord Jesus!

Come, Lord Jesus, come, now that the world is moving toward catastrophe, because it has set itself apart from You; come, now that the sins of the nations are beyond the pale, open your arms of mercy and heal us.

Seek those who are like sheep stranded in error, far from the Church; carefully search, as for a lost coin, for those beautiful souls who do not yet know you; welcome those poor souls led astray like children who come back from their aberrations to your fatherly arms.

We are unfaithful servants, we have squandered your graces and rendered your mercies useless; give to us the spirit of charity so that we may be able to repair our wrongdoings. When we forget You when we get caught up in the opulence of material things, call us back to the reality of life with thoughts of eternal life.

Bring order among our activities with the wisdom of Your proverbs; free us from the foolishness of the false prophets that infest the world like detritus in the life of the spirit; free us from the concealed abuses of the law; break the bonds of our slavery, give us back a true sense of our dignity and of peace.

Enter the world triumphantly, chase the moneylenders out of the Temple; give us saintly Priests who are not impure traders of your Blood; purify your House from the worldly garbage that enters it with impunity and puts next to your throne the idols of vanity and the flesh. Prepare us for the supreme day of Your second coming that we will not dwell on the things of this world that will burn in the fire, but on our eternity.

Call us to the banquet of love, give life to us, renew us, make us one fold under the Supreme Pastor and let You alone be the resurrection of this apostate world that apart from you would fall into the abyss.

Send your Angel to upend the stone of the tomb that has been affixed upon your mystical body that it may rot and disintegrate!

Come close to us poor pilgrims,

Come with us,

Explain to us the Scriptures with the light that you spread in the Church.

Let us know You,

Let us serve You,

Let us love You,

and make our lives an eternal blessing to the most holy Name of God, One and Triune.

Amen.

The End