

The Circumcision of Our Savior



“And when eight days were fulfilled for his circumcision” (Lk. 2:21).

Witness in spirit this first shedding of the blood of the Son of Man, whereby He became a member of the Chosen People.

O Jesus, help me to recognize my evil tendencies and overcome them.

The Gospel of today's feast shows us the Infant Jesus submitting to the rite of circumcision. By this act He wished not only to conform to the Law, which came from God, but also to give new proof of the reality of His sacred humanity. Moreover, He thus certified, as it were, His descent according to the flesh from Abraham, upon whom God had imposed the performance of this rite as a sign in his flesh of the divine alliance contracted with him and his posterity. Had Jesus not submitted to this ceremony, the Jews could not have accepted Him as a true son of Abraham nor recognized Him as the Messiah. But our Savior's observance of the law of circumcision was not a mere formality. His act signified that He now ranked Himself with us sinners and that from this time forward He took upon Himself the iniquities of us all. He received this sign of ransom with the same infinite humility with which He would later submit to the baptism of penance at the hands of St. John the Baptist.

The circumstances of the institution of circumcision show that it represented a renewal of human nature, for when

yield to impatience or self-complacency, when you entertain suspicions of others, or are hasty in judging others, when you give in to your moods, or allow unkind or injurious words to escape your lips, when you do not fight against distractions and do not properly guard your thoughts.

Such have been your offenses, in spite of all the graces you have received during the year; exceptional graces, perhaps, for which you may not even have expressed your gratitude to God. Think also of the trials God has sent you, in which you should have recognized His mercy and which you should have regarded as providential opportunities for growth in the spirit. Moreover, you have continued to be blessed with the great grace of perseverance in your vocation. You continue to live amid the very splendors of the sanctuary, where you enjoy daily access to inexhaustible sources of faith, hope, and love. Compare your privileged state with that of persons whom you know in the world and you will begin to realize how favored you are.

O my God, when at the foot of my crucifix I think over the year that has just ended, I experience sadness at the remembrance of my wasted moments. Some few returns of the new year and then the last day of my life! O God, let me so live this coming year as not to lose a single moment and thus make a careful preparation for the eternal years so soon to begin for me.

The Holy Name of Jesus



“His name was called Jesus” (Lk. 2:21).

The sacred name of Jesus, that is, “Savior,” includes all the names that Holy Scripture gives to the Messiah. Jesus could not have offered infinite satisfaction to the offended majesty of God and so have become our Savior, if He had not Himself been God. Nor could He have been our Savior by meritorious suffering except by becoming man. All that Jesus did and suffered for us is summed up in His holy name.

O Jesus, let me taste the sweetness of Your name; may it be my hope, my consolation, and my strength.

The name of Jesus is our hope. With this name as our protection what is there to fear? The punishment we deserve for sin? But in the name of Jesus Baptism took away from our souls the stain of original sin; and by the power of this holy name Penance cleanses us from the sins which continue to stain our souls. The thought of death? The name of Jesus sweetens even this thought by holding out to us the prospect of a better and everlasting life. The judgment of God? The name of Jesus is our pledge that the mercy of God pleads for our pardon with His justice, which demands our punishment. Or does temptation frighten us? Jesus Himself promised that the power of His name would drive out devils.

The name of Jesus is our consolation. It is *as oil poured out* upon the troubled heart. St. Bernard says, “An efficacious remedy for all ills . . . is enclosed in the name of Jesus as in a precious vase. There is no wound, no contagion,

God ordained it as a sign of His covenant with Abraham, He gave to him and his wife a new name and revealed that a son would be miraculously born to them in their old age. It was also a reminder of our defilement, for the rite implies that there are in human nature tendencies to evil which must be checked and redirected toward good, so that man may become a new creature, worthy of the divine alliance. Seen with the eyes of faith, circumcision takes on, therefore, a moral and symbolical character as well. St. Paul wrote to the Romans, *But he is a Jew who is so inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart in the spirit, not in the letter.*

This circumcision of the heart, the casting off of the old man, we can accomplish only through the grace of the new Isaac, Jesus Christ, who regenerated all mankind through His passion and death. This circumcision of the New Covenant is made in the will. Its effect is the separating and detaching of our hearts from their irregular desires and from earthly affections, for the purpose of achieving union with God by total submission to His will. A holy old man, upon being asked where God is, answered, "Where we are not"; that is, the will of God and the love of God reign within us only to the extent that our self-love and self-will have been destroyed.

O my God, I offer You the precious blood of Your divine Son, shed for the first time on the day of His circumcision. Jesus, my Redeemer, grant me, on this great feast and this first day of the new year, the grace to begin in earnest to destroy the evil that is in me. Help me to grow in the spirit of expiation and to discipline myself strictly in atonement for my past sins.

Holy Simeon



“Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word, in peace; because my eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples” (Lk. 2:29–31).

Picture the holy old man Simeon receiving the Infant Jesus into his arms.

Holy Simeon, obtain for me an habitual docility to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit.

At His presentation in the Temple, the long-awaited Messiah solemnly ratified, at the place of all the sacrifices of the Old Law, the offering He had made of Himself at the first moment of His incarnation. So great an event should fittingly be signaled by a prodigy; and one was granted by the Eternal Father in welcome, as it were, to the Infant Jesus. The shepherds had been summoned by an angel and the Magi by a star, when Jesus was born in Bethlehem. On this occasion, however, the Holy Spirit Himself sent a witness to the divine Babe.

There was living at that time in Jerusalem an old man whose name was Simeon. He had longed unceasingly for the coming of the Messiah, and the Holy Spirit had revealed to him that he should not die before witnessing the rising of the Light of the world. At last his faith and hope were to receive their reward. As Mary, with the Infant in her arms, and St. Joseph ascended the steps of the Temple, Simeon felt interiorly the impulse of the Spirit of God. Immediately he left his house and went to the Temple,

whose perfect cure it does not effect. May it be always in your heart, may it be ever on your tongue, so as to govern all your thoughts, rule all your desires, and direct all your actions." Again he says, "The name of Jesus is honey in the mouth, music in the ear, a shout of gladness in the heart."

In this sacred name we find also our strength, for it contains infinite virtue. Our Savior said, "*And these signs shall attend those who believe: in my name they shall cast out devils; they shall speak in new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands upon the sick and they shall get well.*" These promises from the lips of Eternal Truth have often been fulfilled. We may recall as one example the cure of the lame man at the Gate Beautiful, to whom St. Peter said, "*Silver and gold I have none; but what I have, that I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, arise and walk.*" Again, Jesus has assured us that whatever we ask the Father in His name will be granted us; and so the Church repeats the holy name at the close of all her prayers, asking all things of the Father through our Lord Jesus Christ.

"O God, who didst appoint Thine only-begotten Son to be the Savior of mankind, and didst command His name to be called Jesus; mercifully grant that we may enjoy the vision of Him in heaven, whose holy name we venerate on earth. Through the same Christ our Lord" (Roman Missal).

The Prophecy of Simeon



“Behold, this child is destined for the fall and for the rise of many in Israel, and for a sign that shall be contradicted” (Lk. 2:34).

Imagine that you hear the holy old man Simeon prophesying to Mary and Joseph that enmities will gather about their Son.

Divine Savior, be for me *the resurrection and the life*.

The portents are already clear even in the divine Babe of Bethlehem. Behold Him, our Lord and our God! He enters this world, not only poor, but destitute; not only humble, but in abject surroundings; not only mortified, but rigorously deprived of all material comforts. Could we find it in our hearts to accept, even to welcome, a similar lot? If interiorly we recoil from such extreme self-denial, then we do not as yet perfectly *mind the things of God*. And in proportion as we draw back from accepting and even desiring that which Jesus chose for Himself, He is for us as He has been for others *a stumbling stone and a rock of scandal*.

Simeon prophesied that the divine Child was *destined for the fall and for the rise of many*. Yet Jesus, as His name signifies, came to save. God wills the ruin of no one; He wills to save all men, but not in spite of themselves, nor without their co-operation. It was the whole future of the Church which Simeon beheld in prophetic vision, and his words proclaimed the awful mystery of the reprobation of the wicked. Before Jesus ever began His work the prophet declared that it would fail in part. The cross was to be the

the feebleness of old age forgotten in the ardor of his desire. In the porch of the house of God, among the many mothers who had come to present their children to the Lord, Simeon's inspired gaze recognized the Virgin of whom he had often read in the Book of Isaias; and pressing through the crowd he made his way to the Child she was holding in her arms. Mary, also guided by the Holy Spirit, welcomed the holy old man and placed in his trembling arms the Salvation of the world. Happy Simeon, figure of the ancient world, grown old in expectation and now nearing its end!

No sooner had he received the sweet Fruit of Mary's womb into his embrace than, filled with the need of bearing witness, like the shepherds and the Magi, Simeon gave utterance to his beautiful canticle, the *Nunc dimittis*. This hymn of thanksgiving for all the benefits and joys brought by the Day of Redemption has since become the evening prayer of the Church, just as it marked the evening of Simeon's day: "*Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word in peace; because my eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples: a light of revelation to the Gentiles and a glory to thy people Israel.*" Simeon's insight is deeper than Zachary's was. He proclaims a salvation prepared for all nations, not only for Israel.

"Adorn thy bride-chamber, O Sion, and receive Christ, thy King. Salute Mary, the Gate of heaven, for she bears the King of glory who is the new Light. The Virgin stands, bearing in her arms her Son, begotten before the daystar; him Simeon received into his embrace and proclaimed to the people as the Lord of life and death and the Savior of the world" (antiphon from the Greek liturgy).

signal for a combat that would extend over the whole earth and down all the centuries. Jesus crucified is the center of the whole history of the Church and of the world. The elect owe their salvation to Him; the lost are drawn to their ruin through not believing in Him or obeying His laws. To these latter the doctrines and miracles of our Savior, and especially the humiliations of His passion and death seem to be "hard sayings." Trusting only in their own strength, they despair of acquiring the meekness, humility, and self-abnegation taught and practiced by Christ; and their self-love then finds a refuge in denial and contradiction. Christ cannot be met with indifference; it is His destiny to lay open the secrets of the heart and reveal their good or evil dispositions. Before Christ crucified it is necessary to declare ourselves. Either we must choose to love Him with passionate devotion and zealously obey His laws, or we shall inevitably find ourselves in the camp of His enemies.

O Jesus, dear Babe of Bethlehem, destroy everything within me that is in the least degree opposed to You. Transform and fuse all my thoughts and aspirations into the single burning desire of union with You, of loving only that which You love, and of eagerly profiting by all inspirations that will bring me nearer to You.

JANUARY 5

The Obedience of Jesus to the Law



"They took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord"
(Lk. 2:22).

JANUARY 5 / 73

The ceremony of the presentation of the first-born male in the Temple was prescribed by the Law in practical recognition of God's sovereign right of ownership over His people.

Divine Savior, help me to imitate You by my habitual fidelity to the observances of the religious life.

Jesus obeyed the law of Moses with admirable exactitude. He was circumcised in accordance with the Law on precisely the eighth day after His birth, and on exactly the fortieth day, Mary and Joseph took Him to the Temple to present Him to the Lord. Later, He will also follow scrupulously the prescriptions for the eating of the paschal lamb. He obeyed these enactments because His Father had ordained them through Moses. Our divine Master wishes us to understand by His example of obedience in these matters, first, that nothing is trivial if it is God who prescribes it, whether directly or through one of His servants. The fact that it is His will makes every act important and worthy of reverence.

Second, He teaches us that our least actions become great when they are performed with great love; third, that, while the occasion for an externally important action rarely presents itself, little duties acquire importance by their very multiplicity and continuity. Finally, we learn from both the words and the example of Jesus that one who is faithful in small observances acquires the strength to be faithful also in greater ones. The continuous subjecting of oneself throughout a lifetime to the succession of small sacrifices which are implied by fidelity to the Rule requires great courage and ardent love.

"The least is the least," says St. Augustine, "but fidelity to the least is exceedingly great." The points of the Rule that may seem trifling are yet marked with the general seal and are, therefore, equally within the province of obedience.

The Epiphany of Our Savior



“And entering the house, they found the child with Mary his mother, and falling down they worshipped him. And opening their treasures they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh” (Mt. 2:11).

For us the feast of the Epiphany has almost exclusively as its object the manifestation of the Savior to the Gentile world in the persons of the Magi. But the Vesper hymn in today's Office celebrates simultaneously the three Epiphanies of the Incarnate Word: His manifestation to the Magi from the East, the testimony to Him given by the Father and the Holy Spirit at His baptism in the Jordan, and the manifestation of His divinity by the miracle at the wedding feast of Cana.

○ Jesus, grant that we who now know You by faith may come to behold the glory of Your majesty.

Like the shepherds the Magi recognized their God in the Infant of Bethlehem. They were not disappointed nor taken aback by the poverty of the divine Babe; yet, to minds unenlightened by faith, could a greater disparity be imagined than that which separates a tiny child from the infinite God? The strong faith of these pagan seers was undoubtedly the reward of their immediate co-operation with grace. They had come in search of a king, but interiorly enlightened by the Holy Spirit, they found their God, and immediately they fell down in adoration. The reward of our lifelong quest of Him, which God has reserved for us in heaven, infinitely surpasses the greatest happiness which we could imagine for

Hence, to make the slightest retrenchment is to trespass on the rights of God. Strictly speaking, there are no trifling prescriptions in the Rule. The Rule is, in reality, the Church commanding us, and she makes no distinction of important and trivial observances in the rule of life adopted by her religious. It is the Church, the representative of God upon earth, that forbids us to keep anything in our possession without the Superior's permission. It is the Church that forbids us to be absent from or leave common exercises without the permission of the one presiding. It is the Church that warns us to safeguard religious modesty in the use we make of our eyes, in our conversations, in all our actions. It is the Church that prohibits too great familiarity among religious and too close attachments. It is the Church that bids us be friendly and courteous to all. Every point of rule, the least as well as the greatest, should, therefore, command our respect; and we should observe them all with equal care as the authentic will of heaven for us.

O my God, I resolve to obey the Rule of religious life that has been given me on Your behalf, whatever it may cost me. Confirm me in this good purpose with Your grace; direct my steps in the way of obedience, and make my observance of the Rule such that I may say at my last hour as did St. Aloysius, when he was dying, "I do not remember violating my Rule even once deliberately." Thus, I may hope to merit as he did the everlasting contemplation of You in paradise.

thought of our blessings, how could we allow any sacrifice or difficulty to deter us in the service of Jesus Christ?

O holy Magi, help me to learn to know Jesus and Mary at the crib as you did. I too wish to offer gifts to the Babe of Bethlehem. Pray for me that I may bring to him, pure, intact, and enriched, the treasure I received in Baptism; that the gold I offer may have been coined only for Him and not to purchase earthly satisfactions; that my gift of incense may never have burned before an idol; and that the myrrh I bring may have become more precious through a lifelong spirit of sacrifice.

JANUARY 7

The Calling of the Magi



“There came Magi from the East to Jerusalem, saying, ‘Where is the newly born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East and have come to worship him’” (Mt. 2:2).

The Magi were learned men, well versed in astronomical and astrological lore. In the oldest paintings of the mystery of the Epiphany they are shown wearing crowns and other royal insignia. This tradition probably originated in the application to the Magi by certain Fathers of the Church of Ps. 71:10: *The Kings of Tharsis and the Isles shall offer gifts; the kings of Arabia and Saba shall bring tribute.*

O holy Magi, obtain for me selflessness and a spirit of faith like yours.

The Mystery of the Epiphany represents the first accomplishment of the prophecy of Simeon: “*My eyes have seen*

ourselves. Heaven is worth more than anything it could cost us to attain it, even were the price death by the cruelest martyrdom. But our heaven will be the more transcendently glorious according as we shall pay the more to win it.

As for Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, what a brilliant transformation the visit of the Magi must have brought about in their humble lodging! Even the brief account of it in St. Matthew's Gospel sheds over the infancy of Jesus something of the bright cloud of Tabor. In the silence, the obscurity, and the poverty of our Savior's infancy, there appear suddenly a brilliant star, a princely Oriental cortege, gold, incense, precious perfume. The poor dwelling of the Infant Jesus becomes a royal court. The essential meaning of the mystery of the Epiphany is in its testimony to the royalty of Jesus. The Magi implied this when they asked of Herod, "*Where is the newly born king of the Jews?*"; they showed it also in the gifts they brought. The gold was for their King, as the incense was for their God, and the myrrh for their Redeemer.

In the opinion of the Fathers the gifts of the Magi represented also the spirit of sacrifice: the sacrifice of love, of prayer, of renunciation. The holy Magi had given up everything—homeland, family, wealth, leisure. They had submitted their human reason to faith, they had surrendered their very hearts. And in what manner did they make these sacrifices? Promptly, eagerly, with generosity and patience, with the humble simplicity of children. "*We have seen his star . . . and have come.*" Yet the Magi never saw the kingdom of Jesus Christ come upon earth. We enjoy the blessing of seeing it in its full grandeur, power, and excellence. We are the privileged recipients of its unspeakable benefits. With the example of the Magi before us and the

spirit of faith and detachment. The Magi leave for a long and arduous journey to a distant land, abandoning their homes, their relatives, their leisurely and dignified mode of life, to go in quest of an unknown king, with no evidence for his existence other than the sudden appearance of an extraordinarily bright star. They also disregard the mocking comments which were certainly made with reference to their journey; nor are they at all disturbed by the hostile suspicions of Herod's court. Then, when they have accomplished their errand and are ready to return to their homes, they follow without question the advice of an angel, received during sleep, that they should return to their country by another road.

O Jesus, Light of the world, I thank You for extending Your mercies to all the nations of the earth. May all men soon come to know You and follow You as the Light which has risen for the whole human race. O holy Magi, intercede for me, that I may be led to the Eucharist today by a brighter light of faith, and that when I return to my duties, it may be *by another way*, that is, by a new manner of life, perfect in recollection, self-denial and love.

JANUARY 8

The Star of the Magi



“Now they, having heard the king, went their way. And behold, the star that they had seen in the East went before them”
(Mt. 2:9).

After their interview with Herod, God consoled the Magi with a fresh apparition of the star. They had *seen the star in the*

thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples: a light of revelation to the Gentiles, and a glory for thy people Israel." It is the feast of the calling of the Gentiles. Even from His crib Jesus summoned the nations to gather about Him. The Epiphany already teaches us something of the universality of the Redemption, a truth which St. Peter would have to learn many years later in the vision at Joppa. God did nothing to relieve the earthly poverty of His Son, but He did set in motion the angels and the stars in order to bring men of good will to the crib of Bethlehem. The Chosen People were represented there by the shepherds; the Gentiles, by the Magi. The mystery of the Epiphany should, therefore, be very dear to us, for it is a figure of our vocation to Christianity. The Magi were the first fruits of the Church of the Gentiles; in their wake all the nations have come to Christ by the royal road of the Cross.

The vocation of the Magi, is, furthermore, a great mystery of grace. Many others must have seen the star also, but they did not attempt to follow it. Doubtless, they found a hundred reasons for staying at home. Indolence has a natural ally in self-love, which persuades us to shun everything that is irksome and disagreeable. But the Magi responded to the interior motions of grace at the same time that they were studying the sign which God had sent them in the natural order. Oracles and prophecies had long been widespread throughout the East regarding the advent of the Messiah; and when the Magi observed the brilliant appearance of the new star in the heavens, they at once inferred that it was a sign of the Great King. They did not stop to discuss this extraordinary phenomenon, but prepared at once to follow its course.

This immediate response of theirs implies a most wonderful

Because they had met their trial with courage and patience, the Magi were rewarded. They had scarcely left Jerusalem when the star reappeared. The words of the Gospel account noting its return are like an outburst of joy: *And behold, the star that they had seen in the East went before them.* All fatigue and hardship forgotten, they hastened their steps and soon were in the presence of the King they had come to worship. To all appearances they had entered an ordinary house and found within an ordinary woman and child, but they prostrated themselves in adoration. Faith often leads us also to the unwelcome assignment, the hard or uninteresting work; but at such times there is only one attitude to take—that of the Magi. We, too, must interiorly fall down in worship and offer our gifts of faith, of hope, and of charity.

O Jesus, let my joy in You accompany me in all my journeyings and overflow into all I think and say and do. Never let me lose it through my own fault; and if it is Your will to withdraw Your sensible presence from me for my greater good, help me to practice the faith and courage of the Magi.

JANUARY 9

The Flight Into Egypt



“Arise, and take the child and his mother, and flee into Egypt”
(Mt. 2:13).

After the departure of the Magi and before Herod could order the massacre of the Innocents, the Holy Family received the warning to flee into Egypt.

East, but the Gospel account in no way implies that the star had guided them to Jerusalem.

O Jesus, never let me be false to my duty, especially when faithfulness requires a sacrifice.

Every happiness here below has its sorrowful morrow, which we shall be wise to expect. It is a law of nature that the flowers fall when the fruits come. God had sufficiently enlightened the Magi; He had started them on their way. Then, He withdrew His external assistance and apparently left them to themselves. By such trials God effects the necessary sifting of the courageous from the weak, the faithful from the faithless. The Magi, their duty having been once made clear to them, persevered steadfastly in their journey. The darkness which now surrounded them as they traveled through the nights did not cause them to forget that recently the star had shone upon them.

This is the ordinary condition of our lives: the going forward in the darkness of faith. Daily repetition tends to make our religious exercises wearisome. Even our reception of the sacraments becomes dull and spiritless at times. First fervor and the exuberance which attends beginnings inevitably flag, and a feeling of disillusionment is almost certain to sweep over us one day in our lives—when we discover that the reality is not the dream. Our periods of enthusiasm are the hours of the star, when we feel ourselves led, or almost carried along, by grace. Then, suddenly, the star of consolation disappears. Sometimes this happens through our own fault, but the withdrawal of consolation can also be a new grace, in that we are thus given fresh opportunities of practicing patience, humility, and gentleness; and of turning our wills toward God with all the greater trust and ardor.

O Mary and Joseph, help me to learn from you how to increase in virtue and merit through trials and contradictions.

The angel's order to St. Joseph was the occasion of another difficult trial for the Holy Family. St. Joseph had already undertaken more than one inconvenient journey, and now came the new command: "*Arise, and take the child and his mother and flee into Egypt.*" This journey into Egypt may have lasted a week or more and it was over desert country. When the Israelites had to travel through the desert on their return from captivity in Egypt; God sent to their aid the pillar of fire, the manna, the water miraculously drawn from a rock; but in the flight of the Holy Family we see none of these marvels. Nothing lessened the rigors of the journey for them. Still they obeyed patiently and without question. Yet, how many protests Joseph might reasonably have offered! If Herod was plotting the death of Jesus, could not the omnipotent God circumvent him and protect His Son as He had protected His Chosen People against Pharaoh and Sennacherib? If the flight was necessary, why to a distant place of exile like Egypt? Surely he should not expose the Mother and Child to so many dangers, fatigues, and uncertainties. None of these plausible and natural objections were raised, however, by Mary or Joseph; as soon as the angel had given the order they fulfilled it instantly and to the letter.

Thus began the accomplishment of the final words of Simeon's prophecy: "*And thy own soul a sword shall pierce, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.*" Already the secret thoughts of hearts were being disclosed — of the heart of Herod, full of malice, jealousy, and rage; and of the pure, resigned, loving hearts of Mary and Joseph,

leaving their home without a word, with no recriminations, pliant to all indications of the divine Will. We should bear in mind this secret law of our trials. God strikes us in order to open the hidden depths of our hearts, for there are some virtues that manifest themselves only when this secret door is violently forced.

As for our Savior Himself, He shows us in this mystery that He willed to be the victim of persecution from His earliest years. He willed to be the consolation of all exiles by experiencing in His own Person the pain of exile and of eating the bread of strangers. What a mystery of abasement! The Creator flees from His creature! God permits us to act freely, but our misuse of our freedom cannot effect any change in His eternal designs. On the contrary, His providence extends to the least actions of His creatures and directs them in the end to the perfect execution of His divine plan.

“What will happen to me today, O my God? I do not know. I know only that nothing will occur which You have not foreseen from all eternity. This suffices, my God, to make me tranquil. I adore Your eternal designs. I submit to them with all my heart. I desire all, I accept all, I make a sacrifice of all to You. This sacrifice I unite to that of Your dear Son, my Savior, begging You through His sacred heart and His infinite merits for patience in my trials and that perfect submission which is owing to You in all that You will or permit” (prayer recited in prison by Madame Elizabeth, sister of Louis XVI).

The Massacre of the Innocents



“Then Herod . . . sent, and slew all the boys in Bethlehem and all its neighborhood, who were two years or under, according to the time that he had carefully ascertained from the Magi” (Mt. 2:16).

Represent to yourself the death of these little children slain for Jesus' sake, whom the Church calls by the beautiful name of “Flowers of the Martyrs.”

Sweet infant martyrs, obtain for me childlike simplicity of heart.

Near the Lamb of God destined for sacrifice are other lambs already sacrificed. Why did God permit this carnage? He could have arrested the arm of Herod, just as He could crush the strength of all persecutors; but He did not do it. God has endowed man with free will, and He allows him to make use of it. But He inevitably draws good out of the evil use man makes of his liberty. Herod did not gain his end; and all the ugliness and ultimate futility of impiety is revealed in this cruel massacre. Jesus will die only at “His” hour and, even then, the grave will confine Him for only three days.

The Holy Innocents are made to sacrifice their lives, but in doing so they become witnesses to Christ. They bore witness to the Faith, not by speaking of it but by dying for it. St. Bernard characterizes their martyrdom by saying: “In St. Stephen we have both the act and the desire of martyrdom; in St. John we have only the desire; in the Holy Innocents

we have only the act." Yet, as an ancient preface beautifully says: "The splendor of the free grace of God outshone the martyrs' wills." They were regenerated by their baptism in their own blood. Through their martyrdom for Jesus' sake they are forever associated with the mysteries of the Holy Infancy. Nor will Jesus forget these children who died for Him. He will have a special love for little children and teach the world a new respect for them.

Personal merits on earth the Holy Innocents could not have, but neither did the defilements of the world ever touch them. At the very threshold of life they had already accomplished their mission. In an instant the sword took their life and their eyes were closed to this world—but only to open immediately to the contemplation of God for all eternity. One truth is strikingly taught in this mystery: that innocence itself must submit to the law of suffering and penitence. The Holy Innocents are immolated as victims of sacrifice, and so will the all-holy and innocent Savior offer Himself one day in a far more terrible death. Just as there is light wherever the sun sheds its rays, so Jesus acquaints with sorrow all who would draw near to Him. Yet none gain more nor lose less than they who surrender their lives and all they possess to Jesus. By contact with Him all that appears to be unhappiness, death, and ruin instantly becomes salvation, life, and joy. The purity of the Holy Innocents although untried was made meritorious by the blood they shed for the divine Lamb. In such innocence and simplicity did they receive their martyrs' palms and crowns that the Church says in her Vesper hymn honoring the Holy Innocents that they "play" with them. We, on the contrary must fight for our reward, and we are ever in danger of losing it; but simplicity of heart and purity will lead us to unreserved

confidence in God, and so to the perfect accomplishment of His holy will.

O Flowers of the Martyrs, pray for all the children in the world, especially those whom executioners more cruel than Herod deprive of the life of their soul. Pray also for me that I may bear my cross with patience and desire nothing but the accomplishment of the divine will. May I, like you, be meek and graceful in my trials, so that I may become worthy of sharing your glory for everlasting ages!

JANUARY 11

The Sojourn in Egypt and the Return



“And remain there until I tell thee” (Mt. 2:13).

The events of the life of the Holy Family in Egypt are not known to us. The duration of their exile has been estimated by some at a few months (it is probable that it lasted at least six months), while others prolong it to several years.

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, grant me the grace of perfect abandonment to the will of God.

We may assume that it was necessary for the Holy Family to earn their daily bread in Egypt; consequently, their life there must have been one of poverty and toil; but it was also a life of prayer and of sweet contentment and joy, because of their absolute confidence in God. There must have been other consolations also, since the Jews had numerous colonies in northern Egypt, and Joseph could, therefore, find friends and a livelihood among his own countrymen. But, above all,

JANUARY 11 / 87

Jesus was there, growing daily in wisdom, grace, and age. It may have been in Egypt that He began to speak and walk; at all events, it was here, probably, that He put His little hands to their first tasks.

The gaze of the Infant Jesus must have rested upon the marvels of ancient Egypt: her great temples and pyramids; but His entrance into that country marked the beginning of the ruin of her false gods, as Isaias had foretold: *Behold the Lord . . . will enter into Egypt, and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence, and the heart of Egypt shall melt in the midst thereof.* Perhaps we may see in this sojourn of the Holy Family in Egypt the source of the abundant blessings which, later on, in the first centuries of the Church, caused Christianity and, in particular, the monastic life to flourish so marvelously throughout this region.

Finally, the angel reappeared to St. Joseph and told him he might now return to the land of Israel, because they who had sought the life of the divine Child were dead. How joyfully this message must have been received by the Holy Family! Yet it was a discreet and humble joy, out of deference to divine Providence, which had ordained the flight and the sojourn as well as the return. The angel had not indicated in precisely which part of the land of Israel Joseph was to establish his home. It seems to have been his intention at first to settle in Bethlehem; but, hearing that Archelaus, the cruelest of Herod's sons had succeeded his father as ruler of Judea, Joseph chose the town of Nazareth in Galilee. Here Jesus was to live for the remainder of His hidden life. The marvels of His public ministry tend to make us assign to these hidden years merely the value of a prelude. Yet, its duration and its meaning for us give to the hidden life a special importance. We need examples more than instruc-

tion; and not examples which we could never follow, but simple, ordinary ones, such as Jesus gave us at Nazareth during those years which have been rightly termed "the great school of the Christian life."

O Jesus, help me to be contented with the circumstances in which You have placed me, and yet be always disposed to obey readily any further manifestations of Your divine will. I resolve to abandon myself now and always to Your divine providence; for You have assured me that if I seek first Your kingdom and Your justice, all other goods will be added to me. Grant me the grace to keep my resolution.

JANUARY 12

The Child Jesus in the Temple



"How is it that ye sought me? Knew ye not that I must needs be in my Father's House?" (Lk. 2:49.)

In these words, accompanied, surely, by an affectionate smile, Jesus reminds Mary and Joseph of His divine Sonship. "Why did you not know where to find me?" He says in effect: "Where would a child be but in his father's house?"

O Jesus grant me the grace of preferring to love and serve You, whatever may be the cost to my natural inclinations and desires.

The three days' loss in the Temple is one of the deeper mysteries in the life of our Savior. In this incident we see Him permitting His parents to suffer an agony of worry and anxiety over His absence, while He shows Himself publicly, reveals His wisdom, and evokes admiration. All this is in

JANUARY 12 / 89

striking contrast with the characteristics of the Hidden Life, in which obedience and profound humility are essential and predominant virtues. He had never behaved so to His parents before. With Mary and Joseph as with others Jesus had conducted Himself as a normal child. His divinity was to Mary and Joseph as to us an object not of vision but of faith.

What is the meaning of the words of Jesus on this occasion which, at the time they were spoken, was hidden even from Mary and Joseph; for they learned only gradually what His Messiasship involved? Our Savior wished by His answer to remind them and us that besides His Mother and His duties to her, He had a Father who was God and that His first duty was to obey the will of His Father and fulfill the mission confided to Him. Now, this will of the Father and this mission were the glory of the Father and the salvation of mankind by the revelation of the Son. *"My food is to do the will of him who sent me, to accomplish his work,"* Jesus will say later, in His public life; and again, *"For this is the will of my Father who sent me, that whoever beholds the Son, and believes in him, shall have everlasting life, and I will raise him up on the last day."*

If, therefore, Jesus remained in Jerusalem, if He showed Himself in the Temple, it was because He willed to grant a new manifestation of Himself. The revelation of Jesus in this mystery is particularly important in that it was the first that He personally gave of Himself. Before, others had testified to Him: Elizabeth, the angels, the shepherds, the Magi, Simeon; but here He testified to Himself. Again, the revelation was made in the presence of the official custodians of the Law, where Jesus was manifested as a Doctor even among the doctors. He was not seated among the auditors and disciples. The enraptured doctors gave Him a place in

their circle, a remarkable circumstance when one remembers the prestige enjoyed by the doctors of the Law at this time.

O Jesus, grant me the grace always to respond to You, when You will, as You will, where You will, with perfect readiness and generosity. Help me to understand Your answer to Mary and Joseph, so that I may regulate all my relations with others according to the love and submission I owe to You.

JANUARY 13

*The Obedience of the Child Jesus to
Mary and Joseph*



“And he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them” (Lk. 2:51).

St. Luke states formally and even insistently that our Savior's life during the hidden years at Nazareth was a life of obedience. Divine Savior, grant me the grace of always obeying meritoriously.

The apocryphal writings abound in stories of the miraculous and wonderful events that filled the period of our Savior's hidden life. The Gospel, however, speaks explicitly only of the obedience He practiced during this time. Evidently, we are to infer that during the long period of the hidden life, Jesus willed only to obey, and this with the most perfect submission. He obeyed the will of His parents exteriorly and interiorly, with the greatest promptness, joy, and graciousness, because Mary and Joseph held for Him the place of God. The esteem of the God-Man for obedience

JANUARY 13 / 91

and the attachment of His whole soul to it, as it were, was surely the great marvel of His life; and the wonder of it is summed up in the words, He *was subject to them*.

For who is it whom we contemplate in this life of dependence? It is the Creator of heaven and earth, the Master of the universe, whom all creation obeys and before whom the angelic hosts tremble with awe. Assuredly, neither Mary nor Joseph possessed wisdom and virtue equal to His, but they held the place of His Father. Moreover, He obeyed them not only with full submission, but in all things without exception, in quite unimportant matters for the most part. As a child He helped His Mother in the care of their home, and then as He grew older He assisted St. Joseph in his trade of carpentry.

Obedience is the law of life from which no one is exempt. We may change our masters and substitute usurpers for legitimate rulers. We may become slaves of our feelings and whims, under the delusion that we are liberating ourselves, but always and everywhere we obey. It was to teach us to obey well that Jesus set us an example of thirty years' duration. This was not time lost, since He was giving us the most useful of lessons. During the period of youth and vigor, when men are most tempted by desires of independence, Jesus made it His glory to live in submission. Obedience is a very special, a unique, source of merit. For when in all things we see God and in all things obey God, out of love, we perform our actions in the most meritorious way possible. The material value of the act is of little consequence. Actions that are performed at God's command and for love of Him are, in reality, the only great actions. The most humble lives, if they are lived in obedience, are sublime. By the least of His actions in Nazareth Jesus could have accomplished our

redemption as truly as by His death on the cross; for that which constituted the merit of those acts as well as of His death was the fact that God willed them.

“O Lord God, King of heaven and earth, may it please Thee this day to hallow, rule, and govern our hearts and our bodies, our thoughts, our words, and our works, according to Thy law and in the doing of Thy commandments, that we, being helped by Thee, may here and hereafter worthily be saved and delivered by Thee, O Savior of the world, who livest and reignest for ever and ever” (Roman Breviary).

JANUARY 14

Growth in Wisdom, Age, and Grace



“And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and grace before God and men” (Lk. 2:52).

In Jesus we distinguish divine wisdom which could not increase, but which was manifested in Him more and more as He advanced in age; supernatural wisdom, which increased as His merits increased before God; and natural wisdom, which developed in the normal human way through the acquisition of experimental knowledge. Jesus advanced in grace by manifesting ever greater effects of the grace that was in Him.

O Jesus, grant that I may reach the degree of perfection You will for me.

Except for His natural wisdom, the progress of the Child Jesus in knowledge had to do with His exterior development, in the sense that our Savior revealed outwardly, according

JANUARY 14 / 93

as He advanced in years, the wisdom that was within Him. He adapted the manifestation of His higher knowledge to the progress of His acquired knowledge. Jesus not only grew thus in wisdom, but He also manifested more and more the sanctity within Him, so that His sacred humanity became externally more and more pleasing to God and men. There was nothing in heaven or on earth that gave God more glory or that was more pleasing in His sight than Jesus His Son living in the silence and obscurity of Nazareth.

The mind of Jesus had no thought apart from God His Father, to whose glory He referred His whole mission in this world. He had no judgments on men and events other than those of the Father, for He said of Himself, "*The things, therefore, that I speak, I speak as the Father has bidden me.*" The soul of Jesus thus absorbed in promoting the Father's glory and doing His will was the sanctuary of all virtues, wherein dwelt *the fullness of the Godhead bodily*. "He was sovereignly beautiful," says St. Augustine, speaking of the interior beauty of Jesus, "in all the stages of His life: beautiful in Mary's womb, beautiful in His parents' arms, beautiful in His miracles, beautiful on the cross and in death, beautiful in the tomb and in His resurrection."

And as the soul of Jesus gained more and more the favor of God, so His exterior aspect and conduct mirrored faithfully the progress of His soul. On His countenance was reflected majesty full of sweetness. When He spoke, all men of good will were struck by the words of grace and wisdom that fell from His lips. There was the greatest recollection, modesty, and captivating charm in His whole person. Although He spent most of His time with men of coarse manners, He was ever courteous, charitable, humble, and grateful, ever considerate and helpful, especially toward His

Apostles. He instructed them with patience and reproved them with gentle firmness. And in the work of His apostolate, what tenderness and compassion He showed for the poor, the sick and afflicted, the children! Jesus Christ is our Model. Let us try to conform ourselves to Him in body and soul. Thus we shall realize the aim of our holy vocation and also win others to Christ by making virtue attractive to them. We should ask this grace for all the members of our Congregation through the intercession of Mary and Joseph, the two perfect imitators of Jesus.

I adore You, O Jesus, in all the stages of Your growth. I adore the lowliness to which You reduced Yourself for love of us. I ask the grace of advancing in all Your virtues before God and men. Above all, grant me a heart like Yours. My heart does not know how to love; it is not distressed at the thought of men's ingratitude to You and of its own sins. Change it, good Jesus, and make it worthy of You, meek, humble, zealous, loving like Yours.

JANUARY 15

St. Joseph, Head of the Holy Family



“When Mary his mother had been betrothed to Joseph, she was found, before they came together, to be with child by the Holy Spirit” (Mt. 1:18).

The betrothal of Mary and Joseph was a true alliance. By it Joseph became before the law the father of our Savior, and Mary was given a protector and spouse of her virginity.

St. Joseph, dear guardian of Mary, obtain for me the grace of perfect fidelity to my vocation.

JANUARY 15 / 95

The vocation of St. Joseph was to be, according to the law, the father of our Savior. This was his special role and at the same time his most glorious title. To bear the responsibility of clothing and feeding the Incarnate God was an unspeakable privilege for a mortal man. It must have been a spectacle to create envy in the celestial court to see the God before whose throne they trembled as they adored, sitting and eating at a poor table on earth between Mary and Joseph. One cannot even feebly conceive of those meals. One cannot begin to imagine the conversations that were the outward manifestation of the admirable accord, the ravishing union of hearts in this visible created trinity.

But the vocation of St. Joseph required great fidelity and complete self-abnegation. St. Joseph was and remains the saint of the Holy Infancy; and this infancy of Jesus was for him the occasion often of great pain and weariness. It brought upon him much persecution and very little honor from the world. His role was to veil before the eyes of men the great mystery of divine omnipotence. No ray of the glory of our Savior's public life illumined those years spent in the obscurity of Nazareth. But by the great heart of St. Joseph all the privations, hardships, and labors of his life were welcomed with the most ardent love. We could never comprehend the love that was in the heart of Joseph for Jesus and Mary. The heavenly Father of whom St. Joseph was the earthly representative had imparted to him something of His own love for His Son and for Mary. Some spiritual writers have even affirmed that St. Joseph died consumed by the very ardor of his love.

Let us thank St. Joseph for the good example he has given us of fidelity to our vocation and for his faithful care of Jesus and Mary. His mission itself should strengthen our

trust in him. He was appointed to be a father, and in his virtues—calm strength, faithfulness, self-forgetting love—we see the perfect expression of fatherliness. Like Jesus and Mary we can safely entrust all our cares to St. Joseph. Whatever he takes under his protection will surely receive the blessing of God, for has not God Himself placed St. Joseph over His whole earthly kingdom by making him Protector of the universal Church? Furthermore, we of the Congregation of the Holy Cross should go to Joseph with exceptional confidence and filial love, since he is the special patron of our beloved community.

O chaste Spouse of the Virgin Mary and Foster Father of my Savior, with fullest confidence I invoke you on behalf of the priests, brothers, and sisters, who have the honor of belonging to a community of which you are the honored protector. Make us more worthy of you, of your divine Son, and of our own high vocation. I implore, also, for the young who are placed in our care the grace to imitate your spotless purity and perfect obedience. Be always our defender and father; and when the moment of death comes, when our souls are about to quit the body, show yourself to us, O St. Joseph, as our advocate before our Judge, and refresh our dying eyes with your dear presence.

JANUARY 16

Jesus, the Laborer



“Is not this the carpenter’s son?” (Mt. 13:55)

The hidden life of our Savior was also a life of humble obscurity and toil.

O Jesus help me to make my values conformable to yours.

JANUARY 16 / 97

God loved the Holy Family more than anything else in heaven or on earth, but He did not exempt its members from labor and anxiety. Providence kept a special watch over the little house of Nazareth, but its inhabitants were not spared their difficulties and hardships. They were not fed by a raven, as the prophet Eliseus had been. Joseph had to work for their daily bread and, after his death, Jesus earned a livelihood for His Mother and Himself by following His foster father's trade. He knew the feeling of weariness after a day's labor; He knew what it was to earn one's bread in the sweat of one's brow. Moreover, as a poor laboring man, He was exposed also to the treatment that is commonly given the lowly and the poor. What a spectacle to the eyes of faith is the poverty and obscurity of the Word made flesh! The world went on as usual with its business. The Roman empire was extending and fortifying its boundaries; great battles were being waged, powerful alliances contracted; famous orators and poets were winning world-wide acclaim, and the Incarnate Son of the true God took no part in it all. Yet it was as a preparation for the spread of His Gospel and the world-wide establishment of His Church that all these spectacular events were taking place.

To all whose lot it is to work at humble tasks, Jesus has shown the value of these obscure duties; nor should we forget that it was in these lowly circumstances that He advanced in wisdom and grace. The hidden life is a great school of Christian progress. While in Jesus this progress was part of the mystery of the God-Man, infinitely perfect from His conception, in us it will truly lead to sanctity if we imitate the obedient and laborious life that Jesus led. The example of the Savior makes of work, even the humblest and most ordinary work, a source of spiritual progress in

The Interior Life of Mary



“And his mother kept all these things carefully in her heart”
(Lk. 2:51).

The *things* that Mary kept in her heart were all the marvelous events of our Lord's life. Her role in the holy infancy and the hidden life was twofold. As His Mother she served our Savior and cared for His needs; as His creature she adored her God and contemplated His infinite perfections.

Mother Mary, help me to grow in the interior life.

The Gospel sums up the infancy and childhood of our Savior in a few lines; yet, in reality, the Incarnation, the expectation of the birth of Jesus, the care of His needs as Child, Youth, and Man covered months and years. Mary was everything to Jesus; she fed Him, clothed Him, and in His infancy lulled Him to sleep on her breast. She was His constant companion and, since we may rightly suppose that God placed in the heart of Mary all the love and tenderness that humanity owed the Savior, her adoring and devoted care of Him is to be reverently contemplated rather than understood. But even more precious than her external role was Mary's interior mission of spiritual participation in the mysteries of the holy infancy and the hidden life. Mary followed the course of these mysteries intently; she impressed deeply upon her memory, understanding, and heart all their outward circumstances. There is nothing more open to all impressions touching her child nor more retentive of these

time and of success in eternity. It is not difficult to understand, therefore, why Jesus willed to pass so many years in obscurity, labor, and obedience. This was a more important work than to go about the world preaching the Gospel; He first had to practice the Gospel — in His hidden life — which He was one day to preach. Human pride will never understand such a life and, consequently, will never understand Jesus. We contemplate at Nazareth Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, busy at their daily tasks and seeming to have no other horizon and ideal except the duties of their state. Our vocation is to relive the life of the Holy Family on earth and to manifest to the world the love and devotedness of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. To what marvels of sanctity our community would give rise if we could succeed in reproducing the life of Jesus Christ, especially His hidden life at Nazareth, which was so rich in lessons for us!

Divine Master, teach me to pray and work and take my rest, all in the dispositions that were Yours during Your life on earth. Help me to be contented and at peace wherever Your providence places me and whatever work You give me to do. Make me understand that the value of my labors is in the spirit and intention with which I accomplish them. Grant me the grace, O Jesus, of imitating You in this life, that I may share Your felicity for all eternity.

years! Had our Savior during His sojourn on earth done nothing else except sanctify His Mother, the stupendous grandeur of her holiness would have amply justified His coming.

O Mary, I venerate you for the high sanctity to which you were raised in being intimately associated with Jesus throughout so many years, and from my heart I thank you for all you did for Him and for us during His infancy and hidden life. Help me to imitate you in meditating upon the mysteries of the life of Jesus. Move my will as I ponder them, so that both interiorly and exteriorly I may become more and more like you.

JANUARY 18

Jesus, Our Hidden God



“Verily thou art a hidden God, the God of Israel, the Savior”
(Isa. 45:15).

Not only at Nazareth, but throughout His earthly life, Jesus was
a hidden God.

Divine Savior, teach me how to live hidden in God with You.

The God of glory, *in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*, concealed Himself, first, under the veil of human nature. Then, He hid Himself in the womb of the Virgin Mary, covering the miracle of His conception by a most holy marriage. His presence was made known to John the Baptist in his mother's womb, not directly, but through the salutation of Mary. Except for the shepherds who adored Him in the stable-cave of Bethlehem, the whole world

impressions than the heart of a mother. And the heart of this Mother? Could these mysteries have been more fully and surely preserved or with a more accurate and living remembrance than in Mary's heart? Always she found new delights as she pondered them and compared them with one another, striving to sound their mysterious depths and measure their sublime heights.

Ever present to her gaze, living before her eyes was the One who formed the constant object of her thoughts. Nothing concerning Him escaped her attention. Our Lady knew that no least detail of our Savior's life could be termed insignificant. Everything in Him was divine: each footstep, each breath, each slightest movement or thought was worthy of the adoration of angels and men. In the divine face Mary contemplated the charms of infancy, the grace of youth, the serious calm of manhood. In every fleeting expression she discerned the mystery of God, the divinity in the humanity, the infinite and eternal in time, omnipotence and majesty in weakness and need. And as she followed the progress of Jesus' growth, what joy for Mary to observe how He resembled her in His facial features, in His whole appearance, even in His manner!

With regard to herself, each word, gesture, and look of the Savior was for Mary a new advance in holiness and purity. It is certain that in spending so many years in Nazareth Jesus willed among other things to advance the perfection of His holy Mother, and justly so. Mary is the noblest and highest among creatures and the good seed in her always yielded a hundredfold. What power, what riches of holiness must there have been for Mary in the daily glances, the sweet conversations, the numberless attentions, and the constant care she lavished upon Jesus during thirty

His resurrection, He showed Himself secretly and as if in passing, not to His enemies, whose confusion at the apparition would have sealed His triumph, but to the holy women and the Apostles and disciples. Finally, a cloud took Him from their sight and from then on He has remained hidden in our tabernacles where His presence will continue until the end of time. There He must frequently endure blasphemy and indifference, but His lightnings do not flash out; He does not make us feel His power.

O Jesus, help me to seek and desire always and everywhere to live *hidden in God* with You. Grant me the grace to bear misunderstanding and contempt with patience and even with joy, for love of You and in order that I may imitate You more closely.

JANUARY 19

The Little Virtues



"This indeed is the smallest of all the seeds; but when it grows up it is larger than any herb and becomes a tree" (Mt. 13:32).

In the parable of the mustard seed, our Savior teaches us the secret of spiritual progress.

Divine Savior, grant me the grace of understanding the importance of fidelity in little things.

Fidelity to small duties prepares us for great virtues. Such faithfulness is itself a great virtue. "*He who is faithful in a very little thing,*" says our Savior, "*is faithful also in much.*" How is this true? In the sense that God grants us an

ignored His birth. His childhood also was passed in obscurity. Ordinarily the education received by illustrious persons is known in some detail; but of Jesus only one comment is recorded: "*How does this man come by learning, since he has not studied?*" During the period of His childhood, He was seen only once in public, in the midst of the doctors of the Law, when He was twelve years old; but still the Gospel does not say that He taught. He listened, He asked questions, as a boy properly should; *and all who were listening to him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.* Then, after this brief flash of the light of His wisdom, He retired again, as the sun behind a cloud, into voluntary obscurity so profound that His fellow countrymen knew nothing more remarkable of Him than that He was a carpenter's son and the child of Mary. Nathanael, who lived at Cana, only a few miles from Nazareth, appears not to have heard of Jesus before being introduced to Him by Philip.

Jesus continued to be hidden even during His public life. Although He was the Light of the world, the world, always hostile to light which reveals its wickedness, hastened to obscure the Sun of Justice by the black vapors of calumny. Amid the very prodigies that revealed His divinity, Jesus remained still *a hidden God*. "He is a prophet," said some. "He is a deceiver"; "He is the Christ"; "He is not the Christ"; "He is not of God, because He performs miracles on the Sabbath"; "He is a Samaritan and a blasphemer"; "He is possessed by a devil." And never was the Savior of the world more hidden than in His "hour." Then was He truly *the last of men, a worm and no man*. At the end, as if God were no longer His Father, He cried out, "*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*" Then He was covered by the shadows of death and concealed in the tomb. After

they knew that it would have been blind presumption to aspire to the title of "martyr" before they had worthily born that of "Christian."

O Jesus, help me to understand the value in Your sight of worthy attention to the duties of every moment. Let me see Your will in the least points of Rule and in the smallest prescriptions of my Superiors; and deign to grant me the strength I need to persevere in the faithful observance of them.

JANUARY 20

Advantages in the Little Virtues



"He has done all things well" (Mk. 7:37).

Contemplate Jesus practicing the virtues of mortification, humility, and charity in His hidden life.

Divine Savior, help me to perform all my actions, even the least, in union with Your dispositions during Your life on earth.

The advantages of virtue practiced in ordinary actions over that exercised in more striking ones comes from the fact that the former usually require a more constant mortification, a more solid humility, and purer charity. The occasions of practicing virtue on the more spectacular levels rarely present themselves. To be stripped of one's possessions, to sacrifice oneself for an enemy, to confess Christ in the face of persecution are not actions of every day. But one can always perform the duty of the present moment purely for God.

One can always bear with a neighbor's faults and adapt oneself to a difficult temperament, or avoid speaking ill of

increase of His help in proportion to our zeal in pleasing Him by the perfect fulfillment of small obligations. Grace becoming more abundant, courage also is increased; and courage, supported by watchfulness and fervor, conducts us to heroic virtue. How splendid is the prospect thus opened before the religious soul! If all of her life is an uninterrupted succession of acts of fidelity, then all of her life will be growth in merit; and in the course even of several years consecrated to such faithful observance, what a store, what an abundance of merits will she not have acquired for her eternal glory! God never allows Himself to be outdone in generosity. The more exact we are in accomplishing His will, even in very small matters, the more lavish He is with His favors. No action performed to please Him alone ever fails to receive its reward of added grace; and each grace draws after it a greater one, which, being received with profit, merits another. Thus, from day to day, even from moment to moment, fidelity causes grace to increase.

Then, indeed, shall we go *from strength to strength*. The prompt, constant, and universal fidelity to what is prescribed daily, monthly, and yearly will make of us so many victims of pure love, so many living hosts; and how I would bless the divine mercy for this! Our progress will be the more rapid as grace increases our courage. Think of the heroic constancy of the martyrs, who laughed at the cruelty of tyrants and scorned the fury of their persecutors. Some of them even ran to meet suffering and death with ardent desire. Whence came their indomitable courage? Assuredly, it was not their first exercise of virtue. A thousand lesser victories won over themselves had prepared them for their final triumph. They knew that they would have tempted God in offering themselves to torture before they were ready;

past infidelities, that I may one day hear from Your lips the blessed words: "Good and faithful servant, because you have been faithful in little things, I will place you over greater ones. Enter into the joy of your Lord."

JANUARY 21

Progress Through the Little Virtues



"They go from strength to strength" (Ps. 83:8).

The practice of virtue in small matters can lead to eminent virtue; besides, it is more likely to be motivated by a pure intention than virtue exercised in works of greater exterior importance.

O Jesus, enlighten me by Your grace that I may recognize my negligence.

In the natural order the union of a thousand harmonious details produces the perfect work. In the order of grace, likewise, the assemblage of numberless tiny acts of virtue can result in consummate holiness. The merit of the valiant woman described in the Book of Proverbs consists chiefly in the care and attention with which she fulfilled her ordinary domestic duties. The august Virgin Mary herself arrived at the plenitude of perfection by performing countless small acts of ordinary virtue, if one considers them only in themselves; yet their accumulation raised her to the highest sanctity. One who makes it a rule never to be careless in the service of God is thereby preserved from many illusions and errors. The suggestions of pride and self-love find her ever on guard and nothing escapes her notice, because she has accustomed

others and good of oneself. We are frequently in a position to forgive those who have offended us and to render service to persons for whom we feel no natural attraction. Often we have occasion to refrain from causing others to suffer on our account, or to bear in silence and in a spirit of penance physical pain or discomfort, to endure without complaint any contradiction or unpleasantness associated with our work, to reply kindly to those who ask indiscreet or offensive questions, to receive the rejection of our help with gentleness and a favor with gratitude. We are always able to hold a low opinion of ourselves, to yield gladly to our inferiors, to renounce our own views, plans, even our own judgments, desires, affections, repugnances; to give up comfort, satisfaction, sensuality—in a word, we can, at any moment renounce self. But all this implies great mortification.

In the virtuous performance of small actions there is also a more solid humility, for the desire of notice and esteem are almost always present in the performance of conspicuous deeds. Then too, there is the hidden snare of being secretly convinced of one's own merit, or of cherishing an inner complacency in one's allegedly superior qualities. But in the case of the little virtues, presumption and vanity have no place, since small actions pass without acclaim and have only limited worth when taken singly or in themselves. Again, in the performance of great actions we are powerfully stimulated by the circumstances, which excite us and raise us above ourselves, so that exceptional force is thereby imparted to the will. But in the common ordinary duties there is no external stimulation and, consequently, our natural cravings do not find satisfaction in them. Grace alone moves us to act and only the love of God keeps us faithful.

O my God, I humbly promise to repair by great exactitude all my

Spirit, our first beginning and our last end, since You have made us after Your own image and likeness, grant that all the thoughts of our minds, all the words of our tongues, all the affections of our hearts, and all our actions may be always conformed to Your holy will; to the end that after having seen You here below in appearance and in a dark manner by the means of faith, we may come at last to contemplate You face-to-face in the perfect possession of You forever in paradise" (*Raccolta*).

JANUARY 22

Purity of Intention



"Take heed not to practise your good before men, in order to be seen by them; otherwise you shall have no reward with your Father in heaven" (Mt. 6:1).

In the second section of the Sermon on the Mount, our Savior teaches that good works must be done to please God alone and not to attract the attention of men.

Good Jesus, deliver me entirely from the spirit of vainglory.

The germ of vainglory is in all men; the least favorable opportunity develops it and there is no one of us in whom its pernicious roots do not extend more or less, or in whom its bitter fruits do not easily spring up. No greater service could be done our community than that this universal malady be cured and our members raised forever beyond the suggestions of self-love. So I say to you, my dearly beloved, as I have often said to myself, with all the zeal I have for our happiness in eternity, *Let us not become desirous of*

herself to consider even her least duties important. On the other hand, the scorn or neglect of little things exposes one to serious falls. No one, St. Bernard tells us, becomes wicked all at once. At first there is relaxation in matters seemingly of little importance; then fervor cools; and at length the soul is attacked by a strong temptation and succumbs. Judas would never have sold his Master if he had resisted his passions in their beginnings. The world may be amused at our attention to apparent trifles—the world which makes so much of small improprieties in matters of etiquette—but let us continue to apply ourselves to serving with meticulous care the good God who is so magnificent in His rewards.

The motive which is likely to prompt such fidelity, moreover, is the highest and most meritorious that can be had; for where less satisfaction is offered to self-love, the intention of pleasing God and of showing Him love and reverence will ordinarily be paramount. "If there is anything great outside of God," remarks St. Basil, "is it not that which is done for Him?" The intention is the life and soul of our actions; their worth before God is measured by the purity of intention with which we perform them. This truth should be most comforting to souls who live hidden and obscure lives, unknown to the world. Yet, too often we forget it and we tend to judge from appearances. We term unimportant actions which may be very great in the eyes of faith; and through the same error in judgment we proclaim as great and heroic that which is, too often, only the expression of pride and ambition. Let us bear in mind that all is lost for heaven which is not done for God; the most vaunted work, if purity of intention is lacking, does not equal the smallest action done solely for God.

"Most Holy Trinity, Godhead indivisible, Father, Son, and Holy

vainglory. Let us not seek after the esteem of men, but, with the assistance of divine grace, root out from our nature, so corrupted by sin, that absurd attachment to praise, that eagerness to curry favor with human judgment. Let us courageously combat this passion, which, by making us lose the merit of our works, paralyzes our ministry among others.

This passion more common, more dangerous, and more frivolous than any other, God has reprov'd by His express word, by the example of His Son, and by the example of all the saints. The teaching of the Gospel is explicit: "*Woe to you when all men speak well of you*"; but, on the contrary, "*Blessed are you when men reproach you, and persecute you, and, speaking falsely, say all manner of evil against you, for my sake.*" St. Bernard says that either it was folly for the Son of God to choose to be the object of opprobrium and contempt, or it is folly for us to seek after human esteem. The Jews were scandalized by Christ's conduct and the Gentiles took it for madness, but it was in reality the wisdom and virtue of God. Mary, the Queen of all the saints, the royal daughter of Juda, was content to remain always in obscurity. St. Paul was a Roman citizen and a man of learning, but in the true Christian spirit he wrote, *If I were still trying to please men, I should not be a servant of Christ*. The Apostles left the court of the Sanhedrin rejoicing that they had been counted worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus. After the Apostles came the martyrs in their thousands, who joyfully suffered the loss of their lives and reputations on this earth, in the belief that they began to be true disciples of Christ when they were humiliated and despised. Then came the solitaries, who concealed the holiness of their lives in deserts and mountain fastnesses; finally, the other saints, of every age and con-

dition, who so feared human esteem as a danger to their humility that they were dismayed when surprised in some action which would lead others to suspect their holiness.

When we see what our Lord Jesus Christ, His holy Mother, the Apostles, and all the saints thought of worldly praise, dare we call ourselves their imitators — we who experience so sweet a feeling when someone gives us honorable mention; we who know so well how to keep that silence which makes pass for true the false praise given us; we who are so quick to excuse ourselves when we are wrongly blamed and who cannot be reproached for the least fault without making reply; we who have such a horror of humiliations, although they are the greatest grace God can give us and the sole means of curing our pride.

O divine Master, grant me the grace not to lose my interior peace when others speak ill of me, whether truly or not. Let me learn to value only what You, my Sovereign Judge, see and approve in me. Then shall the work of my apostolate become really fruitful; because, as Your great servant St. Augustine has said, the more we are emptied of self, the more we are filled with grace, and so the more capable of promoting Your glory and the salvation of souls.

JANUARY 23

The Pearl of Evangelical Holiness



“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls. When he finds a single pearl of great price, he goes and sells all that he has and buys it” (Mt. 13:45, 46).

entering upon the life of the counsels is an effective renunciation of all that we possess, of all our goods; that is, our external possessions by poverty, the goods and pleasures of the body by chastity, and our natural interior possessions, the faculties of the soul, by obedience. But perhaps since the time that we solemnly chose the Savior as our portion and left all to follow Him, we have gradually reclaimed some of our goods: the love of our own ease and of our reputation, for example; or any of the thousand satisfactions craved by self-love and egoism. Our transaction may still be incomplete; perhaps we are in effect renegeing on our original bargain whereby we contracted to pay for this jewel with a complete, not a partial, despoiling of self, by absolute poverty, and by humiliation not only accepted but welcomed.

The evangelical pearl is worth all the sacrifices we could make and far more. We know this, we believe it, but we hesitate before such an exchange. Sometimes, however, God intervenes. In order to force us to purchase His love, He may Himself despoil us of all else. By great trials He may bring us to an understanding of the mystery, the folly, of the cross. Left to ourselves we would shrink from buying the precious pearl, since to obtain it one must give up all. We suffer at first from this force of divine love and we submit to it, perhaps, with tears. So many trials, such a heavy cross, so much deprivation! We may even ask God to spare us anything more; but the day will come when we shall appreciate our good fortune and then how we shall thank God for having enriched us in spite of ourselves!

O my Savior, I thank You profoundly for inspiring me to set out in search of the precious pearl of evangelical holiness by entering the religious state. Happy should I be if, like the merchant in Your parable, I were to desire this pearl ardently enough to

Our Savior here exhorts us to seek and find the pearl of great price which is religious perfection.

Divine Savior, fill me with an efficacious desire to surrender all, that I may purchase the pearl of sanctity.

The value of pearls arises chiefly from their solidity, the unalterable quality of their form, their beauty of sheen and texture. These features well represent the goal of the religious life, which is perfection according to the evangelical counsels. This perfection, like the pearl, is complete and immutable, solid and flawlessly beautiful. Moreover, what our Savior tells us about the acquisition of the pearl in the parable suits admirably the choice and the practice of the religious state. In the preceding parable recorded by St. Matthew, of the treasure hidden in the field, we are not told how the man who found the treasure happened to discover it; but in the case of the pearl Jesus expressly states that the merchant was *in search of fine pearls*. It is an easier matter, indeed, to seek for and to estimate the value of golden treasure than to recognize and properly evaluate fine pearls; for this one must be a specialist, a connoisseur. Likewise, in order to appraise rightly the pearl of evangelical perfection, one must have more light, a keener supernatural sensibility, than is required for the recognition in general of the truths of the Gospel and the Church. Again, a greater force of will and firmer decision are needed to bind oneself to the observance of the counsels than to the keeping of the commandments alone.

Our Savior then tells us that the merchant, having found *a single pearl of great price*, sold all that he possessed in order to buy it. This feature of the parable also bears a special relation to a religious vocation. The necessary condition for

sell all that is mine, all that belongs to self, in order to buy it. Help me to approach nearer every day to the perfection of my state, that finally I may really come to possess the incomparable pearl of sanctity.

JANUARY 24

Exclusive Service



“No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will stand by the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Mt. 6:24).

Our Savior here teaches us that we cannot rise toward Him until we have freed our hearts from the love and service of mammon; that is, from worldly riches and all the other perishable goods of this life.

Lord Jesus, help me to understand better the meaning of total consecration to Your service.

God is our true Master; He is our Beginning and our End; He is our Creator and Redeemer, infinitely good in Himself and infinitely good to us. We came into this world for no other purpose than to serve Him. As religious we have in addition voluntarily bound ourselves by vow to the exclusive and total service of God and to the practical renunciation of the world and the spirit of the world. No one serves the devil for love of the devil; but this enemy of our salvation uses the mammon of this world and the allurements of the flesh to draw souls little by little into his

JANUARY 24 / 115

service and away from God. On countless occasions the alternatives are presented to us; both masters we cannot serve, for they are absolutely opposed to each other. We must choose, and it is this necessity of choice which often disquiets us. We should like to reconcile the service of God with certain easy compromises with our triple enemy: the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Without committing oneself to an outright yielding to temptation one can distribute one's service in several directions, legitimate ones, perhaps, but not really leading to the exclusive service of God which is expressed by the vows of religion. *The unmarried woman, and the virgin*, wrote St. Paul to the Corinthians, *thinks about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy in body and spirit*. The virginal soul who belongs exclusively to God should think only of pleasing Him. She may not content herself with saying "God before all and more than all"; for her the constant cry of the heart must be "God alone!" She must strive to know and serve only one Master and aspire to the enviable poverty of an exclusive love. This is her lifelong work; preservation from a divided allegiance is not secured at once by the oblation of religious profession. The devil disputes with God even the souls of the saints. Judas was among our Savior's constant companions, but even then he was serving another master, to whom finally he sacrificed Jesus. This master was his passions. Our Savior's warning, therefore, is meant for all, for those following the way of the counsels as well as for Christians living in the world. It is only by continual struggle against self and its inordinate cravings that we as religious will be able to deny our allegiance habitually to all other masters and offer it purely and exclusively to God. "Receive, O Lord, all my liberty. Take my memory, my under-

standing, and my entire will. Whatsoever I have or hold, You have given it; I give it all back to You and commit it wholly to be governed by Your will. Your love and Your grace give to me, and I am rich enough and ask for nothing more" (St. Ignatius Loyola).

JANUARY 25

Poverty



"Sell what you have and give alms" (Lk. 12:33).

Our Savior requires that His disciples divest themselves completely of all property without thought of receiving material compensation or profit here below, but with the intention of enriching themselves before God by good works.

Divine Master, let me not fail, through ignorance or indifference, in practicing the poverty I have vowed.

The renunciation of our will in the use of temporal goods is so essential to our vocation that the Church would not recognize as religious those who would make only the vows of obedience and chastity. The practice of poverty, therefore, is indispensable to our state. Poverty is, moreover, a supernatural virtue which is born of faith, nourished by hope, and brought to maturity in the love of Him who said, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit*" and "*Sell what thou hast, and give to the poor . . . and come, follow me.*" We could never complain of the sacrifices demanded by our vow of poverty if we reflected seriously upon what the Gospel tells us of the sacrifices Jesus imposed upon Himself for our

JANUARY 25 / 117

sake. His life of sacrifice extended from the manger which served as His cradle to the cross which was His deathbed. How edifying would be our language and our conduct with regard to poverty, if we kept our eyes always fixed upon our divine Model!

Evangelical poverty means the renunciation of all attachment to material goods from the greatest to the least. The true religious clings to nothing. Are there any among us who are really poor in spirit and in heart, poor in their detachment from all created things, especially as regards their own ease and convenience? Upon such poverty depends the blessing of God upon Holy Cross. But perhaps many of us would be forced to admit that we give with one hand and take back with the other. Self-love is so quick to find excuses which could justify relaxation in this regard. It winds in and out of all we do like a serpent, hiding when we grow suspicious of it. It assumes all manner of forms and repays itself in small ways for the great sacrifices we have had the courage to make in spite of it. We sometimes cling tenaciously to something hardly worth naming, but something, nevertheless, which shows clearly how much alive nature still is. We will want for nothing; we feel the least privation and take care to arrange everything to our liking. How we deceive ourselves and how illogical we are!

This is not the poverty which the Rule presents to us; this is not the ideal of the early founders of religious orders. They made themselves as poor by sacrifice as the poor in the world are by necessity. They bore privation and austerity with submission and joy, enduring cold and heat, keeping silence, praying much and laboring hard. Ah, this is indeed to practice the poverty and the penitential life of Jesus Christ! This is that happy self-denial which begets the peace

and liberty of the children of God. Blessed are they who understand it and still more blessed are they who open their hearts to this evangelical poverty.

O my God, make us love poverty because it is indispensable to our religious life; make us love it because through the practice of evangelical poverty we merit a special share in the first of Your beatitudes. Keep continually before our minds the memory of Your cross and sufferings; help us to understand clearly that upon our observance of poverty according to Your spirit depends the prosperity of the Congregation of Holy Cross, the progress of each of us in Your love, and our perseverance in the spirit of our holy vocation.

JANUARY 26

Trust in Divine Providence



“Therefore I say to you, do not be anxious for your life, what you shall eat; nor yet for your body, what you shall put on” (Mt. 6:25).

All Christians should live in the spirit of this precept of our Savior, but for those whose apostolic life is based on the practice of evangelical poverty, these words are to be taken in a full and literal sense.

O my God, teach me how to unite the attention that Your law requires me to give to temporal things with complete trust in Your Fatherly care of me.

If we have given ourselves and all that is ours sincerely and totally to God, we may abandon ourselves with absolute confidence to His divine providence. This providence may

JANUARY 26 / 119

test us, but it will not desert us. It will not always give us at our desire the good things of this earth, but we shall certainly obtain from it all that is necessary. "*Look at the birds of the air,*" says our Savior, "*they do not sow, or reap, or gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are not you of much more value than they? . . . See how the lilies of the field grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed like one of these.*" The lilies of the field, which today are alive and tomorrow are thrown into the oven, not only grow effortlessly under the care of our Father, but to this growth that is necessary for them is added a beauty of purple, gold, and azure that excels all the splendors of Solomon in his glory. "*How much more you, O you of little faith!*" Could our Savior have portrayed for us in a more ravishing and moving manner the very Heart of God, His own Heart, filled with tender solicitude for all His creatures, but especially for His human children?

This counsel of our Savior does not, of course, exempt man from the divine decree: *In the sweat of your face shall you eat bread.* We are not dispensed from the law of work, mental and physical, which remains as a fundamental obligation for every Christian. The birds of the air have their own ingenious ways of finding their food and Heaven seconds their efforts. It will be the same for the Christian on two conditions which Jesus places before us in this instruction: we are not to live in anxiety and preoccupation over our temporal needs, and we are to set our hearts free from attachment to the goods of this life. "*Do not be anxious about tomorrow; for tomorrow will have anxieties of its own. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble,*" Jesus tells us. Then to this counsel He adds the positive precept: "*Seek first the*

Chastity



“And the unmarried woman, and the virgin, thinks about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy in body and in spirit” (1 Cor. 7:34).

Virginal integrity is only the first and basic requirement of the evangelical counsel of chastity; full supernatural observance of our vow of chastity applies also to affections, words, and actions.

Divine Savior; grant me the grace to preserve lifelong virginal purity in thought, word, and deed.

Of our three vows chastity is the most glorious, but it is also the most fragile; and to keep it perfectly until death is a difficult achievement. In order to reach and to persevere in the full accomplishment of this vow it is necessary for us to submit more and more completely to the law of supernatural love, which refers all to God and undertakes and suffers all for His glory. This means that we must not limit ourselves to the wearing of the religious habit, the garb of virginity. Our change of dress should lead to the reproducing of the sentiments and the manner of Jesus in our souls and our exterior conduct, according to St. Paul's injunction: *Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and as for the flesh, take no thought for its lusts.*

Jacob, clothed by his mother in Esau's garments, with the skin of a kid placed on his neck and hands, obtained the blessings of his father. Applying this ruse to the moral order, we shall be able to win grace and favor from our heavenly

kingdom of God and his justice, and all these things shall be given you besides."

By the *kingdom of God* we are to understand heaven and all that leads us there, that is, the salvation of our souls; also, in a higher, apostolic sense, the salvation of the souls of others and the spread of the Church. If we occupy ourselves with God's interests, He will concern Himself with ours. "*When I sent you forth without purse or wallet or sandals, did you lack anything?*" asked our Savior of His disciples, and they answered "*Nothing.*" It is always so for those who work for God, forgetting their personal interests. Furthermore, these laborers are easily satisfied; *having food and sufficient clothing, with these let us be content*, wrote St. Paul to St. Timothy. If we sincerely reflect upon our Savior's words in this instruction, how could we ever again entertain fearful and anxious thoughts about the present or the future?

O my God, grant me a strong filial confidence in Your paternal bounty and deign to keep this trust in Your providence unshaken throughout all the trials that You may will to send me. In all that I think and say and do, let me seek first the kingdom of heaven, trusting to Your Fatherly goodness for the rest. *Keep me as the apple of Your eye; hide me in the shadow of Your wings.*

ence to rule and the poverty of the common life act as effective safeguards to chastity.

O Jesus, with Your grace I shall seek all my joy of love in You who has promised heaven and the sight of Yourself to the clean of heart. Your best beloved on earth were a virgin Mother, a virgin Foster Father, and a virgin Disciple. Through the power of the chaste and holy names of Mary and Joseph and by the intercession of St. John the Beloved, I hope to obtain from You, O most pure Lamb of God, a purity like theirs and a place among the virgin throng who follow You in heaven.

JANUARY 28

Our Lady, Queen of Virgins



“Queen of Virgins, pray for us” (invocation from the Litany of Loreto).

Mary is Queen of Virgins because she possessed the virtue of virginity in the most eminent degree and preserved it in the conception, the birth, and after the birth of our Savior.

O Virgin Mother Mary, show me how to imitate you in perfect virginal integrity and spiritual motherhood.

In the fourth century St. Ephrem, called “the harp of the Holy Spirit,” praised the Virgin Mother of God in the most sublime and eloquent terms. In his panegyric of Mary he acclaimed her as “all-pure, all-immaculate, all-stainless, all-undefiled, all-blameless, all-worthy of praise, all-incorrupt.” For the infinitely pure God in whose sight *even the moon is not bright, and the stars are not clear*, all must be pure.

Father only by putting on the *new man*, that is, our Lord Jesus Christ. This we do, not as an artifice, however, but in obedience to the Father's will; and it is our Elder Brother Jesus Himself who clothes us with His virtues and merits. Our whole life should have for its end the assimilating of the thoughts, judgments, desires, and actions of Jesus Christ so perfectly that we can say with the great Apostle, *It is no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me*. This union makes us live the very life of Jesus; it restores all that we lost in Adam and makes us one moral person with the Savior. By it our actions gain for us supernatural merit and the right to eternal glory. How the soul thrills with joy at this thought! Could we ever allow our bodies, thus united with Christ and daily nourished by His most sacred Body, the slightest contact with impurity? Could we ever divide a heart that is one with His between Him and a creature?

But the vow of chastity, while it brings powerful graces to aid us in putting on Christ, it does not divest us of concupiscence. The grace that is given us to keep this vow is not meant to spare us the necessity of struggle and vigilance. To observe lifelong continence, lifelong watchfulness and prayer are needed; watchfulness that is expressed in a prudent distrust of self and the avoidance of occasions of temptation, prayer that is humble, frequent, and sincere. It is better to flee from temptations against chastity than to struggle with them, because our corrupt nature is so strongly inclined to yield in this kind of combat; the sure way to keep our treasure is to run away with it. No day should pass that we do not ask God with all our hearts for grace to observe perfectly our vow of chastity; and along with our prayer we should practice that temperance in all things which is prescribed by our vow of poverty. The vows, indeed, supplement one another, for obedi-

in the order of nature. To transmit the life of God as Mary did and continues to do, we must have it ourselves and desire to possess it in ever greater fullness. The first requirement in preparing ourselves and others for increased gifts of grace is the deepening of our capacity for self-giving. Mary never sought to draw others to herself; and if we are self-seeking we shall be, like Eve, only a source of ruin for ourselves and others. But if we give to our utmost, we shall receive a hundredfold in the increased power for good, in giving birth to Jesus in our own souls, and in preparing the way for the entrance of His grace into the souls of others. Mary appeared to renounce the power of transmitting life, yet she became the source of life for every child of Adam; she appeared to renounce a family, yet all generations invoke her as their Mother.

O Queen of all the virgin choir,
Enthroned above the starry sky!
Who with thy bosom's milk didst feed
Thy own Creator, Lord most high.

What man had lost in hapless Eve,
Thy sacred womb to man restores,
Thou to the wretched here below
Hast opened heaven's eternal doors.

Hail, O refulgent Hall of light!
Hail, Gate august of heaven's high King!
Through thee redeemed to endless life,
Thy praise let all the nations sing

O Jesu, born of Virgin bright,
Immortal glory be to Thee;
Praise to the Father infinite
And Holy Ghost eternally.

The materials used for the service of God in Solomon's temple were prescribed to be of the finest and purest: the finest gold, the purest oil, pure incense, pure myrrh. These are all only types of Mary, the Virgin of virgins, to whom the Church applies the words of the Book of Wisdom: *Nought that is sullied enters into her. For she is the refulgence of eternal light, the spotless mirror of the power of God.* The fruitfulness of Mary's example, furthermore, has espoused to Christ as virgin brides multitudes of women in every age of the Church.

But what is Mary's present role with regard to these souls whom the Church calls "spouses of Christ"? Not only is she "Keeper of our virginity," as she is invoked by St. Gertrude, but she is also, and pre-eminently, our inspiration and model. We are called to reproduce Mary's virtue and to continue in some measure her work for Jesus and for souls. The virtue of virginity implies not only integrity of body and cleanness of heart, but also fruitfulness. To live the full virginal life we must, like Mary, give life; for our God is the God of the living and therefore everything relating to Him must bear the impress of life. We are to aspire to a spiritual maternity, a higher fertility, which is an image of Mary's, and which like hers is extended to all who are in need of spiritual care. It is in this sense that the words of the Sovereign Judge will bring us either joy or remorse on the last day, when He will say to those on His right hand, *"I was hungry and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; naked and you covered me; sick and you visited me; I was in prison and you came to me."*

In order to fulfill this mission we must possess in the order of grace what corresponds to the power of fecundity

Obedience



“It is the Lord!” (Jn. 21:7)

As the Beloved Disciple knew and answered the voice of his risen Master before He was recognized by the others, so we should respond to the divine will in the voice of our Superiors. Lord Jesus, teach me to understand and practice perfect religious obedience.

The good religious says to herself: “Whatever may be the natural competence of the one who has authority over me, even though she seem to me not to have the light and experience necessary for the office she holds, yet it is the Lord who speaks to me through her. Whether she is young or old, commendable or not for her spirit or her talents, *it is the Lord*. Even if she is imprudent, unfair, insincere, indiscreet, capricious, *it is the Lord* and I shall obey.” Such a religious, inspired by supernatural faith and love, rejects and disowns all the unworthy motives which might rob her of the merit of obedience: all human respect, all natural considerations, all self-interest. Following the counsel of the prince of the Apostles, she purifies her soul more and more by her *obedience to charity*. O may divine charity be the sole motive and principle of our submission! Then, obeying only to please the Lord, we shall also lighten our Superior’s burden and edify our brethren.

Besides purity of intention, religious obedience should possess the quality of promptness. To postpone our obedience is

clearly to refuse it for as long as the delay lasts; it is to do the work of God negligently and to resist grace. How could we act so toward the great Master we serve! We should obey like the arrow which, once released from the bow, flies swift and straight to the mark. The sound of the bell, the Superior's voice, are a divine summons. "*The Master . . . calls thee,*" said Martha to her sister Mary, and *as soon as she heard this she rose quickly and came to him.*

Religious obedience is also unreserved; it extends to all matters, all places, and all times. It is given in secret as in public, in little things as in great, in silence as in recreation, in rest as in labor, in prayer as in mortification, in health as in sickness. If we obey like this we truly live according to the Rule and we practice the abnegation that is indispensable to a disciple of Jesus Christ; for obedience that is without reserve means constant denial of self-will. If a Superior is unjust or capricious in exercising her authority, her will, nevertheless, becomes in a mysterious and important sense the will of God for us. We are in greater need of dying to our own will and judgment than we are of being enlightened, edified, and consoled by faultless Superiors. Finally, the obedience of a good religious is constant with that perseverance which is its perfection and its crown. God grant that our last days as religious may resemble or even surpass our first ones in this regard! Like Jesus, *the author and finisher* of our obedience as He is of our faith, let us be consistent and faithful *even unto death.*

Deign to complete and perfect, O God, the work You have begun in me. Grant that I may esteem and practice disinterested, prompt, unreserved, and persevering fidelity to what is prescribed for me by my Rule and my Superiors. Make of me a living oblation, a living Host. *The way of truth I have*

chosen; I have set your ordinances before me. I cling to your decrees; O Lord, let me not be put to shame. I will run the way of your commands when you give me a docile heart.

JANUARY 30

Unprofitable Servants



“When you have done everything that was commanded you, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants; we have done what it was our duty to do’” (Lk. 17:10).

These words, which are part of a short parable or comparison, our Savior addressed to His Apostles whom He had taken aside to instruct privately.

O Jesus, grant me clarity of understanding that I may appraise myself justly before You.

The lesson our Lord here teaches His Apostles and us concerns not the merit we gain in serving Him, but the humility which should constantly be ours in offering Him our service. In this instruction Jesus warns us against self-glorification on account of the good we have been able to do. Our keeping of His law does not confer a favor upon God, nor does it place Him in our debt; our homage and faithful service are simply His due. By His gracious mercy He has decreed to reward the service we owe Him, but apart from this gratuitous promise on His part, we have no claim to a reward. Our Savior conveys this truth in the form of a short parable. A man has a servant whose duty it is to work in the fields and prepare his master's meals.

JANUARY 30 / 129

In the evening when the servant returns from the fields, his master does not bid him rest and have his supper, but he orders the servant to prepare and serve him his meal; only after the master has finished will the servant be free to satisfy his own hunger. *"Does he thank that servant,"* continued our Lord, *"for doing what he commanded him? I do not think so."*

Surely Jesus does not wish to draw the conclusion that God, our Sovereign Master, is not pleased with our diligence in obeying His commands, but He desires to warn us against the danger of thinking, in our pride, that we merit recompense and marks of gratitude from God for our good works; for we are able to accomplish these works only because of the faith that is in us by His gift. This parable, which was particularly addressed to the Apostles, applied to them with particular aptness. They were the servants, the vinedressers, the shepherds, the ministers of Christ. The duties of their mission were manifold and required their whole energy, all their faculties, all their time; but these duties did not of themselves confer the right of a recompense or to particular favor. All that the Master might will to grant in this respect would be granted only through His goodness and graciousness; this is the implication of our Savior's concluding words: *"Even so you also, when you have done everything that was commanded you, say, 'We are unprofitable servants; we have done what it was our duty to do.'"*

Thus does Jesus indicate in general the relations of the creature with the Creator; for when the Apostles had succeeded in converting souls by their preaching and so furthered, as they believed, the divine glory, the temptation might arise to ascribe some of that glory to themselves. Yielding to such a temptation would mean that they had

misunderstood what their part in the work of salvation really was. In reality, all that was good in them — all that is good in any of us and all the good we do — comes from God and should be turned back to Him. As for ourselves, we only express the simple truth when we call ourselves *unprofitable servants*.

“I adore You, O God, I count myself as nothing before Your divine Majesty. You alone are Being, Life, Truth, Beauty, and Goodness. I glorify You, I praise You, I give You thanks, and I love You, all helpless and unworthy as I am, in union with Your dear Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Brother, in the merciful kindness of His Heart and through His infinite merits. I desire to serve You, to obey You, and to love You always, in union with Mary Immaculate, Mother of God and our Mother, loving also and serving my neighbor for love of You . . .” (*Raccolta*).

JANUARY 31

The Apostolic Life



“You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and have appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain” (Jn. 15:16).

See Jesus instructing the Apostles and forming them for their future ministry.

Divine Savior, grant me the grace to acquire the apostolic spirit and to practice the apostolic virtues.

The virtues which, collectively, make you as a Sister of the Holy Cross a truly apostolic person are, with reference

JANUARY 31 / 131

to yourself, chastity, obedience, and poverty; with regard to your neighbor, zeal, amiability, and patience; and with relation to God, love of prayer, conformity to the divine will, and humble trust in divine providence. The apostolic virtues which affect your personal conduct are the ones you vowed to practice on the day of your religious profession. Your Model in their exercise is Jesus Himself, who has left us in the Gospel examples in plenty of His observance of the virtues represented by your three vows. There is also the example of the Apostles and of the apostolic men who succeeded them, the prescriptions of your Rule, the help you receive in spiritual conferences and from spiritual reading. Examine yourself carefully on your observance of the virtues of your vows and daily ask our Lord to strengthen you in the practice of them.

With reference to God you live the apostolic life insofar as you are a woman of prayer. We read in the Gospel that Jesus passed entire nights in prayer, as though to prepare Himself for the work of the morrow. Can we doubt that the Apostles followed His example? The Acts tell us that they relieved themselves of certain occupations that they might give themselves *to prayer and to the ministry of the word*. You, on your part, should at least never shorten the time for prayer prescribed by the Rule. Such fidelity will gain for you the divine assistance in your work and greater regularity in your general conduct. For you also prayer should be the great preparation for your work.

Jesus is also your Model in practicing conformity to the divine will. Learn to be resigned to the will of God in what may be for you a lesser share of natural or supernatural gifts, in a diversity of employments and places, or in uncongenial ones, in failure and humiliation. Our Savior

possessed all imaginable talents, but He manifested them only to the extent and in the manner willed by the Father. He engaged in manual labor or in preaching as the Father directed, always in Palestine because such was the Father's will. And yet, how many heeded His words or even understood them rightly despite all His zealous teaching in public and private, despite all His miracles? Bearing always in your mind the example of our Savior, carry out the duties assigned to you under obedience in dispositions of perfect confidence in God and deep humility. Be as trustful of God, who speaks to you through your Superiors, as you are distrustful of yourself, remembering that if we cannot succeed even in natural enterprises without divine help, grace will surely be needed in the supernatural task of forming the young to virtue. My dear daughters in Jesus Christ, be persuaded that you cannot worthily acquit yourself of your obedience unless you are faithful to your religious exercises, devoted to study, habitually united with our Lord, and constant in your practice of humility.

"Lord Jesus, by the merits and prayers of the Virgin Mary . . . pour out upon me and my brethren and upon the religious of the entire world, the spirit of faith, sacrifice, prayer, humility, docility, and charity. Grant, O my Jesus, that this spirit of charity may be truly supernatural, universal, understanding, long-suffering, joyous, and fruitful" (*Raccolta*).

"I Am Not the Christ"



"And this is the witness of John, when the Jews sent to him from Jerusalem priests and Levites to ask him, 'Who art thou?'" (Jn. 1:19)

The ecclesiastical authorities of the Jews could not remain indifferent in the face of the growing spiritual movement created by the preaching of St. John the Baptist; especially in view of the popular belief that John himself was the Messias whose advent he was proclaiming.

St. John the Baptist, help me to learn from you how to practice humility.

The envoys of the Jews first questioned John about his identity. Was he himself the Messias, or at least Elias, whose coming *before the great and dreadful day of the Lord* Malachias had prophesied; or was he the Prophet equal to Moses, foretold in the Book of Deuteronomy? St. John answered formally in the negative. To avoid offending so important a personage as the son of the priest Zachary and one who in his own right enjoyed the highest esteem among the people, the delegates sent from Jerusalem had not put their question directly; but John replied to their thought rather than to their spoken words and declared, *"I am not the Christ."*

The very phrasing of the Evangelist St. John's account of this part of the interview conveys to us something of the surprise and dismay with which the question as to his identity must have been received by the holy Precursor. The