

Magnificat



“My soul magnifies the Lord” (Lk. 1:46).

“Let Mary play upon the instruments,” says St. Augustine in introducing the *Magnificat*, “and let the timbrels resound between the active fingers of the young mother. Let the choirs sing together joyfully and let their sweet songs be mingled with alternating strains. Hear then how our timbrel-player sang; for she says, ‘*Magnificat*!’”

O Mary, teach me how to thank God worthily for His blessings, and unite my prayers of praise and gratitude to yours.

Mary, reflecting upon the infinite mercy of the Most High toward her, was filled with gratitude, and with the desire to “magnify” her Benefactor to the full extent of her powers. But in what sense can a creature magnify God? It is clearly impossible to increase the greatness of One whose grandeur and magnificence are limitless and incomprehensibly sublime. Even God could not magnify Himself in the sense of making Himself any greater than He already is. Yet, although human praise can add nothing to God, we can increase His greatness in ourselves by manifesting His image in our souls through the practice of virtue and good works. “Whenever I magnify my soul by work, thought, or speech,” says Origen, “then the image of the great God is produced, and the Lord Himself, whose image I am, is magnified in my soul.”

This homage which all creatures owe to God can be practiced in our thoughts by interior acts of adoration and by the esteem we show for all God’s creatures for His sake;

it can be expressed in our words, when we speak with profoundest reverence of God and all that pertains to Him; and in our actions, when we do everything solely for the glory of God, especially when we practice the virtue of humility. The Holy Spirit says, *The greater thou art, the more humble thyself in all things, and thou shalt find grace before God; for great is the power of God alone, and he is honored by the humble.* Finally, we can “magnify” God by our submission, that is, by willingly bearing the crosses He sends us for love of Him.

Mary used the words “*My soul*” in offering her homage to the Most High, to show that she praised God with her whole strength, with all her faculties of body and soul, all her interior and exterior powers. Moreover, she was speaking not only of her own individual soul, but also of that of the divine Infant she was carrying in her womb; for His soul was so closely united to hers as to form with it, in a certain sense, but one single soul. Furthermore, since by the Incarnation she had conceived also the Mystical Body of the Incarnate Word, she may be said to have included in her canticle of praise all souls created to the image and likeness of God, who were then or ever had been or ever would be in the world. Mary magnified the Lord also for us, praising and exalting Him in our name for taking flesh in her virginal womb, that He might accomplish the great work of our Redemption. And when we ourselves recite the *Magnificat* we should bear in mind that we also may draw upon a higher and more exalted praise than our own; for if, as St. Paul says, the Father grants us all things in giving us His divine Son, we may offer as our own the praise and adoration of Jesus and His holy Mother and also that of all His Mystical Body.

O Virgin Mary, from the first moment of your life until the last you magnified the Lord most perfectly with all the powers of your being, with all your thoughts, affections, words, and actions. Obtain for me the grace to love and to prefer in all things the holy will of God, His interests and His glory, to my own will and my own interests and satisfaction.

MAY 2

The Joy of Mary



“And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior” (Lk. 1:47).

By these words Mary shows that the *Magnificat* is really a hymn to the glory of the Redemption.

O Mary, help me to seek all my joys where you found yours.

Mary rejoiced in God her Savior, because, coming into the world first and foremost to save and redeem her, He had preserved her from original sin and overwhelmed her with His grace to such an extent, says St. Thomas Aquinas, that “it overflowed from her soul upon her body and in such marvelous measure that she conceived in her body the Son of God.” Mary’s joy was so great at the moment of the Incarnation that several of the Fathers have said that she was then filled with the inconceivable joys that are possessed by the blessed in heaven. “O blessed Mary,” exclaimed Abbot Rupert, “it was then that a deluge of joy, a furnace of love, and a torrent of heavenly delights burst upon thee, wholly absorbed and inebriated thee, and made thee experience what no eye has ever seen, no ear has ever heard, and no human heart has ever understood.”

Mary always placed her joy in God. How mistaken we are if we fear the renunciation and self-denial that are necessary for us if we wish to *taste and see how good the Lord is!* For the hearts of those who seek their happiness in striving for the perfect love of God and the perfect forgetfulness of self are a paradise of joy and peace. *Tribulation and anguish shall be visited upon the soul of every man who works evil,* says St. Paul; *but glory and honor and peace shall be awarded to everyone who does good.* And he said of himself, *I am filled with comfort, I overflow with joy in all our troubles.* "Holy Mary" is the first invocation of the Litany of Loreto and "Queen of Peace" is the last. The two invocations are in reality the same. Mary is Queen of peace as she is the joyful Cause of our joy, because she is pre-eminent in holiness. Of all the children of men Mary alone was never at war with God, for by her Immaculate Conception she was preserved from the only thing that can rob the soul of peace and joy, namely, sin.

Again, Mary's profound humility enabled her to endure suffering and humiliation without the least disturbance of her essential joy and peace of soul. Also, since her will was ever totally united to the will of God she ever possessed God's peace and joy in an eminent degree. Finally, her inconceivable charity toward mankind preserved her from all feelings of enmity, the destroyer of peace, even toward those who crucified her divine Son. Who would not be inspired to love our all-good and all-gracious Virgin Mother who has such deep love for us! And if we love her we shall imitate her. "Whoever loves this immaculate Virgin is chaste," says a holy Carthusian monk. "Whoever honors her is devout; whoever imitates her is holy. No one loves her without feeling the effects of reciprocal love. Not one of those who love her

can perish; not one of those who try to imitate her can fail to attain eternal salvation.”

Sweet Virgin Mary, implant in my heart a detachment from all the things of earth like that which characterized your virginal heart. Obtain for me from your divine Son the grace to seek all my joy and peace in loving and glorifying Him and in honoring and imitating you with all my heart and soul and strength.

MAY 3

The Finding of the Holy Cross



(See *Festivals and Saints*, p. 810)

MAY 4

Prayer in Jesus' Name



“Amen, amen, I say to you, if you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it to you” (Jn. 16:23).

Jesus here teaches the disciples the necessary conditions for prayer: we must ask the Father in His name.

O Jesus, grant me the proper dispositions to receive graces of prayer according to Your Will.

St. Augustine, in commenting upon these words of Jesus, remarks that it is not merely the pronouncing of the holy

name of Jesus that gives our prayers their efficacy, but that which is rightly and truly to be understood by the utterance of this sacred name. The name of Jesus represents His Person and epitomizes His mission. To pray in His name means to pray in the most intimate union with Him by faith and charity, in accordance with His interests, by virtue of His merits, and with His spirit. He Himself has given us excellent motives for this prayer in His name. "*Whatever you ask in my name,*" He said, "*that I will do, in order that the Father may be glorified in the Son.*" So to pray, therefore, is to make an act of faith in Jesus and to give glory to God. It is also evidence of our love for Him: "*If you abide in me, and if my words abide in you, ask whatever you will and it shall be done to you.*" It is essential for the apostolic ministry: "*I . . . have appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain; that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you.*" It was to be for the Apostles and for us a means of converse with Him after His "departure": "*Hitherto you have not asked anything in my name. Ask, and you shall receive.*" Prayer in Christ's name, therefore, is an act of union with Him in faith, in charity, and in works.

We no longer enjoy the visible presence of our Savior, but He has given us prayer in compensation. What He did for His Apostles during His corporal life on earth, He still does for us through prayer. By prayer we are protected, consoled, instructed, and cared for in soul and body. The reason that the Apostles had *hitherto* not asked anything in the name of Jesus was that He Himself had been with them. What an inspiring motive for prayer is the thought that it takes the place of the visible presence of Jesus! It can compensate for the divine, immeasurable power

of His very presence! So efficacious, indeed, is prayer that is offered in the name of Jesus that the support of our Savior's own intercession needs not to be added: "*In that day you shall ask in my name; and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father for you; for the Father himself loves you because you have loved me, and have believed that I came forth from God.*" By faith in Jesus, by love for Him, by union with His intentions and merits, the prayer of the Apostles and our prayer become in some sense His own. If the significance of the holy name of Jesus were really understood, who would dare to utter it carelessly! It is because we do not attend to what we are saying that we so often pray without the proper confidence and therefore without efficacy.

All the nations you have made shall come and worship you, O Lord, and glorify your name. For you are great, and you do wondrous deeds; you alone are God. Teach me, O Lord, your way that I may walk in your truth; direct my heart that it may fear your name. I will give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with all my heart, and I will glorify your name forever (Ps. 85:9-12).

MAY 5

Necessity of Prayer



"Lord, teach us to pray" (Lk. 11:1).

In spirit join the disciples as they beg our Lord to instruct them in the manner in which they should pray.

Lord Jesus, grant me to be faithful to the degree of prayer that You will to bestow upon me.

The example of our Lord, His frequent counsels, the lives of the saints, as well as our own personal needs and those of our community and the whole Church present to us most compelling motives for the practice of prayer, both vocal and mental. In the Gospel we find the Savior of the world ever at prayer: in the temple, in the desert, in the mountains. Even His most bitter agony on the night of His betrayal only intensified His prayer. In the opinion of some of the Doctors of the Church, He taught us also the exercise of mental prayer by His example, for He practiced uninterrupted contemplation, and by formal precept in the words recorded by St. Matthew: *"But when thou prayest, go into thy room, and closing thy door, pray to thy Father in secret."* Contemplation is not a matter of time or opportunity, but of love. The sole requirement for its attainment is the surrender of self in love, unreserved and unmeasured.

From the time of the Apostles to our own day there is not a single instance of a saint who was not also a man of prayer. St. John Climacus calls meditation the "channel of all graces," "the destroyer of vice," "the food of the soul." St. John Chrysostom regarded the soul that did not meditate as dead and affirmed besides that without mental prayer it is impossible to remain virtuous. Suarez would willingly have exchanged all his knowledge of theology for one half hour of prayer well made. The Fathers of the Church call prayer a "chain of gold" or the "ladder of Jacob," which unites us with heaven, raising our desires to God and bringing down His blessings upon us. The extent of our penetration of the divine mysteries is proportionate to the use we make of the privilege of prayer. Furthermore, whatever outward success may accompany our works, our spiritual success is in exact accordance with the intensity of our prayer.

More particularly considered, the necessity of prayer becomes even more clearly evident. What is a Sister of the Holy Cross? Is she not one who is dedicated to the work of sanctifying her own soul and of working for the salvation of others? It is for this purpose that she has been freed from the impediment of worldly cares. What holiness is required by her high vocation! What lively faith and ardent charity, what purity of heart, modesty, recollection, detachment, and love of the Church should characterize her! But these virtues suppose habitual union with God and such union can be reached only through the life of prayer. In prayer we find the supernatural light which reveals to us our own nothingness, the vanity of the world, and the infinite grandeur of God. Here faith is reanimated, hope is nourished, and love enkindled. Here we learn the malice of sin, and the value of an immortal soul. Where else than in prayer can we find the energy, the apostolic courage, the supernatural view that will keep us from being seduced by self-love or discouraged by failure in the work assigned us?

O my God, how far am I from the spirit of prayer which animated the saints! Deign to grant me perseverance even when I find prayer difficult and disagreeable. Help me to be faithful to my spiritual exercises, especially meditation, without self-seeking and always in union with Jesus and Mary.

MAY 6

Baptism



“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt. 28:19).

See Jesus on the mountain of Galilee giving His followers their final charge to baptize the peoples of all nations with His baptism, which replaced the baptism of John.

Divine Savior, grant me a better understanding of the spiritual regeneration which was begun in me by my reception of the Sacrament of Baptism.

After the humanity of the Incarnate Word, the creation of the most blessed Virgin Mary, and the establishment of the Church, Baptism is the most marvelous work of the Holy Spirit. Before we received this sacrament we possessed only a natural life. Our souls, estranged from God by original sin, were as truly dead in His eyes as our bodies would be without the soul. This is why Baptism is sometimes called a “second birth”; “*Unless a man be born again of water and the Spirit,*” said our Savior, “*he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*” This rebirth is accomplished by means of water which has been sanctified by the same Holy Spirit who in the days of the creation of the universe *moved over the waters*. The font of Baptism becomes for the Christian soul as the sacred spring of a new creation, as the womb of the mother to the body of her child. By this sacrament the Christian is dedicated forever and unreservedly to the service

of God; he is *sanctified*, deserving the title *saint* which the Apostle Paul gives to all baptized Christians.

Baptism, furthermore, is a double mystery, a mystery of life and death. In receiving this sacrament the Christian becomes one with Christ who died for our sins and rose again for our justification; consequently, the recipient of Baptism is to endeavor throughout his life to bring to full realization this double aspect of his union with Christ. St. Paul is explicit on this point. He says, *For we were buried with him by means of Baptism unto death, in order that, just as Christ has arisen from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life.* This double mystery was formerly symbolized by the rite of Baptism itself, for the neophyte was immersed in the water as a figure of his entrance into the tomb. In returning to the surface he came forth, as it were, to a new life, just as Christ rose from the sepulcher freed from all infirmity and endowed with perfect life.

The Christian life, therefore, is but the continuous development, the translation into our daily conduct of this double supernatural effect of "death and life" produced in Baptism. Herein is the first principle and the program of Christianity. The very life and death of Christ begin to be reproduced in our souls from the moment that we are baptized. The death that is to come about through this sacrament, however, is a death unto life; for our ultimate beatitude is only the glorious unfolding of the divine supernatural life which was infused into our souls when we were baptized. And this life in its fullness means total and everlasting freedom from sin and suffering and death.

O God, enable me to understand something of the nobility of the supernatural origin and destiny that is mine by Your

mercy. You are the beginning and end of my supernatural life; infinity is its scope, eternity its duration. Make me ever faithful to my baptismal renouncement of Satan and his works and pomps, and let this fidelity be the proof of my gratitude for Your infinite goodness.

MAY 7

Preparation for Pentecost



“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you” (Acts 1:8).

Represent to yourself Jesus addressing these words, almost the last He spoke on earth, to the Apostles.

O Holy Spirit of God, help me to prepare worthily for Your coming.

In preparing for the great feast of Pentecost, we could do no better than imitate the Apostles. From the Acts we learn that they prepared by retreat, prayer, and holy desire. Before leaving this earth Jesus had said to them, *“But wait here in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high.”* According to this command of their divine Master, the Apostles were not to return to Galilee to rejoin their families and take up again their occupations. They were to remain in Jerusalem and await *the promise of the Father*. Those intervening days were to be a period of recollection and tranquillity. For the most part the time was spent in the Cenacle, in reality the first Christian Church, hallowed for the Apostles by such solemn and recent memories. They

left the upper room, it seems, only to go to the Temple. *And they were continually in the temple*, writes St. Luke.

Retirement, prayer, and recollection are always a source of good for us. We find them difficult, recollection especially, for it runs counter to our sensuality and our tendency toward scattering our energies. Yet it is only through recollection that the soul can become strong and properly disposed to hear the words of God: *Behold, I will allure her and will lead her into the wilderness and I will speak to her heart*. If we wish to receive the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, we must make our hearts other cenacles from which the noise, the distraction of the world and its useless comings and goings will be strictly excluded.

To recollection should be joined prayer, again in imitation of the Apostles, who *persevered with one mind in prayer*. What prayer that must have been, presided over by Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and offered in expectation of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit! Just as in the Old Testament ardent longing for the coming of the Redeemer was transmitted from generation to generation, so in those days which followed the Ascension fervent prayer was prolonged from hour to hour in order to hasten the coming of the Paraclete. May His descent, now so near, find us also united in persevering prayer made in the name of Jesus and in union with Mary! Ours, like hers, should be a prayer less of words than of desires—a strong aspiration of the soul for which words are unnecessary.

“Come, Holy Ghost, fill the hearts of Thy faithful ones and enkindle in them the fire of Thy love. Send forth Thy Spirit and they shall be created; and Thou shalt renew the face of the earth.” Renew, O divine Paraclete, the face of this world, which does not know You, which knows and loves only itself,

and fill us with Your Gifts, whom You have called to instruct and convert the world.

MAY 8

The Humility of Mary



“Because he has regarded the lowliness of his handmaid” (Lk. 1:48).

In this verse Mary refers to the lowliness of her nature, condition, and sex, from which God has elevated her to a sublime degree in dignity, interior holiness, and external glory.

O Mary, help me to become meek and humble of heart like you and Jesus.

“Herein,” says St. Augustine, “lies the cause of Mary’s joy: that He beheld the humility of His handmaid. It is as if she were saying, ‘I rejoice because of the grace that God has granted me, for it is from Him that I have received the reason for this joy; and I rejoice in Him, because I love His gifts for love of Him.’” Mary did not think herself capable of attracting the divine gaze, for she was nothing; but God in His goodness had turned toward her, and in the divine mercy she found a sure ground of confidence. Mary had been troubled at hearing herself praised by the angel Gabriel and when Elizabeth said, “*Blessed art thou among women! . . . And how have I deserved that the mother of my Lord should come to me?*” she answered by referring all to God to whom alone honor is due, saying, “*My soul magnifies the Lord.*” She, the highest and most

exalted of creatures, ever turned her gaze away from herself and sought all her greatness in God. She knew that she had received great graces and had never offended God, but she was also clearly aware of the infinite majesty of God and her own nothingness; and now in her canticle she adverts to herself only in order to proclaim her lowliness and obscurity.

Although our Lady's words in this portion of her canticle seem not to refer directly to the virtue of humility, some of the Fathers have thought that the Holy Spirit, speaking through Mary, was here setting before us this excellence of His Spouse particularly; for of all the virtues He beheld in her, He loved her humility most of all. "There are two kinds of humility," says St. Bernard. "The first is the daughter of truth; it is cold and without warmth. The second is the daughter of charity and it inflames us. The first consists of knowledge, the second, of love. By the first we are made aware of our own nothingness and we learn this kind of humility from ourselves and from our own wretchedness and weakness. By the second we trample underfoot the glory of the world, and this humility we learn from Him who annihilated Himself and fled when they sought Him out to offer Him the glory of royalty. But when they hunted Him down to crucify Him and plunge Him into the depths of opprobrium and ignominy, instead of fleeing, He voluntarily offered Himself."

Our Lady possessed in a supreme degree both the humility of knowledge and the humility of love, but especially the latter. This virtue above all others made her pleasing to God. It is again the Abbot of Clairvaux who tells us that the virginity of Mary would not have been at all pleasing to God without her humility, and that the Holy Spirit would not have descended upon her, if she had not been humble;

and if He had not descended upon her she would not have become the Mother of God. "Virginity is highly praiseworthy," continues St. Bernard, "but humility is necessary; the former is counseled, the latter is commanded. You can be saved without virginity, but there is no salvation without humility."

O Mary, Queen of humble souls, you see how far I am from the practice of true and perfect humility. Obtain for me from Jesus the pardon of all the sins I have committed against this great and necessary virtue; and deign to offer to Jesus your own humble heart in reparation for my pride. Entreat our Lord, O my Mother, to grant me the grace I need to imitate faithfully and truly the most holy humility of your Immaculate Heart and the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

MAY 9

Blessed Among Women



"For, behold, henceforth all generations shall call me blessed" (Lk. 1:48).

The praise of the Mother of our Savior, so ardently begun by Elizabeth and echoed by the woman in the crowd during the public life of Jesus, has never ceased in the Church. The writings of the Fathers and of Mary's clients in every Christian century, the feasts established in her honor, the places of pilgrimage where throngs gather at every season of the year to venerate her, and the devotions inspired by filial love of Mary bear witness to the truth of her prophecy in the *Magnificat*.

Holy Mother of God and my Mother, accept my homage and let me feel the fruits of your pity.

Mary's humility, profound though it was, did not lessen her realization of the greatness of God's favors to her. She was deeply conscious of her incomparable dignity as Mother of the Savior, and she saw clearly that Elizabeth's words of praise would echo and re-echo down all the centuries to come. It was necessary, indeed, that Mary's unique humility be accompanied by the highest regard for the exalted place she held among all other women. Without the understanding of the true significance of her mission, she could not have entered upon her sublime office with fitting reverence and esteem. The inspired prophecy of Mary, foretelling that all generations were to acknowledge and acclaim the Mother of the Savior, applies to the whole universe, from the highest heaven to the lowest depths of hell.

The Eternal Father honors Mary as the Mother of His only-begotten Son and has granted her an authority second only to His own in heaven and on earth. The Incarnate Son of God during His public life proclaimed Mary blessed because she had heard the Word of God and kept it, and now He continues to promote her honor by revealing through His Church the grandeur that is hers as His Virgin Mother. The Holy Spirit acclaims her as His most holy Spouse and, by the unparalleled infusion of His grace, as the Queen of all the saints. The choirs of angels have as their chief activity, after the adoration they continually render to God, the proclaiming of the praises of their Queen; and the hosts of the blessed unceasingly acknowledge her as the Cause of their joy.

On earth, Mary is blessed in every "Hail Mary" that has

been said since the foundation of the Church militant; and it is "through the intercession of the Blessed Mary ever Virgin" that the Church on earth prays for the deliverance of the souls in the Church suffering. As for the souls in hell, if, as St. Thomas Aquinas asserts, the damned are punished less than they deserve, the mitigation of the full torment merited by their sins is surely owing to the divine Mercy. But every effect of grace or mercy that comes to us from the divine Bounty is evoked by the intercession of the Mother of Mercy. Even the souls in hell, therefore, should bless and praise Mary as their Benefactor; but since they do not do this, it is for us to compensate for their neglect and to ask the inhabitants of heaven to unite their atoning praise with ours. The fallen angels, likewise, despite their fury against the Virgin because of the souls she rescues from their snares, are forced to acknowledge her power and leave their victims at the pronouncement of her name as well as at the holy name of Jesus. Thus, even hell, by experiencing the effects of our Lady's intercession and by acknowledging her power, joins, as it were, with the Church triumphant, militant, and suffering, and the Most Holy Trinity Itself, in fulfilling this glorious prophecy of the Virgin Mary: "*Behold, henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.*"

O Mary, I am filled with joy at the thought that your praises resound in heaven, on earth, and in purgatory, and are handed down from age to age throughout all generations. I implore the Most Blessed Trinity to fulfill your prophecy more and more everywhere in the universe. With all my heart I join the whole Church in saying to you, O Mary: "Blessed is the womb of the Virgin Mary which bore the Son of the Eternal Father and blessed are the breasts that nourished Him." Pray for us, O holy Mother of God, and grant the aid and consolation of your incomparable goodness to all who honor you.

The Gift of Fear



“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Ps. 110:10).
Awaken in yourself the sentiments of awe at the greatness and
sovereign majesty of God which are the special characteristics
of the Gift of the fear of the Lord.

O Holy Spirit, grant me that holy fear which will lead me to
God and keep me united with Him.

The Gift of fear is a movement of the Holy Spirit which
causes us to fear God as a Father and to avoid sin because
it displeases Him. Holy fear of the Lord disposes us to
adoration, and it is entirely consistent with hope and love.
It is not a servile dread of eternal punishment, but a rever-
ential, filial fear based on faith, which keeps the soul atten-
tive to the authority of God and makes her shun the
slightest offense to His infinite majesty; *work out your
salvation with fear and trembling*, St. Paul admonishes us.
His words are both a warning against false security and an
exhortation to the performance of duty in the broadest
and most elevated sense of the word, namely, as signifying
the whole effort of our sanctification.

Through the Gift of fear, compunction for sin is pre-
served in our hearts; we are kept mindful of the fact that
we are sinners, wholly dependent upon God's mercy, and
that as yet we are not safe except in hope. Inasmuch as
holy fear is filial fear, it goes hand in hand with love. In
the Collect for the Sunday after Corpus Christi, the Church

bids us ask at the same time for fear and for love. The soul that lives in the holy fear of God thrills at the greatness and nearness of the divine Majesty. She sees in God the almighty Power that created us, that preserves us, and rules us, and the supreme Justice that will demand an accounting for every idle word. The holier the soul, the more keenly does it experience that confusion at the sight of its own unworthiness which is the sign of advancement in the process of purification.

It is this harmonious blending of respect, of confidence, of compunction, and of fidelity in the service of God that is implied in the Gift of fear. Let us pass our days in this good fear of God, living in His holy presence, appearing before Him always with a humble and contrite heart, faithful and attentive to His perfect service, for *he that feareth God neglecteth nothing*. We should pray often for the grace of a lively sorrow for even our least faults, because they offend an infinite God who is infinitely good; our sorrow will then inspire the eagerness to atone, and so we shall multiply our acts of sacrifice and love. We should also be watchful to avoid sin and all its occasions, fleeing from sin, *as from the face of a serpent*. Then shall we enjoy the happiness and security which Scripture repeatedly links with holy fear: *Happy are you who fear the Lord, who walk in his ways*; and again, *No evil can harm the man who fears the Lord; through trials, again and again he is safe*.

O divine Paraclete, let Your Gift of holy fear remain with me as a protection against pride and tepidity. Let it keep ever before my mind the greatness and holiness of Him who is my Creator and Judge and rid my soul of all fear of creatures, of all cowardly subservience to human opinions. Teach me, O Holy Spirit, to serve the divine Majesty in fear, yet with

peace and joy of heart, according to the words of David:
Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice before him; with trembling pay homage to him.

MAY 11

The Gift of Piety



“For bodily training is of little profit, while godliness is profitable in all respects, since it has the promise of the present life as well as of that which is to come” (1 Tim. 4:8).

Think of the Gift of piety as filling the soul of Jesus with the most reverential affection for His Father and the most compassionate tenderness for the children of Adam.

Divine Spirit of God, I ask the grace to live in the practice of Christian piety toward God and my neighbor.

The Gift of piety inspires in us a filial affection for God and urges us to honor Him as our Father. The Gift of fear inclines the will toward the performance of duty, out of filial respect for God, whereas piety gently affects the heart, disposing it to filial love of its Creator. It fosters in the soul a stronger inclination to occupy itself with God and perform its spiritual duties. Spiritual exercises come to be viewed not as routine duties, but as fulfilling the need and longing of the heart for God; and when aridity is sent to try the soul, it is patiently, even joyfully, accepted as coming from a Father who hides Himself that His child may seek Him. The soul in whom this Gift is active experiences a sweet impression of liberty, joyous abandonment, and filial

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confidence in the service of God, that is to be distinguished from a mere religious frame of mind or vague sentimentality that does not move the will.

The transformation effected by the Gift of piety was indicated by our Lord when He said, "*No longer do I call you servants. . . . But I have called you friends.*" Solely occupied with the divine good pleasure, the soul regards with indifference the various aspects of the works assigned her. Having God in view rather than her own gratification, she no longer consults her feelings and preferences, but succeeds finally in liking all she has to do. This supernatural conception of things enables us to perform acts of obedience, not in the dispositions of a servant, but in those of a child, rejoicing in the opportunity to prove the reality of our love for our Father. Duty is then not measured by obligation, but by love; it is interpreted as consisting not of what God expressly asks, but of all that is pleasing to Him.

The piety inspired by the Holy Spirit of God is, moreover, a profound sentiment that takes possession of our whole being; it is not a matter of short-lived impulses that seize us unpredictably on certain days or at certain moments and that remain superficial. It is not a matter of temperament; as, for example, impressionable natures express a certain piety in sentimentality, ardent natures in exterior works, indolent persons in reverie; nor does the Gift manifest itself in a selfish piety that looks for consolations, nor in passive piety that remains inert when it should act. The true exercise of this Gift, which perfects the virtue of religion, is strong, virile, constant. And intimately joined with the constant, persevering service of God in the soul actively possessed of piety is a tender compassion for her fellow men. She practices kindness toward all without exception, as children

of a common Father. She forgives injuries, bears with the faults of others, rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep. This Gift, like holy fear and all the other Gifts, becomes active in proportion to our fidelity in corresponding with grace. Although the Gifts are present in everyone who has been *born again* and is in the state of grace, however low may be the level of his spiritual life, yet their action as perfecting the virtues is the fruit of response to grace.

O blessed Paraclete, grant that the Gift of piety may produce its fruits in me. Permit me not to stifle it by self-love. Inspire me with a filial love for my Creator and Father and make every creature of God dear to me for His sake.

MAY 12

The Gift of Knowledge



“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk, then, as children of light” (Eph. 5:8).

These words of St. Paul, addressed to the converts at Ephesus, may be referred to the operation of the Gift of knowledge.

O Holy Spirit, grant me the grace to advance daily in the science of the saints.

As the Gift of fear of the Lord moves us to fulfill our duties, and as the Gift of piety causes us to love them, so knowledge perfects our judgment and makes us capable of distinguishing with certitude between true and false, good and evil. When we hesitate as to which course we should

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take, when human respect resists our impulse to do that which is just and right, or an unworthy fear of speaking out cunningly assumes the guise of prudence and sometimes of charity, then the Gift of knowledge will show us plainly the path of duty. It is the complement of the Christian conscience, whose vision it sharpens and to whose decisions it imparts firmness. From infused knowledge derives that supernatural instinct which unmask error and discerns with a special, keen perception the world's subtleties and artifices. We are enabled by it to perceive quickly and correctly that which concerns our own sanctification and the sanctification of others. It shows us clearly the depths of our soul, its secret movements, their source and motives, and the effects these may produce. It teaches us how best to deal with others in the interests of their salvation.

Through the Gift of knowledge a brighter light is shed upon the things of earth and heaven, so that the soul is strengthened and confirmed in truth. "*But when he, the Spirit of truth has come,*" said our Savior, "*he will teach you all the truth.*" It is because the saints never lose sight of the mysterious affinity that links earth with heaven, the finite with the infinite, the creature with the Creator, that they live always and everywhere in the presence of God. The operation of the Holy Spirit through this Gift imparts to us a more practical knowledge of created things in their relation to God and also of divine things, within the limitations imposed by our life on earth. Moreover, it gives such knowledge instantly, as Adam possessed it before his sin, without labor of study and demonstration.

Again, the Gift of knowledge, in perfecting the virtue of faith, adds a special excellence whereby we see the truth more clearly, advance in it more surely, and affirm and defend it

with greater certitude and zeal. On our part, in order that we may dispose ourselves for the active operation of this Gift within our souls, positive efforts should be made to arrive at the light: efforts at prayer and efforts toward knowing God better through study. At the same time we should try to keep our hearts detached from earthly things and free from stain, for sight is promised to the *clean of heart*. It is through detachment alone that we can ultimately be brought to see in creatures that alone which can lead us to their Maker. St. Paul teaches us this very forcefully in the words: *For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I count them as dung that I may gain Christ.*

O divine Spirit of God, be ever with me assisting me to distinguish truth from falsehood, right from wrong. Make my eye single, as Jesus has counseled, that my actions, desires, and thoughts may be full of light; preserve me from the obscurity and blindness that arise from the corruptness of my own nature and from the false judgments of the world.

MAY 13

The Gift of Fortitude



“And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him . . . the spirit of counsel, and of fortitude” (Isa. 11:2).

When the difficulties and trials of life come upon man, he inclines now to cowardice and discouragement; now, through natural impetuosity and pride, to rash and impulsive action. These responses to adversity are perilous for the soul in the spiritual combat. The Holy Spirit, therefore, brings to it a

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new source of strength, namely, supernatural fortitude.

O Holy Spirit, assist me in this meditation toward a true appreciation of the Gift of fortitude, that I may pray for it more fervently.

This Gift is in a special manner the Paraclete's own, for in His sacrament, Confirmation, we receive the Holy Spirit that we may be strong. In our lifelong spiritual struggle against the devil, the world, and ourselves, it is evident that we need supernatural aid that will control our tendency toward either exaggerated fear or excessive confidence in ourselves. Fortitude supplies for our deficiencies and restrains our rash impulses. It is true that at Baptism the virtue of fortitude together with the other moral virtues was infused by the Holy Spirit into our souls, and that fortitude, the virtue, forearms us against undue fear of difficulty, supports us in our daily efforts, and helps us to persevere; but even with this help we are still hesitant, timid, and fainthearted. In other words, there is still a great deal of ourselves involved in the exercise of the virtue of fortitude; but that which comes to pass through the operation of the Gift is not so much the result of our action as it is of the strong impulse of the Holy Spirit. The virtue of fortitude may serve us well in ordinary difficulties, but when the task becomes arduous, we need the special assistance of the Gift. St. Stephen, fearlessly confronting his executioners; St. Paul, offering his neck to the sword; St. Peter, crucified head downward at his own request — these are the trophies of the power of the Holy Spirit in the Gift of fortitude; for we must remember that by nature the souls of the martyrs were as weak and cowardly as our own.

Sometimes the spirit of heroism is needed even for everyday

difficulties. The control of anger, the moderation of zeal, the conquest of the unkind impulse, and scores of other natural human weaknesses may require under certain circumstances the special service of the Holy Spirit. "To do and to suffer" is the summary of every human life; it is in action and endurance, especially in the cause of extraordinary undertakings, that the effects of the Gift of fortitude are made manifest. We are enabled, for example, by the help of this Gift to undertake without fear or hesitation such arduous works as the practice of perfect recollection in the midst of the activity imposed upon us by duty, as did St. Vincent de Paul and St. Teresa; or the contempt of honors and human respect, dreading only sin, like St. John Chrysostom; or the facing of perils and labors, even death, like St. Francis Xavier. Suffering or endurance, the more difficult task, means constancy, patience, and magnanimity in bearing all trials of soul and body, even to martyrdom, for God's sake, in the confident spirit of St. Paul when he said, *I can do all things in him who strengtheneth me.*

O Holy Spirit, deign to accept the prayer I offer You, borrowing from St. Paul whom You Yourself inspired: Clothe me with the armor of God that I may be able to resist in the evil day and stand in all things perfect. Gird me about with truth and arm me with the breastplate of justice. Let faith be my shield and my helmet the hope of salvation. Place in my hand the sword of the spirit which is the word of God, that I may defeat my enemies and gain the crown of eternal life.

The Gift of Counsel



“For what man knows God’s counsel, or who can conceive what the Lord intends? For the deliberations of mortals are timid, and unsure are our plans” (Wisd. 9:13, 14).

As the will follows the dictates of the intellect, so the intellect and will truly and infallibly follow the light given to them by the Holy Spirit through the Gift of counsel, especially in matters that transcend the powers of natural reason.

O Holy Spirit, grant me the Gift of counsel, that I may discern clearly and with certainty the best means of working out my salvation.

The Gift of knowledge gives us a speculative idea of duty, keen discernment of our goal, and general rules for its attainment. The Gift of counsel, which perfects the virtue of prudence, enlightens the soul as to the special application of God’s law to particular cases and as to the practical performance of duty. By this Gift the reason is enabled to discern not only right and wrong, not only the way of obedience, but the way of perfection. It makes us know which of two things, both right and good, is better and more pleasing to God; and it also prompts the will to put into execution that which we see to be the higher and better course.

This precious Gift has a bearing upon our whole life, for we are continually in a position of having to decide between two courses of action. The Holy Spirit is ever ready to be our

Counselor, if we will permit Him to be. But in order that His inspirations may not be lost upon us, we must be on our guard against the weakness of our nature, against natural impulse, which is only too often the sole motive of our actions; against rashness, which causes us to follow whatever feeling happens to be uppermost; against precipitation, which prompts us to act before we have considered both sides of the case; against indifference, which makes us decide at random, through reluctance to take the trouble of examining which course is the better. Our interests and appetites often assert themselves in our decisions far more strongly than good sense and far more imperatively than conscience.

Even when we hold our inner consultation with all appropriate calmness and sincerity, even when our natural judgment is under the dominion of the supernatural virtue of prudence, it may happen at the most critical moments that the conscience remains perplexed and the soul is not at peace. Then is the time to have recourse to the Spirit of counsel; for the Gift of counsel is a practical intuition, a supernatural discernment that quickens and refines the virtue of prudence, raising it to a level inaccessible to its unaided powers. This special light of the Holy Spirit is necessary for us in many phases of our life; for example, when we are at a loss how to reconcile an interior life with one of zeal, or the affection due to souls with perfect chastity, or the simplicity of the dove with the wisdom of the serpent. To cultivate the Gift of counsel we require, first of all, a deep realization of our own weakness, and then frequent prayer to the Holy Spirit that He may teach us His ways. He will not refuse a humble petition for help. We should accustom ourselves to listening to His voice, to judging all things by His light, and following the least of His inspirations. If He

finds our souls recollected and docile, He will speak to us more and more frequently.

Come, Holy Ghost, send down those beams,
Which sweetly flow in silent streams
From Thy bright throne above.

.

O blessed Light of life Thou art,
Fill with Thy life the inmost hearts
Of those that hope in Thee.

.

Lord, wash our sinful stains away,
Water from heaven our barren clay,
Our wounds and bruises heal.

To Thy sweet yoke our stiff necks bow,
Warm with Thy love our hearts of snow,
Our wandering feet recall.

MAY 15

The Gift of Understanding



“Give me discernment that I may observe your law and keep it with all my heart” (Ps. 118:34).

These words of the Psalmist refer to the effect of the Gift of understanding, whereby we penetrate more deeply into the supernatural truths of faith.

O Holy Spirit, prepare me to receive fully the Gift of understanding.

By faith we believe revealed truths and by the Gift of knowledge we possess a reasoned certitude of these truths, but the Gift of understanding gives us as clear an insight into them as is possible for man in this life. This Gift, like a divine ray, casts its light upon supernatural truths, and causes them to shine, as it were, from within. This illumination does not resolve the mystery, it does not give us the intuitive vision of heaven, but it pierces deeply the cloud of darkness with which the mystery is veiled by words or images. It is thus a preparation for the spiritual discernment of contemplation. The other Gifts are connected with the purgative life and with the struggle against the triple concupiscence, but supernatural understanding and wisdom are concerned with the contemplative life. They suppose the restoration of order in the soul by means of mortification and the discipline of the appetites. There is nothing more opposed to the Gift of understanding than sensuality and the inordinate seeking after material comfort and well-being: *The sensual man, St. Paul tells us, does not perceive the things that are of the Spirit of God, for it is foolishness to him, and he cannot understand, because it is examined spiritually.*

The awakening of the Gift of understanding within us is brought about, first, by lively faith or, rather, by the habitual cultivation of the interior life; for if this Gift quickens faith, it is also the reward of faith and prayer. The second condition is mortification, which purifies the heart and the senses: "*Blessed are the pure of heart,*" said our Savior, "*for they shall see God.*" Under the light imparted to us by the Gift of understanding, the articles of faith, the rites of the sacred liturgy, the words of Holy Scripture reveal their living and mysterious splendors. Supernatural understanding is, in short,

of immense importance for the salvation and sanctification of our souls. We should ask the Holy Spirit for it in full measure with the most earnest supplications, for it is to be obtained rather by the longings of our love than by any efforts of our intellect. This Gift will be stronger or weaker in our souls according to the degree of our correspondence with the other Gifts. Its safeguards are humility, restraint of earthly desires, and interior recollection. Be singlehearted and humble in your own eyes and that which God hides from the *wise and prudent*, He will reveal to you, *a little one*.

O God, be good to your servant, that I may live and keep your words. Open my eyes that I may consider the wonders of your law. I am a wayfarer of earth; hide not your commands from me. . . . 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 (Ps. 118:17-19, 30-32).

MAY 16

The Gift of Wisdom



“For the inclination of the flesh is death, but the inclination of the spirit, life and peace. For the wisdom of the flesh is hostile to God, for it is not subject to the law of God, nor can it be” (Rom. 8:6, 7).

St. Paul here contrasts the wisdom that is imparted by the spirit of the world and things of sense with supernatural wisdom which is the perfection of all the Gifts of the Holy Spirit and the highest stage in the mystical ascent of the Gifts.

O Holy Spirit, make me worthy of supernatural wisdom, the crown of all Your Gifts.

Wisdom is the Gift of the Holy Spirit which communicates to us in the highest degree the knowledge and love of divine things. It differs from the Gift of knowledge in that it causes us to see and love truth in God Himself as its first cause rather than by means of creatures. Furthermore, knowledge is not accompanied, or at least not in the same degree as wisdom, by the relish and love of divine things. There is between these Gifts the difference that exists between contemplating supernatural truths and loving them, between knowing that honey is sweet and tasting its sweetness. Supernatural wisdom is also higher than, although connected with, the Gift of understanding. That which is shown us by understanding is held and relished by wisdom.

When the Psalmist bids us relish our Sovereign Good, *Taste and see how good the Lord is*, he calls us to the operations of holy wisdom, to the full perfection of holiness. The Church prays on the day of Pentecost that we may *relish* what is right and just, for the union of the soul with God in this life is rather an experience of tasting than of sight. Understanding is the clear light of the soul, wisdom is its heat—it is union through love. Again, wisdom, the Gift, differs from the wisdom we acquire by study and even that bestowed on us by grace, which has not the depth of certitude that is proper to the Gift. Supernatural wisdom has its origin in the truth known by faith, certified by knowledge, penetrated by supernatural understanding, and applied to particular acts by counsel. This highest Gift of the Holy Spirit then illumines the truth in all its parts, as with a single glance, and draws the practical conclusions which make

our intellectual and moral life conform to the divine Mind.

The contemplation of truth which leads to holiness takes possession of the whole soul: of the intellect by supernatural understanding and of the will by supernatural wisdom. Understanding engenders love, but love is only perfect when it effects absolute conformity of the human will with the will of God. True contemplation, then, implies forgetfulness of self, self-oblation, total surrender; it urges the soul, on the other hand, to that transcendent virtue which does not shrink from heroic effort. The beginnings of the contemplative way are arid, harsh, arduous. The gate that leads to the higher regions of spirituality is narrow and to pass through it the soul must discard earthly encumbrances; she must aspire wholly to heavenly things. We should ask the Holy Spirit fervently and often to make us understand the value of the Gift of God which is holy wisdom, so that we may be not only willing but eager to divest ourselves of all things in order to obtain it. Then, in tasting God through the operations of this most precious Gift, our souls will be made conformable to Him. *The wisdom that is from above, St. James tells us, is first of all chaste, then peaceable, moderate, docile, in harmony with good things, full of mercy and good fruits, without judging, without dissimulation.*

God of my fathers, Lord of mercy . . . give me Wisdom, the attendant at your throne, and reject me not from among your children; for I am your servant, the son of your handmaid, a man weak and short-lived and lacking in comprehension of judgment and of laws. . . . Send her forth from your holy heavens and from your glorious throne dispatch her, that she may be with me and work with me, that I may know what is pleasing to you. For she knows and understands all things, and will guide me discreetly in my affairs and safeguard me by her glory (Wisd. 9:1, 4, 5, 10, 11).

The "Great Things" Done in Mary



"Because he who is mighty has done great things for me and holy is his name; and for generation upon generation is his mercy, to those who fear him" (Lk. 1:49, 50).

In the preceding verse the Blessed Virgin had prophesied that all generations would call her blessed; in this case, she reveals the reason for this honor, namely, the great things God has done for her; moreover, she affirms that her joy will be the joy of all men of good will.

O Mary, obtain for me that holy fear which is the beginning of wisdom.

What are the *great things* that *he who is mighty* has done for Mary? All the wonders ever witnessed on the earth are as nothing when compared with the redemptive Incarnation, the mightiest work of Him who is mighty. God could create more and larger worlds, vaster skies, more brilliant suns, but, says St. Bonaventure, He could not make a more excellent or nobler mother than Mary; for if He could He would have to give her a more excellent Son. Such great things did God do for Mary that He placed it in her power to give Him, as it were, even greater gifts than those He had bestowed upon her. From God Mary received the gifts of life, of the fullness of grace, of being blessed above all other women; but Mary, as His agent, made it possible for God to be our Emmanuel, that is, "our present God" and also our Redeemer through the precious blood He received from her. Because of Mary, Jesus as man is universal judge and

as man sits at the right hand of the Father. If our Savior gave the Apostles the power to perform miracles greater than those He Himself performed, as He tells us in the Gospel, should we wonder that He granted to His most holy Mother the power to give to Him gifts greater than those she had received? Then, having acknowledged the infinite value of God's favors, Mary added, "*And holy is his name*"; thus she recalls to mind the prophecy of the great things wrought in her made by the Psalmist when he said, *He has sent deliverance to his people; he has ratified his covenant forever; holy and awesome is his name.*

It is not only to Mary that God shows His power, holiness, and mercy, but to all His faithful servants. Not only she herself, but the whole human race would profit by what the Almighty had done in her. As she had prophesied that all generations would call her blessed, so now she made another prophecy, affirming that the mercy of God would extend from generation unto generation *to those who fear him*. This divine mercy, according to St. Augustine is "our most bountiful Savior." All the effects of the divine mercy that mankind has experienced from the beginning of time until now, and all that will be produced throughout eternity derive from the adorable mystery of the Incarnation. Although mercy, like all the divine attributes, is shared equally by the three Persons of the Most Holy Trinity, it is, nevertheless, particularly ascribed to the Person of the Son, as power is to the Father, and bounty to the Holy Spirit. It is particularly the Incarnate Word who acquired for us at the cost of His precious blood a share in the dominion that the Eternal Father had given Him. But our Savior did not will to accomplish this work by Himself. In addition to acting in union with His Father and the Holy Spirit, Jesus willed to associate His Virgin

Mother with the great work of His mercy. The new Adam, like the old, was to have a helpmate. Since *it is not good for man to be alone*, the Eternal Father gave His beloved Son a Mother who co-operated with Him in the great work of the salvation of the world.

O most powerful and benign Virgin, I give thanks to the Most Holy Trinity for making you so mighty and so merciful. Humbly I implore you to exercise the great power God has given you in my behalf, for the total destruction of whatever in me is displeasing to Him and to you, and to establish in its stead the perfect reign of your divine Son. O Mary, Mother of God and Mother of Mercy, pray for us.

MAY 18

Mary's Praise of the Divine Power



“He has shown might with his arm, he has scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart. He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and has exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty” (Lk. 1:51-53).

These verses of the *Magnificat* in which Mary summarizes the effects of God's action in the world: His rejection of the proud and the worldly rich and powerful and His goodness to the poor and lowly are as a brief anticipation of the Sermon on the Mount.

O Mary, make the kingdom of God come within me and all mankind.

From the instant of Mary's consent to the Incarnation, a Christian revolution was inaugurated whereby the kingdom of pride, self-seeking, material power, and confidence in human resources was to be overthrown, and a divine plan was to reshape the human order. In His eternal decrees God had already reversed the order established by sin, which advocated the belief in man and confidence in human might instead of faith in God and in His power to make use of the weak things of this world to confound the strong. The sublime mysteries which God had hidden from the wise would now be revealed to *little ones*. The miracle of grace was to appear in those whom the world would judge entirely unfit and unworthy. Mary herself is an example of what God does through a little one. Upon her lowliness was built the new kingdom with its supernatural laws and power based upon poverty, humility, and weakness.

Mary knew that in co-operating with the work of the Redemption she was associating herself with a work of sorrow. She rejoiced in this and, also, in the knowledge that God was not going to draw her out of her poverty and obscurity, nor do for her any great human thing. And she who at the beginning of the *Magnificat* had praised God for His regarding of her lowliness, now included herself among the multitudes of the lowly whom the power of God exalts, hiding thus in a general thanksgiving her own unique and unspeakable privilege.

Moreover, Jesus at His birth would manifest His power by the very weakness in which He came to exalt the *little ones*. The Incarnate Word Himself is the *arm* whereby God scatters the proud and puts down the mighty from their thrones and sends the rich away empty. It was through Christ that the Father created all things, it was through Him

that we were redeemed and heaven was opened. The firmament is the work of God's *fingers*, but the mystery of the Incarnation, surpassing incomparably all the other works of His power, belongs to the *arm* of the divine Might. The strength of this *arm* of God was to bring the Apostles, martyrs, confessors, and virgins their virtue and their triumph, and through their weakness was to break the strength of a proud paganism. Jesus, in His turn, would also say, "*Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. . . . Woe to you rich! for you are now having your comfort. . . . Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. . . . Woe to you who are filled! for you shall hunger.*"

It was through your humility, O Mary, Handmaid of the Lord, that these great things were accomplished. On behalf of all mankind whose sadness has been changed into joy through your mediation, we say, "*Thou art the glory of Jerusalem; thou art the joy of Israel.*" In the name of all women whose shame was blotted out by the blessed Fruit of your womb, we say, "*Thou art the honor of our people.*" Most humble Virgin, make humility, which is the source of all blessings, reign in our hearts and efface from them the cause of all evils: arrogance and pride.

MAY 19

The Promises of Mary



"He has given help to Israel, his servant, mindful of his mercy—even as he spoke to our fathers—to Abraham and to his posterity forever" (Lk. 1:54, 55).

The last verses of the *Magnificat* echo the earlier ones in speak-

ing of God's goodness to Israel and of His fidelity to the promises made of old to Abraham and through the prophets. O Mary, obtain for me the grace really to place myself without reserve and forever under your protection and guidance.

The words "*He has given help to Israel, his servant*" serve, in a sense, as a conclusion to the Old Testament, to the Law and the Prophets. The great promise given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and then to the prophets coming after them was now fulfilled by the coming of the Redeemer. Mary's song of exultation dies away in a quiet confidence and tranquillity, for she already bears Jesus within her and is conscious of His strength protecting her. The final words of her canticle also remind us of the truth of God's word and His fidelity to His promises. *He is the faithful God who keeps his merciful covenant down to the thousandth generation toward those who love him and keep his commandments.* In the Apocalypse the Holy Spirit speaks of Christ as *faithful and true*; and Holy Mother Church ascribes this same quality to Mary in invoking her as "Virgin most faithful." Our Lady is said to have revealed to certain of her clients that among all the titles of honor in her litanies, those most pleasing to her are "Mother most amiable," "Mother most admirable," and "Virgin most faithful." As she was always faithful to her Son and to the divine will, so she is faithful to her promises to us.

What are the promises of Mary? They are to be found in passages of Holy Scripture such as the following, which have been applied and transferred to her by the Liturgy. "*You that yearn for me, come over to me, all,*" the Liturgy represents Mary as saying in words appropriated from the Book of Ecclesiasticus, *and be filled with my fruits. You will re-*

member me as sweeter than honey, better to have than the honeycomb. He who eats of me, will hunger still, he who drinks of me will thirst for more; he who obeys me will not be put to shame, he who serves me will never fail."

Similar sentiments are borrowed from the Book of Proverbs: "*I, Wisdom, dwell with experience, and judicious knowledge I attain. . . . Mine are counsel and advice; mine is strength; I am understanding. By me kings reign, and lawgivers establish justice; by me princes govern, and nobles; all the rulers of earth. Those who love me I also love, and those who seek me find me. With me are riches and honor, enduring wealth and prosperity. My fruit is better than gold, yes, than pure gold, and my revenue than choice silver. On the way of duty I walk, along the paths of justice, granting wealth to those who love me, and filling their treasuries. . . . So now, O children, listen to me; instruction and wisdom do not reject! Happy the man who obeys me, and happy those who keep my ways. Happy the man watching daily at my gates, waiting at my door posts; for he who finds me finds life, and wins favor from the Lord. . . . To him who lacks understanding, I say, Come, eat of my food, and drink of the wine I have mixed!"*

Most faithful Virgin, make our trust in you as strong as yours was in the word of God, and help us to recite your *Magnificat*, so dear to all your children, with the gratitude, love, and confidence that you had in your heart; then it will soar from our lips, as it did from yours, straight to the very Throne of God. With St. Ambrose we pray, "Let your soul be in us that we may glorify the Lord; let your spirit be in us that we may rejoice in God our Savior."

The Mystery of the Ascension



“He parted from them and was carried up into heaven” (Lk. 24:51).

See the Apostles gathered around Jesus during the last moments of His sojourn on earth.

Divine Savior, teach me to love and relish above all the things of the spirit.

All the mysteries of the Word Incarnate end with His Ascension, as all the gifts of grace we receive end with our death. This last mystery of the earthly pilgrimage of our divine Master is the first of the mysteries of His heavenly life. As God He had never left heaven; as Man He willed to earn His right to enter it; and now, in order to complete His glory, He takes formal possession of His heavenly kingdom. This glory He received in essence at the Resurrection, but then He did not as yet enjoy the accidental splendor and happiness which is associated with actually dwelling in heaven. Through His Ascension, then, Jesus received the plenitude of glory: *He who descended, he it is who ascended also above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.*

In our interest, too, it was fitting that the Savior ascend into heaven. He had finished His mission and established His Church. His visible presence here below had ceased to be necessary. It was *expedient* for us that He go to the Father. Expedient, because in this way heaven itself would be opened to us, because His going *to prepare a place* for us

would strengthen us in the life of faith and strongly confirm us in hope. Expedient, also, because our love would increase through the descent of the Paraclete, the Spirit of Love, who would not have come to us unless our Savior had ascended into heaven. The Ascension, moreover, confers a stupendous favor upon our human nature, which, in the Person of Jesus, has been raised above all the heavenly hierarchies and participates in the very glory of the Godhead, *above every Principality and Power and Virtue and Domination—in short, above every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come.* Pope St. Leo beautifully said that the glory of Christ our Head is the hope of His Mystical Body, because in Him our humanity has attained to the very throne of God.

Again, the Ascension is the source of our salvation in the sense that through this mystery our Savior took possession of heaven in our name and became our Advocate in heaven with the Father. Finally, by allowing us to see Him visibly ascending heavenward, Jesus draws our gaze, so to speak, away from earth and leaves us looking in hope and desire toward heaven, the ultimate goal of all divine counsels and all human effort.

“O Jesus, Redeemer of mankind, joy of our hearts . . . give us to see Thy face and enrich us with Thy blessed light. Be Thou our Guide and our Way to heaven; be Thou the object of our hearts’ desire; be Thou the joy of our tears and the sweet recompense of a life spent for Thee!” (from a seventeenth-century version of a hymn by St. Ambrose.)

Heaven



"I go to prepare a place for you" (Jn. 14:2).

Try to enter into the sentiments of exultation and confidence which these words of Jesus inspired in the Apostles.

Lord Jesus, grant me holy desire of heaven and indifference to the things of earth.

What is sown a natural body rises a spiritual body. Agile, luminous, subtle, incapable of suffering—such will be the bodies of the elect in heaven. And when the glorified body is reunited with the blissful soul, the soul's happiness will increase, because of the new and ineffable sensations which it will then be capable of experiencing without satiety and forever. What rapture it will be to contemplate the glorified body of Jesus, our Brother! "*From my flesh I shall see God,*" said holy Job; each of the elect can say also: My eyes, these eyes, are to see Jesus in all His majesty as the King of glory, in all His beauty as the Son of Man, in all His meekness as the Lamb of God. They shall see Mary, His Mother and ours, the Refuge and Consolation of our exile. In her we shall contemplate the glory of her Son and her own radiant splendor as Queen of heaven, raised to a throne above all thrones, except that of the Divinity. We shall see the innumerable army of the elect and all the beauties of paradise, of which St. Paul, who had beheld them, at least in spirit, could only say that the mind of man was unable to conceive of such magnificence.

Our minds will be illumined by the rays of the Sun of Justice. All darkness, uncertainty, and error will be dispelled, so that we shall know the most hidden mysteries. The ravishing beauty, infinite sanctity, and limitless mercy of our Creator will draw and hold our hearts in an endless, burning rapture of love. And this love, perfect and everlasting, will eternally give birth to changeless and ineffable joy. The very bliss of God will be communicated to us—or rather, it is in God Himself, God omnipotent, infinite, wise, glorious, and good that we shall be plunged and engulfed. The soul, as the Fathers tell us, will be filled with God, surrounded by God, penetrated with God. God within her as in His kingdom, she in God as in the center of her repose. God possessing her wholly and she wholly possessing God. The human tongue cannot speak nor can the human mind conceive of the joy of this possession. We cannot as yet comprehend what it is to be eternally hungry and eternally filled, ever ardent in desire and ever enraptured by fulfillment. Eternity! O heavenly Jerusalem! be henceforth the dearest object of my thoughts and desires, the motivating force of my life, the principle and consummation of my joy.

O my God, how happy will be the day when, my exile ended at last, You call me home! Make me so live every moment of my life on earth that I may be welcomed by You in that kingdom which has no end, where I shall see You, love You, and possess You forever.

The Ascension of Our Savior



"He was lifted up before their eyes, and a cloud took him out of their sight" (Acts 1:10).

Imagine that you are with our Lady and the Apostles and disciples as they watch Jesus ascending into heaven.

O Jesus, grant me to live my life in the spirit of this glorious mystery.

It was from Jerusalem, the royal city of David, that Jesus willed to ascend into heaven and enter into His kingdom. It was in this holy city that the Apostles were bidden to remain until the coming of the Holy Spirit; and from Jerusalem also was to commence the preaching of the Gospel which would be proclaimed to the whole world. The Ascension did not, however, take place within Jerusalem itself. Jesus led His disciples outside the city proper to the Mount of Olives, where He had begun His passion and from where He will one day judge the world. Perhaps it was on the way thither that the disciples asked, "*Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?*" This was not the time to explain anew the meaning of the prophecies relating to the restoration of the throne of David, and so Jesus merely answered that the knowledge of the time and manner of this restoration was reserved to the Father.

Following this response He gave His disciples to understand that the kingdom of the Messias, the new Israel, would receive its advancement, if not its perfection, through the

testimony of the Apostles, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, as Isaias had foretold: *"I will pour out my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thy stock; and the prophet Jeremias: Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love . . . and I will build thee again and thou shalt be built, O virgin of Israel. Jesus opened before them, also, the magnificent horizon of the future spread of His Church: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall be witnesses for me in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and even to the very ends of the earth."*

Then, blessing His own, the Master departed from their sight. With what love and longing must His Virgin Mother and His little band of followers have watched Jesus rising toward heaven! And what, we may reverently wonder, were the thoughts of our Savior as He saw the earth gradually vanishing in the distance! Oh, how brief is this life, how small our earth, how short-lived the suffering and sacrifices that can win for us, nevertheless, an unspeakably great and everlasting reward! Let us try to imagine, also, however imperfect our conception must necessarily be, the splendor that attended our Lord's entrance into His heavenly kingdom. Let us see the heavens opening to Him—heaven, the dwelling place of glory, of joy, of power. Accompanied by His foster father, St. Joseph, and all the elect of the Old Testament, Jesus receives the homage of the angelic hosts. He is welcomed by the Father and the Holy Spirit and He now takes His eternal place at the right hand of God; that is, He takes full possession forever of the power, the majesty, and the divine glory of the Father.

Lift up, O gates, your lintels; reach up, you ancient portals, that the king of glory may come in! Who is this king of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle. Lift

up, O gates, your lintels; reach up, you ancient portals, that the king of glory may come in! Who is this king of glory? The Lord of hosts; he is the king of glory (Ps. 23:7-10).

MAY 23

Our Lady, Queen of Apostles



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

Mary is Queen of the Apostles because her dignity as Mother of God surpasses theirs. The Apostles were *the ministers of Christ, the dispensers of the mysteries of God*. Mary is she of whom *was born Jesus who is called Christ* and she is also the custodian of the mysteries of God. Moreover, Mary was the first Apostle, for she first gave Christ to the world and so achieved the essential aim of the apostleship.

O Mary my Mother, obtain for me an increase of apostolic zeal.

On feasts of the Apostles and Evangelists, the Church sings at *Matins* a hymn written by St. Ambrose, which celebrates the glories of the Apostles in most exalted terms. They are acclaimed as “princes of the Church,” “soldiers of the heavenly court,” “the true light of the world,” in whom triumphs the glory of the Father and the Son and in whom the will of the Holy Spirit is accomplished. The Apostles were, moreover, the special choice of Jesus. He sanctified them, confirmed them in grace, and promised that they should one day sit with the Son of Man in His majesty *judging the twelve tribes of Israel*. Yet, high as the Apostles

are placed in the Church both on earth and in heaven, Mary is their superior; she is their Queen. During the years following the Ascension of our Savior she was also, indeed, their Evangelist. The account of the Annunciation and the Incarnation and most of the facts relating to the infancy of Jesus as they are recorded by St. Luke could have come only from her. There was no one who could speak to them as she did about the hidden life, the mystery of the cross, and what took place in the soul of Jesus on the cross. This thought moved St. Ambrose to say, "It is not strange that St. John should have spoken better of the mystery of the Incarnation than the others, since he lived at the source of heavenly secrets."

As it was Mary's mission to be the "Evangelist of the Evangelists" and the "Apostle of the Apostles" in the early Church, this is still her mission today with regard to us. We are successors to the Apostles in the sense that our work also is to manifest Christ to the world. This is a supernatural task to be achieved only by supernatural means; and if we are to succeed in it we must, as the Apostles did, depend on Mary. To her we must look for direction in the most difficult task of our apostolate, that of forming ourselves to a completely supernatural spirit. We cannot be true Christians unless we are children of Mary. In her school, at her feet, we must learn to know Jesus. We must see Him through her eyes, follow His movements with her loving attention, tend Him in others with her hands and under her guidance. Above all, we must ponder His mysteries in our hearts in union with her, so that day by day we may deepen our insight into the spirit of her Son. Then, if, like the Apostles, we accustom ourselves to see Jesus living in Mary, there will flow from us, when the time comes for us to do the work of God, the

spirit of His holiness, the fullness of His power, the perfection of His ways, the truth of His virtues, and the communication of His mysteries.

O compassionate Mother Mary, Queen of the Apostles, deign to be my guide and strength in the fulfillment of my vocation. Jesus has graciously chosen me to labor in His vineyard, but in order that its fruits may be plentiful, I must be filled with His spirit. This is your mission, O Mary, since you are my Mother. Teach me to find Jesus daily in the duties of my state, in my work, and in the other members of the Mystical Body. Help me to understand that the spirit of the true apostle is, above all, the spirit of prayer and sacrifice. It was through sacrifice that you became the Mother of the Mystical Body and so transmitted the divine life to your children; by this means, too, my zeal will fructify for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

MAY 24

Believe . . . in Me



“Believe . . . in me” (Jn. 14:1).

Faith in our Savior is both the basis for our relations with him and the first condition of the supernatural life.

O Son of God, inspire in me a more staunch, active, and joyous faith in You.

In the New Testament faith means the acceptance of the Gospel preached by Jesus Christ and His Apostles. Not to accept the Gospel is not to be a Christian. This faith, moreover, is based neither on intuition nor on direct vision. It is

the acceptance of divine testimony—a free acceptance, because we can refuse belief; enlightened, because it rests upon a personal and intimate conviction that God has really spoken; and supernatural, because divine grace is needed to give light to the mind and assistance to the will. In the past God had spoken to man by the prophets; but *last of all in these days*, St. Paul wrote to the Hebrews, [He] *has spoken to us by his Son*. All that our Savior has said, therefore, all that He has done, all that He has revealed, as it is contained in Scripture and taught by the Church demands the assent of our faith. Jesus insistently recommends this faith to us, He frequently praises it in others, He requires it from His disciples under all circumstances from the beginning to the end of His public life.

In this faith which every Christian must possess, Jesus wishes to see certain qualities. It should be a firm, constant, resolute faith, so that we would sacrifice our lives, if necessary, in testimony to our faith in the Son of God, as our Savior Himself was the first to do. Our faith should also be living and active. Whatever the situation in which we find ourselves, or whatever the obstacles in our path, or the decisions we must make, the first question we should ask ourselves, as St. Vincent de Paul was in the habit of doing, is: "What would Christ do in my place?" There is always in the life of Jesus a mystery, an utterance, an action, that tells us what we should do, what course to take. Our Savior never leaves us without an answer, for He Himself said, "*I have given you an example.*"

Again, Jesus desires us to believe in Him with an eager, joyous faith, because we thereby glorify Him as *the author and finisher of faith*. He it was who brought it to earth by His incarnation; who implanted it in our souls by His life

and teaching, sealed it with His blood, and provided for its preservation and spread by the establishment of the Church. We should always find new joy in making an act of faith in the divinity and humanity of Jesus or in some mystery of His life. And, while it gives glory to the Savior, our faith in Him makes us participants in the treasures of His wisdom and knowledge, because the dispensations of the divine will are contained in the deposit of faith, which is the teaching of Christ: *For God, who commanded light to shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts, to give enlightenment concerning the knowledge of the glory of God, shining on the face of Christ Jesus.* We also share in His power and virtue, because living faith in Him makes all things possible. St. Paul calls his own life, so great and fruitful, a life of faith in Jesus Christ: *And the life I now live in the flesh, I live in the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me.*

My Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, I humbly beseech You to scatter the darkness of my mind and to give me a lively faith, firm hope, and burning love. Grant, O my God, that I may know You well and may do all things in Your light and in conformity with Your holy will.

MAY 25

Take Courage



“But take courage, I have overcome the world” (Jn. 16:33).
Both the life of our Savior and His own precept impress upon

us the duty of exercising hope, the second of the theological virtues, and of not ceasing to make acts of this virtue until death.

Lord Jesus, strengthen in me the virtue of hope.

To believe in anyone we must have confidence in him; and it is to confidence that Jesus exhorted the Apostles in the words: "*Take courage, I have overcome the world.*" The goal of Christian hope is the possession of God in eternal life. Now, our Savior is our God and, consequently, the proper object of our hope. Eternal life, which consists in knowing the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, is our heritage only in Christ and by Christ. He, our High Priest, has entered into the sanctuary of heaven before us. *This hope we have, says St. Paul, as a sure and firm anchor of the soul, reaching even behind the veil where our forerunner Jesus has entered for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchisedech.* The bliss of heaven itself, moreover, is the eternal and blessed presence of Jesus, for in heaven *we shall ever be with the Lord.*

But the possession of God in eternal life is a supernatural aspiration which it is impossible for us to attain without His all-powerful assistance. And so the means to reach the goal become also the object of our hope. These means, too, come to us from the Savior. He said of Himself, "*I am the way. . . . No one comes to the Father but by me.*" Through Him we receive all grace and merit. Without Him we can do nothing. He is our *God-given wisdom, and justice, and sanctification, and redemption and in everything [we] have been enriched in him.* He is our Advocate with the Father and by His death He is a *propitiation for our sins, not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.* In tempta-

tion, Jesus is our Protector and our Model, for He was *one tried as we are in all things except sin*.

In all suffering and doubt He is our Light and our Support; everywhere we have in Him a faithful Companion and Fellow Wayfarer. And when the time comes for that great and final departure, who remains as the only One who consoles and is able to console us? Is it not our good Master with His sacraments and His grace? It is because of Him that death is not for the Christian as for *others who have no hope*. In Jesus death is a gain, thanks to the resurrection, which, by faith in Him, by the reception of the Eucharist, by His own Resurrection, makes us citizens of heaven. Truly, with His well-beloved Son the Father has given us all things. Let us remain firm, then, in our hope as in our faith; for in Jesus we are not only established in hope, but we *rejoice in hope*, and with St. Paul we *exult in tribulations also, knowing that tribulation works out endurance, and endurance tried virtue, and tried virtue hope*. Nor will our hope in Christ be disappointed, *but God commends his charity toward us, because when as yet we were sinners, Christ died for us*.

O Jesus, divine Savior, I place all my hope in You; and because of this hope I shall not fear *even though I walk in the dark valley*. You will render to me my heritage and give joy to my soul and body by the eternal contemplation of Your glory. Jesus, who died and rose again and are now seated at the right hand of the Father to intercede for us, grant that I may hope in You, like Abraham, against all hope. O risen and glorified Savior, be with the Father and the Holy Spirit my confidence and joy here below — that confidence and joy which no man can take away.

Abide in My Love

"Abide in my love" (Jn. 15:9).

If we abide in our Savior by charity, He necessarily abides in us through sanctifying grace; and the fruit of this union is the observance of the great commandment of love, upon which all else depends.

Jesus, my God, grant that I may love You above all things for Your sake alone.

What is it that our hearts endlessly seek after and desire? It is God, our first and most intimate need. Toward Him, the Source of our being, the Principle of our conservation and of our beatitude, we naturally incline, as the plant turns toward light and moisture. Nothing except God can fully satisfy us; but Jesus is our God, as He solemnly affirmed; "*He who sees me sees also the Father*"; and again, "*I and the Father are one.*" If our Savior is God we belong to Him and we are under the obligation toward Him of the first and greatest commandment, which is to love God with our whole heart, our whole soul, and all our strength, for His own sake, because of His infinite perfection. This must always be the predominant motive of our love. Other motives, such as holy fear, gratitude, hope, may be joined with it, provided that pure love remains truly predominant. The pure love of God differs from interested love in that by it we love Him because He is good; and we wish Him well, while interested love consists in loving Him inasmuch as He

is *good to us* and in desiring *our own* good. The love of the divine benefactions, however, easily passes to love of the Benefactor, and if this love of His bounty is based on His infinite goodness, it becomes identical with charity.

After God, man is the need and delight of man. This satisfaction, too, which we seek for in our fellow human beings, we find in Jesus; for as He is truly God, so He is also truly Man. We see in Him a human nature like our own, even to being liable to suffering and death, although possessing at the same time an infinite sublimity and containing all excellence, honor, and dignity of nature, grace, and glory. We belong to Him, and we are completely dependent upon Him for our existence, our life, and all our interests, natural and supernatural. We have, so to speak, our roots in Him. Moreover, despite our unworthiness, past and present, Jesus loves us with an active, disinterested, supernatural love as His creatures, His brethren, His coheirs, His friends, as the children of His heavenly Father. No friend could love us more than He, none could be more powerful nor more faithful.

The effects upon us of our growth in divine charity have been well described by the author of the *Imitation*. Our burden becomes light: "For love carrieth a burden without being burdened and maketh all else that is bitter, sweet and savoury." We are lifted upward toward God: "For love is born of God and cannot rest but in God." We aim with joy at the highest perfection: "The lover flieth, runneth, rejoiceth . . . he giveth all for all." Our souls become filled with joy and peace; joy, because "nothing is sweeter than love . . . nothing more pleasant, nothing fuller nor better in heaven or on earth"; peace, because the love of Jesus gives us "a tranquil heart, great peace, and festive joy."

May the love of Christ our Lord grow in our hearts until we attain to the perfection of charity, without division, without reserve, without measure!

“Lord Jesus, I unite myself to Your perpetual, unceasing, universal sacrifice. I offer myself to You every day of my life, and every moment of every day, according to Your most holy and adorable will. You have been the Victim of my salvation. I wish to be the victim of Your love. Accept my desire, take my offering, graciously hear my prayer. Let me live for love of You, let me die for love of You; let my last heartbeat be an act of perfect love!” (*Raccolta.*)

MAY 27

Members of Christ



“Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?”
(1 Cor. 6:15.)

We owe to St. Paul the sublime comparison of the Mystical Body of Christ with a living organism of which Jesus is the head, the Holy Spirit the soul, and the Church the body.

Divine Jesus, grant me a better and more practical understanding of my life in You.

Of all the Fathers St. Augustine studied the marvelous doctrine of the mystical Christ with the greatest love and insight. He points out that Jesus is presented in Holy Scripture under three distinct aspects. We see Him, first, as the only-begotten Son of God, coeternal and consubstantial with the Father; second, as the Incarnate Word, who, by an unspeakable act

of condescension became man and thus our Brother, our Mediator, and our Redeemer. Finally, there is, in St. Augustine's phrase, *the whole Christ*, who mystically completes Himself by joining to Himself the Church so as to form what St. Paul calls *a perfect man*, of whom He personally is the head and all the faithful are the members. Not that there is anything lacking to Christ, but as the Word could complete Himself in His role as Savior, according to the actual dispensation of Providence, only by assuming our humanity; so, too, the God-Man completes Himself by uniting to Himself the Church. The manner of this union St. Paul symbolizes by Christian marriage and by the union which exists between the members of a living organism and its head.

The members of Christ have no other spiritual life than that which they draw from their Head, just as the life of the branches is derived from the vine to which they are united so as to form one and the same plant. "*Abide in me,*" Jesus tells us, "*and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it remain on the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in me.*" We abide in Jesus by the exercise of faith, by corresponding with His graces, and by reproducing His virtues in our own lives. We live by Him and He in us when, having renounced sin, we die to ourselves as the seed which falls into the ground must die before it can yield fruit. When we no longer act except in accordance with the teachings of Jesus in the Gospel and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, then the divine life of Jesus has come to birth in our souls. And when the new man, Jesus Christ, is formed in us, His desires, His words, His actions, in a word, His whole life is lived again in us according to our vocation and in the measure of our capacity.

Then we can say with the Apostle of the Gentiles, *It is*

now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me; that is, if I speak, I speak through His power; if I pray, it is owing to His grace; all I accomplish is done through Him. This mystical life of Jesus, which consists in thinking, loving, speaking, and acting as He did, makes the perfect Christian, a living continuation of Christ in the human family. It is only in becoming one with Jesus, united with Him as the branch is joined to the vine, that we can be pleasing to the Father. It has been truly said that in all the universe God the Father loves with the true love of friendship only Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Son of the Father's love and complacency and through Him alone can we be beautiful in the Father's eyes.

O Jesus, let me no longer be led by the humors and whims of nature which so often motivate and govern my actions; when I speak or act, when I pray, labor, or suffer, let it be in You that I do these things. Through the intercession of Your blessed Mother, I beg You to teach me how to die to myself that I may live in You, with You, and by You. Show me what in me is displeasing to You and prepare me to receive the graces that You mercifully will to give me. Above all, good Jesus, never permit me to stand in the way of the graces which through me You will to bestow upon others.

MAY 28

Imitation of Christ



“But be renewed in the spirit of your mind and put on the new man, which has been created according to God in justice and holiness of truth” (Eph. 4:24).

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The imitation of Christ is more than a counsel or a recommendation; it is a duty.

O Jesus, enlighten my understanding and move my will that I may efficaciously desire to imitate You.

The Eternal Son of God did not become incarnate solely for the purpose of reconciling the world with His Father and delivering mankind from the bondage of Satan. This was only a part of His mission. A principal end of the Incarnation was to provide man with a Teacher, a Master and Model, of all virtues. Jesus shows us this by calling Himself the *Way* by which we must live, that is, according to His example; as well as the *Truth* (by His doctrine) and the *Life* (by His death and His sacraments). During the thirty-three years of His mortal life our Savior endeavored by precept and example to reproduce His virtues in His own disciples and through them in the souls of all men. Therefore, He willed to pass through all the stages of human life: to be born, to labor, to suffer and die, like all the children of Adam.

If the title "Christian" means "follower of Christ," and if the Savior came to be for us a rule of conduct as well as of faith, then we cannot be true Christians without imitating His virtues. His life is a mirror wherein each of us can see traced out the pattern our own life should follow. Jesus says to all, "*If anyone wishes to come after me, let him . . . follow me*" and "*I have given you an example, that as I have done . . . so you also should do.*" St. Paul teaches us that in becoming Christians we became adopted children of God by grace as Jesus Christ Himself, the Son of God, is by nature. Ought we not resemble our heavenly Father as children in the natural order resemble their fathers? But since

God Himself is invisible, we can achieve this resemblance only by conforming ourselves to His image as it was visibly revealed in His Son. Just as we received from Adam the germ of our physical life, which, as it develops, takes us through the stages of human existence until we reach maturity like that of our first parent, so we receive in Baptism a principle of supernatural life which should grow and strengthen until Jesus Christ is formed in us. Furthermore, our happiness in both time and eternity depends upon our likeness to Jesus Christ. In this life we cannot become the object of the divine love and complacency unless the Father sees the image of His adorable Son being formed in us; and in heaven our happiness will be in accordance with the degree of conformity with Jesus Christ that we achieved during life. Let us see whether we are becoming living copies of our divine Model; whether our eyes are pure, our ears chaste, our words discreet, our comportment modest and grave like His. Let us see whether we are replacing our natural eagerness for notice with His humility, the coldness and indifference we sometimes show our neighbor with His compassionate charity, our vacillation with His constancy, our moodiness with His equanimity, our ill-regulated affections with His purity of heart, our distracted habits with His recollection, our immoderateness of speech with the temperate wisdom of His discourse.

O Jesus, grant that I may say to You with a sincere and efficacious will, "*Master, I will follow thee wherever thou goest.*" This grace I ask through the most blessed Virgin Mary, Your closest follower, and through Your Apostles, who, after the descent of the Holy Spirit, led lives so faithfully conformed to Yours.

Knowledge of Christ



“Now this is everlasting life, that they may know thee, the only true God, and him whom thou hast sent, Jesus Christ” (Jn. 17:3).

According to the words of our Savior Himself in His prayer for His disciples at the Last Supper, everlasting life consists in the knowledge of Him.

Divine Savior, teach me to know You and to make You everywhere better known and loved.

We cannot imitate that which we do not know; and so, if we are to follow Jesus, it is necessary for us to come to know Him. To know Jesus is to become acquainted with all that faith teaches us about Him and about His relations with us. It is to possess in detail a knowledge of all the events of His life, from His birth to His ascension into heaven; but not in a merely speculative way, for this of itself does not move the will. We have long known Jesus in the sense that we are familiar with the history of His life on earth. Perhaps, because of reading and hearing about these events so frequently, we have become somewhat insensible to their import for us. Yet, if we are to imitate Him, we may not be satisfied with the superficial knowledge of Him that all Christians possess; we must study His life in a deeper and more detailed way. The purpose of this closer attention to the life of our Savior on earth is that we may be filled with the spirit of His doctrine and example in the

sense of the words of St. Paul: *Wherefore I . . . do not cease to give thanks to you, making mention of you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may grant you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in deep knowledge of him.*

The principal means that has been provided us for growing in the knowledge of Jesus is the Gospel. Its lessons should be deeply impressed upon our minds, for the least word of Jesus Christ is light for the soul and the source of its life and peace. By a reverent and humble study of His life as it is narrated by the Evangelists, we shall be enabled to enter ever more deeply into the mysteries of Christ. Then we shall advance in the imitation of Him whom we must resemble under pain of not being recognized by Him when we appear before His tribunal. We shall be filled with zeal to make others know and love our divine Master, and we shall bring this about more by our example than by our instruction. His virtues will become living and real to us; His teachings, intimately familiar lessons; the thought of Him, sweet and habitual. But in order to gain this true knowledge we must pray as well as study. For all is supernatural that Jesus teaches by word and example. All is above our natural lights and also against the inclinations of our fallen nature. We can understand and follow our Savior's teachings, therefore, only insofar as we are assisted by grace.

The contemplation of the hidden and public life of the Savior should lead us also to the study of another book, open to all eyes, where the greatest saints have been formed—the crucifix. Take into your hand this glorious Standard after which your Congregation is named and say to yourself, "Who is it who hangs dying here in anguish? It is Jesus Christ; my God and my Savior. And why does He suffer? For love

of me and it is I who have crucified Him." Work to become perfect copies of your divine Model and nothing will be able to destroy your vocation. The crosses you will meet in fulfilling your duties will appear bearable, to be loved, and even preferable to everything else, because Jesus preferred the cross. "Divine Savior, I desire ardently to meditate upon Thy holy books. Make Thy words my chaste delight; deign to grant me understanding of them. Reveal Thyself to my soul and allow me to drink continuously of the salutary waters of Thy grace" (prayer of St. Augustine).

MAY 30

Our Lady in the Cenacle



"All these with one mind continued steadfastly in prayer with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren" (Acts 1:14).

Represent to yourself the upper room and the Apostles and disciples in prayer, gathered about our Lady.

O Mary, Spouse of the Holy Spirit, be to me counselor and guide, as you were to the Apostles.

As we return in thought to the Cenacle, that sanctuary of recollectedness and peace, where the Apostles and disciples are assembled, persevering *steadfastly in prayer*, the first impulse of our hearts is to look for Mary, the Mother of Jesus. Peter will on Pentecost receive general jurisdiction over the Church as the earthly representative of our Savior, while Mary will remain in the ranks of the faithful; but it is no

less true that in the upper room, as in the infant Church, Mary played a unique role. The Apostles had known the Lord for a few years only, that is, since the baptism of John. They recognized and acknowledged His divinity, but it would seem that they had not yet been fully instructed in certain fundamental mysteries of Christianity, as, for example, the Incarnation. This was Mary's secret. She had not revealed it even to St. Joseph, for, as we know, he was told of it by an angel; and it was the Holy Spirit, not Mary, who first disclosed the secret to Elizabeth. But that which the humility of Mary had hitherto concealed, it was now time to speak of, and it may have been during these days of prayer in the Cenacle that Mary, the witness of all the mysteries of the Christian faith, spoke of them to the Apostles and disciples.

Mary was not only the instructor, but also the counselor and guide of the Apostles, awed as they were by the enormity of the task which confronted them. She told them, perhaps, how one day an angel came and asked of her also the impossible, reminding her that *nothing shall be impossible with God*. She exhorted them to have confidence, to pray. During these days of intimacy the Apostles, we might say, "discover" Mary. They no longer feel they are alone, for they recognize that in Mary God had given them a source of comfort and strength. But even more than by her words Mary supported the Apostles and disciples by her example. What fortitude of soul was hers! What goodness to those who had abandoned Jesus! The sight of her alone must have lifted up their hearts. She was the model of all the virtues that Jesus had Himself practiced and taught. They had only to observe her to know what they should be.

Mary also prayed with and for this little band of Jesus'

followers. Incessantly she implored the Holy Spirit to descend upon their souls, still so blind and powerless. Mary's presence in the Cenacle during these hours preceding the descent of the Spirit of God was necessary for the Church; for it was through her intercession that the Paraclete hastened His coming. It is right that at this moment we should find the Church, as she will always be found, gathered about Mary, drawing inspiration from Mary, modeling herself upon Mary, and supplicating her to obtain from her Son the promised grace. Mary also will continue to sustain her role. It is by her intercession that the members of the Church down the ages will receive grace from the Holy Spirit; it is to Mary we must have recourse if we wish to obtain it.

Hail Mary, our Mother, on the eve of the first Pentecost more than ever *full of grace*, dearest and worthiest of all who awaited the coming of the Paraclete! Deign in your gracious mercy to intercede for me and prepare me for the descent of the Holy Spirit, who reigned so perfectly in your pure soul.

MAY 31

Pentecost



"And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:4).

In celebrating the feast of Pentecost, we honor a mystery that is daily renewed; for the Paraclete still really descends into souls that are properly disposed to receive Him; not in a visible form as upon the Apostles, but just as truly. Nor does He now usually bring with Him the external gifts that were necessary in apostolic times, but graces of conversion and sanctification

which are and will ever be the same as those that accompanied His first coming.

Divine Paraclete, grant me as the grace of this feast that I may be interiorly enlightened and purified as were the Apostles and disciples.

What were the Apostles before the descent of the Paraclete? Men drawn from the lower social classes, without education, and not even endowed with great intelligence. After three years in the school of a divine Master they still did not understand His doctrine and they still held to a false interpretation of His promises. But, immediately upon receiving the Holy Spirit of God, the truths of faith, the significance of the teachings of Jesus suddenly became clear. Without study on their part or formal instruction, they now understood the whole deposit of faith: dogmas, moral doctrines, the sacramental system. Many of the saints, also, have told us that they learned more in prayer than from books or other human instruction. Have recourse, then, to the Holy Spirit, and without neglecting natural means for advancing in knowledge, acquire the habit of invoking Him in your studies. Ask also that He Himself may speak to you in your meditations and spiritual reading and in the spiritual conferences you attend.

The instruction that the Apostles miraculously received from the Holy Spirit was not for them sterile knowledge. While they were being enlightened, they were also being interiorly purified; for the Paraclete is the Sanctifier as well as the Spirit of Truth, and under the symbol of the tongues of fire He infused divine charity into their hearts. Before, the Apostles had been ambitious, jealous, quarrelsome, but now they are transformed. Not only are they saints, but

they are models of high sanctity. In the world, but no longer of the world, transcending every earthly interest and desire, they can say to the whole human race with St. Paul, "Be imitators of us as we are of Christ." The same transformation could be brought about in us if we knew how to draw down the Holy Spirit. His sacred fire, once really enkindled in our hearts, would destroy every irregular desire, all sensual affection; it would consume all the impurity in our soul, so that we should become pure gold.

The coming of the Paraclete also caused the Apostles to rise above all human fear. These men who had been so lacking in courage that they abandoned their Master—the most zealous among them had three times denied Him—now go forth to preach His Resurrection, to proclaim His divinity, to spread His Gospel in synagogue, Temple, and public street, and even before the tribunals of their persecutors. Not only are they fearless in exposing themselves to suffering and death for their Lord and Master, but they even aspire to a share in His lot. They look forward to dying for Him as to a high and blessed privilege. How great is our own deed of fortitude and courage—not, perhaps, in order to face martyrdom, but to win the victory over the flesh, the allurements of the world, and the wiles of the devil!

O Holy Spirit of God, I am as ignorant, as defiled by sin, and as weak as the Apostles and disciples were before Your descent on the first Christian Pentecost. Impart to me also the light, the purity of conscience, and the strength of soul which Your coming brought to them.