

personal arrogance, and especially at His clear declaration of His divinity, *they took up stones to cast at him*. They would have stoned the Messiah in His Temple, they would have extinguished the Light of the world!

With what beauty and majesty, O Jesus, and with what marvelous grace Your divine figure stands out against this ominous background! Composed and calm, You neither fled nor yielded to this angry crowd, but You withdrew from their sight by Your divine power. Grant me this courage, O Jesus, in the defense of my faith and of all truth. And never allow me, divine Redeemer, to force You to hide Yourself from me through my resistance to the light of Your grace. For Your withdrawal would be the most terrible of chastisements, the greatest of misfortunes.

OCTOBER 1

The Man Born Blind



"And as he was passing by, he saw a man blind from birth"
(Jn. 9:1).

After the discourse on the spiritual light which ended with an attempt on the part of some of our Savior's adversaries to stone Him, St. John narrates the cure of the man born blind. He who knew and avowed his blindness received both physical sight and the new vision of faith; they who believed themselves enlightened remained blind.

"Lord, that I may see!"

As Jesus was passing perhaps one of the Temple gates where the poor and the afflicted were accustomed to gather in the

would surely love me. For from God I came forth and have come; for neither have I come of myself, but he sent me"; in referring to the identity of His knowledge and activity with those of the Father, as: "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that of myself I do nothing; but even as the Father has taught me, I speak these things." Finally, Jesus affirms His divinity in claiming the power to impart eternal life, as: "Amen, amen, I say to you, if anyone keep my word, he will never see death."

The third class of testimonies reveals explicitly the divinity of Jesus, as in the words which provoked the Jews to their attempt to stone Him: "Amen, amen, I say to you, before Abraham came to be, I am." This most beautiful definition of God, reminding us of the words addressed centuries before to Moses, "I am who am," marks His eternity, His independence, His causality. The creature, properly speaking, does not exist, it subsists. It has a derivative, contingent, unstable life. It is, in a manner, only a phenomenon, manifesting itself in God.

The growing irritation of the Jews at the repeated testimonies of our Savior was shown in their livelier and more numerous objections and in the raillery and insults with which they received the prediction of Jesus concerning His death; for example, *Again, therefore, Jesus said to them, ". . . Where I go you cannot come." The Jews therefore kept saying, "Will he kill himself, since he says, 'Where I go you cannot come'?"* Their increasing hostility was also evident in the blasphemous outrage they committed in accusing Jesus in the presence of the crowd of being a Samaritan and possessed by a devil, that is, of being both wicked and mad. Then, carried out of themselves with fury at His response to their charges in which He openly flayed their national pride and

hope of receiving an alms, He saw a man who had been born blind. Filled with compassion for this man's affliction as well as for his poverty, for St. John tells us he was a beggar, Jesus stopped and fixed His divine glance upon him. The disciples, whose sympathies also had been aroused, asked, "*Rabbi, who has sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?*" Our Savior replied that neither the blind beggar nor his parents were responsible for his affliction, but that God had permitted it in order that His works might be made manifest. The motivation of the miracle which was now to be performed was, therefore, the revealing of the works of God. Then Jesus added another reason, which recalls the imagery of His instruction during the Feast of Tabernacles: "*I must do the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world I am the light of the world.*" That is to say: As it is the nature of light to shine forth, so my mission, as long as I am here below, is to glorify God in revealing Him and manifesting His works. Only a short time remains for Me to live, and therefore I hasten to make My light shine by a miracle which will reveal Me as the light of the world; just as in the temple My light as Messiah and as God shone forth in My teachings.

The miracle itself was extraordinary. Rightly did the cured beggar cry out, "*Not from the beginning of the world has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind.*" This man had never seen the light; his blindness was complete and, humanly speaking, incurable; so apparently hopeless was his case that neither he nor his parents even thought of invoking our Savior's miraculous power. But in this instance Jesus did not wait to be asked; *he spat on the ground and made clay with the spittle, and having anointed*

the man's eyes, He told him to go and wash in the pool of Siloe. The rites occasionally used by our Savior in performing miracles are, in some instances, spiritual symbols, and it is in a symbolical sense which we are to look for here. The saliva and the flowing water are, above all, an image of holy Baptism, whereby a man becomes a new spiritual being; just as our Savior may actually have created sight in this man. Again, in Baptism a man is relieved of the defilement of sin and spiritual blindness by the water which springs forth from the mount of the Church, as the pool of Siloe from the Temple mount, and which has for its source the wound in the sacred side of the Redeemer.

O Jesus, Light of the world, You gave sight to the blind man that we might know You as He who enlightens every man who comes into the world. I, too, come to You for the gift of sight. Grant me, good Jesus, that undimmed vision of the spirit which sees You in every person, in every place, in every task, in all the events of life.

OCTOBER 2

The Guardian Angels



(See *Festivals and Saints*, p. 853)

Testimony of the Cured Blind Man



"They took him who had been blind to the Pharisees. Now it was a Sabbath on which Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes" (Jn. 9:13, 14).

In the view of the Pharisees, Jesus had committed two violations of the Sabbath rest: by molding clay, which was regarded as servile work, and by practicing medicine, which was permitted on the Sabbath only when there was danger of death.

Divine Savior, grant me light to know the truth and courage in bearing witness to it.

Jesus had hidden Himself and left the Temple to escape the fury of His enemies after His open revelation of His divinity, but now He cast among them, as it were, a new and flaming brand of contention by this striking miracle. A miracle produces its full effect, however, only when it does actually produce wonderment. Our Savior excellently disposed all the circumstances of this cure toward this end, and the Pharisees were able assistants; for they bore witness to the reality of the cure by their very efforts to deny and suppress it. They were apprised of the miracle by the people, who, after first assuring themselves of the identity of the cured beggar, brought him to the Pharisees. In the cross examination of the cured blind man by the Pharisees, the manner of the cure was described again, as it had been before for the crowd; and Jesus was again acknowledged as the author of it. A division now arose among the Pharisees. The more hostile stressed the fact that the cure was per-

formed on the Sabbath, but others said, "*How can a man who is a sinner work these signs?*"

Next, inquiry was made of the parents of the blind man. They had not witnessed the cure, but that their son was born blind and now had his sight restored they could not deny; yet, fearing expulsion from the synagogue, they referred the matter back to their son. The cured beggar was again summoned and pressed to admit, at least, that Jesus was a sinner; but he would only say, as if out of prudence, "*Whether he is a sinner, I do not know,*" implying by these words what he immediately asserted, namely that there was one fact of which there could be no doubt—he himself was once blind and now he saw. Finally, weary of the continued questioning, he asked with a touch of mockery, "*Would you also become his disciples?*" And to the Pharisees' answering sneer that he might keep that title for himself, since they were disciples of Moses, to whom they were certain God had spoken, whereas of Jesus' origin they had no knowledge, he replied, "*Why, herein is the marvel, that you do not know where he is from, and yet he opened my eyes. Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshipper of God and does his will, him he hears.*" This response was interpreted as a great piece of insolence and with a last taunt, "*Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us?*" they drove him out of the council room and probably out of the synagogue.

This gave the beggar the opportunity of meeting Jesus, who was looking for him, for He had *heard that they had cast him out*. Our Savior approached him and first tested him with the question: "*Dost thou believe in the Son of God?*" The beggar replied eagerly, "*Who is he, Lord, that I may believe in him?*" Then, very clearly and explicitly,

Jesus said, "*Thou hast both seen him, and he it is who speaks with thee.*" Rarely had our Savior shown such great condescension; and the recipient was a poor beggar, but he was sincere and upright and, therefore, a dear friend of Jesus. Seeing now with the eyes of both body and soul, he fell upon his knees and worshiped, saying, "*I believe, Lord.*"

Lord Jesus, grant me an upright heart, always and everywhere bearing witness to the truth. Let not the fear of earthly loss or the hope of earthly gain ever cause me to depart from Your law. Before Your light, O Jesus, the blind see and those who think they see remain blind. You are the light that enlightens men of good will, but Your light only dazzles the proud and blinds them the more. The Pharisees refused to admit their sin and so they could not be forgiven. Preserve me, good Jesus, from ever falling into such a state of blindness.

OCTOBER 4

The Good Shepherd



"I am the good shepherd" (Jn. 10:11).

The beautiful and moving parable of the good shepherd, which is linked with the miraculous cure of the man born blind, is our Savior's answer to the attacks and the malice of the Pharisees.

O Good Shepherd, I ask the grace of remaining always among Your faithful sheep and of being myself a worthy shepherd of the souls in my charge.

Not content with persisting in their own stubborn refusal to believe in Jesus, the Pharisees had dared to threaten His

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followers with exclusion from the synagogue. And now, angered by his courageous profession of faith, they had just driven out the blind man cured by our Lord. It was against the Pharisees as evil shepherds, as falsely arrogating to themselves the pastoral authority, that this parable is directed. A good shepherd, Jesus tells them, knows his sheep and goes before them as their leader; and when danger threatens he even risks his life in their defense. Then our Savior applied to Himself these characteristics of the good shepherd.

Christ the Shepherd knows His sheep and they know Him, He tells us, with a mutual knowledge, like that which exists between the Father and the Son. This very strong parallel would seem to allude to the close bond that unites Christ and the Christian in the Mystical Body. Jesus, on His side, knows us who are His sheep with the most perfect and intimate knowledge. He knows not only the viciousness of our fallen nature, but also what we can become with the help of His grace. Nothing that takes place within us is hidden from Him: thoughts, desires, affections—all are clearly visible to His eyes. The Psalmist says, *My soul also you knew full well; nor was my frame unknown to you when I was made in secret, when I was fashioned in the depths of the earth. Your eyes have seen my actions; in your book they are all written.* Our Lord knows the good and the evil that we do, the efforts we make to please Him, our least infidelities, our words and actions, good and bad. Yet, this knowledge Jesus has of His flock is a benevolent and merciful knowledge. From all eternity He has regarded us with the tenderness that His heavenly Father has for Him. Those faithful souls whom from eternity He has known as docile to the promptings of grace, He elects and chooses in time from among thousands and leads them into saving

pastures, supporting their weakness and giving them to drink of His life-giving waters. *The Lord is my shepherd*, cried David in a transport of gratitude, *I shall not want. In verdant pastures he gives me repose; beside restful waters he leads me; he refreshes my soul. He guides me in right paths for his name's sake.*

Jesus goes before us as our guide and model in the way of His commandments and counsels. All the virtues were first practiced in their perfection by Him; the keenest suffering was first borne by Him. He was the first to rise, glorious and immortal, from the tomb and ascend into heaven. There in that blessed eternity He now awaits us, He, the Way that leads us there. And Christ, the Good Shepherd, gave His life for His sheep. When He said, *"I lay down my life for my sheep,"* He was speaking of His passion and death. Our divine Shepherd has put all that is His freely at our disposal: His life, death, resurrection, glory, precious blood, merits, virtues—all are for us. How can our hearts not be entirely His! How can everything we are and do not be for Him!

O Jesus, divine Shepherd, I adore You and thank You. It is by You that the Church subsists and grows throughout the world, through all ages. Her authority, her strength, her unity come from You, her omnipotent and merciful Shepherd. It is my hope and my desire that I may remain to the end in the fold of the Church, following You closely in sickness as in health, in humiliation as in honor, in death as in life.

The Good Sheep



"And mine know me" (Jn. 10:14).

Represent to yourself Jesus as the Good Shepherd leading His Sheep.

O Jesus, make me an ever more faithful and zealous member of Your flock.

The good sheep! This is the corollary to the Good Shepherd, but how seldom we reflect upon it! We accept the Shepherd's care and His gifts without considering that in strict justice we owe Him in return the total service of every power of our being and every moment of our lives. Our Savior is all in all to us, His flock. He is the Door of the sheepfold, the Way, the Pasture, and the Shepherd; we are, therefore, essentially and intimately dependent upon Him. A characteristic of His sheep, Jesus tells us, is their knowledge of Him. We cannot know our Savior as fully and comprehensively as He knows us, but we can be always growing in the more intimate knowledge of Him; and this should be the chief preoccupation of our lives. St. Paul, learned though he was in human science, glorified only in knowing Jesus and Him crucified.

Let us ask ourselves how well we know our Good Shepherd: His precepts and His virtues, His interests and tastes. Let us see whether we are trying daily to grow in this knowledge and in the love it produces. The world does not know Jesus. The world, wholly absorbed in its own interests,

gladly studies nature and its marvels, but the Author of nature, Jesus, the Eternal Word, by whom all things were made, it forgets or ignores. He is regarded as an extraordinary person, a great philosopher, but His religion is viewed as a form of mythology and His moral teachings are rejected as too austere. It is for us, then, and the relatively small number of true and faithful Christians scattered throughout the world to devote our full energies toward knowing Jesus better and imitating Him more perfectly; so that the other sheep, who are not yet of His fold, may be brought to know and follow Him.

The faithful sheep not only know the shepherd, but they also heed his voice. Jesus speaks to us through Scripture, through the voice of our Superiors and our Rule, through spiritual conferences and spiritual reading, in the good thoughts and interior lights that are granted us, and in the remorse of conscience or the spiritual consolations He sends us. How sweet is His voice, so gladly heard and eagerly obeyed by faithful and interior souls! Let us beg the Good Shepherd to speak to us and through us to those who may be given us to instruct and sanctify. Good sheep follow their shepherd. How many generous souls have followed Jesus—into deserts and solitude, to self-denial and mortification, to apostolic labors, to persecution and humiliation, even to Calvary and the cross; but thence, at last, to heaven, where the Good Shepherd now reigns with the elect!

O beloved Shepherd, what shame, what cowardice is mine that I have not followed You with constancy and eagerness! Shall I never be really moved by Your love, nor by the examples of those who have followed You closely, nor even by the reward to which You invite me? Jesus, Good Shepherd, I attach myself henceforward to You alone; grant me the grace never again to

heed the call of strangers: the call of self-love and worldliness and pride. Let Your voice alone be my guide. Make me hear it, good Jesus, and draw me after You to the eternal fold of heaven.

OCTOBER 6

Our Father, Who Art in Heaven



"In this manner, therefore, shall you pray, 'Our Father who art in heaven' " (Mt. 6:9).

It may have been during the days following the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles, when our Savior was staying in the environs of Jerusalem, that He gave this instruction on prayer. Tradition indicates a site on the Mount of Olives as the spot where the Lord's Prayer was first uttered.

Father in heaven, grant me a true filial love of You.

The title, Father, which we give to God is addressed alike to the First Person of the Trinity and to the Three, inasmuch as they share one and the same divinity, one and the same creative power. We rightly invoke God by this name, because all that is included in the concept of fatherhood belongs to God in His relation to us. He gave us existence by creation, whereby we have been placed not only in a state of absolute dependence upon Him, but we have become also His exclusive property. He watches over us by preserving our existence and He offers to us as our inheritance the kingdom of heaven. In another and higher sense also we have the right to call God Father, namely, in that He adopted us as His children in Jesus, through sanctifying grace. The name, Father, is

one of power and love, which on our side opens our hearts to sentiments of respect, submission, filial love, and confidence. How many other glorious titles we might have given God, but it was Jesus who chose for us the name, Father!

Jesus wishes us to be united not only to God our Father, but to all men, our brothers and children of a common Father. The word *our*, then, in the title of the *Pater Noster* recalls the equality of all men before God; it reminds us of the common bond which unites us to our fellow men and, consequently, admonishes us that we should love them and be concerned about them. In the name of all men, just and sinners alike, we praise God or supplicate Him or thank Him; thus the efficacy of our prayer is extended and multiplied. God receives more glory from it and we ourselves pray with greater zeal, because we pray in union with all and for all. Our Savior would dispel from our hearts all narrow egoism and exclusiveness. He would have each of us think of himself as part of a whole and pray and act as such, in imitation of Him.

In the third element in the address of the Lord's Prayer, *who art in heaven*, Jesus directs our imagination and our will toward the abode of the divine Majesty. God is everywhere present by His immensity; yet heaven is here mentioned explicitly, because it is there above all that He reveals His majesty, power, and goodness. It is there especially that He communicates Himself to His creatures by eternal beatitude, which consists essentially in seeing God face to face, in possessing Him, in knowing Him, and in loving Him. Heaven is the kingdom of joy, of glory, of ineffable power, where, as a king in his palace, God reveals the treasures of His bounty and shares them with His elect. To that glorious kingdom let us direct our thoughts and

imagination as we repeat the first words of the Lord's Prayer, that we may be filled with reverence for God as our Lord and King, as well as our Father; and that we may excite in our hearts a lively desire of attaining the goal: our heavenly fatherland, our Father's house.

Our Father, who art in heaven, I believe in You, I adore You, I hope in You, I love You. I believe that You are truly my Father and that I am really Your child. I believe that all men are my brethren and that in loving them I show my love for You. You are the all-powerful King of heaven and there You await us, Your children. Oh, give us a keen desire to come to You in Your kingdom, and grant that we may merit to be there received with a Father's embrace.

OCTOBER 7

The Holy Rosary of Our Lady



(See *Festivals and Saints*, p. 858)

OCTOBER 8

Hallowed Be Thy Name



"Hallowed be thy name" (Mt. 6:9).

In this petition we do not ask that the infinitely holy name of God, which is superior to all sanctification be *hallowed* in the sense of receiving a higher degree of holiness, but we express

our desire that all men may come to know, adore, love, obey, and so glorify God.

Lord Jesus, grant me to glorify the Father in union with that divine intention wherewith You glorified Him on earth.

By the name of God we mean His nature, His attributes, His Person, God Himself. To *hallow* the name of God is to revere it as holy, to glorify it by our acknowledgment, and to render it homage and love. No other name deserves greater reverence, honor, and glory; for the name of God is supremely glorious: *O Lord, our Lord, how glorious is your name over all the earth;* and awesome: *holy and awesome is his name.* It is a name worthy above all names of our praise: *From the rising to the setting of the sun is the name of the Lord to be praised.* The name of God is also lovable: *Sing praise to his name, which we love.*

To pray for the divine glory is not only a most exalted and most fitting work, but it is also a duty of justice, our first duty, from which all others derive. Yet, while it is a universal duty, obliging all men without exception, can we say that God receives this glorious and due acknowledgment everywhere and from all? When we offer this petition of the *Pater Noster* fruitfully, then we actually procure for God a good which He does not yet possess, since He waits to receive it from us. Nor can we do anything better or more salutary for our neighbor than to pray that the request of this petition be realized; for are we not asking in reality that happiness and peace may prevail in the world? And are not grandeur of soul and generosity of heart manifested when God is glorified, infinitely more than in the glorification of other men or self, to which men sink when they will not honor God? In praying thus we direct our own

personal thoughts and intentions to the very end that God proposes for Himself. We labor at the same work of glorification in which He has been engaged from all eternity, the work which He ceaselessly pursues, and that toward which all exterior creation tends. There could be no better or nobler intention.

In this respect as in all others, our prayers should always follow the order of the Lord's Prayer. Before thinking of ourselves we should think of God and pray first of all for His glory. Not that there is need of our asking Him to provide for His interests, but it is necessary that the interests of the divine glory be closer to our hearts than all other interests. When we ask God to help man to glorify Him as He deserves to be glorified, we are praying for the realization of the sole purpose of our life on this earth. This petition should also be applied to our practical conduct, so that by our words and actions, and by our support of all movements that promote the conversion of sinners, infidels, and heretics, we may bring others to honor and hallow the name of God.

O God, my Father, with Your grace, the chief desire of my heart henceforth will be Your glory, Your greatest possible glory. I shall work for this in all that I do every day and every moment of the day. Help me to hallow Your name first in myself, by consecrating all my thoughts, affections, and actions to Your glory, and by abstaining from all that could lessen the honor which is Your due; and enable me also to cause Your name to be hallowed in the lives of those who are in my care.

Thy Kingdom Come



"Thy kingdom come" (Mt. 6:10).

It is not because God could be dispossessed of His sovereign dominion over all creation that we pray thus, but because the human will can reject the beneficent reign of God by opposing His laws. We implore God in this petition to bring about the interior reign of grace, a reign whose coming depends at once upon the grace of God and the free will of man.

Rule over me, Lord Jesus, to the exclusion of all other authority.

When we pray that the kingdom of God may come, we ask that God may effectively dominate in the whole universe and we also pray, in an ultimate sense, for heaven, for our eternal beatitude. But this kingdom of heaven is to be reached only through the reign of God's grace in our souls; for heaven is the kingdom of sanctity, the kingdom of God's children; and both holiness and the adoption whereby we become the children of God have their source, for us, in divine grace. The reign of God which we hope to merit in heaven must, therefore, begin here below in time; in our hearts through sanctifying grace and by the practice of faith, hope, and charity. *For the kingdom of God does not consist in food and drink*, St. Paul reminds us, *but in justice and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit; for he who in this way serves Christ pleases God and is approved by men*. It is the reign of grace that we ask for, then, in this part of the *Pater Noster*. And, since by the expression, *the kingdom of God*, our Savior meant sometimes heaven and sometimes the

Church, we ask also in this petition that the Church may extend her reign over all mankind.

The realization of this request gives great glory to God as well as blessedness to man. God is nowhere more glorified than in the Church, in the soul that enjoys the state of grace, and in heaven, the place of His full, true reign, where He is perfectly served and perfectly loved. For men, on the other hand, the coming of God's kingdom is essential and supremely salutary. What are we or what have we without the Church, without grace, without heaven? Finally, to pray with ardor and sincerity that God may reign in all hearts is to advance toward this kingdom by the surest path and to assure ourselves of a high place there, inasmuch as such a request raises our thoughts to heaven and stimulates our desire to win it at all costs. We who are engaged in apostolic work should add to this prayer, moreover, the self-immolation of apostolic zeal; for to bring about God's temporal reign, whether in ourselves or in others, demands continual sacrifice. Let us examine whether we are making an effort to promote the coming of the kingdom for which we daily pray. Do we listen attentively to the suggestions of grace and obey when we have understood them? Does God reign over our senses, imagination, mind, passions, so that our ideas conform to His? Perhaps we shall find that, on the contrary, we become impatient and discontented when our wishes are thwarted even in small matters.

O heavenly Father, each time that I say *thy kingdom come* I wish to renounce all rights over myself. Your rights have not and cannot have limits. I desire to give You full and perfect dominion over me. In Your power and mercy, bring it about that Your grace may rule, govern, and control me entirely at all times, in all places, in all circumstances, in everything, with-

out the slightest exception. I include the whole world also in my intention when I say to You, *thy kingdom come*; to this end I implore You to make my works fruitful, insofar as they may promote the spread of the Church and the advance of Your reign over all hearts.

OCTOBER 10

Thy Will Be Done



“Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven” (Mt. 6:10).

This petition begins the requests that have to do with the attainment of our goal; first we ask for positive goods and first in the number of these is our spiritual welfare, which is to be found in the accomplishment of the divine will.

“Father . . . not my will but thine be done.”

In this petition we beg the grace of accomplishing the will of God both by our active co-operation and by our ready submission to all that He permits in our regard. The manner in which we desire to accomplish the divine will is expressed in the words, *as it is in heaven*. The angels and saints, contemplating God face to face, see the plans of divine Providence in all their wisdom and holiness. Rapt in adoration they worship this divine Providence, they submit to it in love and reverence, they carry out its designs with zeal, and their one desire is to see these designs accomplished in full. We pray, therefore, that God shall find in us no more opposition to His will than He finds in the blessed. To submit thus totally to the will of God, with the full consent of the

intelligence and the will, to execute the divine decrees with reverence, love, and joy, is to be a saint; and were this submission practiced on earth, it would constitute our perfect happiness, since right order is born of such obedience. But we fail in the perfect accomplishment of the divine will, because we do not understand that it is to our own best interests to obey it, or because we lack the necessary force. Free will is a great good for man; it is the source of our power to merit and to reach holiness, but it is also a great danger and the principle of sin. "Take away self-will," said a Father of the Church, "and hell will no longer exist."

The defect in our liberty in this world is the possibility of our abusing it and preferring our will to the divine will. The blessed in heaven have had this defect removed, and they are all the more free in being delivered from the possibility and the desire of seeking happiness in sin; for there can be no happiness except in not sinning. Now, in the accomplishment of the will of God, which is the grace we ask for in this part of the Lord's Prayer, we unite our will, so weak and defective, to the will of God, the rule of all holiness and perfection. We are one with Him and He reigns in us; there is no longer any question of sin. Thus we share in His infallibility, power, and wisdom, and He, in return, hears our prayers.

In heaven or on earth there is nothing higher nor more desirable than the will of God, the Father of the blessed and our Father, with the same claims on our obedience as on theirs. In any case, it is in vain that we would desire to resist Him. What God has decreed happens, whether our will is united to His or not. Let us, then, raise our thoughts to God and heaven, and from that height view the all-just, holy, and wise dispensations of the divine will. Let us say

now and always from the bottom of our heart: May the most just, the most high, the most lovable will of God be done, praised, and ever more exalted!

Grant me, O God, light to know Your will and love to accomplish it. Let me always and everywhere say in union with Jesus: "May Your will be done, not mine! May I do Your will in all that depends on me and submit to it in all that does not!" Bless my resolve to submit to You in everything, whatever may be the cost; and when I fail, let me sincerely repent and promptly and faithfully return to You at the first warning of Your grace. Make me content with all that happens to me, forcing the foolish reasons of my mind and the rebellious feelings of my heart to yield to my filial dependence upon You.

OCTOBER 11

The Motherhood of Our Lady



(See *Festivals and Saints*, p. 860)

OCTOBER 12

Give Us . . . Our Daily Bread



"Give us this day our daily bread" (Mt. 6:11).

The preceding petition of the Lord's Prayer had as its object spiritual good, the good of the soul; this one is directly concerned with the preservation of the life of the body.

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O my Father in heaven, help me to be more mindful of the truth that all my material blessings are the gifts of Your bounty.

The *bread* for which we ask in the *Pater Noster* signifies all that is necessary and useful for the maintenance of our physical life, that is, food, clothing, shelter. Jesus teaches us here to ask for these means of physical well-being not only for ourselves personally, but also for all our brethren. We pray to our common Father on behalf of all His children, that they may receive that which is necessary for their life *this day*. In obedience to the counsel of our Savior on another occasion when He said, "*Do not be anxious for tomorrow,*" we ask only for today. Tomorrow and on each succeeding day we shall renew our request for necessary bread, since neither superabundance nor extreme want are ordinarily useful to us. If the whole Christian family were really united in intention and prayer, if each morning every Christian would humbly and sincerely ask *daily bread* for all other Christians, material distress in this world would be greatly lessened and, in general, life's course would pass with less pain and suffering.

On our part, we should co-operate with divine Providence not only by prayer, but also by work, and by wise management and prudent disposal of the temporal gifts we receive from God. Furthermore, that we should ask for these gifts at all does not imply that God is unaware of our needs, or that by our prayer we could or should prevail upon Him to hear us, as men come to a decision after good reasons have been laid before them. Jesus Himself has assured us: "*Your Father knows that you need all these things.*" God knows our needs better than we, and He will give us all that is for our good. We do not pray, therefore, in order to dispose

God to hear us, but to dispose ourselves to receive His favors by removing the obstacles that prevent our requests from being granted. Our prayer is, on the one hand, an avowal of our insufficiency and unworthiness and, on the other, an acknowledgment of the divine Power and Goodness.

It is God's will that we ask for everything we need by prayer, from the highest and most sublime graces to our smallest needs, from heaven and the Holy Spirit to our daily bread. Moreover, we honor Him by coming to Him with our smallest needs, for thus we show that we wish to have nothing except by His action, nothing which He has not given us. Prayer for our temporal wants also implies our recognition of the fact that all our labor would be unrewarded and futile unless it were blessed by God. If some have more than they need and others are in want, the reason is not that God has forgotten the poor. He wishes to bring together the rich and the poor in the practice of virtue — compassionate generosity on the one side and gratitude on the other. Indeed, the reason that God has placed a superabundance in the hands of the rich is that they might in His name share their goods with the needy.

Father in heaven, in the name of all Your children, my fellow Christians, I ask the grace of filial trust in You, that we may ask for our daily bread with a quiet mind and rely for tomorrow upon Your Fatherly goodness. Let our daily prayer to You, our common Father, be for us a bond of union in which we express for and with one another our continual and entire dependence upon Your goodness for all that we are and all that we possess.

OCTOBER 13

Our Lady of Fatima



(See *Festivals and Saints*, p. 863)

OCTOBER 14

Forgive Us . . . As We Also Forgive



"And forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors"
(Mt. 6:12).

In this fifth petition we ask that our sins, mortal and venial, may be forgiven and that the punishment they have merited may be remitted. Sin and the chastisement of sin constitute a real debt contracted toward divine Justice.

Lord Jesus, enable me really to forgive that I may be forgiven.

Sin and the punishment due it are the debts for which we ask annulment in this petition. Venial sin can be remitted through this prayer, if we are repentant, and if no bad disposition of will interposes an obstacle. In the case of mortal sin, leaving out of consideration the presence of actual and perfect contrition, this prayer obtains remission only mediately, insofar as we ask the grace of conversion. Prayer can remit the temporal punishment due to sin, in part at least, because it is a satisfactory work, and here we ask specifically for this remission. In the light of the benefits that may be

gained, therefore, this petition should be made in all sincerity and seriousness, with contrition and a true purpose of amendment. Each of us on his own account can truly acknowledge himself as a sinner and fear with reason that all has not yet been pardoned; for we read in the Book of Ecclesiasticus, *Of forgiveness be not overconfident, adding sin upon sin.*

But God is not a pitiless creditor. He is willing to cancel the debt we owe Him on condition of real repentance and firm purpose of amendment. Our Savior, however, has added a further condition, namely, that we shall be forgiven *as we also forgive our debtors.* We must recite this petition of the Lord's Prayer, then, after having become reconciled with those who have offended us. God places the matter of our judgment in our own hands. As we forgive, so shall we be forgiven by Him. Who of us has not offended God? Who does not need to ask pardon for his sins? And if anyone of us is uneasy with respect to that pardon, here is explicit assurance from the very lips of Jesus. If your brother has offended you and you are sincerely disposed to forgive him, if you feel no hatred nor resentment against him, if you are gladly reconciled at the first sign of regret, the first advance on his part; or better, if you yourself are disposed to make the first advance, and if these are your dispositions as often as he offends you, then you have every reason to be certain that our Savior is saying to you as He said to the paralytic of Capharnaum, "*Take courage . . . thy sins are forgiven thee.*"

Let us consider also the greatness of the favor we ask in imploring forgiveness for our own sins or those of others. Sin is the greatest obstacle, rather, the only obstacle, in the way of our achieving the goal toward which we are working. It is only because of sin, furthermore, that anything else becomes an obstacle to us, either by cutting us off completely

from our last end or keeping us from reaching the perfection for which we have been destined. Sin, then, is the greatest evil that can befall us or the human family as a whole, the only evil, the source of all unhappiness.

Lord, I am guilty in Your sight and I do not deserve Your mercy, but You have promised the forgiveness of my offenses according as I forgive others. Hoping in Your word and in Your compassion, I forgive from my heart all who have offended me and I implore Your pardon of their sins as I beg forgiveness of mine.

OCTOBER 15

Lead Us Not Into Temptation



“And lead us not into temptation” (Mt. 6:13).

In this petition we ask that divine Providence may never forsake us in the snare of sinful occasions which threaten our weakness from within or without.

O my God, grant that the temptations You will I should undergo may cause me to grow in humility and trust.

Let no man say when he is tempted, that he is tempted by God, writes St. James; for God is no tempter to evil, and he himself tempts no one. But everyone is tempted by being drawn away and enticed by his own passion. Then when passion has conceived, it brings forth sin; but when sin has matured, it begets death. It was not God who endowed man with concupiscence; this was the work of sin. In direct-

ing us to ask our heavenly Father, who could urge us only toward good, not to lead us into temptation, Jesus reminds us that we ourselves tend to go to meet occasions of sin; also, by the circumstances of our life we are sometimes exposed to temptation without its being our fault. We pray, therefore, that God may not let us succumb to these snares; but we do not ask to be relieved of all temptation, for temptation is a law of life on this earth and the condition of our merit. It would not even be good for us never to experience it, for we should then fall into pride and presumption, we should practice virtue with less energy and fervor and so lose immeasurable merit. Our petition, then, in the Lord's Prayer is that God either will not permit us to be exposed to temptations that are too strong for us or give us the grace necessary to triumph over them.

Like the other petitions of the *Pater Noster* this one should be recited always with thoughtfulness and sincerity for several important reasons. In the first place, we are constantly being exposed to temptations that arise from within ourselves or from some object or some person outside, or from the devil, whose profession is tempting men. Second, not only are we unable to live long without experiencing temptation, but we cannot overcome it without the help of grace. This grace is to be obtained in prayer, for our Savior exhorts us, "*Pray that you may not enter into temptation.*" Third, the consequences of temptation are of prime importance to the salvation of our souls. To our last breath we are on the verge of the abyss, in constant danger of falling into it; at any moment we may forfeit that state of grace in which only death can establish us permanently. No holiness of state, no retirement from the world, however secluded, can insure freedom from temptation. And those persons who have

traveled farthest on the road to perfection are subject to the most subtle and dangerous temptations of all.

In a sense, then, of all the petitions of the Lord's Prayer, this is the most necessary one. And while it would be a mistake to hope that grace will be given to save us from perils to which we have lightly exposed ourselves, yet we can never doubt that through the goodness and almighty power of our heavenly Father, help will be granted us for the asking in the temptations which inevitably arise, despite our watchfulness. Let us go forward steadfastly, then, between the two hazards of presumptuousness and faintheartedness, and we shall never pray in vain for strength against the snares of temptation.

Deeply conscious of my weakness and instability, I beg Your help, O Father in heaven, against my own follies. I acknowledge that I sometimes presume upon my strength, that I run into danger, and weaken myself by repeated small concessions to self-love. Deign to increase in me the virtue of supernatural prudence, that I may join vigilance to prayer, according to the admonition Your divine Son gave to His Apostles: "*Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation.*"

OCTOBER 16

Deliver Us From Evil



"But deliver us from evil!" (Mt. 6:13.)

This petition is, as it were, the positive side of the preceding one; by it we ask our Father to make us emerge unharmed from the moral and also the physical evil that He may allow to befall us.

Our Father who art in heaven, preserve us from all temporal misfortune that will not bring us nearer to You, our last and supreme Good.

The evil from which we ask to be preserved by the providence of our heavenly Father in this last request of the Lord's Prayer is not only supernatural evil, or sin, but also the evils of this life, temporal misfortunes, which, indeed, have their ultimate source in sin or in the devil, who is the principal author of all evil. Even when temporal evils are not directly the result and the punishment of sin, they are, at least, the consequence of the first sin. Sometimes our Father judges it for our good that we suffer misfortune; in this case, may His holy will be done, but we have His direction to pray that evil may be averted from our bodies and material goods and those of our brethren, as well as from our souls. In the Litany of the Saints the Church enumerates the various disasters from which she begs God to preserve her children; in this petition we summarize them in the one word: *evil*.

We ask for this deliverance because temporal misfortunes may become an occasion of sin, and because they ordinarily present an obstacle to peace and general order. But, should God judge it for our good to send us temporal afflictions, they are not then truly evils at all, but they may become real blessings through the use we make of them. Jesus voluntarily endured the greatest of temporal misfortunes, those from which human nature most shrinks; it would not become His followers, therefore, to indulge their natural aversion in such matters or judge them as human nature would dictate. Jesus made His sufferings serve to restore the divine glory, to expiate our sins, and to win for us the graces that

preserve us from sin or remove it from our souls. The perfect Christian will ask to be relieved of such afflictions, then, only in the spirit of the prayer of Jesus: "*Father, if it be thy will.*" Otherwise, he will endure temporal suffering patiently that God may be glorified and that he may sanctify his own soul.

Our chief aim in making this last petition of the *Pater Noster* should be that through our deliverance from evil we may serve God with a freer mind, with more love, gratitude, and fidelity. But there may never be in our minds a weighing of temporal misfortunes as against the sole true evil, which is sin. We must be prepared to endure the former in their most extreme form rather than escape from them at the price of a wound to conscience. Faith knows no evil except supernatural evil, that worst of misfortunes, which is an evil also for God. And since we are to love God above all things and more than ourselves, it is right that we should have a supreme and sovereign horror of sin, more because it touches the divine Majesty than because it injures us. Therefore, we include in this petition also the intention that we may be preserved from mortal sin, the cause of damnation which is itself the evil above all evils to be dreaded, and also from venial sin, which wounds the soul and makes it weak and languid in the service of God. Preserve me, O Lord God, and all those who are now being tried and afflicted by evils of body or soul. Grant me and all my brethren the grace to abandon ourselves to You when temporal misfortunes sadden and depress us. Above all, save us by Your light, Your forgiveness, and Your protection from all moral evil. Pity our weakness, O Father, that finds its only strength and all its strength in You.

The Purity of Our Lady



"You are beautiful, my beloved, and there is no blemish in you"
(Cant. 4:7).

These words from the Canticle of Canticles, as applied to the Blessed Virgin Mary, bring before our minds the utter sacredness and purity befitting her who was to bring forth the Incarnate God. Mary's sinlessness is part of the reverence due to God.

O Mary, increase my love of purity of heart and perfect this purity within me.

Perfect purity supposes exemption not only from every carnal fault, but likewise from all sin, mortal or venial, actual or original. It implies exemption also from ill-regulated movements of the passions and the disorders of concupiscence. While these imperfections, if they are involuntary, do not constitute sin, yet they are a consequence of original sin and lead to sin. Furthermore, perfect purity supposes the possession of sanctifying grace. The soul, even without sin, that did not possess sanctifying grace, would be like a diamond without its fire. The purity of the Mother of God contained all these perfections and, in addition, other privileges that are exclusively hers. There can be, of course, no question of sin where Mary is concerned; but neither did she know the ill-regulated movements of concupiscence, which are the consequences of original sin. Yet this extinction of concupiscence in her was not the result of the external protection of God, removing from her all such troubles and

attacks. It was the effect of grace, whereby all the faculties of her soul were kept in perfect subordination to her reason and will.

The purity of the Mother of God represents power with respect to God and to us. Three virtues give the soul influence with God: love, humility, and purity; but if purity be wanting, love and humility lose their potency. God is, before all things, infinite Purity, and nothing lacking in purity can please Him. We owe the Incarnation to the utter cleanness of Mary, as St. Bernard so forcefully says: "By her purity she attracted the glance of God and by her humility she conceived Him." The purity of Mary also wields power over us. To realize this truth we have only to think of the beneficent influence of Mary through the ages and the attraction she has always had for mankind. The spectacle of her immaculate purity is presented to us under various charming forms: Mary as an infant, Mary in the Temple, Mary in her virginal retreat at Nazareth conversing with the angel; Mary, Virgin and Mother, with Jesus in her arms. The sweet radiance of her purity transforms hearts, the thought of her consoles and encourages. To love to think of her is in itself a sign that we are renouncing sin and aspiring to virtue. How efficacious is her protection for those who seriously struggle, who invoke her name and confide in her!

Let us form the resolution of imitating, according to our vocation, the purity of the Mother of God. Purity of heart which shuns every voluntary fault and knows how to master rebellious passions is the first condition for the spiritual life and the best preparation for heaven. Heaven is the home of purity where nothing defiled may enter, but on earth it is so easy to defile our soul. We who walk the ways of earth can scarcely avoid taking on some of the dust of the

road. This is why the work of purifying our heart can never cease while we are on earth. This is why we need constantly the help of heaven to support our weakness. Recourse to Mary, our sweetness and our hope, assures us of this help. Let us ask her protection in the words of one of her most eloquent clients in the early Church. St. Ephrem of Edessa:

“Most holy Lady, alone most pure in soul and body, alone exceeding all in perfection of purity, in chastity and virginity — alone made in thine entirety the home of the graces of the Holy Spirit . . . cast thine eyes upon me, my most holy Lady, Mother of God, full of grace. Glory of the nature that is ours in common; Dispenser of all good things; after the Trinity, the Mistress of all; after the Paraclete, another Counselor; after the Mediator, the whole world’s Mediatrix; than Cherubim and Seraphim higher, beyond power of words to tell, and more glorious by far; unsearchable Abyss of God’s goodness; Protection of the universe, Fullness of the grace of the Trinity!”

OCTOBER 18

The Victory Over Satan



“But if I cast out devils by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Lk. 11:20).

The expulsion of the devil was the proof of his defeat; for if the prince of this world is no longer master in his own house, it is because one *stronger than he* has conquered him.

Divine Savior, preserve my soul from tepidity and all carelessness in Your service.

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The cure of a man possessed by a dumb devil occasioned the blasphemous accusation of the Pharisees that the miracles of Jesus were performed with the aid of the prince of the devils. The reply of Jesus consisted of three comparisons or figurative illustrations, which refuted His enemies on their own ground, by arguments drawn from their accusation itself. In the second comparison especially, that of the strong man and the one who was stronger, our Savior illustrated the relations of Himself and His kingdom with that of Satan. Satan was, indeed, the mighty prince, who because of sin, could claim the whole world as his kingdom. And it is to warn us of his power that the Church gives us repeatedly in the Gospel passage appointed to be read in the Mass an illustration of his might and trickery.

In a previous meditation we considered the temptation which our Savior deigned to suffer in the desert. Today, we are again reminded of the danger to which man is exposed from his invisible enemies. In a great number of passages the inspired writers of Scripture speak clearly of Satan and the demons as grim realities and as persons that are declared and mortal enemies of God and of human souls. They constitute a kingdom in deadly and unchanging opposition to the kingdom of God and His angels and saints. It is a fearful fact that in the world mighty forces of evil work in and through mankind against God and all that is good.

It is true that the Strong One was overcome and fettered by a Mightier who had the strength of God resting upon Him, but the divine Victor did not wholly deprive the devil of his power to do harm. Every man by the right use of his will must prove himself a loyal soldier under Christ's standard in his combat against the Enemy and, with Christ,

win the crown of victory. Our Savior did not come to re-make the material order or to change the world essentially, but to triumph over it and provide man with the means of protection against the evil that imperils his soul. Christ overcame by His teaching, His holy life, His sacrifices and sufferings, especially His passion and death on the cross. And what He did, He left us power to do by means of the supernatural helps He has bequeathed to His Church. With these helps: the Mass, the sacraments, and the other sources and channels of grace, all holy souls who have lived since the coming of Christ have overcome the world and the power of Satan. The conflict is a decisive one. We relapse into the Satan's power when we do not frankly declare ourselves for Jesus. All compromise drains our spiritual energy and makes us undeserving of the abundant graces that are given us when we remain loyal and generous.

My eyes are ever toward the Lord, for he will free my feet from the snare. Look toward me, and have pity on me, for I am alone and afflicted. Relieve the troubles of my heart, and bring me out of my distress. Put an end to my affliction and my suffering, and take away all my sins. Behold, my enemies are many, and they hate me violently. Preserve my life, and rescue me; let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you. Let integrity and uprightness preserve me, because I wait for you, O Lord (Ps. 24:15-21).

The Praise of Mary



"Now it came to pass as he was saying these things, that a certain woman lifted up her voice from the crowd and said to him, 'Blessed is the womb that bore thee, and the breasts that nursed thee.' But he said, 'Rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it'" (Lk. 11:27, 28).

Following the exorcism and cure of the blind and dumb demoniac the Pharisees accused our Savior of being Himself possessed by a devil. In the midst of the discussion a woman from the crowd proclaimed the praise of the Mother of Jesus.

O Jesus, grant that I may deserve to be called blessed by You, because of my imitation of Your Mother's faith and holiness of life.

This spontaneous cry of praise was not addressed, as we should have expected it to be, directly to our Savior. The woman did not say, "Happy the heart that possesses such wisdom and the lips whose utterance breathes grace and the hands that lavish upon us so many wondrous favors!" In her thoughts this woman had made a very natural transition, and it was the Mother of Jesus whom she proclaimed as blessed. Perhaps she herself was a mother and therefore vividly comprehended the happiness of Mary in possessing such a Son, of caring for Him, of exercising parental rights over Him, and of holding a very special place in His heart. Yet, at the same time, her words praised Jesus also, in that they were clearly an expression of faith, admiration, and sincere devotion to Him. Moreover, she declared all this

publicly, in a loud voice: she *lifted up her voice from the crowd*, undeterred by the presence of the powerful enemies of Jesus, who were openly and freely indulging in mockery and derision of Him.

Our Savior's response did not deny the high prerogatives of His holy Mother. He seemed to say by implication, "Yes, blessed is she"; but then, quick to turn attention from Himself and center it upon His mission, He assigned another and a new reason for celebrating and proclaiming the blessedness of His Mother. In addition to her happiness of being united to Him by ties of blood, she was also blessed, and to a greater degree, because of her faith and holiness. The words of Jesus: "*they who hear the word of God and keep it*" immediately recall that which St. Luke tells us of Mary: *But Mary kept in mind all these words, pondering them in her heart*. They make us think also of the words of Elizabeth to Mary: "*Blessed is she who has believed.*"

If we sense a correction in our Savior's reply, it is not at all to be understood as a restriction of the praise accorded to Mary; it was addressed to this woman and to all who place too high a value upon natural privileges and do not sufficiently esteem spiritual goods. But the reply of Jesus was also a consolation for the woman who spoke, as well as for all of us, since it shows us that the means of being united to our Savior, even as Mary was united to Him, are at our disposal, if we will to make use of them. These means are faith and conduct in conformity with our faith. Failing this bond of union with Jesus, even the divine maternity would have been of no spiritual avail for Mary. The whole importance of this episode lies in our Savior's affirmation and emphasis upon the necessity of faith and the incentive He offers us for living the life of faith.

O dearest Mother Mary, how sweet it is for your children to see your prophecy that all generations should call you blessed fulfilled from the very commencement of the kingdom of your Son. First, the angel Gabriel saluted you as *full of grace*; then, Elizabeth proclaimed your blessedness; and then, as the kingdom of Jesus began to extend its sway, Simeon in the Temple bore witness to you. Now your honor has spread to the people. The woman in the crowd praised your union with Jesus as His Mother, and if we belong to Jesus by faith and holiness of life, we belong also to you, His Mother. Like this woman, like all true Christians down the ages, I, too, wish to honor you. May I pass through this life, O Mary, with your rosary in my hand and your praise on my lips.

OCTOBER 20

The Afflicted Woman in the Synagogue



"Now he was teaching in one of their synagogues on the Sabbath. And behold, there was a woman who for eighteen years had had a sickness caused by a spirit; and she was bent over and utterly unable to look upwards" (Lk. 13:10, 11).

This incident occurred as Jesus was traveling through Judea. It may record His last teaching in the synagogue; at any rate, among those present on this particular Sabbath was a woman pitifully afflicted by diabolical possession; or, perhaps, like holy Job, her body had been disfigured by the power of Satan.

Lord Jesus, help me to know myself.

According to the text of St. Luke, Jesus merely happened to notice in the crowd this woman whose infirmity was cer-

tainly marked enough to attract attention. Her body had become so deformed that she could not even look upward. She herself did not ask for a cure, but Jesus, moved by pity, called her to Him and said, "*Woman, thou art delivered from thy infirmity.*" Then, as testimony to the cure and a pledge of His protection, *he laid his hands upon her.* Instantly, the bonds of Satan were broken and standing straight she gave glory to God. This whole scene was a scandal to the head of the synagogue. Jesus had again cured on the Sabbath! But he did not attack our Savior directly. Instead, with a glaring want of logic, he scolded the crowd in the synagogue, as if this miracle had been performed at their request. "*There are six days in which one ought to work,*" he said; "*on these therefore come and be cured, and not on the Sabbath.*" The ruler of the synagogue had our Savior in mind, but he reprimanded the people; perhaps, because he feared an embarrassing reply from Jesus, whereas the people would not venture to answer him.

The ruler of the synagogue had just been praying publicly that God would send the Messiah; he had just read or had heard read the Holy Scripture, which on every page speaks of mercy and charity for one's fellow men. Yet now, alleging zeal for the Sabbath precept, or rather his false interpretation of it, but in reality because of his hatred for Jesus, he was openly scandalized. Our Savior flayed this shamelessness as it deserved. "*Hypocrites!*" He said, "*does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or ass from the manger, and lead it forth to water? And this woman, daughter of Abraham as she is, whom Satan has bound, lo, for eighteen years, ought not she to have been loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?*" On the one hand, an *ox or ass*, on the other, a *daughter of Abraham*; untying an animal from the manger

as against delivering a human being from the bonds of Satan; leading an animal to water as against the simple imposition of hands; the Sabbath, which lasts for only twenty-four hours as contrasted with eighteen years of suffering under a most painful and disfiguring malady. Jesus spoke in the plural, perhaps because this man had found some supporters. In any case, the audience in general was well disposed toward Jesus; for while they were careful to keep silence, *the entire crowd*, says St. Luke, *rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him.*

We share heartily in the indignation of our Savior at the pharisaical malice and hypocrisy of the head of the synagogue, but perhaps our own conduct has not always been free from this kind of secret envy. There may have been times in our lives when we, too, like the ruler of the synagogue, may have criticized even good that was done, under the pretext of zeal, but really out of jealousy. We should take care also that we do not imitate him in allowing our religious life to become a mechanical routine in which the inner spirit and life have been gradually extinguished.

O my divine Master, I constantly need Your help that I may see clearly the motives of my actions, which self-love is so ingenious in presenting as good and noble. Free me, as You delivered this poor infirm woman, from all fettering bonds of self-deceit.

The Man With Dropsy



“And it came to pass, when he entered the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees on the Sabbath to take food, that they were watching him. And behold, there was a certain man before him who had the dropsy” (Lk. 14:1, 2).

The scene of this mystery seems to be across the Jordan in Perea or at its borders. Our Savior is dining at the house of one of the most influential members of the party of the Pharisees.

Lord Jesus, impart to me Your spirit in my dealings with those who may be hostile to me.

St. Luke tells us that on a certain occasion our Savior entered the home of a ruler of the Pharisees to dine. The guests were Pharisees and doctors of the Law, whose actions and dispositions were those of their sect, as St. Luke strongly implies in the words, *they were watching him*; that is, to see whether He would permit Himself any liberties with their doctrines or usages. There could surely have been nothing agreeable in this prospect for our Savior, yet He accepted the invitation, as He had on other occasions, showing us again the magnanimity of His heart, always generous, always forgetful of self. Hardly had the guests taken their places on the couches set for the meal, when our Savior was put to the test by the presence of a man afflicted with dropsy. It is possible that he had been secretly brought in (although with no complicity on his part), so that a case of conscience might be raised; or it may be that his need and his confidence in Jesus had given the sick man courage

to come of his own accord into the room. He seems, however, to have said nothing, through fear of the Pharisees, perhaps because it was the Sabbath day. But how fitting it is that we should here as always find the suffering drawing near to Jesus! He is always in their midst, as the Good Shepherd surrounded by His sheep.

Now, as ever, Jesus was quick to see the poor sufferer and His compassion was immediately aroused. At the same time He knew that the Pharisees were watching, and that they had accused Him again and again of violating the Sabbath precept by curing the sick on the Sabbath day. Therefore He first put a simple question to the Pharisees and the doctors of the Law: "*Is it lawful to cure on the Sabbath?*" This He did in order to move them to look into themselves and sincerely reflect whether in fact reason and conscience would not permit such an act. His question made it necessary for them explicitly to give or withhold permission for the cure. According to their alleged convictions, they should have answered in the negative, but fearing a triumphant rebuttal from the Savior, they remained silent. Then Jesus answered His own question and announced His decision in a double form. First He answered with the deed itself. The man was healed of his dropsy and allowed to go.

Then Jesus suggested the proper response to His first question by asking another: "*Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fall into a pit, and will not immediately draw him up on the Sabbath?*" Again there was silence, although the Pharisees knew well that even the most scrupulous Jew would not hesitate to go to the rescue in such an event, Sabbath day or not. The inference was very plain: if both reason and conscience agreed that such an action was not a violation of the Sabbath precept, so did they also agree, and with

even greater validity, where there was question of curing the sick.

Divine Savior, I contemplate with wonder and admiration Your patience and loving kindness. So many times You showed the Pharisees their error and as often they replied with the same accusations. Yet, on each occasion You instructed them with all forbearance and sincerity, although You knew well what was in their hearts. Help me to treat those who may bear me ill will always with patience and consideration and to be always ready to do good to them.

OCTOBER 22

The Last Place



“But he also spoke a parable to those invited, observing how they were choosing the first places at table” (Lk. 14:7).

Jesus, having observed that His fellow guests at the house of the Pharisee were greatly preoccupied with the matter of precedence in their places at table, taught them a lesson in the guise of a parable.

O Jesus, teach me to form a just estimate of myself during life that I may claim mercy from You in eternity.

The occasion of our Savior's little parable was the arrogance and pride shown by the guests at this repast at the Pharisee's house in their choice of a place at table. Jesus observed that they not only aspired to the first places but actually appropriated them. Even the presence of their most distinguished Guest did not move them to a show, at least,

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of good breeding. But this was only one aspect of their pride. They cherished no less an esteem for themselves from the spiritual point of view. The first places in the kingdom of heaven were also to belong to them by right. A second reason for the parable was the very goodness of the Heart of Jesus. He wished to be not only a guest but a benefactor, and heal the souls of His fellow guests as He had healed the body of the man afflicted with dropsy. Their malady, indeed, was far worse than dropsy, for their hearts were swollen with egoism and self-sufficiency; they were fairly bursting with pride. We may observe here also the intrepidity of our Savior. He attacks sin whenever He finds it; if it rears its head in public, if it becomes an occasion of scandal, He flays it publicly. Yet, in this instance, He chose the image of a marriage feast, partly, perhaps, for reasons of tact, so as to avoid offending the assembled guests by a direct reproof.

The parable advises one who has been invited to a wedding feast not to take the first place, for if a more distinguished guest were to come in, he would have to make way for him; whereas one who would unassumingly take the last place at table would be urged to go higher. As to meaning, the parable would seem at first glance to contain nothing more than a maxim of human wisdom, counseling discretion and reserve to avoid the humiliation which is so often the lot of the overbold. Our Savior did not disdain to appeal to motives of natural prudence in His teaching; on the contrary, He took human nature into account and harmonized His doctrine with it. Nature and the supernatural are not opposed; grace builds on nature, and nature placed at the service of grace makes the perfect Christian. But we may validly see a profound spiritual significance also in the choice of a

wedding feast instead of merely a dinner or an ordinary feast. The joy of the kingdom of heaven and of the reign of the Messiah was often represented in Jewish teaching and theological language by the figure of a wedding. Thus the question of precedence among the guests in the parable becomes the image of rank as it is ordered in heaven.

Finally, the moral of the parable was explicitly formulated by Jesus Himself: *"For everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted."* This is the basic law of order both on earth and in heaven, because it is the law of justice. It applies now to us as it applied of old to the Jews. With respect to heaven, no one can claim the kingdom of God as a thing due him. Eternal life is a gratuitous divine gift, and insofar as it can be won, it is won through humility; the humbler we become here below, the more we shall be glorified in heaven.

You know well, O divine Master, how proud I am in thought, word, and deed, how wanting in the lovely virtue of humility. Grant me a humble heart, and let my mind be deeply impressed with the realization of my nothingness and sinfulness. Let me even come to rejoice at being slighted, and to feel no resentment when others are preferred to me. With Your grace I shall henceforward aspire to be great only in Your sight and to become ever smaller and more lowly in my own.

OCTOBER 23

The Humble To Be Exalted



"For everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted" (Lk. 14.11).

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Jesus Himself drew the moral, so to speak, from His parable on choosing the last place at the wedding feast.

Divine Master, enlighten me interiorly that I may see and desire the beauty of true humility.

In this parable our Savior gave the following advice: "*But when thou art invited, go and recline in the last place; that when he who invited thee comes in, he may say to thee, 'Friend, go up higher!'*" Jesus was not advising clever and artful calculation, however, whereby we choose the last place with a view to obtaining the first. There is an artificial humility that makes use of such devices for its own ends. One speaks ill of oneself in the hope of being contradicted; one affects humility in order to be esteemed. To act so is still to seek the first place, but by an indirect route. What Jesus recommended was a sincere effort to disappear and to serve without playing a shining role, in other words, humble disinterestedness. We should take the last place because we really wish to be there and not as an artifice for gaining advancement. The first place? Yes, when there is question of devotedness, hard work, and self-sacrifice; but when pleasures and honors are to be claimed, the last place should be our desire. We shall be truly humble when we seek humility more as justice than as a virtue, when we rejoice in contempt as our due, and when we are motivated by the knowledge that we deserve to be humiliated rather than by the desire of humiliation. Then shall we possess solid virtue and show ourselves worthy of our names of Christian, daughter of the Church, child of God, spouse of Christ.

There are occasions when the sincerity of our humility is tried. It is when we are overlooked, when without our seeking it we are assigned to a position or a task that we

may feel is unworthy of our talents, or when we are not given the place or work that we think is rightfully ours. Are we silent then, untroubled, without resentment or rancor? Do we really feel then that we are nothing and experience satisfaction in being so regarded? Inner rebellion at such times shows us the flaws and weaknesses in our practice of humility and self-abnegation. The humility that is Christian and deserving of the exaltation promised by our Savior is revealed in our customary way of acting, in our words, in our thoughts, especially with reference to the relative merits of ourselves and our neighbor; for we are inclined to exaggerate the good that is in ourselves and the evil that is in others. Christian humility is reflected also in our attitude toward God. Before Him, above all, we should take the lowest place, recognizing our nothingness, our powerlessness, and our sinfulness. The smaller we are in our own eyes, the more we shall be elevated and favored by God. It was through her humility that Mary became the Mother of God and the Queen of all the saints.

I acknowledge, O divine Master, that humiliations irritate me and disturb my peace of mind. I feel it keenly when I am forgotten and set aside. I admit an eagerness for praise and a dread of correction, even of kindly admonition. Through the intercession of the most humble Mary, Your Virgin Mother, I ask the grace of a sincere conviction that I deserve to be ignored and forgotten among creatures so that I may at last act only for Your glory, O most sweet, most holy, most humble Jesus!

A Counsel of Perfection



"But he also said to him who had invited him, 'When thou givest a dinner or a supper, do not invite thy friends, or thy brethren, or thy relatives, or thy rich neighbors, lest perhaps they also invite thee in return, and a recompense be made to thee'" (Lk. 14:12).

To His first counsel on taking the last place at the feast, our Savior added a second precept, which opened a still broader spiritual vista; it is not a rule of social conduct which Jesus formulated here, but a counsel of perfection.

Divine Savior, grant me the grace to understand and follow Your doctrine in this mystery.

It seems that after our Savior had taken His place at the table of the Pharisee, He began to take notice of His fellow guests. The host had probably invited members of his party, relatives, and rich neighbors. No thought, certainly, had been given to the poor of the neighborhood and, no doubt, as ordinarily happened on such occasions, these humbler folk had gathered in large numbers around the house. We have here exemplified the typical Pharisee point of view, the spirit of egoism which bestows a benefit only if a return may be expected. The conduct recommended by our Savior is precisely the opposite of this Pharisaical practice. He said to His host, "*But when thou givest a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; and blessed shalt thou be, because they have nothing to repay thee with; for thou shalt be repaid at the resurrection of the just.*"

Every word of this divine counsel requires meditation. Let us observe especially the intention we should have in our benefactions. All thought of temporal compensation should not only be set aside, but we should flee from and avoid human recompense. We should congratulate ourselves upon not receiving it and desire no other consolation than the heavenly reward. Our Savior here established a principle that is entirely supernatural and directly opposed to corrupt nature and egoism. Thus He revealed His own spirit, which was one of sublime disinterestedness and purest piety. To do good not with a natural aim or for earthly advantage, but solely for God and heaven—this is truly to act in the spirit of faith, in the spirit of Jesus. Our Savior does not forbid us to “invite our friends,” but from the aspect of eternity we can do more and better. The saints give us the example, and obedience to the counsel of Jesus would have led even His Pharisee host to sanctity. During our lives on earth we should love to do good without hope of return, without even the desire of a return. Those who give us nothing, not even gratitude, not even a polite “thank you,” those who seem not even to benefit by our acts of self-sacrifice—to these we must love to give and give again.

It is an altogether new path of well-doing that our Savior opens to us; upon it we shall find a new happiness: “*Blessed shalt thou be,*” Jesus said, “*because they have nothing to repay thee with.*” Our happiness will be the happiness of God in giving to men; and on the day of the resurrection God will substitute Himself for those who on earth could not or did not make us a return for our bounty. How un-Christian is our conduct if we find happiness only in giving to those who make a return! How narrow is our heart if it cannot taste the happiness of disinterested giving!

Fill me, good Jesus, with the understanding and desire of Your spirit. Enable me to overcome my human desires of appreciation and gratitude, so that I shall not only not look for a human reward, but count myself fortunate in not receiving it. With Your grace I shall be able to serve others in the spirit of faith and perfect disinterested charity, and so rise to the supernatural heights to which You invite me.

OCTOBER 25

Parable of the Great Supper



“A certain man gave a great supper” (Lk. 14:16).

In this parable of the supper our Savior foretold the rejection of the Jews and the call of the Gentiles, who were to fill the places refused by the Jews.

Divine Savior, help me to comprehend better the privilege that is mine in being permitted to receive You in Holy Communion.

The supper mentioned in the parable is a figure of the Eucharistic Banquet which God has prepared for all humanity. The guests, His Chosen People, were the first to be invited, but when they heard the promise of Jesus, “*The bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world,*” many of them *turned back and no longer went about with him.* Yet the Lord prepared His supper and invited His people again; it was to the lost sheep of Israel that the Apostles were first sent. But their invitation was also rejected by the great and powerful, the doctors of the Law, whereupon the Apostles gathered in the poor and the lowly, but *still there*

[was] room. And so the Apostles left Jerusalem and traveled the highways of the world, bringing in to the holy table the Gentiles from pagan and barbarian lands.

Who is it that invites us to partake of His supper? It is Jesus Christ, God and Man, our Savior and our Judge. He Himself comes to greet us, not clothed in the radiance of His majesty, for that splendor would only terrify us, but in the humble little Host. What can we do but cry out like St. Elizabeth, "Whence is it that my Lord should come to me?" And protest with the centurion, "Lord, I am not worthy!" Jesus wills to be at once our Host and our Feast that we may have Him as our Companion, as our Strength, and as the Pledge of our final beatitude. He does not, therefore, give us this blessed Food once only and then bid us go our way alone, but He invites us to come again and again to His banquet hall, that He may be our daily Bread.

Our own dispositions of mind and heart should respond insofar as they can to this great love of Jesus. With lively faith we should say to Him, "*I do believe, Lord; help my unbelief.*" We should offer Him our profound adoration: *Come, let us bow down in worship; let us kneel before the Lord who made us.* In humility and contrition we should confess our guilt: "*Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee.*" In gratitude we should exclaim, *How shall I make a return to the Lord for all the good he has done for me?* And we should say to ourselves with entire confidence, "*If I touch but his cloak I shall be saved.*" It is for our benefit, not for His own, that Jesus invites us. All grace is enclosed in the sacrament of His adorable Body and Precious Blood; and He works for our maladies of soul the very same miracles of healing that He wrought upon the sick and broken bodies of Judea long ago.

My Savior, it is not a figure or representation or portion of Yourself which I receive in Holy Communion. It is Your whole Person with all Your merits and satisfaction for sin which You offered for me as well as for the Apostles at the Last Supper. You bade me as well as them to eat the Bread and drink of the Cup, so as to *proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes*. O incomprehensible invention of wisdom, power, and love! Fear and adore, O my soul, and love this Lord who found so sweet a way to penetrate the wall of flesh which is ever an impassable barrier between human hearts. O Jesus, teach me to use each sacramental union with You as a preparation for the next, so that when my last Communion comes, I may but exchange the heaven of You in my heart for the heaven in which I shall see You in all Your beauty face to face, forever.

OCTOBER 26

Parables of the Divine Mercy



“Now the publicans and sinners were drawing near to him to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the Scribes murmured, saying, ‘This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.’ But he spoke to them this parable” (Lk. 15:1-3).

Our Savior, surrounded by an audience of publicans and sinners, is reproached by the Pharisees. In reply He delivers a series of parables illustrating the divine mercy.

Divine Shepherd, teach me to appreciate better the extent of Your mercy toward me and all mankind.

The persons in two of the parables delivered by Jesus on this occasion are a shepherd or owner of a flock, who has lost

one of his sheep, and a woman, who has lost a drachma. In both cases that which has been lost is an external, material possession dear to the owner, however insignificant it may seem to others. For the man who possesses only a hundred sheep a single one has its value; and to a poor woman one drachma is a large sum. It is the wage of a day's hard work, and its loss in this instance appears to be felt so keenly that the nine drachmas which are still in possession seem to count for nothing. Anxiety, too, is expressed by the painful efforts made to recover the lost goods. The shepherd scours the desert wastes, calling aloud. A lost sheep is, in fact, deserving of pity, since the sheep has neither instinct to find its way back to the fold nor means of defense. And so, when the shepherd finds the lost one, he does not punish it or show anger, but carries it joyfully on his shoulders back to the fold. In the other case, the woman lights a lamp. She makes a thorough search of every nook and corner of her modest home; she expends almost more light and effort than a drachma is worth. And then, what joy is expressed when the quest is rewarded! Again, as with the shepherd, it wells up from the heart into glad exclamations and finds a sympathetic echo in the hearts of neighbors and friends.

The meaning of the parables is briefly indicated in the words, "*I say to you that, even so, there will be joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, more than over ninety-nine just who have no need of repentance.*" The application is clear; it is the mercy of God that is described in the parable, from a threefold point of view: the value which God attaches to the soul of the sinner, the zeal with which He seeks after it, and His triumphant joy when He has recovered it. A twofold purpose is also evident in this moving instruction of

our Savior. He wishes to encourage and console the sinners who are gathered around Him, by revealing to them in figure the infinite divine mercy and so draw them to repentance and conversion. On the other hand, the parables are designed to correct the view of the Pharisees with regard to sinners, for they banished them from the kingdom of God in advance and took scandal at their efforts to reform their lives. God, on the contrary, values and loves these souls. He seeks after them with eagerness and rejoices at their return to Him, while the angels of heaven, the *friends and neighbors* of God, share His joy. We are given a glimpse in these parables of the value God places upon our souls. We are shown His standards for the mercy and zeal we are to practice toward those with whom we deal in our apostolic work, especially sinners. Finally, the meaning of the parable as our Savior reveals it shows that the only real cause for sorrow is the loss of divine grace and the only true joy is the recovery of our intimacy with God.

O my God, I adore Your divine mercy and I am deeply grateful for the many operations of Your clemency toward me. You are ever seeking me by the inspirations of grace, You carry me on Your shoulders, as it were, by Your sacraments. Help me to grieve over my least infidelities, and grant me the light and guidance of Your Holy Spirit to recover the lost drachma of intimate union with You, so that it may be with Your mercy and Your zeal that I win for You the hearts of others.

The Prodigal Son



“A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the property that falls to me’” (Lk. 15:11, 12).

Like the two parables which precede it in the same chapter of St. Luke’s Gospel and which were yesterday the subject of our meditation, the parable of the prodigal son defends the divine love and mercy toward repentant sinners. But in this case that which is lost is not a material possession, but a tenderly cherished son.

O Jesus, grant me the grace of finding my pleasure in You alone.

In the parable of the prodigal son, which has been described as “the pearl and crown of all the parables of Scripture,” the waywardness of the Prodigal is vividly portrayed. He insolently demands his share of the inheritance; he callously leaves his father and his paternal home, and wastes his patrimony in extravagant living. Then, his unhappiness is depicted with equal clarity. It is, in fact, the young man’s misery and misfortune rather than the shamefulness of his conduct that are emphasized in the parable. We are shown how the abuse of his freedom reduced him to both interior and exterior destitution. He was degraded even to the point of keeping swine, which for the Jews was a symbol of extreme moral corruption. Even worse, he envied the animals the food that was given to them.

The entire parable is a representative of the gradual descent of the soul into sin. The soul that lives amid the

abundance and peace of divine grace and fellowship is apt to lose the realization of what it is to be without these blessings. This soul become restless and eager to taste forbidden delights that appear so attractive. There follows impatience with rules and restraints; the road to heaven begins to seem a long and narrow way. Then, the soul claims as its own that which has been granted it by the liberality and goodness of God, and squanders in self-gratification its countless gifts and graces in both the natural and supernatural order. The inevitable result is disillusionment and a sense of guilt; and the soul finally discovers that it has not found freedom according to its desire, but has only changed masters.

The parable describes this sad awakening in the case of the Prodigal, and also his sincere repentance. One day, St. Luke tells us, the young man came to himself. He compared his present state with his former condition in life. Interior unhappiness and exterior afflictions as well often have the effect of drawing the sinner's attention to the inspirations of grace. He thought of his father and his father's goodness and decided to return and ask pardon. His resolution was manly and sincere: *"I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father. I have sinned against heaven and before thee. I am no longer worthy to be called thy son.'"* Here is the image of true repentance and perfect conversion. If we would enter into ourselves in recollected prayer, we should draw into our souls stronger rays of the divine light. The recognition of our own sinfulness, the thought of our heavenly Father's goodness and mercy to us, and the all-pervading action of divine grace begin the work of true conversion in the soul. Then, humble confession and the good resolution firmly put into practice are its completion. Let us ask these graces for ourselves and for all sinners.

"We have offended Thy goodness, O God, by our sins; forgive us and pour out Thy mercy upon us. Remember that we are the work of Thy hands, frail though we be. We beseech Thee, suffer not another to usurp the honor of Thy name. Pardon us the evil we have done, and grant us good things even beyond our prayer, that thus we may be well pleasing to Thee, now and forever" (from a hymn composed by St. Gregory the Great).

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Return of the Prodigal



"I will get up and go to my father" (Lk. 15:18).

Picture the Prodigal returning in humility and sincerity and with firm resolution to his father's house.

Father in heaven, grant me the strength to sacrifice everything that could keep me from loving and serving You perfectly.

Meditation which does not lead to resolution is inefficacious; but a resolution that is not put into immediate practice runs the risk of passing into the category of abandoned projects. Our Savior did not tell us what it cost the Prodigal to keep his resolution, nor how many times he was tempted to turn back during his journey homeward. It is not unlikely, however, that he asked himself with some dismay what sort of welcome he would receive, if, indeed, he were to be received at all; or whether he would be able to endure the embarrassment and humiliation that in all probability awaited him. It sometimes requires heroism to break with one's

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sinful tendencies and sincerely to amend one's life. For this reason we are inclined to allow our souls to remain captive for an indefinite period, fluctuating between the desire to be free and the inability to form an effective resolution to bring this about.

Three ways of acting upon a resolution are open to us. Resting complacently in our well-meaning but ineffectual desires, we may continually postpone their realization. The folly and danger of such a course is noted in the Book of Proverbs, where we read that *the sluggard's propensity slays him*. You desire to be a worthy Sister of the Holy Cross. Then, surely, you will carefully observe the Rule that will make you such. You desire a place among the saints; then, you will seriously try to correct your faults and imperfections. Again, we may resolve firmly to begin at last to work in earnest at our sanctification, yet we make certain reservations; for example, we limit the extent of our renouncement where there is question of a particular place or person or some object, quite trivial, perhaps, in itself. Yet, a fine silken thread about its leg keeps the bird from taking flight as effectively as an iron chain. Or we may sincerely and strongly determine to end all compromise and mediocrity, whatever it may cost us, and without delay. If this be our disposition of soul, we shall place ourselves in the hands of the divine Physician, like a sick person who allows himself to be treated entirely as the doctor directs. Totally submissive to the divine will, we shall view persons, places, and employments with impartiality and be content to retain or dispose of all things as obedience may direct. Our sole aim will be to serve God as perfectly as possible and to lose no opportunity of proving that we love Him above all things.

O my God, I have promised to work only for Your glory and for

the salvation of souls. With the help of Your grace I shall keep this promise, however difficult the sacrifices You may ask of me. Renew me, my God, in the spirit of my mind and clothe me with the new man, which has been created according to You in justice and holiness of truth.

OCTOBER 29

The Welcome Given the Prodigal



“But while he was yet a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with compassion, and ran and fell upon his neck and kissed him” (Lk. 15:20).

The last portion of the parable of the prodigal son serves primarily to emphasize God’s merciful love for sinners. This divine love is so great and so incomprehensible to us that sometimes, like the elder brother of the Prodigal, we are tempted to complain.

Father in heaven, inspire in me a greater confidence in your infinite mercy, and enable me to impart this confidence to others.

It was not by mere chance that the father of the Prodigal saw his son *while he was yet a long way off*. He had never given up hope of his return, and we can imagine him climbing the hill near his house every morning and evening, like the mother of the young Tobias, scanning the horizon on every side as far as his eyes would reach. He immediately recognized his son in the half-starved and ragged traveler approaching his house. He ran to meet him and checked

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with his embraces the Prodigal's humble confession. In addition, he restored him fully to his former condition and rights, which are signified by the robe, ring, and sandals. Then there is a feast for which the fatted calf is killed, the joyful eagerness of the father showing itself in his order for the preparation for the merrymaking: "*Bring out the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; because this my son was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost and is found!*"

The father in the parable is the image of the Father of mercies, yet a very imperfect image. His generous forgiveness and loving reception of the Prodigal, which would seem contrary to all likelihood in an earthly father, are only as a shadow of the mercy of God to the repentant sinner. The father of the Prodigal waits for his son, he does not go in search of him. God never loses sight of the sinner, but pursues him with the interior and exterior impulses of His grace. In this respect, the parable of the shepherd seeking the lost sheep gives us a more vivid image of the mercy of God. In the Old Testament also we find the prophet Ezechiel representing the Lord God as a shepherd who seeks his sheep through lonely deserts and rocky places and brambles. He gently entices them back to the fold, promising them the richest pastures near the riverbank and on the mountains of Israel. He offers to bind up their wounds and strengthen their weakness. Every argument that love can devise is put forward to persuade the lost sheep to return to the shepherd.

Both the Old and the New Testaments are filled with such illustrations of the infinite divine goodness and mercy; and our heavenly Father wishes us to imitate His zeal in the reclaiming of the Prodigals and the lost sheep. Aware as we are of our own frailty and in appreciation of God's

many favors to us, we should extend to all sinners our pity and the charity of our prayers, especially to those who are hardened in sin; for the greater the sin committed and the more frequent its repetition, the more difficult it is, ordinarily speaking, for the sinner to repent. The love of the heavenly Father does not change, but the sinner becomes gradually less able to return to Him. The habit of praying for sinners is not only a work of fraternal charity, but also a proof of our love for God. If by our prayers we have won the grace of repentance for only one sinner, we have added more glory to God and greater joy to all heaven than could be produced by *ninety-nine just who have no need of repentance.*

O Lord, your kindness reaches to heaven; your faithfulness, to the clouds. Your justice is like the mountains of God; your judgments, like the mighty deep; man and beast you save, O Lord. How precious is your kindness, O God! The children of men take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They have their fill of the prime gifts of your house; from your delightful stream you give them to drink. For with you is the fountain of life, and in your light we see light (Ps. 35:6-10).

OCTOBER 30

Our Lady, Mother of Mercy



“Hail, holy Queen, Mother of Mercy!” (from the hymn *Salve Regina.*)

Under Christ, who is our Lord and King, we revere Mary as our Lady and Queen; and because she shares in the goodness as well as in the power of God she merits as one of the greatest of her titles that of “Mother of Mercy.”

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My Queen and Mother, obtain for me a deep hatred of sin and a profound trust in your power and mercy.

God has absolute dominion over all created things; He can do with them as He wishes. Having given Mary the authority of a mother over His Son, who is Himself God, He has given her marvelous power over everything that is subject to her Son. "For how would it be possible, O Blessed Virgin," asks St. Peter Damian, "that He whom thou didst bring forth, even though He is almighty, should resist the maternal authority He has given thee over Him?" Through Jesus, therefore, Mary has not only a primacy of honor with regard to the angels and saints, but a real power to command both angels and men. Before her the angels bow in homage by reason of her unique dignity and the dazzling beauty of her soul. But Mary is queen of the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and martyrs, of the confessors, virgins, and all the saints by a most tender and intimate title, in that all their merits and glory are due under Christ to her. We likewise owe all our graces under Jesus to her. Every blessing that helps us on our way to God, although unsolicited and unacknowledged, comes to us through the ever vigilant, suppliant omnipotence of Mary's intercession.

Mary is, then, really and truly queen; but so sweet and clement a Sovereign Mistress is she that the Church salutes her also as Mother of Mercy. "I am the Queen of Heaven and Mother of Mercy," said our Lady to St. Bridget: "I am the joy of the just and the door through which sinners are brought to God. There is no sinner on earth so accursed as to be deprived of my mercy." All sinners now in heaven owe their salvation, after Jesus, to Mary. It is likely that her prayers obtained the conversion of the Good Thief and the

grace of repentance for Peter. Judas also would have been saved by her intercession; but, although Mary is all-powerful with the Heart of God, her good offices can be thwarted by an obstinate human will; sinners who have recourse to her must be resolved to amend their lives.

A deep detestation of sin is one of the first graces our Lady obtains for those who submit to her maternal influence. This gift lies at the root of all perfection and provides supernatural energy for our perseverance. If God were to permit us to choose for ourselves any one of the extraordinary gifts that He has given His saints, we could not do better than to ask for the profound hatred of sin which they possessed. We are all sinners, and the more we grow in holiness, the more intensely conscious we become of our sinfulness and the more compunction we feel. We can all join St. Bonaventure in saying to Mary, "Who are the subjects for mercy, if not the miserable? And since thou art the Queen of mercy and I am the most miserable of sinners, it follows that I am the first of thy subjects. How then, O Lady, canst thou do otherwise than exercise thy mercy on me?"

"O purest, best, and most merciful Lady, help and relief of the faithful, powerful comforter of the afflicted and assured refuge of sinners, forsake us not, but keep us ever under thy protection. If thou forsake us, to whom shall we have recourse? What would become of us without thee, most holy Mother of God, who art the spirit and life of Christians? Even as respiration is an infallible sign of life in our bodies, so is thy holy name, when it is constantly on the lips of thy servants, not only a sign, but a veritable cause of life, happiness, and protection" (St. Germanus, Patriarch of Constantinople).

LAST SUNDAY IN OCTOBER

Jesus Christ the King



(See *Festivals and Saints*, p. 868)

NOVEMBER 1

All Saints



(See *Festivals and Saints*, p. 870)

NOVEMBER 2*

The Unjust Steward



“What is this that I hear of thee?” (Lk. 16:2)

In the parable of the unfaithful steward Jesus teaches us that just as the master of the steward, upon hearing that his servant was wasting his master's goods, summoned him to give an account, so God will demand an account of our use of the natural and supernatural goods He has entrusted to each one of us.

* If a meditation for the feast of All Souls is preferred, see September 11, p. 619.