

Blessed Justin Russolillo, S.D.V.

Works – Volume V

For Mental Prayer

*Translated and published by
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INTRODUCTION

As a young student, in 1961, I read in one of Fr. Justin's diaries: *We resume the publication of Spiritus Domini. Thanks be to God! I will undertake this work also, perhaps dusting off, correcting and completing the book-notes of the young cleric Fraraccio*¹. This statement was followed by a question: *Why didn't he continue?*

Fr. Fraraccio was never asked this question. When I asked him, he simply answered: *I did not continue because soon after my priestly ordination, I was transferred to Montesano Scalo, and was deprived of the pleasure of listening to his preaching.*

In the various volumes of Fr. Fraraccio's notes, published by Fr. Anella² in Italian, Like: *Evangelizing Divine Union, When you Pray, I Am the vine You are the Branches, The Feast of Divine Love* etc. the content was revised, corrected and completed by the editor, here the texts have been revised, corrected, completed and published by Blessed Justin.

¹ Fr. Ugo Fraraccio, S.D.V. (1918 - 2003) was a Vocationist priest very close to Blessed Justin; in addition to writing many of the founder's talks, he also patiently corrected the draft of all the books published by Fr. Justin. When Blessed Justin was relieved of his duties as Superior General, he was appointed Vicar General "with all the rights and duties of Superior General".

² Fr. Oreste Anella, S.D.V. (1920-1997), pupil, friend, cooperator and biographer of Blessed Justin, was the postulator for the cause of Beatification and publisher of many of Fr. Justin's writings.

In the writings published in *Spiritus Domini*³ in the rubric *In the Exercise of Mental Prayer*, we find a Fr. Justin that is easy to understand, discursive, logical and convincing. With simple words, practical examples, in a discursive stile that often engages his audience. Fr. Justin catechizes the faithful parishioners of St. George's Parish in Pianura, the Vocationist students and the Vocationist Sisters on the most sublime mysteries.

In most of this volume it is evident that Fr. Justin does not write, but talks and dialogues with his listeners. In a stile very much different than the one he uses in the *Devotional, Ascension, Spirit of Prayers, Let us make Man, Journey Toward the Espousal Relation*, he presents his asceticism, mysticism and spirituality in such a way that every parishioner, aspirant, student and religious can understand and absorb it.

Fr. Justin was an untiring preacher of the word of God; he preached every day and often two and three times a day. As it appears clearly in the following pages, he preached always on the word of God, and most often on the *direct words of God*.

In his meditations more than doing exegesis, the author makes practical, ascetical and mystical applications. While believing and teaching that the word of God contains one message, that is, has the same meaning for everybody, he believes to be appropriate and convenient that each listener may variously apply it to himself, and that each listener can make various personal, ascetical and mystical applications on the same word. This helps us to understand why the rubric under which all these meditations have

³ *Spiritus Domini* is the periodical of the Society of the Divine Vocations started by Fr. Justin in 1927. From its beginning up to this date continues to publish many of Blessed Justin's writings and continues to promulgate his spirituality and charism.

been published is not titled *In the exercise of the Word of God*, as we would have expected, but in the *Exercise of mental prayer*.

It is proper of mental prayer to deepen, to bring out the meaning of a divine word and to give it life, by applying it to one's self in the dispositions and conditions of the moment. Some of the reflections and applications are rather common, some are definitely exclusive, genuine and fascinating; one cannot read them without feeling touched and involved.

While preaching to people of Pianura and to the members of his religious institutes he always had a lit candle on the altar to remind everyone of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Only the Holy Spirit can vivify the word of God inspired by him.

May the reading of these pages enkindle our hearts with renewed love for the Word of God, and with an ever-progressive desire of union and immersion in the divine mysteries.

Fr. Louis M. Caputo, S.D.V.

PART I

EPIPHANY OF LIFE

Epiphany of Life

These meditations dictated to the people of Pianura in the Parish of St. George Martyr, were published in Spiritus Domini from July to December 1940.

The Epiphany, as all the other solemnities of the liturgical year, more than an act or historical remembrance, is considered as a state or permanent reality, as something that continues in time. Every Epiphany is also a true "spiritual illumination" on the role that we may play in that mystery or in that extraordinary event. The interior light beams forth from the Spirit and from the Word.

"We all need an epiphany totally ours, totally for us, O mystery of spiritual illumination".

With Blessed Justin, let us enter into this mystery of light, docile to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit.

Starting the Journey

I do not know if you ever decided the place of your soul in the mystery of the Epiphany¹, that is, of the spiritual illumination for a supernatural enlightenment. In order to get closer and closer to the goals of the Lord, we need to establish ourselves more firmly, and courageously enter in this spiritual enlightenment. We all need an epiphany totally ours, totally for us. If we are already in it, we only need to progress in it. Every spiritual progress needs

¹ Epiphany, from the Greek, means apparition, manifestation, splendor, glory and light.

a continuous impulse, if we want to be constant, since from the moment of original sin, we always tend downward.

Let us implore this from the Lord, through the very grace of the Christian mysteries that are renewed year after year and in every soul of good will.

The Star

The mystery of the Epiphany is the feast of the illumination of the souls. Every illumination requires a star. Do you know Sister Louise Napolitano? The Sister that goes out of the convent with a very intense and pious childlike desire to know, which one is the most beautiful title of the Blessed Mother from among all the titles of the litanies.

The Blessed Mother and the angel tell her: *Morning Star!* In this invocation, the Sister finds the formula of her daily apostolate.

The Blessed Mother loves to be honored as Morning Star. This title, however, was first attributed to Jesus. In the Book of Revelation he says: *I am the spring from the root of David and the bright star of the morning* (Rv 22, 16).

This title is applied to the Virgin Mary in the sense that she is the dawn that precedes the day.

It is applied to Jesus in the sense that he is the great luminary of the day.

The Day

Sacred Scripture says that the day of the just is in a continuous growth; so the just must become ever more just. He who is holy should become ever more holy. Now we have to see the actual

status of our soul. She may still be in the night with only a glimmer of star, or at the dawn, or even in full midday. Is it possible that someone may be in the fullness of light of midday?

I always suppose that the souls to which I speak already have triumphed over mortal sin and deliberate venial sin².

Can I suppose that you are souls enjoying the fullness of midday's light? I am afraid that we may confuse the pallid glimmer of a star with the bright splendor of midday!

More Light

How beautiful is the vision of Venerable Marina de Escobar³. She is transported in a world of light, and then is elevated in a heaven of brighter light, and then she is taken to a sphere of light even more beautiful and ... to ever more and more bright spheres. The same happens to us.

The fact that we are still in this world tells us that we have not yet reached our heaven and that form of perfection, in which we will be with the Lord.

² Fr. Justin was talking to many Vocationist Sisters, Priests, candidates, brothers and the good, daily communicant people of Pianura.

³ Blessed Marina de Escobar, mystic and foundress of a modified branch of the Briggittine Order was born at Valladolid, Spain, February 8, 1554; died there June 9, 1633. Until her forty-fifth year her attention was given mainly to her own perfection, then she devoted herself more to promoting the piety of others. At fifty her continual bodily afflictions became so severe that she was confined to her bed for the remainder of her life. Providence provided her with an admirable spiritual guide, in the Venerable Luis de Ponte (1554-1624). The special external work entrusted to her was to establish a branch of the Order of the Holy Savior or Briggittines but with the rules greatly modified to suit the times and the country.

The sun makes nature bloom, and the light of the Lord makes spiritual life bloom.

O mystery of spiritual illumination! O desire, hunger and thirst of greater light!

Did we possibly pass the age when it was easier to ascend?

As in this physical world we perceive whether our house is damp or dry, so the soul perceives whether our body is adolescent or young, mature or old⁴.

When our body is in its developmental phase is inclined to the leisure that favors its development; and the soul is invaded by cravings of disturbing desires that prevent her from applying to spiritual things in youth. Once we have reached a certain physical maturity, we tend to maintain and enjoy what we have achieved, and rarely the soul feels the stimuli of an ardent desire toward higher spiritual heights.

Only grace, only God's grace, can lift us up higher.

To progress

It is not possible to improve the good we are already doing, without the desire for a greater good.

In our spiritual life we do not have in this life a state of perfect maturity but a state of perennial youth, an ongoing expansion of horizons, a continuous ascension to new heavens, under the influence of good desires. This is a characteristic of spiritual life⁵.

⁴ Every age places some impediments to the light of the Spirit.

⁵ At every age, God gives us the necessary grace to grow in the perfection of love.

To many souls it happens that after many efforts they succeed to establish themselves in God's grace, and after one day, (let us not be pessimist) after a week, (let us be generous) after a month, they return to the previous disorders; they lift themselves up again, only to fall back again.

What kind of life is this? An alternation of resurrections and deaths!

Jesus once raised from the dead was no longer subject to death! We must be able to say the same of everyone who wants to live in Jesus Christ.

Physically we die, but only once!

A certain man, in the *Witnesses of the Resurrection*, very effectively imagines that Lazarus, raised from the dead, rebukes his sisters: *What did you do to me? I was dead once and you had me called back to the life of the body! Now, I have to die again!*⁶

The Word

Spiritually there should be no death, but, only a continuous growth, a continuous dilatation, a continuous ascension. Indeed, when God's grace is warmly welcomed, it places us in this fervor of continuous growth, dilatation, and ascension.

All this is always accomplished by spiritual illumination. First creating word is: *Let there be light;*⁷ all the rest follows. It became night and then morning. First day. Evening came and then morning followed again. Light of a new day! Second day, and so on!

⁶ Episode of the apocryphal gospels.

⁷ Gn 1,3. Fr. Justin's comments to this word may be found in *Ascension*, art. XXXIV-XL.

Now, there must be in us the ardent desire for greater light, and consequently for the divine word. If we have it, let us thank the Lord for it, and let us implore the grace of never losing it, but of increasing it.

What can you expect from one who is lazy? Even if you shoot a cannon, he does not hear, or pretends not to hear! Likewise, he does not see the light of the thunderbolt, or pretends not to see it, and he remains satisfied with that vague glimmer.

Those who go to sleep with the desire of the light, at the first ray of light are already awake.

The silence

This illumination will come to us from the Word! This Word appears in our humanity; he appears in our day. From this Word we expect this interior illumination that enables us to live our entire ascetical year.

If the light comes from the Word, from the word of God, the best preparation to receive it is interior silence.

Remember the well-known scripture verses: *Dum medium silentium tenerent omnia, omnipotens sermo tuus, Domine, a regalibus sedibus venit* – *When peaceful silence lay over all, and night had run the half of her swift course, down from heavens, from the royal throne, leapt your all powerful Word.*⁸

The Spouse comes! *Media nocte clamor factus est, ecce sponsus venit, exite obviam ei* – *At midnight there was a cry. Look, the bridegroom is coming! Go out and meet him.*⁹

⁸ Ws 18, 14

⁹ Mk 25, 7

The interior silence is not easily understood!

How is it possible to be silent internally? Internally we talk without interruption. We remain internally silent only while we are listening to someone else. Then it starts an enjoyable dialogue. One says: remain silent internally, so that you may listen to the word of God; I answer: Let the divine word be loud enough that I may hear it, because only listening, I can keep silence within my own self!

The Lord needs silence in order to talk to the soul; the soul needs to hear the word of God in order to remain silent within.¹⁰ Or, at least the soul needs that someone else talks to her; someone who is able and willing to talk to the soul. For this we have the precursors of the gospel! The Blessed Virgin and the angels start to talk to the soul.

In this case, it should be my voice¹¹ to set in your soul the silence needed to listen to the voice of the Lord.

Reasons for silence

O necessity of interior silence that enables us to listen to the divine word!¹²

What is the profound cause of this necessity of silence for the soul to receive the divine action? For the Lord to act in our soul, he must be present to the soul.

¹⁰ Cf. Russolillo, *Io sono la vite, Voi i tralci*, Ancona Ed. Milano 1969, p. 19: "The Lord will talk to you, in proportion of your silence".

¹¹ Fr. Justin's voice, he was preaching.

¹² In *Ascension*, Fr. Justin says: "Consider the times of silence as appointments, encounters and dialogues with Jesus, in the intimacy of holy love" (Works, vol. I, art. 348).

We know how strongly Christian asceticism insists on the exercise of the presence of God.¹³

Usually we consider the exercise of God's presence as a way to stir up and strengthen all the energies of good, and to reduce or curb the forces of evil. We do not consider it as a tool to achieve this goal; we stress that this divine presence is a necessary prerequisite to the divine action in the soul.

The Lord God Trinity becomes present to us through the Word: both in this world and in the other. In this world, he becomes present to us through revelation and the light of faith; in paradise he becomes present through the vision and the light of glory.

Do you remember the answer Jesus gave to Philip? Philip exclaimed: *Lord, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us!* Jesus answered: *Philip, he who sees me, sees the Father* (Jn 14, 9).

The Father reveals himself to us through the Son. The Son in turn, gives us the vision of the Father. The splendor of the light manifests the presence of the sun.

I think that we enjoy our paradise through the vision of the second person of the Trinity, the Son. In the vision of the Son, there is the vision of the entire Trinity. In this way, also in the state of glory, Jesus' word *I am the way* remains true. Even in heaven, Jesus remains the only way. Even in paradise it is true that *Omnia per ipsum facta sunt – Through him all things came into being* (Jn 1, 2).

In paradise, we will have the divine presence through the divine vision and in the light of glory, and with it we will have also the blessedness and glorification. Everything through the Word!¹⁴

¹³ St. Francis de Sales teaches us that a good manner of praying is to simply, at the beginning, place ourselves in the presence of God, and without conversing, stay before him, the risen, the living, open to listening to him.

¹⁴ Cf. Russolillo, Works, vol. I, art. XLV: "Your glory in the soul is your very Word, Jesus, who lives in the soul, enlivening and making her a saint,

In this earthly life we do not have the divine presence directly, but as in a mirror, as St. Paul teaches us.¹⁵ To the vision of glory in the other world, corresponds the vision of faith in this world; consequently we receive all the supernatural good through faith, which is foundation, basis and root of the entire work of our sanctification.

How does the vision of faith come to us? It comes to us through hearing, as St. Paul teaches us;¹⁶ he is the apostle of faith before being the apostle of love and of the zeal of love. Now, the divine presence starts, develops and is fulfilled in an interior vision, which depends on a divine word we have heard.

In our listening to the Word we have the presence of the Lord, as a vision of the Lord in this world.

Saint Ambrose commenting the words of St. Luke: *When the angels went away from them to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go, then, to Bethlehem to see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us"*. Do you understand? Let us

through the action of the same Spirit who effected the Incarnation. If the world must be filled with your glory, it must be filled with saints. In order to be filled with saints, it must be filled with your Word, your Incarnate Son, living in every soul".

¹⁵ 1Co, 13, 12: I see now through a glass in a dark manner: but then face to face. Now I know in part: but then I shall know even as I am known.

¹⁶ See Rm 10, 14-18: But how can they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach? And how can people preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring [the] good news!" But not everyone has heeded the good news; for Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what was heard from us? Thus faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ. But I ask, did they not hear? Certainly they did; for "Their voice has gone forth to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world."

go to see what we have heard! You go to see the Word? Yes, we go to see the Word; this Word is the second person of the Trinity, incarnate and made visible in human nature.

How do we see this Incarnate Word in this world? We see him through his very word more so than through his assumed nature.

The eyes of the shepherds saw his humanity. They saw the veil of the Word, and when we see the image of Jesus' humanity, we see the veil of the Lord's veil. When we receive his word in faith, we see him more directly than through any other veil.

Jesus said to St. Thomas and repeats to us: *Beati qui non viderunt et crediderunt* – Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe (Jn 20, 29). Blessed, indeed, are those who believe, more than those who see. Also to the Blessed Virgin it was said: *Beata quae credidisti* – Yes, blessed are you who believed (Lk 1, 45).

Our blessedness consists in accepting the word, and in accepting it completely. We must open the heart of our understanding to receive, conserve, do, and to speak and incarnate in ourselves this word.¹⁷

From all this we can see how important and necessary is this silence. This is the reason why we say that the interior silence must be a permanent disposition of the soul.

Mortification of words

Whenever we talk about spiritual life we must remember that we are limited. In us, the spiritual and supernatural elements are

¹⁷ See, *Ascension*, art. 689: [We cannot remain indifferent to] the gift of his interior word, light, bread and feast of the soul. We cannot remain indifferent to his conversation and his silence. Oh! Hearing his word at every Mass and prayer, or at least, often during the day!

combined with the natural and material elements, and the latter must not prevail.

We keep repeating: Let us eliminate ever more what is not necessary; everything that is sensible must be ever more reduced to the minimum.

We want to push this elimination not stopping at what is convenient, but to what is really necessary, and if it were possible, I would say to what is indispensable.

Reduction of the sensible element

This does not mean to place and tighten an iron clutch around our head, but give triumph to the spirit, because otherwise, the sensitive element will suffocate us.

Scripture says that: *The natural person has no room for the gifts of God's Spirit; to him they are folly; he cannot recognize them, because their value can be assessed only in the Spirit* (1 Co 2, 14).

What is this sensible element in our case? It is the human word!

The devil has great interest in multiplying our words, as if all those spoken around us were not sufficient. We have a deluge of unnecessary printed words and a deluge of internal words gushing out of the abyss of the past and the sky of the future! Let us reduce the internal and external words. Let's enter in the silence.

Aren't there any words we can eliminate? We do not intend to talk about sinful words. Yet Scripture says that whenever we talk a lot, there is always some fault. *A flood of words is never without fault; whoever controls the lips is wise* (Pr 10, 19). Even, if, so to speak, there are no words that we should mortify of necessity because they are not sinful; let us reduce human words out of love.

We should enter into silence in order to listen only to the gospel of God. Can we eliminate some of our readings?

I do not know to what extent you have the passion or temptation of the newspaper. I am sure that there are some people for whom the newspaper is a necessity, but certainly not all its pages are necessary.

If we do not reduce all these words, we will never be able to reduce (I say reduce, not eliminate) all the internal endless blabbing.

Let us then reduce, only out of love, our human words.

As we can easily understand, this internal silence on our part must become all internal attention to the Lord who wants to talk to us!

Loving Attention

We should not think that eliminating some readings and conversations we will automatically enter into the desert, we will sink into a vacuum!

In this silence of desert and in this desert of silence resounds the divine word!

This word comes from the Father who generates the Word! Those who do not understand Jesus as the Word of the Father do not understand him at all! Everything in him is word of the Father! He is the personification of the word of the Father.

Thus we understand how all those who get close to him, today, in this mortal life, must be all ears, as tomorrow, in the future life will be all eyes!

Vision of John the Evangelist! Sacred, mysterious animals, with the wings all filled with eyes (Rv 4, 6)!

Try to imagine a person who could see from every part of his body! In eternity we shall be all vision.

That is why the Gospel insists on the necessity of being vigilant; after all, vigilance is internal attention (Mk 13, 33).

Certainly the Lord wants to communicate with the soul through his word. At times he speaks in a terrible manner: *Yahweh's voice shatters cedars; Yahweh shatters cedars of Lebanon* (Ps 29, 6).

The Lord manifests himself in this way to his enemies in order to shiver them. This, however, is not the way he deals with his friends.

It is said that St. Ignatius, sometimes raised so much the voice that the windows quivered. Fr. Lainez, hearing his voice, would cry and say: *What did I do to be treated thus by Fr. Ignatius?* It is evident that the saint did not raise his voice out of anger, because immediately he appeared serene!

Do you ever think that maybe we too need to hear that voice that shatters cedars? We are not the enemies of Jesus we are his chosen ones. I am sure that we do not commit a sin of pride calling ourselves the Lord's chosen ones. He talks to us in a different way and with ineffable gentleness. We need constant attention and loving attention to the Lord, and we do not possess it yet!

Maybe in our dealing with men we are too kind in our manners. We may be too delicately sensible; in our dealing with the Lord, in all truthfulness, we are still too rough.

We should wish to be as gentle with the Lord as he is gentle with us. We regret being so unrefined with the Lord and we gladly receive this invitation to a greater spiritualization, to pay our full attention to the Lord. If our attention to the Lord is not an attention of love it cannot be the tender attention that the Lord expects of us.

Loving attention! *Audiam quid loquatur in me Dominus Deus, quoniam loquetur pacem in plebem suam - I will hear what the Lord God will speak in me: for he will speak peace unto his people* (Ps 84,9).

I will be all attention to receive in my heart what the Lord will tell me, because he has a word of peace, a word of union of love for my soul.

More Life

As soon as our Lord came, he sent his angels to call me too. This helps us to understand the goal of the mission of the Incarnate Word.

When it is question of calling the souls to the word of God in person, the word that enlightens us is this: *I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full* (Jn 10, 19).

Only God knows how many times we have heard this painful exclamation: *What kind of life is this?*

Imagine a poor man in pain, a poor sick person in a hospital! Imagine him mutilated, paralyzed in a very slow agony saying: *What kind of life is this?* He would have his good reasons to say that!

Let us imagine that this poor individual has the use of all his members and lives in the gloomiest misery, and with good reasons says: *What kind of life is this?* Truthfully such a life does not deserve to be called life! If we were able to give to this person all that is really necessary to life, would he be happy? He is all alone, with no human being around; he can fill his stomach, that is true, but when the stomach does not complain, the heart wakes up and the poor man suffers; he rightly exclaims: *What kind of life is this?* Let us imagine that we can give some company to this person! But company is not always ideal!

Multiplicasti gentem sed non magnificasti laetitiam - You multiplied the nation, and not increased the joy! (Is, 9, 3). *What kind of life is this?* And so on. We are never satisfied!

The reality of our life is that even if we had everything, we would always create fictitious needs for something else. The cravings would never end!

The profound reason for our discontent is this: The Lord wants to communicate to us his divine life, and until we do not have it in its fullness and do not enjoy it with security, we can never be totally satisfied.

Our temporal, natural life will never be able to satisfy our desires.

Now, notice that even in the supernatural order, even in our participation of divine life, we experience the same story.

We can live our spiritual life as a mutilated, or paralyzed individual; we can live it as a poor man that starves every day, or as a poor lonely individual who has no friends and no ideals.

Even if we are all united with the divine persons, we never get along perfectly. Even if we reach the participation of divine life, until we do not reach the true and total divine union, we will always lament: *What kind of life is this?*

Now the Lord comes and repeats to us: *I have come so that you may have life and have it to the full* (Jn 10, 19).

Divine Life

This life, of which Jesus talks, and that only Jesus can give to us, is the very life of the divinity. It should always be clear, however, that we could never be fused in one only being with the divinity.

God will always be God and we will always remain human beings; and yet the Lord grants us a real participation in his divine life through the state of grace. This is what Jesus talks about when he says: *I have come so that you may have life and have it to the full* (Jn 10, 19).

It should not be a surprise for us, if finding us in an overabundance of light, at the beginning we feel blinded. Our spirit is used only to a certain dim light, to a glimmer of light. The supernatural truths are a too brightening light and the human eye instinctively tends to close.

Little by little we get our eyes used to this brighter light.

This life springs forth from the word of God! This light comes to us through the word of God.¹⁸

What a lively light shines on us from that word: *I came so that you may have life and have it ever more abundantly.* We experience it almost blinding!

So that we may not be shocked and in order to get used to it, let us think for a moment what the Lord says to the Prophet Ezekiel: *Son of man, can these bones come back to life? ... Prophecy over these bones and say to them: Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!*¹⁹

How can the bones and inanimate beings listen to the word of God?

The skeletons had a soul, to which they still belong, but the sea does not have a soul! Jesus *rebuked the wind and said to the sea: be quiet! Be still! The wind ceased and there was a great calm. ... They were filled with great awe and said to one another: Who then is this whom even wind and sea obey?*²⁰

¹⁸ Cfr. Russolillo, Ascension, n. 287: "From Sacred Scripture, the soul will obtain the weapon of victory over temptations, the ray of light for every shadow or doubt, consolation for every pain and strength for every weakness. With this in mind, the memory should become an unyielding coffer of divine words."

¹⁹ See, Ez, 37, 1-5.

²⁰ Mk, 5, 35-41 – The calming of a storm at sea.

As the insensitive creatures may be elevated and enabled to listen to the word and execute the command of the Lord and obey to it (this is made evident by the way the Lord addresses them and talks to them), so likewise our life may be elevated and enabled to receive divine life and live in divine life; divine life overflows in our lives and, through its grace, we participate of it.

I am the life

The Lord always communicates his life through the word. So we understand how important it is to dispose ourselves and remain in good internal dispositions toward the word, like the Blessed Mother, who: *Kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.*²¹

The Blessed Mother remained all by herself in Nazareth, while her Son was in the desert; but when Jesus started his ministry of the word, she made sure not to miss any of his words. Are there any souls animated by this desire? And I do not mean only all the preaching done in a parish, but also all the words the Lord says to the soul. Only God knows how many divine words we have missed!

With these premises, there is really reason to fear for the future; but the Lord is our salvation, and the soul with confidence should tell him: *Lord, before anything else, save in me your very graces!*

The Lord answers: *This is the reason why I came! I came to give you life.*

We are given a gift from God, and when we receive it, we realize that is no longer a gift, but the Lord himself, in person. We are

²¹ Lk, 2, 19

usually more inclined to see the gift rather the gift-giver. We use this expression not to imply ingratitude, but in the sense that in supernatural life we deal with the Lord who is most personal in all his things. Receiving any of the Lord's beneficence, we receive his person. Likewise, through the gift of that word, the Lord himself comes to us.

Talking to a person I can communicate an idea, but through my word, I cannot place my soul in his soul. Only the Lord can do that – only the Lord does it.

This is not just an idea. Christ has come, and this is a great reality. God has come! This is a very bright light! I cannot understand it. The Lord gives me a gift, whatever it may be; I am inclined to make mine the gift, and do with it whatever I please. If I take time to think what I have received I get shocked! I have received the Lord! And the soul remains surprised, shaken, distressed.

Likewise, the Lord works in the soul a deeper recollection and the soul becomes aware that she has been enriched; only later she realizes that God himself has come into the soul and the soul feels wounded. So, through a few words of the priest on the altar, Jesus becomes present, and we receive Jesus²². What a marvelous thing! We remain surprised at this idea that our life is the life of God, somehow is Jesus himself, in person.

The Lord himself is our life! We believe it, and yet when we start feeling him in us, we are surprised, wounded by the excess

²² In *Heavens' Heaven* Blessed Fr. Justin wrote: In the Eucharist, man is elevated to the priesthood; he gives a new existence to Jesus, the sacramental existence. He becomes so close to the Virgin Mary and to the Eternal Father, in their relationship of divine paternity and maternity ... The celebrating minister somehow, and in truth, can say to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament with the Father and with Mary: You are my son, today I have begotten you (Works, vol. 7, p.184).

of light, troubled by the divine presence. Jesus said it: *I am the life!* He is our life!

With his grace, he will get us used to this light, as it is said of the magi: *with one light they go in search of another light!*

All this is contained in the state of grace, yes, but this is not a content that we know how to enjoy. When the eyes of our soul will adjust to this truth, we will see better our duty in the practice of supernatural life. Indispensable conclusion is to place and maintain the soul in condition of receiving this light, because the creature is expected to prepare and then the Lord will do the rest.

Promise of Life

We face truth that emanates so much light as to dazzle our eyes; if our eyes are closed because of excessive light, they should not remain closed forever! This is the reason why our Lord dims this dazzling light adjusting it to our vision.

The Lord has granted us the ability to see even in our supernatural order, and out of his goodness makes us sharers of a superior light; he himself strengthens our seeing capacity and proportions it to his light.

We say that in every word of the Lord we find something more; more than a sanctifying idea, we find the Lord himself.

Usually, when they receive gifts from the Lord, the souls pay attention only to some advantage they may receive and they do not go beyond it, because they do not understand the Lord's ways. And once again the lord laments: *I have been with you all this time and you still do not know me* (Jn. 14, 9)!

I have been receiving the word of God for so many years, and I did not yet see, honor, welcome in it the divine Word.

Observe with what delicate art the Lord prepares the souls to this supreme epiphany of divine life in us, of which we now speak.

First, he works out an extraordinary miracle: The multiplication of bread! It was such a marvelous miracle that the crowds wanted to proclaim him king (see Jn 6,14). This is not what Jesus wanted! He wanted to elevate them in a sphere of greater light.

Their eyes were dazzled, and the day after, they only thought of the bread they ate without paying anything and without any work.

Our Lord turns away from them. He eclipses like the star that accompanied the Magi. Afterwards he finds himself back on the same subject and says, *Look for, come searching for the bread that does not perish. Whoever comes to me will not be hungry again; whoever believes in me will no longer thirst* (Jn 6, 26-58). Christ intended to create silence in their souls; he intended to place and establish them in loving attention to his word.

Then, he starts to talk again: *Your ancestors in the desert ate manna and died; I will give you another food, and those who eat it will never die.*

How mysterious this sounds! Imagine the attention that those people strangely curious had to pay! What does their Lord mean?

Our Lord clarifies better what he wants to say: *He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood will have life.* The light however did not penetrate those souls. *Is it possible that this man will give us his flesh to eat?* Thus, not believing in him they walked away.

We already know everything, but we do not understand it completely.

Life in Jesus

Now we consider the life we find in Jesus, our life that is Jesus, and not to the nourishment of this life that is the Eucharist. In those words there is something that we miss.

He who eats this bread will live forever ... will not experience eternal death. Of which death and life is he talking about?

Certainly he is not talking about bodily death. Could he be talking about the state of grace?

We are well aware of the fact that even receiving the Eucharist we may sin. So, saying those words our Lord must mean another order of life, another species of life.

This word of the Lord must be understood in a different way. What would it be or what could it be? It is the life that is in Jesus!

If I were to ask you: What is the substance that is found in the orange? You would respond: The orange contains the substance of orange. What is the life that is found in Jesus? In Jesus we find the life of Jesus, his very life. He wants me to become part of this life.

Do I, somehow, receive the life of Jesus? Could I receive that life through natural assimilation? Certainly, not, never! Our Lord cannot be assimilated like any ordinary food.

I am talking about his very life. I eat bread but I do not become loaf of bread.

Let us imagine, for a moment, that all the bread I have eaten up to now has not been assimilated yet, and it would still be all in me, I would be a piece of bread ... so, since I cannot assimilate Jesus, he remains in me.

Maybe, the more I try to clarify the concepts, the more I confuse you, because only Jesus knows the art of talking to the souls. That is why, with a more accessible, more terribly true, and more truly terrible expression he says: *I am the vine and you are the branches* (Jn

15, 5). Echoing this expression St. Paul says: *You, Jesus, are the head; we are the members* (Cf. 1 Co 12, 12-27). In a more beautiful and more theologically appropriate way, Jesus exclaims: *As the Father has sent me and I live the life of the Father so... you live my life.*

As eternally there remains the distinction of the three divine persons, notwithstanding the fact that they are one nature and one life, so, there remains forever the distinction between human nature, life and person from the soul that shares the life of Jesus. Jesus lives in her, and she lives in Jesus!

We do not, yet, comprehend the profound meaning of these things; we do not yet feel with intimate experience these divine things.

Up Higher

There are souls that are in the presence of the Lord; but it is not enough to be in the presence of the Lord!

There are souls who stand beside the Lord, but it is not enough to stand beside the Lord! We settle in this position, but it is not enough to remain in this relation; this is good but only as a first step. Some souls are satisfied with this position and relation, but the Lord does not want to be only before or beside us, he wants to be in us. The soul that wants to remain only before or beside the Lord does not really love him in truth, or loves him very little.

Why are we so obstinate in wanting to remain and behave as subject? It is fair to be his subjects, because he is the Lord, but that is not enough. We cannot stop and remain in the observance of his law, as many do, as true subjects; all this is beautiful, but it cannot be enough.

The Lord wants to be our inseparable companion, yet we do not succeed to live this continuous companionship.

The Lord does not want to stop here either. He is constantly

searching a way to be with us, to come to us, to be in us, to live in us through Holy Communion, but always in an intimate vital union that surpasses the sacramental union.²³

The sacramental union is a means for that vital union, and it is meant to nourish and increase it.

Maybe, we cannot yet grasp this with our intelligence, and much less with our heartfelt experience.

The Lord, however, wants us to understand all his words, that we actualize them in us, and that we enjoy them in him.

In our routine daily life we are aware that we are living, but we do not perceive the consciousness that there is one greater than us, and he is the one who directs and disposes of everything.

I repeat, we know this but we do not understand nor experience it fully. We have no awareness of it, and not being aware of something good that we possess is like not having it at all; certainly we do not possess it fully.

All these things we are talking about are contained even in the smallest fragment of grace! Actualizing this truth we live the divine life.

The Lord gives us this divine life and we ignore it, not in the way we know it, but in its intimate sense.

The Lord is now calling us to the full possession and enjoyment of his life.

²³ Cf. Ascension, art. 596: " My Lord Jesus is the living God; my Lord Jesus is also the Living One. In every image, in every commemoration of the liturgy, I will look for him, the Living One. I will have him, living. Living in the Eucharist, in the Church, living in his servants; living at the right hand of the Father; living in search of the lost sheep. I will look for him in a special way in the Eucharist, and in his search for sinners".

How the solitary life of a celibate person is different from the life of communion of two married people! Thus, we can have a pallid idea of the difference that exists between the life of a soul that lives all alone, and the life of a soul that is aware of God living within her.

It would be one thing if Jesus were to say: *I give you life*, and it is quite another his saying: *I am your life*.

How good is the Lord who wants to give us this complete possession and enjoyment of his self!

Incorporation

I have come, so that the souls may have life and may have it ever more abundant. These are the words that enlighten us in this spiritual journey.

We have said that Jesus means his very life, so that can be true in us what St. Paul says of himself: *Vivo iam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus – yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me* (Gal. 2, 20). The Lord wants to elevate all souls to this state.

We expect the understanding and enjoyment of this divine truth, of this divine state.

In order to be practical, we ask ourselves: What are the conditions required to make sure that this happens always more in us so that we may arrive to the fullness of the age of Jesus Christ?

Look at a child, he is a man even though he did not reach yet the use of reason; his body follows a certain law of growth and keeps developing itself always more. It happens the same in the supernatural order. The graces of God are in us from the beginning as in a stage of infancy; they need to be ever more developed. This development presupposes some favorable conditions and some voluntary cooperation.

At the beginning, the Lord always does everything. So it happens in Baptism. What do we do in Baptism? Nothing! We are small, poor inert beings. Once, we become adults we must work for the conservation and development of our physical life. The same happens in our spiritual, moral and supernatural life. Now, on our part we need to live the life of Jesus.

Who lives of my life? My body.

Who lives of your life? Your body.

It is not possible otherwise. So it is also of Jesus' life. This divine life is found in Jesus, consequently to live of it, as an indispensable condition, we must belong to his body. We say this to follow the metaphor of the body according to Saint Paul, but we can also say it with the image used by Saint John: *I am the vine and you are the branches*. According to one and the other simile, we must become Jesus, enter into Jesus; he is the head and we are his members.

Behold the incorporation.

Great means for incorporation

I beg you, get rid of any coarse and grotesque idea that may come to your mind. In this incorporation each and every one of us remains always a distinct person and that completeness that is the individual. There is no more effective terminology that can express that union better than the members united together to form one body, so, the incorporation.

What is this mystical body of Jesus? In a general sense, it is the holy Catholic Church. The more intimately, profoundly and highly we belong to the holy Church, the more we belong and are incorporated in Jesus.

You know all this already. As we grow in love and union with

the Church, Jesus lives more in us and we will live of him. Practically, how does this happen? Is it enough to be baptized to enter and live in the Church?

It would be a real blessing if throughout our entire life, we could develop the grace of Baptism. Today we use some beautiful expressions: to live the Baptism, to Live the Confirmation, but the daily reality does not always correspond to this program and ideal. Practically, this greater union with the Church is always practiced with an ever more perfect dependence and union with the hierarchy of the Church; and this should be practiced with true supernatural motivations, without paying attention to the person.

A greater dependence on the hierarchy incorporates us more intimately to Jesus, also in the liturgical and apostolic life.

A greater union with the prayer of the Church, with the liturgical prayer incorporates us more inly with Jesus. This is much more known today; in the past, people very rarely, or never, spoke of this. To achieve this union with Jesus in the liturgical prayer, we do not need to have constantly the missal or breviary²⁴ in our hands. Any book can be used as long as it helps us to actualize this union with the liturgical prayer of the Church, in order to bear a more solid incorporation into Jesus.

It is important to enter in that spirit and not necessarily to use those formulas, notwithstanding that those formulas contain some effectiveness to that purpose. To be a hermit, could it be enough for me to build a small uncomfortable cell in the middle of a forest and eat raw, wild foods? No. To be a hermit I need a spirit of segregation from the world and conversation in heaven. The missal and the Breviary, if used only materially, can even be

²⁴ *Breviary* was the common name used for today's Liturgy of the Hours.

an impediment for some people, who could benefit much more from other books. I do not say these things to despise the use of them; may the Lord free me from such thoughts.

Apostolic life. Likewise we enter ever more in communion with the Church and, through her, in the incorporation with Jesus participating more in the works of the Church. I am not talking only of Catholic Missions, or of these or those organizations, but of every approved holy deed, because the work of the Church is universal sanctification.²⁵

We intend any participation to the great work of catholic priesthood!

It is not enough to look at so many specific organizations. In general we mean: to work always more effectively with the Church and for Universal Sanctification; only thus we will be more incorporated in Jesus. This is the fundamental condition required to be of Jesus Christ.

Eucharistic life – Above all this there is the great sacrament of the Eucharist. We need to nurture ourselves with the Eucharist with maximum frequency, with integral Eucharistic life! By the way Jesus expresses himself about the Eucharist, we conclude that it must be our daily meal. Those who think of an annual, monthly or weekly reception of the Eucharist, may be getting more or less close to the idea of Jesus, but are far from reaching the practical ideal intended by Jesus.

²⁵ Blessed Fr. Justin, in the booklet, *Apostles of Universal Sanctification*, wrote: *The ultimate goal of all the activities of the Catholic Church is universal sanctification for the divine union. The small Society of Divine Vocations, whose immediate goal is the searching and forming the elect of the Divine Vocations to the consecrated life, the priesthood, to the missions and to holiness, works in this field because in order to lead people to holiness priests and saints are needed.*

Take and eat: This is my body; take and drink this is my blood. It is above all through the Eucharist that we incorporate ourselves more and more to Jesus.

I am the living bread come down from heaven. He who eats of this bread shall live forever. The bread I shall give you is my flesh, which will be given for the life of the world. If you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and do not drink his blood, you will have no life in you. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. Because my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. As the Father, who has life in himself has sent me, and live for the Father, so he who eats me will live for me. This is the bread come down from heaven, it is not like the manna eaten by our forefathers, who ate it and died. He who eats this bread shall live forever (Cf. Jn 6, 53-59).

We know and practice all this, but it must be perfected always more.

I can pray a lot to attract God to me. But if I ask to be ever more taken by him, I will have a more liturgical prayer.

If I approach a priest to share his sacred knowledge, to receive consolation or direction, I certainly do something good. If I approach him to cooperate more with him to the kingdom of Jesus, I do something even better: this is the beginning of the apostolic life.

If in my communion I enter ever more deeply in the reality of that divine truth: *As I live for the Father* (i.e., of the Father's life), *so he who eats me shall live for me* (i.e., of my life), I will start to comprehend, feel, enjoy and live my incorporation to Jesus.²⁶

²⁶ Blessed Justin in Ascension, published in 1937, wrote: *On the altar infinite wealth! From the altar infinite treasures. We will take part in or celebrate the Mass in the most actual and intense union with Jesus, and with him we offer and consecrate ourselves, we ascend to the Father and descend to the souls to elevate them and unite them to the divine Trinity* (Vol. 1. art. 221).

Function of the Holy Spirit

Since through our incorporation we live the life of Jesus, as Jesus lives the life of the Father, it follows that we are and must be animated by the very Spirit that animates Jesus, the Holy Spirit.

To the idea of the incorporation with Jesus we must link the idea of the vivification of the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of the Father and of the Son! So the idea of the incorporation must be completed with the idea of the vivification of the Holy Spirit.

In every phase of Jesus' life is revealed the immediate action of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus was conceived through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is led into the desert by the Holy Spirit.

In the Jordan, the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus in the form of a dove.

Jesus starts his preaching ministry affirming the fulfillment of the promise in him: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me* (Lk 4,18).

The Holy Spirit is the constant trainer and inspirer of Jesus' life. Likewise he must be our teacher and inspirer, because we are the members of Jesus. On our part, we must allow the Holy Spirit to animate us so that we may arrive to the fullness of incorporation with Jesus and to the perfection of supernatural life in Jesus Christ.

Spirits

Practically the soul must eliminate the impediments. Various spirits influence us. We are never left alone to think.

Every act of ours depends on our choice, but we are continually prompted by the influence of various spirits.

We know the spirits that act upon us: On one side is the Holy Spirit, and on the other side the spirit of the devil, the spirit of the world and the spirit of the flesh.

Those who want to be animated by the spirit of Jesus must oppose every spirit of the devil, of the world and of the flesh.

The spirit of evil is always active and knows how to adapt to the times, the environment, to the characters and to the circumstances.

St. Paul admonishes us: Do not conform to the worldly environment. This impedes the work of the Holy Spirit.

If we want to live of the life of the Lord, we must advance countercurrent, so as to dominate the environment, and thus through our cooperation Christ will exercise his dominion over the world.

We cannot at the same time live according to the Spirit of the Lord and please those who are around us. Either we place ourselves in a state of violence with the world, the devil and the flesh, or we will do violence to the Spirit of the Lord.

In this regard the soul will face many difficulties.

The soul questions herself: *So then I should not fulfill my civic duties? Shouldn't I obey?* Certainly! But if I want to fulfill my duties to please the world, I become slave of the world.

The human spirit is always under the influence of the world.

How could we, otherwise explain that so many beautiful souls arrive at the end of their lives without having accomplished their mission? A human and natural vision dominated and enslaved them.

We need to be animated by the Spirit of Jesus, and this Spirit must be the only one to dominate in us.

Could we ever live with two heads?

Jesus says: *We cannot serve two masters* (Mt. 6,24).

We cannot serve the Spirit of God and the spirit of the world.

Can the human spirit be together with the Spirit of the Lord to direct our actions? Not together, but subordinated.

The Spirit of the Lord is the only one that can animate and vivify life in the supernatural order. This element of fight against the spirit of the devil, which affirms itself in the spirit of the world and acts in the human spirit, must be always in action.

When this fight is carried out properly, we will begin to experience what is written: *The Holy Spirit filled the whole world.*

Here, the word *orbem* – *world*, must be understood as the world of the soul. The Holy Spirit wants to fill and direct our whole life.

If we want to limit his field of action within us, we condemn ourselves to be partially dead. Any part of my being not permeated by my soul would be dead. Unfortunately, this happens in our moral-supernatural order.

We could be intelligent, kind, loving with the world, but with the Lord we are not, because we put so many limitations to the divine presence and action of his Spirit.

Spirit of Prayer

This supernatural life is certainly mysterious. Does this surprise you? Even natural life is so mysterious!

Our main concern is to know how to live well; we do not worry about not being able to explain life. We are interested in knowing what is needed on our part to produce that fruit of God's glory for

which we have been created. This is the reason why we must reflect upon the manifestations of this supernatural life. We should get used to keep always present in our meditations the distinction of the divine persons.

What concerns the soul is the work of the three divine persons. There is always a special reason to attribute this or that work to this or that person. The Blessed Trinity is our life through the Holy Spirit. For this reason, we make special reference to the Holy Spirit. We follow the pattern of natural life.

What indicates to us that one is alive? His breathing. The cessation of this breath is a sign of death. The same happens in our supernatural life; its most continuous manifestation is this breathing!

This breathing in our spiritual life corresponds to prayer, to mental prayer. Our supernatural life is manifested and nurtured with prayer, so much so that we can talk about the spirit of prayer. The Holy Spirit manifests himself and acts in us above all as Spirit of Prayer.

For this reason we give so much importance to prayer, and for this we would love to comprehend what in the interior practice is our true spirit of prayer.

We take for granted that our devotional life is always well organized and ever better practiced, both in community and private prayer. Yet, we can say that our life of prayer, at least in some part, is missing the true spirit of prayer.²⁷

²⁷ "In reality, it is the Spirit of the Lord that gives life to our souls with supernatural life. He works in us through the sacraments, the channels of his grace, which is our supernatural life, and his charity, which is the heart of

What spirit we want to talk about? We want to talk of the spirit of which St. Paul talks about when he says: *In the same way, the Spirit too comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes with inexpressible groaning. And the one who searches hearts knows what is the intention of the Spirit, because it intercedes for the holy ones according to God's will* (Rm 8, 26-27).

Our Usual Prayers

Now, with patience and intelligence, we see to what we can reduce all our prayers.

I do not intend to talk against any form of prayer as I talk mainly about private, personal, intimate prayer.

To what do we reduce our prayers? At times our prayers are like so many audiences of the Lord, royal, divine audiences. Could it be sufficient if our prayers are an audience with the Lord?

At times our prayers are like lessons that we recite. See, what a wonderful concept? Jesus is our teacher and we recite our lessons! But, is prayer, by any stretch of the imagination, some lesson that we must recite to the master?

At times our prayer are like perorations. We present ourselves to Jesus as our Sovereign and Judge.

this life; and the other theological and cardinal virtues, which are powers and faculties of this life. Through faith and religious instruction, he offers us the nourishment for this life. But, it is through prayer that the Spirit of the Lord prepares us to conform and cooperate with this whole treasure of grace, and that is why he is given to us as a spirit of grace and prayer" Russolillo, *Ascension*, art. 43.

Let us be clear! I certainly do not intend to condemn the prayers that take place as an audience with the Lord. But audiences are something extraordinary. They are granted rarely and they take place between people that do not live together. We would not say that a wife receives an audience with her husband. Some times, however, our prayer becomes a divine audience. These forms of prayers are needed in some solemn occasions. They too, will be, as they are, manifestations of the spirit of prayer, but it is not enough.

In these audiences the souls are before the Lord, at most are together with the Lord, but they do not reach the point of steadying and being in the Lord. If we were with God and in God we would not need audiences! Consequently, the prayer of audience is not the whole life of prayer, is not the whole spirit of prayer.

We can say almost the same for those prayers that are as lessons that we recite before the Lord. He listens to us in his mercy and with patience deserving of a special devotion! The worst part with these prayers is that some souls not only give the impression that they are reciting a lesson, but that they are teaching a lesson to the Lord as if he were not understanding certain things! Let us recite our lessons before anyone else; let us offer them to our little ones, but not to our Lord.

The Lord wants to be our teacher, as he was in Bethany with Mary, seated at his feet and listening. But I do not mean to speak badly of these prayers. The prayer as a lesson is neither the whole life of prayer, nor the whole spirit of prayer, at best, it may be a good and holy action.

Other times in our prayer we perorate the cause of others; this is brotherly love. While we ourselves are needy of everything, we pray for others knowing that others will do the same for us a hundredfold. In the peroration there is much more the element of prayer, but not even in the peroration there is the whole life

of prayer, the whole spirit of prayer. You may say: Taking out of my prayers the audience, the lesson and the peroration, what remains of my life of prayer? This means that the spirit of prayer in you did not yet fill your universe; it still does not animate and vivifies your entire life.

We are like a living being not yet able to breathe normally. Are we still babies? But babies are taught how to walk, not how to breathe. We teach how to breathe to a person who has drowned. We are drowned in a sea of words. Let us repeat the concept: *Prayer is the breathing of the soul.*

See what the Holy Spirit is. There are in our prose no words to denominate him. We say: The Father, the Son! Words of high prose! To indicate the third person we must say: Holy Spirit, the embrace, the kiss, the gift, because he is love and love is all poetry! He is the love that proceeds from the Father and from the Son as a unique principle. Just to give a vague idea, I would say as when we embrace, the arms are two, but the embrace is one, and the one who originates the embrace is one. As when we give a kiss. The lips are two, but the kiss is one, and the one who initiates the kiss is one. As when we see. The eyes are two, but the vision is one and the one who sees is one. The same happens when we smile ... but when we breathe... Forgive the parenthesis of the divine poetry!

This Holy Spirit is in us the spirit of supernatural life, the spirit of supernatural love, the spirit of supernatural union with the Blessed Trinity.

When two people love one another, they do not recite memorized dialogues; they want to look at each other, smile and embrace each other according to the humor of the moment. Let us bypass these mundane acts and take note that there is no scheme or fixed formula to express love, except the law of life and happiness. If my prayer still follows schemes and formulas does not yet deserve this name.

Schemes and formulas are necessary for community prayer, and also for the first formation of virtuous acts, of devotional life, but no more.

The groaning of the Spirit is inalienable also in the sense that it does not follow patterns and formulas that can be learned and repeated.²⁸

Is this the practice of ejaculatory prayers? But for many people today, ejaculatory prayers have become the simple means of spiritual industry to purchase more and more days and years of indulgences.

What did I do with my ejaculatory prayers? I gained the indulgence. I have done very well; but this is not the whole life, the whole spirit of prayer.

Let us enter for a while in the house of Nazareth! Does by chance, St. Joseph pick up a prayer book and starts to talk to Mary? Does, by chance, Mary pick up the Missal and starts to talk to Jesus? Does Jesus pick up the Holy Scripture and starts to talk to the Father?

The spirit of prayer is the very life of loving relation with the soul and the three divine persons; relationship always corresponded, expressed, nurtured and lived.

Let us repeat often with the Apostles: *Lord, teach us how to pray.* And even more often: *Give us your spirit!*

²⁸ Blessed Fr. Justin gives us the following guidelines: *While praying in private, when not reciting the mandatory prayers like the Liturgy of the Hours, never worry about the quantity of formulas nor about completing what one had in mind. With peace, concentrate on glorifying the Lord (Ascension, 462). Once one is immersed in prayer, let it flow freely, for all the time available; when the assigned time is ended, leave without regrets, for no matter what you had in mind to add, you have already prayer well (Ibid, art. 463).*

Spirit of life

I have come so that the souls may have life and may have it always more abundantly.

We can match these words with the others: *I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be ever greater* (Jn. 15,11).

What is for us this life of joy? What is for us this joy of life?

What is the life and joy of Jesus? It is the Holy Spirit.

This Spirit dwells within us, and wants to be also our Spirit; whose Spirit is he? He is the Spirit of the Father and of the Son. This leads us quickly to understand how the Spirit of the Father and of the Son continuously carries us out of this world, above all the world.

We continue to give a lot of importance to material, passing things, but this Spirit takes us out of the world; under his influence, all material things lose the importance that they seem to have in the eyes of poor human beings, slaves of illusions in the world.

As long as we continue to give so much importance to material passing things, we have in our selves the evidence of being always under the influence of the world and its spirit, which wants to always prevail in us and engage the spirit of man with him and bring him from heaven to earth, tie him and drag him from earth into the abyss.

Keep in mind and meditate on the words of St. Bernard: *Quod aeternum non est, nihil est* – *What is not eternal is nothing.*

All the things, we enjoy through our senses, are not eternal, therefore they are nothing.

So we worry and are anxious for nothing! Please, let us follow the Lord!

Let us not hesitate to be guided by these principles.

It is true that the Lord wants us in this world, in this mortal flesh, but the Lord also says: *Instead, seek his Kingdom, and these other things will be given to you besides* (Lk. 12, 31).

The Kingdom of God consists exactly in this dominion of his Holy Spirit over our soul, this supreme control of the Holy Spirit over every action and state of ours.

Let us allow the Holy Spirit to vivify us and the kingdom of God will be done in us.²⁹

In the supernatural world of God's kingdom in us, the Holy Spirit makes us always feel the attraction and the elevation to the divine reality, to the kingdom of God and continuously takes us to the Son and to the Father.

If we feel this attraction to the Father and to the Son we are sure that the Spirit of Prayer animates us.

Spirit of the Father and of the Son

My mind feels like empty of the knowledge of the eternal Father and of the Word, his Son. This void claims fullness. Who can understand the Father and the Son? Only the Spirit of the Father and of the Son reveals them to me. The Holy Spirit fills this great void.

Spiritus Domini replevit orbem terrarum – The Spirit of the Lord fills the world (Ws 1, 7). If it were not for this Holy Spirit we would remain in our dark void. How does the Holy Spirit give us the knowledge of the Father and of the Son?

²⁹ Cf. Rm 14, 17: *The kingdom of God is not a matter or food and drink, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*

The Holy Spirit gives us the knowledge of the Father and of the Son by making us ever more like the Father and the Son. He does it by perpetually spiritualizing us in the divine persons, because he is the spirit. He gives that knowledge to us by perpetually elevating us because he is the holy one. He gives it to us by perpetually uniting us to the divine persons because he is the Holy Spirit.

Two persons get to really know each other when they get closer to one another, when they join each other and when they have the same character, the same tastes; in this way the Holy Spirit enables us to know the Father and the Son by elevating us ever more to them, uniting us ever more with them, making us ever more like them.

God Trinity reveals himself to us in the mystery of creation in the words: *Faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram* – *Let us make man in our own image and likeness* (Gn. 1, 26).

Why does the Holy Spirit make us in the image and likeness of the Father and of the Son? He makes us image of the Father to offer us to the Son. He make us image of the Son to offer us to the Father. He makes us in his own image and he is the gift.

The Holy Spirit, who is called and is the gift, makes us gift of the Father to the Son, and gift of the Son to the Father.

All these things we are saying make upon us the effect of a music that we still do not enjoy, maybe because it is the first time that we listen to it; if we unite ourselves to the Holy Spirit, this continuous elevation and offering in the name of the Son to the Father, and in the name of the Father to the Son will become very familiar to us. This may seem like a play of words, but in this is the inner life of union with the Trinity and for this we were made so that through the grace may be communicated to us the divine life of the three persons and the divine union with the three persons. Let us abandon ourselves to this action of the Holy Spirit, all communion with divine persons without effort and without fixed formulas.

Work of the Holy Spirit

What is the aim of this Spirit of love in us? Every life, if it is full, overflows into other beings. So divine life overflows giving existence to the entire universe.

We have received the first and most shining revelation of the Holy Spirit in the Annunciation. At the Annunciation, the Holy Spirit appears and comes as the one who forms Jesus. So, that mystery simultaneously reveals the person, the action and the work of the Holy Spirit.

He always tends to form Jesus. Every soul that is under the action of the Holy Spirit must be formed in the image and likeness of Jesus and all the souls living in humanity will not exhaust the divine beauty of Jesus.

The Holy Spirit accomplishes this work, or, to be more precise, the entire Trinity accomplishes this divine work through the Holy Spirit, who, on account of this, is also called "the finger of God".

The work of the Holy Spirit, which is universal sanctification, consists in forming the souls according to Jesus, in such a way that every soul is another Jesus.

This work is accomplished gradually as we progress living in love, in the gift, in the Spirit.

The culmination of this greatness and beauty of supernatural work is that through us the Holy Spirit wants to form Jesus Christ in our brothers.

When does the Holy Spirit form Jesus in our brothers through us? Could it be when we start our works of ministry? It could be then, but it is not difficult to understand it!

If you have a glass filled with liquor, when will it overflow? When it is full to the brim; but if it is not full, it cannot overflow and fill others.

When we will have reached the fullness of grace, the fullness of love, the fullness of spirit, our good will overflow unto others.

Oh! How we should long to be full of grace and of the Holy Spirit! Can we reach that point? Not only we can, we must reach it.

Whoever believes in me will see rivers of living water flowing from within him (Jn 7, 38). The Gospel expressly says that Jesus *said this in reference to the Spirit that those who came to believe in him were to receive (Jn 7,39).* The Lord never ceases to communicate his life to us because love never says *enough*. It is our human way of doing that makes us desire the good only to a certain point.

We want to be patient, but only to a certain point; we want to be recollected but to a certain point! Doing so, we place a limit to the Lord's work of sanctification.

Why shouldn't we go beyond that point if the Lord wants us beyond? The Lord wants our capacities to expand and dilate, to be full and overflowing.

As we continue to grow, this fullness of grace overflows and pours out to benefit others. Without his fullness of grace and of Spirit we can talk the entire day without any beneficial effect. We can go around from morning to night without concluding anything! Affected by sterility, *We have worked hard all night and have caught nothing (Lk 5,5).*

We cannot reach an effect without a cause. Does this mean that everything I do is bad? Not at all! Does it mean that all I do is useless? Not at all!

We are saying that the Holy Spirit forms Jesus in others through us when our heart is full of Jesus.

Which method, which guide must I choose to make sure that this happens? There is a way without method, completely multi-form.

If in us there is the light of the Word, certainly it will shine also for others. If in us there is the fire of the Holy Spirit, certainly it will set others on fire as well.

When Jesus is in us he certainly communicates himself to others. It is enough a simple gesture, a smile, a word and the good comes out. So we spread this good without even being aware of it.

Regardless of our role, our mission, through us Jesus reaches others.

It may happen that while I work directly in a particular soul, the Holy Spirit through me sanctifies another soul to whom I was not thinking, or was not paying too much direct attention, because my attention to that first person was not motivated by the Spirit but by other human motivation.

This is the culmination of apostolic work! Too often we limit our expectation to minimum effects, to mediocre successes.

It is true that we should never despise little things; great things begin from little ones. It is not convenient for us to stop at a goal that is not God himself.

Divine life in us, divine life in others! We must work to make sure that all souls have divine life and have it ever more abundantly.

We must reach such a level of divine life that, even in our present life, without any effort on our part, Jesus Christ is always revealed. Jesus must be revealed even in our mortal flesh. Every human life must be an Epiphany of Jesus!

Following the Star

Blessed Justin has always considered and celebrated the Epiphany as the feast of our vocation to faith. In the Epiphany we see the vocations of all gentiles to faith. As every vocation interferes with our plans, so the vocation of the Magi messed up their plans.

In this short meditation we see how our knowledge nurtures the desire and how the desire enables us to overcome the fear to start something new or different. A good, natural disposition to contemplation eases the discernment and enables us to act.

Following the star on the journey through the night and in the separation from other human beings we do not lose the vision of our vocation. The journey goes on! But when we are in the confusion of life, among the citizens' rumors, the star disappears!

The Lord is Lord of light and he cannot abandon us too long in the darkness. The star reappears outside of the city; joy pervades us, keeps us going and enables us to abandon ourselves in the arms of the divine child. Our Epiphany goes on!

The Shepherds, the Magi! We are used to laugh about their images placed in the manger. A certain sense of ridicule is united in us to the very concept of those people. In our prayer we must free ourselves from this wrapping of ideas deriving from our non-mortified senses, in order to be able to elevate ourselves without suffering their depressing influence. Up to now we did not cultivate devotion to the shepherds and to the Magi, who were the first and only ones to respond to their vocation. In them we see the first heroisms of correspondence to the divine vocation.

We go to see an eclipse. Why? What's extraordinary? Doing

so we show that we didn't have religious education. We should rather make special pilgrimages to see a leaf, to know an exotic flower, that is, an idea of the Lord, a fact of the Lord, to give praise to the Creator. It is reflection, natural contemplation that is lacking. If we want to get used to mystical contemplation, we do well to get used to natural contemplation: this too is prayer, this too is fruit of supernatural grace; it is called natural because its object is natural and sensible.

This is the prayer of all the saints, starting from the first man, from Adam and Eve to the last hermit that separates himself from the world and concentrates in God, in heaven and earth, in the sea and the desert. This great prayer, which may be called the first level of contemplation, is lacking. Human things, human events distract us, but not the vision of a golf, of a mountain, of a canyon, of a flowerbed.

Current human events distract me. Past human events are less distractive. In other words, wherever is more present my "I", wherever I can project myself outside of me, I find my dissipation, because I project myself in others. My greatest distraction, what brings me the farthest away from my center and my goal, that is the Lord himself, is my very self. In the human events of the past, or in present human events that are far from me, I find less of myself, and I have less distraction.

Try to imagine the spirituality of the patriarchs. Think of Jacob. All his children every day go to pasture their flocks, and he remains in meditation, and he spends entire days not in idleness, but in meditation. The entire oriental world had plenty of people that cultivated astrology, and they spent many hours contemplating the sky, calculating the celestial constellations, foreseeing celestial phenomena that had some effects on this world and on men. They were aware of the prophecies of other sages. The little scriptures they had were continuously studied, and they exercised a lot their memory.

One day, with great solemnity, from the top of a mountain, in the presence of a king and his court, and of an army who had called him so that he may pronounce a mysterious, powerful oracle, Balaam pronounced it saying: *How pleasant are your tents, Jacob; your encampments, Israel! ... I see him, though not now, I observe him, though not near: A star shall advance from Jacob, and a scepter shall rise from Israel* (Nm 24, 5 and 17).

The way, the moment, in which Balaam pronounces this oracle, left his words engraved forever. Consequently, when the Magi said: *Vidimus stellam eius – we saw his star*, none asked *which star?* No! They all knew the oracle. To this must be added that before Jesus birth, all peoples were expecting the arrival of the Messiah. All at once, this expectation ends as if by magic, and this can be evidenced with historical portfolios, as Vito Fornari¹ makes it clear.

The Lord calls those Magi, because he finds them worthy of himself. There is difference between Jesus two ways of calling: Jesus goes to search for a soul, or Jesus remains where he is and sends for a soul. He uses the first way to call sinners, and the second way to call the elect, the flowers of mankind.

He sends for the entire category of Magi, not only for those three. Sending the star he invites all the contemplatives of the sky, because they were the best disposed of all mankind. *Multi sunt vocati – Many are called!* Wherever they were, in Arabia, Syria, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Ethiopia, Oh! There were many of them. Isaiah sees in the spirit a flood of strangers, camels, dromedaries, who come to you, Jerusalem. But where is this invasion? The Lord calls all contemplators of heaven, for all peoples were to follow them; they were the guides of the people, and the people imi-

¹ Vito Fornari (1821-1900) Italian philosopher and writer; his main works are: *the Life of Jesus and the Art of Saying*.

tated them. On his part, the Lord has done all he had to do. Now enters the human element.

We have seen his star and we know his language. But, how can we follow his invitation? Should we leave our home, our things and go? It is easily said! Let us speak realistically, if at this moment an angel of God were to appear and tell us: *The Lord is expecting for you in the steppe of Siberia*, who of us would move?

Were the Magi really three? Maybe, the most important were three; honestly we must suppose a large number, a great quantity of aides, an impressive caravan, because in a capital city like Jerusalem, which was accustomed to such passages, three strangers would not greatly trouble the entire city.

We greet, in spirit, these heroes. You may change their names as you please, to make sure that the word Magi does not offend them in your thoughts. Call them *the very first, the most elect* ... after all, they are the first song and the first stanza of mankind's generous response.

They left their towns! At that time, things were so bad, that anyone starting a long trip, if he were smart, would make his last will and testament before embarking on the journey. This explains why others did not respond, did not follow the star. We cannot completely excuse those who did not respond to the Lord's calling. What an excuse can a creature ever have not to respond to God's voice? When the Lord is present and sends for someone, he calls the most elect; while these are on their way to the Lord, they must become more beloved. The sacrifice goes on the horse with them, and the closer they get to their destination, the sacrifice gets harder and harder.

We should not think that for the fact that we belong to the Lord, he would give us prosperity in everything! In that case, we would never be the saints he expects us to be. Above all, the Lord wants our personal holiness, and to achieve it we need the angel of sacrifice.

They start their journey and go to a king, who could have kept them hostages forever! *It doesn't matter!* It would have been good if he were to keep them. A real passion had settled in their soul, a spark of love was enkindled and the light of the star was more effective than a dart of the sun.

They started their journey not knowing where they were going; they did not know that the star would accompany them all the way. They did need time to make all the arrangements, to invite others, to gather together all three, all seven, all hundred of them. The mystery of the Epiphany did not take place a few days after Christmas; who knows how much time after! We do not say anything about the mockery they suffered from those who did not want to join them. And this is the great evil in the world; worldly people do not want to follow God, and if others follow him, they persecute them. They are mediocre, vilely mediocre (God forgive me, if there is bitterness) and they would want everyone on their level.

They started going. After a few nights they convinced themselves that the star was really moving and guiding them and their inner joy started. Their journey became the most poetic enterprise of all times. Only thus we understand the flight and the song of the soul! The trip takes place entirely at night.

Those who go to God must always walk in the night; in the night of the senses, in the night of the heart and of the spirit. They must darken all that is perceptible by the senses and external, otherwise the star of God does not shine.

You cannot join your angel if you want to stay in the midst of your companions. If you are in the midst of a thousand companions totally estranged from your heart, you are alone, in the most profound solitude.

(You cannot really enjoy the satisfaction of the book of God, while in the dissipation of the newspaper). We escape the night; we lock ourselves in and sleep.

The spirit wants the night not so that we may remain silent, but so that we may be able to enjoy another harmony. The Magi clearly understand that a celestial spirit guides them. Even if it were only a natural phenomenon, knowing that God made it for me, it restores me; it is always a smile of God to me. Here it is question of a superior intelligence, which is either the star itself, or one who guides it. The guide must be intelligent. Maybe an angel took this luminous body; it fits him very well. Starts the first union with the angel in the night. For the Magi the day is not more beautiful than the night; for them the beauty is the vision of the angel. During the day, they lock themselves in the tent and wait for the night. The journey was long and took a lot of time. Finally they are in Jerusalem and the star disappears. What an unpleasant surprise, what a disappointment, what desolation! There is no light in their soul, since they do not know if the star will ever reappear again.

In Jerusalem no one knew anything of that king. They were received as suspicious foreigners, and they understood that they were not trusted. This is the apex of their sanctification. Death of the senses, frost of death in the heart, shades of death in the spirit (we are approaching the goal). How many days do you have to be in this turmoil? *Et ecce stella! Et gavisii sunt gaudio magno valde - The star is here again! Seeing the star they felt a great joy.* Those poor souls resurrected, those poor hearts revived. Their pain was similar to the pain of Mary when she lost Jesus.

Finally they arrive. The star stops. I do not think that it was a surprise for them not finding the baby in a royal palace. Much more important of glory of servants and attendants is that announcement sent by heaven! I cannot imagine that the poverty they found could have been a surprise for them.

The child was already a few years old, and he was in all the graces of childhood, of divine enchantment, and we can well believe that the first words that he pronounced, after those to Mary

and Joseph, were for these princes, because (we can say it, anyway ... we may take the license to say it) he had come for them more than for Mary and Joseph. The will of this man-God shined in the sky and guided them; it was incarnated in their hearts as a passion of love. This is only the beginning! We should enter in the mystery of their prayer and of their consecration. This is the beginning: *videntes stellam gavisii sunt gaudio magno - seeing the star they were filled with immense joy* (Mt 2, 10).

We would like to experience the joys of travelling during daytime, but no, if there is no night, the star cannot shine. Imagine a child who finds himself in the middle of the night. Which night? His own family becomes a pain and his own parents are for him a terror. Because he saw a star: the vocation. He wants to follow it. As long as it is night, the star will shine, but at the first ray of dawn, the star disappears. Let us not be afraid of the night, notwithstanding the fact that it is gelid and dark. And if there is in us the desire for the divine union, let us make sure that it is not turned off. If the night is darker than ever, and if the star disappears, it means that we have entered a city of men, into the world. Let us go out and exalt, and we will become aware that we are closer to our destination. The more every suffering becomes atrocious, the more it reveals to us that the end of our journey is near.

Now, listen to the story of a particular epiphany. A soul wanted to bring something to Jesus, then concluded: I have nothing but misery. I have nothing, Lord, please, give something to me! But, let us see, what could I really bring to Jesus? He called the shepherds and the Magi, and he calls us too. We cannot go to him empty handed. Or I bring him something that he already has or that he himself has given to me, and that does not seem to be a gift. Or, mine could be a true gift, if it increases his good. This does never happen with the Lord! The truth is that we can always offer something to God and we have a lot to offer him, because more than the gift itself, he appreciates the affection of my act of giving. If I do not do this act of giving, God does not receive it, and so

somehow something is missing to the Glory of God. From among all the acts, the one that is more ours, the one with which we offer what is more our own: our freedom. If we offer our freedom to God, he will have it; and if I truly offer it, I offer to God something that he did not have yet in me.

Haven't we already made this offering! Yes, you have offered it, but this act by which you renew it, the Lord doesn't have it yet. So if you make the donation of your freedom to God, he will possess it, if you don't, God will not have it. And if I keep trying to bring to God other souls that do not love him, then my act becomes really a royal gift.

I am only a beginner ... I cannot do it. But, do you want to do it? Are you getting ready to do it? The simple fact of knowing that someone is preparing a gift for us is in itself already something pleasant and enjoyable. If you prepare yourselves to save souls, you please God. There is nothing holding you back from bringing souls to God here and now. The apostolate of prayer and of suffering precedes that of the action; there could be a classmate out of the dominion of grace, of inspirations, he can be brought to Christian perfection.

The story goes on. That soul is not satisfied. What do you pretend to be? How can you place yourself outside of God to search for something that he does not have and has not given to you? The soul is not satisfied because she wants to offer to God something worthy of him, fitting to God. The soul is satisfied only in one thought; in the thought that places her in relation with the Blessed Trinity. Then think that the only thing that can be offered to the Father is the Word; the gift to the Word is the Father. True gift to the Father and Son is the Holy Spirit, divine gift of the Trinity. The soul has arrived at the end of her journey. Now she is at peace.

Elevation and Consecration for the Divine Epiphany

For Blessed Fr. Justin and his religious families, the Offering of the Most Precious Blood and the Consecrations are the favorite forms of prayer. Since all life is seen as relation, the Offerings and the consecrations are considered as very effective means to strengthen our personal relation of love with God Trinity. As every liturgical celebration culminates in the Eucharist, so for the Vocationist, there is no celebration that does not culminate in a consecration, a new bond with the Lord, a new right given to God over our life.

We see his star, O most holy Mary, and we come to adore him!
We bring with us the treasures of mind, heart and life to do him
homage!

O most holy Mary, first throne of Jesus, and his bright revealing
star, show and give us your Jesus and unite us with you in
honoring him so as to be pleasing to him.

May infinite glory be yours O Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
through Jesus Christ our Lord, for all the stars of your creation,
for your saints, for the virtues and supernatural gifts that shine
in the heavens of the universe, of the Church and of the soul,
as testimony to you, and invitation to live with you, O vivifying
splendor of divine light.

May infinite glory be yours, O Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for
all your divine revelations to humanity, to the Catholic Church,
to every soul and especially to those sublime souls, to whom you
have elevated the mind and heart of the saints, of our angels, and
of our mother and queen, the virgin Mary.

Infinite glory of infinite love for that particular, intimate and personal epiphany of your creation, of your words, of your saints, of your angels, of your Mother and of your Church!

For the epiphany of your perfections, and especially of your holiness, of your charity, of your unity of nature, of your Trinity of persons, of your missions, and of your indwelling in the soul.

May infinite glory be yours Father, Son and Holy Spirit, because in every epiphany, you have not only shown me your perfections, given me your merits and admitted me to your joys, but you always give me all yourself, and you also want all my self for you.

Only on account of the innumerable imperfections of my acts, I am not yet totally possessed and transformed in you; only on account of the disproportionate limitations of every creature, I do not possess you perfectly, but I can possess you always more.

Receive me, O Lord God, through the hands of Mary most holy and through her constant prayers, grant that all my being may ascend to you in the temple of creation, of the saints and of the soul rising before you as incense of prayer.

Receive me, O Lord God, through the hands of Mary as I promise a constant mortification in body and in spirit, so that all my being may be offered on the altar of the duty of love, in perennial sacrifice to the divinity and sacrament to the souls.

Receive me, O Lord God, through the hands of Mary as I promise to spend my life in apostolate among the unfaithful and the Christians, to expand and to confirm your kingdom of truth and of charity in every heart.

Receive me, O Lord God, through the hands of Mary as I promise to secretly aspire to the most sublime forms of holiness, to shine always higher to a greater number of souls, for your greater glory.

Receive me, O Lord God, through the hands of Mary as I promise to consider every circumstance and every relation as your epiphany. Consequently, I want to recognize, to love and serve you in every brother. Your will and your glory in every event!

Receive me, above all, O my Lord God, in the hands of Mary most holy, Mediatrix of all graces, queen of the saints and mother of divine love, in the promise that I love to repeat to you: I love you with all truth, fidelity and generosity with all my heart, mind and strength, as a true servant and disciple, lover and priest, O my God Jesus, O master, O my all.

Ignite new stars in the heavens and send other angels to the hearts, inspire new graces to the souls, so that all may constantly enjoy new encounters, new manifestations, and new unions with you, O adorable love.

Be always in me, O my flower, O my star, O my Heart, cause of every perennial ascension, and grant that I, in you, may advance toward the glorious epiphany of paradise, in the bosom of our Father, to whom with you and the Holy Spirit, be infinite glory. Amen.

Christmas-Epiphany

Christmas-Epiphany is the most well-known and used song by the Vocationists and by the people of Pianura. It reveals the interior drama of Fr. Justin, who has dedicated all his life to cultivate vocations, has placed his hope in them and then sees them vanish.

The song is inspired by the betrayal of the vocation of a young man called to the priesthood and religious life in the Vocationist family. Fr. Justin had more than motherly care for this young man and had placed great trust and hope in him for the future of the Congregation. The sky darkens and he sees death and darkness around, while a deep sense of discouragement seems to have hold of him.

God, who knocks down and lifts up, gave him Mary as the star of the Society of Divine Vocations, the angels and saints fill up the emptiness created in his heart and... the desert is all blooming! The new Christmas reveals the vitality of his family and fills him with holy hope for the future.

Darkened the false sun I followed,
Cold that human heart I believed,
The betrayed youth
Dies from his own elation:
The tired soul is deprived of everything
Has no strength to advance in the dark night.

A little light I implore for my mind.
A little peace I ask for my life.
Light and peace in love,
In my heart, without end.
But the tired soul is deprived of everything
Has no strength to advance in the dark night.

Behold, in my night appears a star
Brightening of dawns my valley.
O, that morning star
With its divine splendor
Says to my afflicted soul
A word of life.

While around and inside everything is silent
Deeply and sweetly resounds that voice!
O mysterious word
That espouses my thought:
You, Mary, are my star!
The good you place in me reveals you.

Your word opens for me a vast desert,
Where you want me alone and apart.
The desert is all blooming
Does not scare my nature.
Full of saints, full of songs
As if earth were Paradise.

Each saint carries a heavenly flower,
Flying stops by me.
O wintertime spring
In the sphere of the mystery!
What does it happen, in the serene,
Sacred nights around my Lady?

In the night shines of angels' a flight
Everywhere a chorus of angels sings.
O luminous flight
O loving inscrutable song!
What does it happen, in the serene,
Sacred nights around my Lady?

Closer she gets and to herself lifts me!
She turns ever more beautiful and sweet.
O my divine union!
O song of immensity!
Paradise, Paradise!
Another life in my heart I embrace.

O God, my baby, come from heaven to me
O God, my Son, to me from heaven born!
O my divine union! O song of eternity!
My God and my all.
O my God and my all!
I'm out of my mind for the sweetness!

Thousands of kisses on your face I stamp,
In every kiss there is a higher vow.
With Mary's heart,
My life, I want to love you.
You want a mother as you want God the Father,
O Man-God, Son by essence.

Glory to God in the highest heavens.
Peace on earth to all the just ones,
Toward every horizon
From the mountains of the Lord.
Human beings, afflicted hearts,
To the joys' of a new world, come.

My soul, no more on earth:
Take now the flight.
Mary and Joseph are your powerful wings.
Not talking, but doing,
Singing Jesus God!
With saints assembled singing and flying
We move from earth to heaven.

PART II

AT THE BANQUET OF THE PHARISEE

CHAPTER 1

Come to the Banquet

At the Banquet of the Pharisee, was the theme of the meditations preached by Fr. Justin during the retreat of the Rogations, May 8, 9 and 11, 1939. These meditations were published in Spiritus Domini, of March-April, May-June and July-August 1940. They are ascetical-mystical applications on the banquet in the house of Simon in Bethany, narrated in Mt 26, 6-13; Mk 14, 4-9; Lk 7, 36-50 and Jn 12, 1-8. In these meditations Fr. Justin unifies the four Gospel passages and identifies Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany and the unnamed sinner in one person as it was commonly retained since the time of Gregory the Great. Modern scholars, according to the Oriental tradition, the writings of the Greek Fathers and the new Roman calendar, agree in sustaining that they are three different persons.

These meditations dictated to the people of Pianura and to the communities of the Vocationist Fathers and Sisters develop a particular aspect of the author's teachings on Divine Union. He goes much further than the Gospels' episodes that he fuses into one. Every gesture of Mary Magdalene (and of Mary of Bethany and of the unnamed sinner) is seen and explained as the veil of a profound transformation and union.

In addition to talking about forgiveness and its connection with repentance and grace, he expounds the intimacy of love and the signs of love emphasizing in a particular way Tears and Kisses. Even though tears and kisses reveal love, they cannot help us to adequately penetrate the mystery of God's love. In these meditations philosophy and theology, asceticism and mysticism are constantly intertwined and completing each other.

As an interesting aside, we find the genuine explanation of the concept of recollection, understood not as isolation from everything and everyone, but as union, interaction of the soul with the angels and the saints, with the souls of purgatory and the just on the earth: our true friends, who prepare and facilitate our union with God Trinity. God can never be alone! Wherever there is God, even in our heart, there must be the whole heavenly court! What a banquet! What a joy!

The intensity of love and faith of the sinner crafted on the mercy and love of God

creates a relationship of deep spiritual intimacy between this soul and the Savior, a truly divine union! The beginning of this series of meditation leads us to believe that Fr. Justin had read to his listeners the narration of Luke's Gospel, which he did often at the beginning of his talks.

A Pharisee invited him to dine with him, and he entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at table. Now there was a sinful woman in the city who learned that he was at table in the house of the Pharisee. Bringing an alabaster flask of ointment, she stood behind him at his feet weeping and began to bathe his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and anointed them with the ointment. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this he said to himself, "if this man were a prophet he would know who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, that she is a sinner." Jesus said to him in reply, "Simon, I have something to say to you." "Tell me, teacher" he said. "Two people were in debt to a certain creditor; one owed five hundred days' wages and the other owed fifty. Since they were unable to repay the debt, he forgave it for both. Which of them will love him more?" Simon said in reply, "the one, I suppose, whose larger debt was forgiven." He said to him, "You have judged rightly." Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? When I entered your house, you did not give me water for my feet, but she has bathed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but she has not ceased kissing my feet since the time I entered. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she anointed my feet with ointment. So I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little." He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." The others at table said to themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" But he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace" (Lk 7, 36-50).

Was this Pharisee animated by good intention, or not?

Often the Pharisees approached Jesus with good manners, but with the bad intention of trying to catch something against him. Was this Simon with bad intention? Maybe, not!

We cannot think that some people do always bad things, that they can do only evil. Only the damned are in this condition. All those who are in this world, regardless of how corrupted they may be, they are always besieged by grace, and therefore have not only good moments, but also all the possibilities of becoming saints.

After all we should not be surprised that this Pharisee in the presence of such a spectacle was disturbed and had bad thoughts. The fact that our Lord taught him, and made the conversion of Mary Magdalene to happen in his house, shows that the Lord desired to convert and to lead him to the perfection of charity.

We think this way also for ourselves since we too invite Jesus. We invite him to come to our soul in Holy Communion; we receive him every day. We also invite him often during the day – at the least, I suppose, you do it many times every day – to come and visit, instruct and console us. Good souls are very familiar with this act of love. Every time I come to his presence, in those frequent short visits, I must beg him to come to me; and while it may seem that I go to him, in reality he comes to my soul, otherwise my visits would be completely empty. We too, then, very often invite the Lord Jesus.

Naturally we should see whether we invite him with the true intention of having him, of uniting ourselves with him or ... I do not want to say, with bad intention, I hope not, but with an intention or disposition of lukewarmness, of indifference, that is, of continuing to be as we are. This is the bad intention, the worst intention: wanting to remain what we are. The good intention and disposition the Lord expects from us, is that of wanting to change, till we transform our own selves into him. This, naturally, is understood pertaining to things of the soul.

When we think of material things, there is always the intention of improving; this usually is lacking and lacks in spiritual things.

The interest to improve must always prevail in spiritual things. This is the reason why we call Jesus, so that coming to us and in us, he may change our ideas, convert, elevate and transform us.

The Lord places the liberation of so many souls before our eyes, the liberation of this poor sinner from a life of sin, the liberation of some possessed people, and finally also the liberation of some creatures from illnesses, precisely so that it may take place also in us.

We are following Jesus' public life, in front of this display (not in the sense of glamor or effort made by the Lord), display of goodness and mercy, at least according to our impression, display purposely operated by the Lord to draw us into this current of mercy, of grace and of liberation.

Since we do not intend only to explain the Gospel, but we want to repeat and relive it ... we place ourselves in the role of the one who invited Jesus. Or should we take the place of some invited guests? Truthfully, at least now, we are more in the condition of the one who invited the Lord. Other souls will later come to the banquet both called and not called.

When the Jews used to celebrate these banquets, many a times or always they celebrated with open doors. The glory of the master of the house consisted in having many guests. At times these banquets were offered in open areas, and those who so wished were always free to join the celebration. Considering this custom of the time, it does not seem strange that the poor sinner wishing to encounter Jesus took advantage of that occasion. We should not think that this sinner might have been wishing to meet Jesus for a long time; we should rather think that she was touched by grace at that moment, and immediately responded, without paying much attention to the external circumstances, whether it was convenient or not to present herself without any invitation.

At what time or moment should we correspond to grace? When

we have and perceive it. To establish the circumstances of time, place or other does not depend on us. The Lord knows best what he has to do in us; when he sends us an inspiration, and makes us understand that it comes from him, we must obey immediately; there should be no place or time for discussion.

We are on the part of the one who invited the Lord. When we invite the Lord, we do so always to offer him a great reception, a triumph. We must celebrate a feast that ends always with a banquet. We could say: *This is done with strangers, or at the beginning of a friendly relationship. We offer an extraordinary banquet when we invite for the first time to our house a new acquaintance, or for an old friend we see rarely.*

If it is the case of a person that is always with us, it is not the case of preparing a banquet every day. Even those who love each other immensely and end up marrying each other, they celebrate the first day of their life together, they are not feasting every day. Indeed they do not do it because they cannot afford it; if they could afford it, they would do it everyday. And so... we start to understand.

When it is a question of spiritual happenings we can celebrate a big feast and banquet every day because the Lord pays the expenses. At most, we can offer our hall (our soul, our day), the Lord takes care of all the rest. After the celebration, we do not need to reset and clean the hall. Every thing is done with such a splendor of purity that afterward there is nothing to clean or to put in the proper place.

In the worldly celebrations there is a lot of work. Imagine what must be done after a birthday party, a twentieth anniversary! We need time and lot of work to clean up, rearrange and regain our inner peace; to regain the spirit of recollection, to clean the soul from so many imperfections. Whenever we meet with other people we move a lot of dust - we say so to talk with kindness - we

do not say that we soil ourselves, we get wounded and scratched and we end up in a hospital. We limit ourselves to say: we get dusty! Afterward there is more work to be done to clean up, rearrange and have everything in its place!

In the spiritual celebration there is nothing like this. In them we have an increased sense of recollection, of peace and joy in God. It is all an increasing of wellbeing; there is neither disorder nor dust.

It is only a question of offering the place. In this place will be celebrated this banquet, and after each celebration we will experience an increase of goodness.

Poverty is for many men an impediment to celebrate feasts; this, however, is not an impediment for us because the Lord takes care of all expenses. The celebration of spiritual banquets does not even increase our work, because there is no need of cleaning. We have many good reasons to celebrate this banquet every day, because even though we have started our life of union with the Lord, even though we have reached a level of intimacy with him, it is also true that to a certain point the Lord is for us someone to be known better, yet he is never a stranger to us.

With the Lord we are always starting again. Regardless of the level of friendship we have achieved we are always confronted with new levels of intimacy to be experienced, new levels of God's love to be conquered.

We have embraced a friend, and we find ourselves in the presence of a Lord that we do not know yet; there is reason to celebrate every day this new level of friendship, this new opportunity of a higher union. Every day we ought to celebrate a new conciliation with the Lord, even if not always a higher and closer allegiance, and so we will find ourselves on the part... (This word sounds terrible to the soul) we find ourselves in the place of the Pharisee that invites Jesus.

We invite the Lord every day, often even more frequently, many times a day. We are well aware that at this banquet we must multiply the invitations. This may help us understand the reason of our evening practice – done in community or in private – of the sacred invitation to the angels and saints; everyone should invite all the angels and saints he knows (the more the better) to the banquet of the Eucharist and of the Word, to all the banquets of love we celebrate every day.

We do not expect, and we do not want uninvited guests to this banquet.

The angels, let them all come, we expect them; the saints are also all most welcome; but if some trouble makers of this earth, the ravages of this world, or even our enemies show up, it surprises us, and then we would like to close the doors. Once the invited guests have entered we place the waiters in front of the door – with or without uniform - so that no one else comes in.

When we invite the Lord, it is not just an invitation; it is not an ordinary feast. There is another norm of good behavior with respect to the Lord. The first rule he wants to be observed is: *open and wide open doors!* He cannot be locked in! Where would you like to lock the Lord in? Don't you see the Host? There the Lord is in a state of sacrifice, but he does not want to be in a state of sacrifice in us. The sacrifice of the Eucharist is enough!

He does not want to be in a state of sacrifice at the right hand of the Father, in heaven, nor in the soul! So, all doors must be open; he will be even happier if you prepare his banquet in the public square, on the road or in the open fields. In this we do not agree with him!

That particular soul would like to celebrate the banquet within closed doors, secretly; she wouldn't want even the presence of the guardian angel! We do not see eye to eye with the Lord. We must sacrifice our ideas, our tastes and we must make ours the

ideas and tastes of the Lord, otherwise, we don't get along with him. It is dangerous not to get along with the lord. He who wants to invite the lord, must open all the doors, the doors of his memory, of his intellect, will and sentiment, must open to the outmost the heart to the Lord and then to all those whom the Lord loves, expects, calls and attracts! We must open to let all the people share the banquet with the Lord.

This is not contrary to the idea of interior recollection; especially in our apostolic life this is the way to recollect. This is the form of recollection the Lord wants.

Any other form of recollection would not be sacred, and we want the sacred, divine recollection, not the infernal one. Even hell is recollected, but like in a tomb. There is the recollection of the cemetery and of the tomb, but we do not want it.

The recollection of the apostle consists in opening heart and mind to the souls, so that they may come to Jesus. When Jesus is the main focus, the center of attraction, then recollection consists in widening as much as possible the sphere of our activities, not in restricting it only to ourselves. When Jesus is the center, recollection consists in widening as much as possible the effusions of divine goodness and not in limiting them. Then, there should be no surprise that we have this banquet in the open.

Who is more eagerly waiting for this opportunity? Who is the one who gets closer to Jesus? They are the poor! Undoubtedly, when we say poor, we intend all imperfect people, private or public sinners! They are the ones who need Jesus the most, who get closer to him and who more implore him.

The true disciples of Jesus do not say anything because they are used to Jesus' ways. The angels and saints do not complain, and while they are coming keep calling and inviting these people. But Simon, who invited the Lord, keeps complaining and murmuring.

Our grumblings are not exactly like those of Simon. He grumbles for other reasons and his murmuring greatly displeases the Lord: this is certain. Our grumbling is different, but it too displeases the Lord.

We should not be displeased that many rush to this banquet. Do you want to know the truth? We are more certain that the Lord is with us, when many people that we do not like get closer to him. When the unwanted come, it is a sign that a real celebration is taking place in our soul, that the Lord is present in us, and he through his goodness attracts them. We stop here and say to our soul: *My soul, invite the angels and saints but do not expect to be alone with them.*

The banquets of love with the Lord are celebrated with open doors, so that those who want may enter, because the Lord comes specifically for sinners, and undoubtedly sinners are annoying, dirty, twisted, scrawny, but they approach the Lord to become like saints, like angels, and our Lord transforms them.

Let them come! Let us wait for them. Let us compel them to come! Doing so we open the door of another banquet hall; a new banquet starts; the oriental banquets last a long time, eight days, a month. Remember the banquet of that king that lasted one hundred and eighty seven days! Rejoice!

The Blessed Mother comes with her followers; Jesus comes with his court, and more comes the crowd of sinners; not one or two, but many. Then, we too, used to this way of thinking, renew these invitations, with the intentions of inviting the angels and the saints and all those they like to invite. Every angel, every saint has some souls that are dear to him or her. Come all, angels and saints and bring whomever you wish to bring. They may cause some discomfort to us, but we will be happy to please Jesus, even with personal discomfort for us.

We will be going around saying and repeating to the angels

and saints: *Come to the wedding feast, everything is ready.* Glory to the Father, to the Son and to the Holy Spirit because everything is ready.

A certain man prepared a banquet and at the appointed time sent his servants to call the invited guests: come everything is ready. Glory to God! Everything is ready!

A certain man! That certain man now is each one of us. In the Gospel account, *that certain man* is first of all God the Father, and since we are in his image and likeness, and since God wanted in us this image of paternity, the *homo quidam*- *that certain man* is each one of us.

Let us send to call everyone: angels, saints and souls, *quia parata sunt omnia, because everything is ready!* Come to the banquet! Say it to all the guardian angels of the souls we encounter, remember in a special way the souls of those sinners I commended to your prayers. For yourselves, as a spiritual assignment, mortify some taste of yours, or at least think: Could this be also the taste of the Lord, I renounce to it, because I always want what he wants!

CHAPTER 2

Breaking the Alabaster Vase

The Lord is the infinite, the immense, he is the one who loves everyone and he wants to serve everyone. I cannot love the Lord without loving in him all the souls. I cannot invite the Lord without inviting all the souls that he loves and wants to save. Every invitation or banquet made to the Lord must be open to all souls, good and not so good. We become the point of encounter between the Lord and the souls. If we revert all our interest in our own selves, we exclude from us God and the souls and consequently we deviate from our goal, which is always the salvation. If the devil succeeds in distracting us from our goal, he will then easily lead us to sin, true cancer for the soul.

Somehow the owner of the house, Simon had some reason to think negatively.

If he were a prophet, one sent by God or God's very son, he would have enough light to know people deeply, nothing should be hidden to him, and then he would know who this woman is!

You are right, Simon; he must know and does know, and this is the very reason why he came to your house. It is so true that he knew it; he accepted your invitation precisely for her sake, or at least, mainly for her.

I cannot think that our Lord would have done any act, even the most insignificant externally, for any other reason but the salvation of souls.

We cannot forget our goal, we cannot distract ourselves or de-

viate from our goal, or go against our goal; this is impossible in Jesus. His goal was the redemption, and this has been present in each and every act of his.

It may seem that in the thirty years of his hidden life he focused his attention on caring for the Blessed Mother, and on helping St. Joseph, and yet that was more than a preparation, even that was a redemption, not less than the one he will fulfill tomorrow with his public life, with the sacrifice, with the Blessed Sacrament.

Jesus has been the savior every instant of his life; in reality God is one, and all he does is reduced, reported and ordained to unity.

If this is Jesus' goal, it is also the unique goal of everything else, the only goal of every being. Thinking otherwise equals to err, to go out of the way, ruin yourself, and lose the others.

No surprise then that wherever we are with the Savior, wherever we are dealing with Jesus, the souls always approach us, and they come to us to find salvation and redemption.

The desire to meet Jesus will be more or less explicit, their search may be more or less manifest, but this is the motivation that compels them, the instinct that moves them.

Everyone is moved because he/she searches health of body and soul; we too, when we get closer to another person, we do so because we are searching health and salvation. So, open doors banquet! We invite Jesus and Jesus in turn invites all souls, and we become the blessed instrument for this encounter, we happen to offer the meeting place for this encounter with the Lord: I would love to talk at length about this "objective".

In our meditation it may happen frequently that the one who talks, or the one who wrote, goes ahead to share other ideas, other points, while the listener or the reader – at the beginning or in the midst – is taken by some thoughts and contemplates on them. Whenever I encounter, whenever you encounter this thought of

the goal, the soul is forced to stop and meditate on it; I cannot just go ahead, you must not go ahead without paying attention to the goal.

Now, I do not intend to stop the theme and talk about the goal; I simply say that whenever you find this word, you must stop and meditate on it, because it is so easy to be distracted from our goal. Our enemies in their snares aim at this, to attract us to other things that are not our goal, to keep us busy in other things that are not our goal; and we are wasting all this precious life and gifts that the Lord offers us.

We should enter Jesus' mentality and reduce ourselves to the unity of Jesus, so that all we say, offer and do, more or less explicitly, but always directly must aim at the salvation of souls. On feast days or working days, in church or on the way, at school and at work, amongst friends or unknown people, whether we are in good health or sick, always and everywhere our goal should and must be present. All that happens, exists and must be directed to our goal. Whatever does not seem directed to our goal must be rejected.

The goal of our salvation brings us closer to Jesus, because Jesus is the Savior and only adhering to the Savior we have salvation, just as only placing ourselves in the sun we receive light and warmth. It is no surprise that being Jesus in us, many souls approach Jesus in us.

The first condition for salvation is to seek and reach Jesus, to adhere and unite ourselves with Jesus. This going, adhering and uniting ourselves to Jesus is simply the story of God and man's love. In it is all divine-human love. On this relationship of love we find the ultimate reason and the very essence of our goal.

As in the relationship of love we find the three divine persons, which means everything (divine persons, divine nature, divine perfections and operations are condensed, and most simply, in-

finitely and essentially are love), likewise, all that concerns the creature, considered in its very self or in its relation with God is relationship of love. This is true regardless if we consider the creature in time or in eternity, at the stage of incipient, proficient or perfect, or in the way of purification, illumination or union.

Saying salvation we intend God's love known and reciprocated, achieved and enjoyed. First of all we need to eliminate all obstacles and impediments. We must first break something. By her nature the soul is something open to God, always in motion toward God. The enemy of the soul, in order to deprive us of our spiritual life, tries to lock and halt the soul. The soul, meant to be totally open to God and in perennial motion toward God, is constrained in an ever more limited space and in an environment ever more confined and begins to be stagnant, and this happens in the state of Lukewarmness and in every form of deviation from our supernatural good. The soul folds on herself under this impulse of Satan, turns her eyes on her self and delights in this illicit satisfaction, and inside it accumulates narcissism.

The soul folds on herself under this impulse of Satan, turns her eyes on herself, and delights in this illicit satisfaction, and inside she accumulates dirt. You no longer have an eye but a tumor. The eyes become two putrid tumors; they are no longer open to heaven; they are no longer open and in motion toward the eternal beauty. Our lips are no longer open to singing to the Lord with angels and saints; they are closed, they are full of cancer. The heart is no longer open in its pulsation to send ever-new flows of blood to the whole being, to receive new levels of life from the Sacred Heart, but it becomes a black tumor, filled with rotten blood. We must break it! We need a surgeon to open it, otherwise the decease increases and one dies. We must open it.

Let us now take the liberty of uniting in our mind the banquet in the house of Simon, the Pharisee with that in the house of Simon the leper. We find ourselves in front of a woman that carries

a most refined and precious vase filled with a perfumed essence, the most aromatic. She breaks this alabaster vase and spreads around that aroma. An all-encompassing aroma that upsets some people and consoles others, according to their dispositions. Before bringing this vase in the house of Simon, to break it at the feet of the Lord, she had to break many other vases, many more valuable vases of porcelain.

There are some tumors that must be broken in secret, like those things we hide for necessary modesty. They must be broken in the privacy of an operating room, under the stilettos of a surgeon. Once lukewarmness has caused the fruit of death, when the sin is grave, with the malignant force of the pus it tends to corrupt all the healthy part around, not to get out. Nature has no strength to react.

The Lord endowed nature with some admirable forces that tend to restore sanity where it has been broken; when, however, lukewarmness starts to produce its fruit, i.e., mortal sin, when the sickness is grave, this infernal humor neutralizes and infects the sound and saint humors. There is no other remedy than the operating room!

To prevent gangrene and death, you have to put yourself in the hands of another, under the knives of a surgeon. If you do not do anything, it is question of hours or of days and death will come. It is useless for you, my soul, to make resistance and grimaces of repugnance: if you want to save yourself you must submit to this treatment.

You have indulged in doing wrong, now you have to suffer the frightening intervention, what you do not like. You did what you ought not have done; now you undergo what you do not like! That's why you need a confessor who must be also a surgeon. It's not enough for us that he places some hot clothes on the tumor, or tells us a sweet word of comfort. All this I suppose already done, I say all this eradication of tumors.

After the eradication the soul has started to live again and now she feels uplifted; she experiences the joy experienced by someone after a long and grave recovery; it is the joy of life that starts all over again, it is the very joy of God that re-echoes in the soul.

The soul has understood that she must break something and get rid of the best she has. What is "this best"? For the world, the best are the unlawful satisfactions. "Having eliminated this, that and the other one, what else remains in life? That is the best!" We have personally heard this type of reasoning from our poor, sinful brothers!

All this best of the world, seen in the light, appears what it really is: a mass of manure, to use a civilized language! Mortal and death producing material! We have to break up and send that stuff to that mayhem of hell. Go to the devil, where you came from, streams of hell.

The soul understands that by opening up and emptying herself derives her wellbeing and salvation, and so she turns to the Lord bringing much better and salvific load. A totally different load, which in turn, is also broken and effused at the feet of Jesus!

This method and system of the soul remains always valid: open yourself, and if in order to open it is needed to break, break it all!

After this blast of explosion the limits of the soul's capacity expand and the soul fills well. Then the enemy tries to shut her again in herself, with the pretext to enjoy the good received. This, however, is not the idea of the Lord. The soul that is left to be deceived begins to bounce again and falls into another state of thinner sloth; and then a new jerk, a new blow, and a new dilation, and then a bigger good. Again, finer temptations follow to turn on the self in order not to lose that good, to enjoy and cultivate it. A new state of lukewarmness follows, a new stagnation and another breaking and expanding is needed: till our all life comes to its breaking point and death takes over.

For now let us meditate on this idea, accept the spiritual assignment of placing ourselves at the feet of the Lord and let us see how we really are. It is not always proper to look at oneself, but when we are affected by sickness it is justified to look at our own self, even using a mirror, if necessary. Let us see ourselves in Jesus, in this divine mirror to see how many tumors have grown in us.

All that we hate to reveal, all that we want to keep hidden is a very dangerous tumor! Whatever we want to hide to our superior, to our director is a cancer. Do not hide it because it is extremely dangerous for the soul; either you break it yourself or let someone else extract it for you.

I do not want to imagine that one of my listeners finds himself in these spiritual conditions¹. Illusions are useless: very often we are Satan's laughing stock. The influence of Satan is still too much in our lives. Even a small part would be too much, and it is too much in the true sense of the word. Let us be ever more sincere, more open to the minister of God, with the representatives of God. No secret of evil with the spiritual director! This is an old theory, too familiar, but too deliberately forgotten.

¹ In Ascension, art. 448, Fr. Justin states the same principle, that when preaching we should "Never suppose that the listeners are in a state of mortal sin".

CHAPTER 3

Mystery of Grace and Love

Love enslaves the lover; the true lover, however, does not become aware of it. Love cannot be kept hidden; it must be expressed through expressions, acts and gestures of love. The kiss, the embrace and the crying are expression of love. Bending, washing the feet and drying them are acts of love. Breaking the alabaster vase and spreading the precious aroma are gestures of love.

You know the story of what happened and maybe you have been meditating on it. Maybe you have also read what St. Gregory the Great wrote about this episode: *It is impossible to meditate on this fact without crying.*

Only the one who cries says this! Truthfully only one who cries is surprised that the others do not cry; he who does not cry is surprised that others cry!

Let's leave the external gestures that someone might consider like the grimaces of love. Substance is needed not grimace: but we do not want to disparage these external signs of love!

If I cry because I want to cry, mine is a grimace; but if I burst into tears because I suffer, and then spontaneously, not forcibly, then it is no longer a grimace. Who laughs because he wants to laugh is a clown, but he who laughs because he cannot keep himself from laughing in front of a funny thing, then his is a natural, spontaneous, true laugh.

We do not know what has happened in that soul. We are fac-

ing the mystery of grace and of love. We should comprehend and keep always in mind that grace is inseparable from love; grace and love are equally mysterious, better, grace and love are a unique mystery, irradiation of the very mystery of the Trinity.

When I say “mystery” I do not mean anything faraway, something very rare that may happen to anyone. All of us are banded by this mystery from all eternity, and we say that it manifests itself as grace and love, for grace is distinct from charity, but mystery is one, as divine persons are distinct, but God is one.

Grace is one thing, charity is another, but one is the mystery of grace and love.

We do not know what happened in the soul of Magdalene: we can only say it is the mystery of grace and God’s love; the very mystery in which we are born, in which we are enwrapped and consequently does not lead to envy. We need emulation, yes, emulation with all those who have loved the Lord, even with the Seraphim, but without any envy of this grace and love of others, since we are all enwrapped in this mystery. If envy were possible among angels and saints, they would envy my mystery of grace and of love, just as I would envy theirs. Let everyone enjoy what is his own.

This love of the Lord has come to the fore; it penetrated the heart and put out what was there. All those tumors we spoke of, tumors in the eyes, in the mouth, in the heart, in all parts of the physical and moral being, had already been uprooted in the secret of consciousness and solitude; all that was seduction, and occasion of sin had already been sent away; there were no more excrescences, tumors and boils, all that stuff, because Jesus’ thought had entered and had found correspondence.

Now he starts to feel a certain attraction that he cannot contain, he starts to experience love.

All saints have experienced love; some have manifested it in

one way and some in other ways. We are allowed to have preferences among the saints, just as God is allowed to have predilections. When is question of angels and saints all our preferences and likings are for this way of experiencing and manifesting love. Everyone is allowed to have his own preferences; it is clear, even while united in the same parish, in the same cenacle, in the same family. Everyone must be free to have among the angels and saints, among the methods of prayer, his preferences and attractions, to the honor and glory of the divine predilections!

We take this freedom and express it with the utmost simplicity. Once a choice has been made, whoever rebels to the law is no longer independent! Every act of rebellion is a ring in the chain of Satan!

So many self-lovers are slaves; if they make some grimaces with their hands, mouth or head, it is because they are rings of Satan's chain with their heart, head and mouth, and they go into ravings.

To find independence, we must go with our thoughts to the superiors, to the authors of the laws, who must be considered superior to the laws, not in the sense that they can break them without accountability, but because they do not feel the burden, because those laws are the expression of their mentality, of their internal feelings. And so going up and up we arrive at the Lord, who in his very divine nature is the eternal reason of every law.

The more the soul corresponds to God's love, the more she is united with God, shares his nature and assimilates his will, doing so she no longer feels the burdensome binding of the law, they have become needs of the heart. They are like her new nature. As a matter of fact, grace is our new nature. In this sense we say that love makes her free; for the same reason we can tell the soul: *love and do whatever you wish.*

In that house is the one she loves, and that is enough. While

bringing all of her self to the one she loves, she wants to manifest her love in every way possible. A love that does not want to manifest itself is not love. What good is it for me that someone loves me and doesn't even tell me, and doesn't manifest it in any way?

Look at the divine persons! Didn't they love each other eternally? Yet, they wanted to manifest it in time. The entire universe is like the big alabaster vase in which the eternal Father offers all his love to the Son, outside of his own self.

God knows that I love him, and yet he has made it a duty and a need for me to express it to him. Then, let us take and bring to him the most beautiful and precious things we have.

We have no idea of these precious vases, or have only a very pale idea. For the Orientals at that time the vase was the only beauty of the house: vases and carpets, and they showed them off. This soul takes the most beautiful and the most precious vase and fills it with the most fragrant essences. Even of this we have no clear idea. The Orient is the country of perfumes; all aromatic essences are there. When we say: "Oriental luxury" we can say no more.

She brings to fulfillment this gesture of love. Love is always gentle and renders the lover ever more gentle. Even the coarsest reject, as he begins to love, begins to get gentler. He gets gentler in his person, in his feelings, in his works. Love is a great gentleman and always renders one gentler; he does not care at all about costs. The first dream of every lover is to be very wealthy to be able to give much, to make the other happy, to show his great affection, (above all for this).

It does not matter that we are dealing with one who knows what is internal. Even though he knows everything, the Lord always expects this external manifestation of love. The whole creation is the external manifestation of each divine person for the other. All creation expresses the Father's love for the Son, and the Son's love for the Father.

With his alabaster vase Magdalene goes and prostrates herself at the feet of Jesus, washes them with her tears and dries them with her hair. Thus she reveals another way, another feature of love: love makes one a slave. The person that gets disgusted in serving the loved one has no love.

Love renders a person a slave, but he does not become aware of it because in reality love is not slavery. He, who becomes a slave and is aware of it, does not love. The one who serves being aware of serving does not love. Love makes the lovers one slave of the other, but they are not aware of it, and they are not aware of it because for them that is not true.

We say so only because we see the external, we see the acts rendered by slaves.

It was the duty of a slave to bend at the feet of a guest to wash and dry them; seeing a person doing these things, we feel justified to say that a person has become a slave. We, external spectators, human calculators say so. The lover does not reason nor feels that way, because for him there is nothing else but love. It is a fact, that he makes himself a slave, however, it is also true that the Lord made himself his slave first!

If you really love your souls, do over and over again this journey from the house of Magdalene to that of Simon, the journey that we have tried to do together with these poor considerations. Reflect on these various characteristics of love, and see how far we are from it. It does not pay to do the same thing; it would be only a contortion. Let us implore the Lord to give us this Love. With the continuous infusions of charity from the Lord and the exercise of charity from our part we will achieve that love.

CHAPTER 4

Transforming Power of Love

This chapter introduces us in the transforming mystery of love. The Lord offers his forgiveness to the sinner; she accepts it and is inflamed by love. The poor Pharisee could not be aware of this internal transformation, nor can we, but the Lord sees it. The sinner was no longer a sinner when she arrived at Simon's house and encountered the lord. The impure, the unclean, the sinner cannot, he must not approach the Lord; but he who has been impure, unclean or sinner must approach the saint to be further purified or sanctified. In the process of forgiveness, the offended must always take the initiative precisely because he is not guilty. That is why God takes the initiative and the soul, image and likeness of God, must make the first move in forgiving one's neighbor.

Let us pray to the Lord to establish us in the truth. We must admit that the poor Pharisee was not totally wrong. Responding to him, Jesus did not say: "You are wrong", but explained to him how things really were. The Pharisee knew who that woman was and what kind of sinner she was!

The one who is in a state of sin cannot approach the Lord who is the personification of holiness. This is certain; not only the Pharisee says and must say: Keep far from me anyone who is in sin. We know how determined and sharp are the words of the Lord about contagious sins! It is true, that it is direct especially about the scandal of the little ones, but it applies equally to any other spiritual damage done to the souls: *It would be better for him if a millstone were around his neck and he be thrown into the sea* (Lk 17,2). Let him disappear from the face of the earth: so grave is the

contempt deserved by sin and the state of sin, so detestable is the hatred for sin and the cursed influence of sin. Much different is the case of the saint that gets closer to the sinner to convert him. Jesus declares that he did not come for the just, but to call sinners to repentance.

Deep inside, the poor Pharisee was right: We know who and what kind of woman she is. Only out of respect for Jesus I do not ask my servants to throw her out as she deserves, but if he were truly a prophet he should know who she is and do not allow her to be so close to him.

Simon was right, or at least he thought he was right, he was aware of being right. The reality, however, is that she is no longer what she used to be. This was the obstacle: Magdalene had been a sinner, maybe up to one hour ago, but now she is no longer a sinner. Correctly, the person who is in sin should not get close to the Holy One. The sinner that gets close to the Holy One with good dispositions is no longer a sinner or at least has begun to get away from sin and can get close to the holy of holies.

Here's the knot and it is untied very well. This transformation is entirely interior and escapes the man's eye. Man's eye simply sees sin, a state of sin, harms done to others, and judges what he sees. God's eye judges in reality, because everything is present to God, not just the appearance, but also the intimate reality. The state of the soul is exactly what corresponds to its present intimate reality. According to this reality, that woman is no longer the sinner, the subject of scandal or God's curse.

This transformation comes in an instant, It is the work of grace and of love, grace received and corresponded love is an instantaneous work; just as in the work of creation the Lord said: *Let there be light, and there was light* (Gn 1, 3). Being it work of grace and of love is all unseen because grace works in the substance of the soul, and love is infused and remains in the heart without

being seen from outside; thus it escapes to the knowledge of the senses based on the exterior. It takes sometime for this exteriority to experience the influence of internal reality and transform it as well; the fact is that the inner reality is different, and this transformation is known to God's eye, not to Simon the Pharisee. He still judges according to the past and the exterior; the Lord judges according to the present reality, and each one from his point of view is right.

All reason is on the part of Jesus; Simon, if he is not totally wrong, he is still wrong for having judged and condemned according to the appearance. Man has no right to judge, and much less to condemn his brother, who is not his subject. Therefore our Lord does not explicitly blame him; he does not say, "You think evil" etc. ... but only: "Simon I must tell you a word."

"Speak, Lord!" And Jesus tells him how the transformation has taken place. Through Jesus' words we understand what has happened in Mary Magdalene and how her love started.

Two debtors owe a big debt, but a different debt: one owes more and the other less. The Lord fully condones both of them. Let us consider things, as they should be, as they have to happen, not as they usually are: who will love the Lord more? According to reason, according to justice, according to what it is supposed to be, according to what is to be done, the one who has been condoned more, will love the Lord more.

The Lord says that this woman loves much, because she has been forgiven a lot. The Lord made the first move, and then she out of gratitude has started to love him. The soul is not immediately satisfied with this solution. We do not remain satisfied, because the Lord forgives out of his mercy, out of his pure goodness, but on what is based this forgiveness? This forgiveness originates from the very nature of God, but this forgiveness of sin, this condoning of debt, to be truly received must find a base on which to

stand in this soul. How could it be received otherwise? The Lord on his part is always rich in mercy; the Lord is always in the act of effusing his goodness, but not everybody receives it.

We say that Mary started to love when she experienced that she had been forgiven and forgiven a lot, but on what was based the Lord's forgiveness? We know, (and let us always keep present this principle) that love is a mystery and that love-relations are mysterious, consequently something is said and something is not said, not because this would be illicit, but simply because in every aspect of love there is something mysterious. So we face something that we understand and something we don't understand; what we cannot understand, we cannot explain. How can we express it, if we cannot understand it?

Love is always searching for this mystery. The lovers are pleased with it; they wrap themselves in it, and joyfully relax in it. Our Lord emphasizes Mary Magdalene's love of gratitude toward God. She loves because she has been forgiven. Does this love of gratitude precede or follow the grace of forgiveness?

Here is the query! It is necessary that something be in the heart of Mary Magdalene to receive this pardon that can only be received by a heart detached from sin. The divine goodness cannot give it unless there is a change of the disposition of heart, if he does not repent and does not detach from evil; afterward, yes! Soon after repentance one receives forgiveness of sin in proportion to the sorrow and to the love of the soul, or simply for a greater tenderness of Jesus, who communicates his merits. We also obtain the Lord's forgiveness, almost simultaneously with our repentance; however, the change of heart must precede the forgiveness. This change, which is the effect of pure love, deserves grace. An imperfect sorrow alone would not suffice: then the sacrament of penance is necessary. The sacrament of penance must precede the same effusion of grace and forgiveness.

We would love to see the fire that descends from heaven in the

very instant that enwraps this mass of sin, this heart corrupted by sin and transforms it. We would love to be present at the sacrifice of Elisha; we would love to see with our own eyes this altar with twelve stones, with on it this dead meat, still bleeding but already in the process of corruption, because corruption begins at the very moment of death. Around these stones flow threatening waters, rotten, waters of the earth, and near there is a prophet praying, and around there is the spectator people with a great disposition of disbelief. The anger of the Lord envelops this entire scene, envelops the king and his court, encloses the people and the false priests of Baal, and for their fault the wrath of God spreads throughout the region. And the sky has been closed for three years.

In this sea of sin, in this hell, there is a soul dear to the Lord, she enjoys the intimacy of the Lord, it is the prophet! He alone is sufficient to change the face of the earth, to win all the opposition of divine justice, the rigor of the divine holiness.

Likewise, in the heart of this sinner there is an altar of stones, desecrated stones, and above it there is meat, a lot of meat, all matter, all opprobrium, all corrupted flesh. Whenever the flesh is object of thoughts and desires, or of any other attitude of internal acts, of reflections upon the self, of earthly satisfactions, it is always something that dies or dead already. Upon these elements flows that putrid water, humus of corruption. All this is in the presence of the Lord, but before the Lord there is a prophet, a saint.

Don't forget what we said about the need of an intermediary! A prophet, precursor, saint, a spiritual father or mother is always needed as mediator between God and mankind, between God and sinners. This mediator is always needed even between God and the soul of another prophet who receives other increases of grace; this praying prophet is always on his knees.

We would love to catch the moment when these flames come

down from heaven and consume everything destroying that dead flesh, evaporating those stinging waters, rekindling the faith in all those unfaithful people, and bringing back to the Lord the hearts of all those who have been ungrateful up to that moment, the prevaricating heart of Israel. We would love to see that!

We have seen this spectacle so many times, but we have placed our hands in front of our eyes and we did not want to believe. Behind us there was another one who placed his hands before our eyes: So that we could not see. Another one, who somehow hears the words of the Lord, blinds our eyes, so that, while being in the midst of so many wonders, we may not see. The same happens to us. Maybe, we exaggerate talking this way. We are facing the marvels of the divine love and we do not see anything. We are at the concerts of the divine love, and we do not hear a thing. There is one who closes our eyes and our ears. May the Lord be merciful to us and establish us in the truth.

The Lord simply says that it was a love of gratitude that was enkindled in Mary Magdalene, and for us remains the probing: This love of gratitude should follow the reception of the benefit, but our Lord concludes: Her many sins have been forgiven because she has loved much, thus, somehow revealing to us that the sinner's love preceded the forgiveness.

Could it be false what was said before? The solution seems to be very simple. Some people doubt that the love of gratitude may be pure love and they point out that it cannot be pure love in as much as it implies personal interest; yet it seems evident to us that the word of God considers it pure love, and that is enough for us.

Things must have happened thus: The Lord touched that soul and offered to forgive all her sins if she would love him; so from one part precedes the offering of the Lord, and, out of necessity, the act of the Lord, since he is the first in everything and for everything. If he does not begin, creation will not begin to exist,

it never begins to live in a new way; he is always the first even though he is the offended party. How wrong we are when we say of our neighbor: "He offended me", it is his duty to recognize his wrongdoing, come to me, etc."

You may be right, and everybody may agree with you, but if it is true that you were made in the image and likeness of God, and if it is true that you must always become his better image, you are infinitely wrong. The one who has been offended must take the initiative exactly because he is the offended one and has done no wrong. The offender is wrong and is sick! You who are well should walk toward him; you cannot pretend that the one who is sick should walk.

The Lord has made this offer: "I forgive you, if you love". From the part of the Lord, forgiveness comes first because it had been offered, and what has been offered is given. Grace has arrived to that soul, but the soul did not embrace it yet. Before this generous, gratuitous, loving offering, the soul has been touched, has started to love, and the grace has been received. The gift has been accepted, so both statements are true; it is true that the forgiveness, the condone comes first, as the Lord's offering, and love comes first in the soul, this being set on fire. Before this pardon and remission entered the soul, the soul said: Yes, I love you; and everything is done. The fire has inflamed this heart, this sacrifice, this altar, and the soul has been transformed.

It always happens so, not only at the first conversion, but at all others, at all spiritual levels and progresses: there is an announcement, a message, an offering from the Lord and the soul accepts and corresponds and as a consequence takes place the union and infusion of first or second grace. So, something precedes from the part of God and something from the part of the soul.

What marvels us the most, and is the main focus of our meditation, is the transforming power of love. It is well described by a

human poetess, and well sang by the angels and saints of heaven. *Can a word softly spoken in a person's ear inflame her completely? Can it change all her sadness into joy? A word can change all the internal attitudes, provide well-being, happiness, enthusiasm, and a different life.* This is true of human love; let us imagine what will be of divine love!

Who was the prophet, precursor, apostle that knelt before the sacred altar with all that dead flesh amassed over it and emitting all those putrid humors? Who invoked the fire from heaven for Mary Magdalene? It could have been her sister, because Martha already loved the Lord. It could have been her brother, because Lazarus already loved Jesus. Maybe someone else, we can believe whatever we wish, because the Gospel does not provide any information for us. What is sure is that next to every visible minister of God, there is always an invisible minister; we can say and believe this.

It was the Virgin Mary, Mediatrix of all graces for the souls and mother of divine love in every soul. If we can appeal to an interior opinion, we can also say that there is always an angel of the choir of the Seraphim. There is always a Seraphim present in every soul that receives the message of divine love. This Seraphim brings from heaven the flame that transforms us. It is always a Seraphim that takes from the altar of God the burning charcoal and touches the mouth of the prophet, apostle, precursor! There is always a Seraphim next to the visible minister, brother, sister, catechist, nun or priest that implores the Lord to send down from heaven the fire of his love to transform a soul. There is always an invisible minister of God, an angel and precisely Seraphim.

Wherever there is someone who loves, God intervenes, and with him there is always one of the Seraphic spirits, his personal court of love. This is the reason why we believe in the special mission of the Seven Spirit Assisting at the Throne of God, of these seven living flames around the Lord and in our midst.

As spiritual assignment: say a special prayer to the choir of Seraphim and to the Seraphim that loves us the most. I think that in every choir of angels there is one that loves us more than the others. I suggest a personal, spontaneous prayer to the angel that loves us the most among the Seraphim and Seven Spirit Assisting at the Throne of God. Much more as lasting thought, take a look and say a word to the Queen of Angels, Mediatrix of all graces, Mother of Divine Love, and then to the Holy Spirit!

CHAPTER 5

The Lord always defends the soul he loves

Being oppressed, obstructed or persecuted should not surprise us; we are more surprised when this happens just while we are doing good deeds. Contradictions and obstacles serve to purify us of every imperfection in good works. The Lord always defends the soul he loves, and so does with Magdalene or sinner. He defends her because she is engaged in loving him personally, directly. The more we grow in this relationship of personal, intimate, exclusive love, the more we enjoy the defense of the Lord. The Lord is always defending the beloved soul, but not always when or as she wishes.

We are in an ongoing battle, and so we need to be defended from devils and men, and maybe more from men than from devils. The worst evil comes to us from our neighbors, and we ourselves are our first neighbors, and we are our own first bad spirit. We should always keep in mind the admonition of St. Paul: *Our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world's rulers, with the evil spirits in heaven. Therefore, put on the armor of God, that you may be able to resist on the evil day and, having done everything, to hold your ground (Ef 6, 12-13).*

This being defended, we take it now, as one who raises his voice in our favor. Especially, when a soul starts to do good to other souls, hell uses depraved men, good men and saintly men, saints that are still on earth, to impede it. I do not know if we can find oppositions and impediments from saints in heaven. I am thinking about what happened to Daniel when he was considering the return of the people of Israel from the Babylonian exile.

He says that he had to contend for long a time with the angel of the Persians, and then St. Michael came to his aid and the two of them together succeeded.¹

We need to be defended by one who can raise his powerful voice in our favor; otherwise we perish under the difficulties. A word spoken at the proper time and place in favor of good deeds is more helpful than many generous almsgivings, which are also very effective.

Often a pious soul in her tribulations sees and feels herself in a state of violence. Here we intend in a special way the tribulations deriving from all sorts of difficulties encountered while doing good ... About the others, like sicknesses and death, which we expect, we need patience! The tribulations that place us in a state of violence are the ones we encounter while doing good; we do not expect them! In our ingenuity, in our subconscious presumption, in our ongoing inexperience we do not expect them. *And the soul exclaims: Domine, vim patior, responde pro me... quare obdormis, Domine? The soul exclaims: Lord, I suffer violence, answer me, why don't you come to my aid?*

Wake up, Lord Jesus, say a word, and calm the storm. The Lord responds: *Propter miseriam inopum et gemitum pauperum nunc exurgam, dicit Dominus – with mercy I shall now rise in favor of the derelict and the cry of the poor, says the Lord.* Now I take charge.

In many episodes of Sacred Scripture we see this scene of the soul that asks for divine help: Lord, grant me a sign, so that all those who oppose me may understand that this or that is your will. You have loved me and you consoled me. *Fac mecum signum in bonum ut videant qui oderunt me, quoniam tu, Domine, voluisti me et consolatus es me. – Lord, give me a sign of your favor so that those who*

¹ Cf. Dn 10, 10-14.

hate me may see that you are at my side and sustain me. We would love to see who is the blessed soul for whom the Lord immediately and always takes her defense.

What are the special conditions of this soul, and what are the oppositions she encounters from the part of man, and through them from hell itself to quickly and always move the Lord to take her defense? It is indeed beautiful to be defended by the Lord himself! It is worth noticing that the Lord always takes the defense of some souls, without their asking. It is beautiful to be defended by the Lord, but he does not always defend us as we would like it, then and there; at times the Lord postpones our defense, and for many he suspends it to the end of time. See! How many saintly servants of God have died defamed and they must wait until judgment day so that the truth may be known. Here we are in the presence of a very blessed soul whose defense is immediately taken up by the Lord: Mary Magdalene, she alone, and always! Why?

Simon had just conceived that thought in his mind, and immediately the Lord responds: *Simon, I have something to tell you. Speak, Lord.* The Lord with great sweetness and gravity starts saying what we already know. Why? To defend that poor soul.

This scene was repeated a second time, a few days before the passion, at the house of another Simon, Simon the leper, (who knows? It might have been the same Simon who later became a leper!) Mary Magdalene goes again with an alabaster vase, it may be the same vase that she kept as a relic because it had been used for the Lord; this second time, in her love and in her sorrow she breaks it.

The apostles complained about her and again Jesus comes to her defense: *Let her alone. Why do you make trouble for her? She has done a good thing for me* (Mk 14, 6).

At the banquet in the house of Bethany, when Martha com-

plains with Jesus that Mary has left her all alone to do the household tasks, while she stays at his feet listening to his words: *Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need only of one thing. Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her* (Lk 10, 41-42).

Jesus defends her always, both in her house and in the house of others, with the Pharisees, the Apostles and her own sister. Jesus does not tolerate that Mary may be for one instant under the pain of suspicion, of rumors. This triple episode reminds us of the words of the Song of Songs: *I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles and other animals of the field, do not awaken my beloved until she is ready* (SOS 3, 5).

What does this teach us? It enables us to understand that when a person engages herself in direct exercise of personal love with the Lord, in the love that is simultaneously effective and affective with the Lord, she finds so much the favor of the Lord, she gives him so much delight and glory that he does not want anyone to disturb her. The Lord does not want that soul to stop that exercise, not even in order to do other good deeds; all the other good deeds can never equal the dignity, merit and value of love. Whatever other good deed, whatever devotion or pious exercise, whatever work of ministry a soul may do must be tested; these tests serve to render more precious these activities with virtuous acts; these trials serve to purify and elevate them. The soul can encounter obstacles, impediments and fights; she must always be alert to prevent attacks coming from everywhere. While the soul is directly engaged in the practice of charity, our Lord does not allow any interruption to that act of charity, to that exercise of love, not even in order to practice other virtues and do other good deeds.

So we come to understand also why men and hell envy and hinder so much this holy rest of divine love, this contemplative life. We thank the Lord who enables us to understand these things and commit ourselves to love God directly.

So, I understand what I must do to free myself of so many thoughts, nuisances and oppositions: I must love the Lord directly. Certainly by loving more directly, explicitly and personally the Lord in all our works there is always an immense gain of peace, security, prudence, supernatural merits and everything else.

If you want to use the love of God as a tool to gain something, you will not have the defense of God, at least not immediately and not always. Whenever the love of God has any finality other than God himself, regardless of how good the finality may be, it is not pure love. If we want truly the pure love, we must always exclude love from the category of means.

We must take advantage of this knowledge and reflection, but not to use this love as a tool for our own defense; in this case we will not obtain it anyway. We must practice it to grow in the esteem and desire of this love and to confirm ourselves in the perfect consecration to love. Maybe, in this we could find the reason why some saints had so many difficulties in their lives and works, others less and still others none.

Those who commit themselves to the works of the Lord, but not directly to his love, are very harassed and troubled; this happens so that they may be purified, detached and rest in God alone, so that they may come to love God with that intensity and purity with which they could have loved him from the beginning. On the contrary, those who commit themselves to the direct love of God, not worrying that everything may be lost, that the whole world may collapse, going always directly to God, to his pure love, they have more success in everything they do because the Lord takes their defense.

We should keep this in mind for ourselves and others. Whenever we find a soul occupied in loving God we should not disturb her. When the Lord favors us with a special flame of fervor, we should abandon ourselves in it.

We should concentrate in the love of God choosing the best part. We should utter a prayer that may seem presumptuous: Lord, I want to engage myself to loving even if your defense does not happen in me as in Mary Magdalene, because if this thought would permeate me, I would have reason to fear that my love is not perfect.

As spiritual assignment: Make the renewal of the consecration to the love of God. Before the image of the Sacred Heart, we should consecrate ourselves to Jesus, so that the devil and his emissaries may not deceive us again.

As the devil sees the soul applied to the pure love he excogitates many difficulties in order to attract her attention to other things, even though they may be good, holy and apostolic. The Lord intervenes immediately and the difficulties become victories over difficulties. The promptness with which Satan instigates them and the immediate intervention of God makes us understand how precious, meritorious and saintly is this direct exercise of love.

Prayer: Attract and absorb me in you and in your love, Lord. Suscipe me - take me completely according to this word, according to this spirit of love.

CHAPTER 6

Affective and Effective Love

The sinner has loved much! Her love is affective and effective. Her affective love is like the love of Mary most holy for her Son. The bonds that derive from love are stronger and last much more than any other bond of flesh and blood. The example that Jesus offers us in this sinful woman is a source of encouragement and gives us the ardent desire to love him affectively and intimately, notwithstanding the poverty, or sinfulness of the past. Thank you Jesus for this sign of your immense love, of your predilection for the repented and converted sinner. Following her example everyone can live of pure love, of only love for the Lord.

We need to render a special thank you to the Lord. It is a thanksgiving that loving souls should be used to do. We need to thank him because he deigned to allow us to love him. We thank him even more because he has commanded us to love him.

Now we thank him for this poor converted sinner that he allowed to be part of his public life. We thank the Lord for lifting her up in the esteem and affection of his disciples. Without her example we would not dare to abandon ourselves to so much confidence with the Lord, to such an intimate and personal love. We would have thought that only the Blessed Mother could have lived this life of love, these effusions of love. A life totally spent in the affective exercise of love with the Lord, we would have thought it possible only for the Immaculate Conception.

Such is the entire life of Magdalene! It is all a practice of love, a love that seems totally committed and always occupied in the

most effusive manifestations and effusions of love. In the Gospel we find her always at the feet of Jesus, bathing them with her tears or listening to his divine word. At the feet of the cross we see her again crying. At the feet of the risen Lord she is again on her knees crying and shouting her happiness and kissing if she were allowed. Afterward the tradition shows her to us occupied in the same exercise until death: Prayer, contemplation and exercise of perfect love. We do not see in her any practice of apostolate. All the others, even the pious women, became all apostles. Mary Magdalene has done nothing else but continued to listen to his interior word and to effuse her affection. To those who look only at the superficiality of things, she appears without any fertility of works, and yet it is not quite so!

What is apostolate but a flame of love and a fertility of love? There is no apostolate at all if it is not all flame of love and fertility of love. Where abounds this love abounds also this flame and this fertility. This may or may not be clearly visible since we are in the world of the supernatural and in the effects produced in the soul. It is certain however that if there are supernatural effects they are due to this flame and fertility of love: Only love produces. Wherever there is love there is fertility. Where there is no love there may be a lot of noise, confusion, much external expanse, but there will be no fertility, production of holy works and fruits of goodness. Looking deeper in the activity of Mary Magdalene we should say that her apostolate has been more intense and more productive, proportioned to the love she exercised.

Talking as the world does and from what appears we can say: She has done nothing else except loving the Lord, nor did she think of doing anything else. She does not appear as a penitent, nor does she intend to do penance, even though she is the most penitent converted sinner. She only wants to enjoy her beloved and that is why she withdraws in solitude, she immerses herself in prayer and forgets any bodily need. If her prayer, her high contemplation, if her love spreads light, attracts and elevates, she is

not aware of it; this is not her intention, she only wants to love the Lord. The more we transcend from everything else and concentrate ourselves in God even in loving the souls; the more we glorify the Lord, the more we benefit the souls. She spends her entire life in this exercise of affective love that to many it seems to be unnecessary; they think that effective love is enough! Certainly it is enough, but without affective love, effective love either does not exist, or if it exists, it is not properly nurtured and does not develop normally.

We must make a special act of thanksgiving to the Lord for having given us this example in a sinner, otherwise we would never dare to abandon ourselves to this exercise; we would not think that we could fill our life simply with the practice of affective love for Jesus. Somehow, we would have been right: Only a real saint could have some intimacies, some confidences with God. We may understand them only in Mary, the Immaculate, the full of grace, the Virgin Mother of Jesus. Only in Mary!

Considering all the holiness, election, elevation and the special relation with the Man-God, we easily understand that the Blessed Virgin Mary has the duty and the need to pour out her love and affection for all her life. Could any other person, who is not holy as Mary or united to Jesus with such a relationship, ever be able to allow herself to approach and to love him in this way?

Now everything seems clear and evident to us: without the example of Mary Magdalene, if near the Blessed Mother there were not this other Mary, disgraced, profaned, cursed, but converted and forgiven, we would not dare so much, nor would we have any example that would allow us to abandon our life to all affective love. We thank the Lord therefore for this figure of a converted, pardoned woman, admitted to intimacy with the Lord as his chosen one.

We are right when we think that only those who are saints can

approach Jesus; we would be wrong however to think that we could not become great saints and could not get so close to Jesus, regardless of our past, and of the abyss from which the Lord has pulled us back and given us a new life. As soon as we understand and correspond to the love of Jesus, we are immediately immersed in his holiness and are allowed to abandon ourselves to the affective love.

We are not, nor can we be mothers of Jesus; the mother as the father is only one, so we do not have this kinship that allows us to get close, to unite ourselves to Jesus in that way, yet we would be wrong thinking that this natural bond could be superior to the bond of love between the soul and God. The bond of love is superior to any other bond of flesh and blood.

One day, our Lord said: Who is my mother? Whoever truly loves – even affectively – the Lord, and in this love fulfills God’s will, this is my mother, my brother and my sister (Cf. Mk 3, 35).

Love establishes between Jesus and us such a bond that may be equal and - we do not hesitate to say – superior to any family relationship, when love is great and intense, in spirit and love.

The Blessed Mother remains always ahead of all of us, because in her everything is at the highest possible level. Her love is superior to any other love. The Lord gave us the moving example of this converted sinner, to remind us that every soul that wants to understand and correspond to God’s love is authorized to join Mary Magdalene, at the feet, near the cross where Jesus offers himself, near Jesus in the Eucharist, with Jesus wherever he is. Around Jesus there are many others who do different things. This soul has understood that the desire of Jesus is that the souls that are near him forget everything else and think only to love him. According to Jesus’ desire, the better part consists in the practice of affective love.

Our Lord says: She has loved much. He reveals to us the in-

tense, internal love of Magdalene, and wants to show it to us. How does he show it to us? Through her tears, kisses and perfumes! And, this is love? Does love consist in this? Lord Jesus, are you telling us that if one has no tears, if one does not take time to kiss you, if one does not have these perfumes, does not love you? It is useless to murmur. Around Magdalene everyone murmurs: Pharisees, apostles, relatives, all. It is useless to murmur, since the Lord has pronounced himself: *She has loved much.*

The love of the sinner has been manifested through these external signs; they express what is inside, and only what is inside counts. What is inside needs these external manifestations to be maintained, nourished and to ascend to higher levels. Those who want to extricate love of these external things reduce it to a state of violence that soon becomes agony; they impoverish and weaken it to the point of putting it at risk of seeing it languish, to see it finish completely.

If we had already that charity we would like to have, then we would not be here adding speculations and reflections on this. Since we are not in this state, at this level, we like to see what these tears, these kisses, those aromas that are being pouring out, that alabaster jar that one day breaks mean for us. She falls down at the feet of Jesus to drink his divine word; she sinks at the feet of the cross to cry almost desperately; she does not even care about the vision of angels on the day of resurrection; she insists in wanting to know absolutely where Jesus is, to take and bring him with her, even as cadaver. Grant us, Lord, to fully understand these acts of the repented sinner and to live them in our relation of love with you!

To this repented sinner was given the message: *I ascend to my Father and your Father* (Jn 20, 17). It was Mary Magdalene that first received this message to be transmitted to us. Since we still do not have that intensity of love to immerse ourselves in silence and adoration of love, we will continue to reflect on these things, if

it pleases God to keep us in this banquet; it will help our special preparation to the mystery of the Ascension.

I urge you to renew your consecration to love. Do not waste time searching formulas and theories of consecration. Everyone on his own will offer himself to the Lord as he understands and is able to do opening himself to these manifestations of love. *Suscipe me Domine secundum eloquium tuum - take me Lord according to your word of love*, and then I shall start to live the true life.

CHAPTER 7

Dilating Tears

Infinite love requires a continuous dilatation and this causes crying, crying of joy, crying of love. Fr. Justin sees in these tears of love springs of living water that sparkle eternal life. Love is eternal and likewise tears, expression of pure love, are eternal. Angels and saints pour tears for all eternity, but crying they are not aware of shedding tears and every tear becomes glimmer of light.

Let us focus our attention to this lady who stands at the feet of Jesus not only at the banquet in the house of Simon the Pharisee, but also at Bethany, in the house of Simon the Leper, at the foot of the cross, at the sepulcher on the great day of the resurrection.

She plays an important role in the Gospel and in the words of Jesus. She does not talk, except very few words. Only that phrase that comes out at the death of Lazarus: *Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died* (Jn 11,32); and other phrases said to the angels that appeared at the tomb: *They have taken my Lord, and I do not know where they laid him* (Jn 20, 13); and to the one she thought was the gardener: *Sir, if you carried him away, tell me where you laid him, and I will take him* (Jn 20, 15). In this circumstance in which she plays a major role, she does not talk. She cries, kisses and sheds perfume, thus she expresses, thus she pours her love at the feet of Jesus. Our Lord has seen so many tears, since all those who suffered got close to him, since he has taken upon himself all the sufferings of the entire humanity, since he accumulated in his heart all the tears of mankind.

He who has seen so many tears highlights only the tears of Magdalene, and the divine sympathy comes to the point that the Lord cries - on another occasion to be correct - seeing her weep.

There must be some preciousness, I would say some kind of mystery in the weeping of the soul, otherwise our Lord would not have given so much importance and we could not pray for the gift of tears; if it were any kind of vent, of humor, it would have no value; a secretion of this poor body what value can it have? Indeed, this is the most despicable thing in our body. This is something else!

We could say that when our Lord says: *Truly, I say unto you, rivers of living water will flow from within him*, he intends to talk of the grace of the Holy Spirit, of every spiritual good, but also of these rivers of tears gushing from this human heart. They spring and gush to eternal life, they increase grace's life in the soul, and obtain increase of graces to other souls. What can increase grace is only charity; only charity gets the increase of grace. Charity is inseparably united with grace; only in this light we realize that those tears of love may have been seen, understood and hinted in those words of Jesus: He who drinks of this water will have in himself a spring of waters that will flow for everlasting life.

Not every love produces in us increases of grace. Not every love can be called spring of tears flowing to eternal life. This can be said only of a love that is so intense, so overflowing as to break open the present capacity of the soul and give her a greater dilation. This laceration manifests itself with weeping. Weeping always indicates a sentimental capacity of the soul that was forced to the extreme and was in a certain way torn apart.

This sentimental capacity can be a sentimental capacity of hatred, and we have those who weep for hate they cannot vent or satisfy; it can be a sentimental capacity of self-love, selfishness, and sensuality. The ordinary cause of those who weep is the love

of oneself; sensualistic egoism cannot get the satisfaction wanted and weeps.

When the cause of weeping is the sentiment of love of God stretched to such intensity that can no longer be contained within the soul, then from the will it overflows into feelings; it grows again and then dilates, fills and boosts the feeling to the top and overflows; then we have the weeping that comes from the love of our Lord; this source of supernatural waters that opens in the heart of man gushes into eternal life, excites the weeping of Jesus, and can be silenced only in paradise. *Then the Lord will wipe away every tear from their eyes.*

The Lord God will personally wipe away their tears with his presence, with his gazes, with his hands. All the other forms of weeping do not need this special intervention of our Lord. There is no need for our Lord to personally dry the tears; all other tears have been wiped away by time; time heals every wound, soothes every pain. Old age makes us insensible to so many human things; even if we were to die in our youth, the very reality of facing eternity, the interests of the soul make us forget any other interest. Death wipes away all other tears. In Eternity remains only the weeping of the damned for having lost the Lord forever, and the weeping of the elect; that is why it is said that on the day of universal judgment when our Lord appears, all will weep, reprobates and elect will weep before the infinite good that is God himself. This weeping of love cannot be contained and continuously rips the boundaries to form new, wider, expanded capacities, and we will have a continuous expansion and a breaking of the boundaries of the soul. Precisely - but in the reverse sense - like a cascade, from waterfall to waterfall, *ruptae sunt fontes abissi magnae - all the fountains of the great abyss burst forth, and the floodgates of the sky were opened* (Gn 7, 11); as in the history of the flood, when the fountains of the abyss burst open, the infinite goodness of God became visible; when, this infinite good of God opens and invades the soul, then we have the flood, the cataclysm in the most beautiful sense.

The tears of the elect can be wiped away only by Jesus, but he does not dry them by diminishing the pain. All other tears are wiped away by eliminating their cause; if one cries for the death of a brother or a child, the Lord consoles by bringing back to life the brother or child; if one cries for the loss of material or human things, he will stop crying by getting back what he had lost. The cry that derives from the overflow of love cannot end by possessing the beloved because this love is its spring. Who cries for Jesus' love? The one who starts to see the opening of the sky, and believes to the point of visualizing it. He cannot receive or sustain this vision without giving free flow to his tears.

We believe that he is not aware of crying, because if while weeping he is aware of it, his tears are not tears of love. Tears that dry like every thing else are not tears of love of God. These are not the rivers flowing to eternal life; they are not those sources of tears that glitter at eternal life, that is, for all eternity, lasting for all eternity.

It does not matter if we do not understand how this happens. If it is true, as it is, that God is infinite good and that we will never comprehend him totally, there must be something in eternal life, in paradise, something that is crying but not of the species we know, not in the way we cry now. In paradise there must be a way of crying worthy of the elect, corresponding to the incomprehensibility and infinity of a good that we possess fully and yet never adequately, that offers itself ever more to our love always yearning for it. This good is infinite, and because of its infinity it is not yet possessed, nor can ever be possessed in all its infinity. We enjoy it but not in the sense of adequate comprehension. Throughout eternity the soul will always comprehend and desire it ever more. We weep because our heart becomes a fountain gushing into eternal life.

The expression "to eternal life" for us means that love produces increases of grace in us and in others. "To eternal life" for

us means also that the spring of tears will continue to spring also after death, in the blessed eternity. The wiping out of these tears from the eyes by the hand of Jesus must be understood as a greater freedom, as a greater sweetness of crying.

It seems strange that weeping wipes out weeping! The Lord cannot deprive his elect of what is cause of joy. The Lord takes away from our weeping the painful element connected with the joyous element. In this life, even in our weeping out of love there is something that hurts, that is painful in the sublime sense. The Lord takes away this element of suffering, he removes from our eyes that redness that indicates pain, which is an element of ugliness, but will not close this source, will leave for eternity the spring of tears.

Thus we explain the weeping of the elects on the day of universal judgment; this weeping certainly is not weeping of fear, of dismay, of terror, nor of compassion for the reprobate, it is a totally different thing.

Is it ever possible to have this quasi eternal weeping, given the fact that tears, a natural element of a very limited human body destined to dry up and die? Tears do not represent a normal secretion. (It is strange that in our meditation we indulge on a physiologic study, but everything must contribute to the service of God). The normal, periodic secretions go through their process of formation, evacuation and ending, only to restart over and over ... Tears are not normal, do not represent a normal secretion; we do not cry every so many hours, or continuously for so many hours, as we need to eat, to sleep etc. Crying does not represent a periodic, normal secretion, but an excess of feelings. Since we are made of body and soul, whenever we have this excessive emotion, we have this physical manifestation of weeping.

It is said that some mystical phenomena (rapture, ecstasies) usually happen at the beginning of the elevation of the soul to this extraordinary supernatural status. As the soul progresses in

this state she becomes trained and gets used to it. She becomes temperate to a greater fortress; the soul no longer gives in to that impetus, in the sense that she does not succumb to it. At first, the body succumbed to that impetus, to those forms of fainting, of acute sufferings. Saint Philip Neri, surprised in public by rapture, said, *Whoever desires these things does not understand what he asks*. I think he wants to say that those things are so painful that are not desirable by anyone who understands. Some writers say that in time the physique becomes accustomed or strengthened, so that it does not succumb to these impetuses.

This can be said of those forms of fainting and of rapture, but it cannot be said of weeping. This weeping should be perennial for the soul that really loves the Lord with all her heart, with all her strength, with all her being. It could cease, or better could come to a stop, only when the soul must attend to other things, like administration. (Saint John Chrysostom says: we should embrace all the nuances of vigilance, and even the burden of administration, in order to be of help to the little ones). As administration we intend all that is most annoying and oppressive: the temporal administration of material goods.

While we attend to all these things the soul cannot concentrate on the love of God; out of necessity at that moment, this love calms its impetus and slows down its intensity; then there is no ripping in the inner boundaries, no overflowing of these waves that would flow into the soul if she was directly concentrated on the love of God. Then we will have this interruption in weeping, but as soon as the soul comes to her place with Mary Magdalene at the feet of the Master, again she experiences this fullness of affection that overflows, and again that affection finds a way out ripping the boundaries; the soul starts crying again at Jesus' feet. These tears are actually the most beautiful spectacle in the eyes of Jesus, most pleasant harmony to the heart of Jesus.

We can say that the flowing water, the gushing spring and

the river landing in the ocean is the most beautiful spectacle, is the most enchanting, mysterious and poetic happening in nature. Likewise in the life of the soul this love filled with such intensity and such impetus to continually break down these interior dams, is the most beautiful spectacle anyone can imagine, not for tears in themselves, but for this vehemence of love, for this impetus of love.

Please, notice that calm love does not exist; there is *no very calm, very serene love*. If we deprive love of this element of impetus, vehemence, and rapture, we take away from love its flower, its uppermost, its best. In human love it can happen that from far away two friends can love each other with impetus, they dream of who knows what ... then when they are close ... friendship continues but in a calm form. Two others love each other so impetuously that they become one. Once they reached their objective, after a few days the vehemence ends, the impetus of love; they may maintain a lasting friendship throughout this life ... in the best of hypotheses, but generally it does not last; love is seeking a vehement and impetuous love; only the Lord can be so dearly loved, because only the Lord, once reached and possessed, continues to offer new heights that we can reach and possess. This is the source of tears. In the love of God we cannot conceive this calm, this serenity; should we notice this element, we may well say: there is some kind of lukewarmness. The ecstasies and raptures may end may come to an end because ecstasies and raptures can end because the body gets used to it, gets hardened, but weeping cannot end, as it is true that we can never get to possess God adequately.

Only the Father does not weep while loving and possessing the Son, because he loves and possesses him adequately; only the Son does not weep loving and possessing the Father because he loves and possesses him adequately; this adequate love and possession is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is an infinite fire.

Could we say that the fire with its flames is a form of weeping? Any other creature, man or angel (... Who knows how the angels

cry? Will their cry have the form of sparkling fire? The sparkling of the angelic light is the weeping of the angels; maybe it will be so also for us the weeping in heaven. Now we cry shedding tears, there we will weep sparkling light. We thank the Lord for this enlightening: our weeping in heaven will be like the weeping of the angels,)... every other creature in loving his God can never reach that state of serenity, of calm that we reach when there is nothing else to say, to understand, to do, when we can rest in possessing and enjoying the good we have achieved.

I have taken my exams, I have received my Ph. D., I have nothing else to do, nothing else to achieve. Oh! What a problem, the end of youth! My friend is limited, he has no more secrets to share with me, he has no other sweetness to offer, Oh, what a problem this human heart that arrives at a point that it has nothing more to say, to give...

No problem, my soul! You are not made to achieve that result, nor for that human heart, but for the Lord. If there were to be a day in which the Lord had nothing else to tell or give me, it would be the end of the universe; this day will never arrive. Throughout eternity, this ardor without burning thirst this vehemence without disturbance will not diminish, and therefore this weeping will assume other forms but will never cease.

We will keep imploring one by one all the angels and saints of heaven during these Rogation days¹, begging the perfection of love.

¹ **Rogation days** are days of prayer and fasting in Western Christianity. They are observed with processions and the Litany of the Saints. The so-called *major* rogation is held on 25 April; the *minor* rogations are held from Monday to Wednesday preceding Ascension Thursday. The word *rogation* comes from the Latin verb *rogare*, meaning "to ask", which reflects the beseeching of God for the appeasement of his anger and for protection from calamities.

The faithfuls typically observed the rogation days by fasting and ab-

As prayer, we will make ours that of the Samaritan that St. Theresa made hers for long time: *Lord, give me this water to drink.*

I would love to know why Mary Magdalene weeps and remains silent, spreads perfumes and remains silent. Even this is a mystery, but a mystery of which we may get some ideas, because she cries in silence, and kisses in silence. Usually when we cry for other reasons we vent with words. Dante wrote: *you will see me crying and talking at the same time, words and tears, words and offering of perfumes; but here we are before a person that does not talk: she weeps, kisses, perfumes, but in silence.*

stinence in preparation to celebrate the Ascension, and farmers often had their crops blessed by a priest at this time.

The reform of the Liturgical Calendar for Latin Roman Catholics in 1969 delegated the establishment of Rogation Days, along with Ember Days, to the episcopal conferences. Their observance in the Latin Church subsequently declined, but the observance has revived somewhat since 1988 (when Pope John Paul II issued his decree *Ecclesia Dei Adflicta*) and especially since 2007 (when Pope Benedict XVI issued his *motu proprio* called *Summorum Pontificum*) when the use of older rites was encouraged.

CHAPTER 8

Weeping and Kissing

The soul that loves the Lord can never love or receive him adequately because he is infinite, for this the soul must continuously dilate, breakup and grow. Love is received and given through the eyes and the lips, through tears and kisses. We should ask the gift of tears that are spring of living water and sparkling of light, the tears that express the joy of possessing the beloved and the desire of possessing him ever more. What we say of tears we can also say of kisses, expression of the interior consecration. Blessed Justin invites us to reserve the kiss only for the Lord.¹ Likewise we reserve for the Lord also the absolute superlative.

We have mentioned the silence of Mary Magdalene. Now we talk about the reasons of this silence, which have not been given yet. We would like to indulge at length at this font of tears to convince ourselves of its perennial flow, whenever we are truly concentrated on the Lord.

If it were the case of human motivation, tears could not be perennial, but in case of a motivation that is on the part of God, tears cannot cease. When the soul is before the offense to God rendered by her own sins, she understands that it is an infinite offense. As hell cannot end because it is the punishment of this sin in the soul for all eternity, so time cannot cease the weeping of sincere contrition of perfect love in the elect that has offended the Lord. This weeping is essentially manifestation of love that

¹ Russolillo, Ascension, Vocationist Ed. Newark NJ 1997, art. 344

grows and nurtures the soul's happiness; it originates from the consideration and motivation of God, infinitely offended by the sin of the creature. Precisely because she has offended God, the soul cannot cease to shed tears with intensity of love, with elation of love, exactly for this love.

Our Lord manifested well the gravity of the offense received in his humanity. The wounds of the hands and feet, the wound of his heart will remain open for all eternity; and they will tell us a lot! First of all they tell us God's love for us, and then the infinite offense we rendered to God.

In the day of eternity the souls will be telling him: *What are these wounds in your hands?* He shall answer: *Thus I have been pierced in the house of those I loved* (Cf. Zc.12, 10).

This font of tears opened by contrition spurts from a principle of human reason, and from a principle of divine reason. It seems that from the human angle this can end; as matter of fact it will end. It is written: *The Lord will wipe away the tears of his elect* in as much as they derive from human element: *quoniam priora transierunt – because the things of the past have passed away*. They are gone forever!

In view of eternity, the things of the past are temporal things that are no more, but eternal things remain. Tears shall be wiped as far as their motivation and their human element. The tears that gush forth in the contemplation of God's beauty, for reasons of gratitude cannot be contained. The tears that gush forth before the vision of God's life for reasons of empathy cannot be contained, the same can be said for any other divine perfection, or for any other aspect of divine union or of divine relation to which the soul is called, and in which she is confirmed; these tears cannot be contained and will rest for all eternity.

The same is said of kisses. Notice how true it is that the soul can only be given and received through these two ways, that is,

through the eyes and the lips. Saying “lips” we intend our faculty to express ourselves with words. We do not say by way of mouth. We use our mouth mostly to eat and to breathe. We say “lips” because they are very much needed to pronounce our words. Words are not our only way to communicate, but they are the main way through which we express our soul. We can say that through the eyes we give ourselves and receive others, through our lips we can only express and give what is in us.

Eyes and words are the two ways through which we can give and receive the soul; this is said in general of the eyes and the lips. If we want to go deeper, if we want to see more deeply we must say that the eyes give only through tears and the lips give only through kisses.

The gaze of affection expresses this loving disposition of the soul, but it cannot be said properly that it gives the soul. When one looks at me tenderly, I understand he loves me. I cannot understand anything else from his gaze. If a person cries before me, out of pure tenderness of affection, then it is as if he wanted to pull out the soul from my eyes and pour her into my heart. And much more the kiss! It is not a mere union of body to another, almost to receive more or less pleasing, dangerous, sinful feelings when it comes to human beings!

May the thought of Jesus, the very word of this adorable name, cleanse from the sky of the soul all the human clouds, vaporized by the ill-energized senses, as we talk about these things! Otherwise we must do as our Father Faber did. This morning we ask the Heart of Mary to make us understand these things; in the morning we are doing the month of divine love, that is, of the Heart of Jesus and in the evening we make that of Our Lady, combining June and May, and we thank the Lord who unites the palpitations of the Heart of Jesus and Mary with those of the soul he loves, and this soul should be the one who listens and who speaks. Fr. Faber preaching in London the novena of the Immaculate Heart

of Mary kept talking very high in the language of holy love, and he became aware or heard that while he was talking of the love of God and of the Blessed Mother, of the relationship of soul-spouse of God ... the listeners were lost in profane fantasies, irreverent thoughts and applications, on the third or fourth day he said: I remembered the evangelical precept *do not throw your pearls before swine* (Mt 7, 6); and he refused to continue preaching the novena of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

This cannot happen to our small audience, as it is made up of daily communicants. It is not an easy audience to find, and I thank the Lord for speaking to these souls, both of the religious communities and of the Christian parish community. It is an enviable audience! All the saints who spoke to souls would envy me for it. It does not matter that many times they receive the Lord coldly, and then are in a hurry to recite fifty Hail Mary and then sing certain songs in a certain popular way; the fact is this, all in all, they are in high spiritual level, even while dragging behind a pretty rough load of defects! They receive Jesus Christ, and therefore the **Song of Songs** must also take place before them and in them.

The Song of Songs starts with a word, a longing, a thought that contains all the spirit of this poem of sacred love: *Let him kiss me with kisses of his mouth* (Sg 1, 2). With these words the soul invokes the saints, angels and sister-souls to obtain for her this yearning, this longing that the Lord may kiss her. We are not really worthy to talk of these things!

Through the eyes the soul offers herself with tears and kisses; this explains why this soul remains at the feet of Jesus weeping and kissing. Mary Magdalene always chooses the same place whenever she encounters the Lord, in other people's house as well as in hers, at the foot of the cross and she would have loved to do it even on the day of the resurrection.

Our Lord allows her to take always that place, except on the

day of the resurrection, when he has to send an urgent message of reconciliation, a word of love to his apostles, saddened, demoralized and for other reasons that we may consider later, if we get to it.

So, the soul offers herself through this kiss.

The tears tell us that the soul is filled in such a way that cannot contain any more the fullness of love and rips, but this ripping gives her a greater capacity, expands the previous boundaries and in that expansion the soul becomes aware that she can give herself more to the Lord; she senses that she is somehow more than what she was and feels that also this new dilation must be offered to the Lord, and here comes the kiss.

The kiss is the most simple, sincere and warm manner of consecration to the Lord. We believe that in order to consecrate ourselves to the Lord we need so much preparations and ceremonies, in reality, the most simple consecration, the most similar to the acts of Mary, to the acts of the Incarnate Word is the kiss. It is clear, this applies to those who reserve the kiss only for the Lord. The person who kisses here and there, the one she should have, or shouldn't have kissed should have the ears plugged! He is not worthy to listen or sing the song of love. May he fall asleep, may he rest under a tomb, under a blanket, tomb and blanket of his sins. Those who kiss only the Lord and his images understand this. If it is good to kiss also the images of the saints, it is so only because in them we see the Lord.

Those who have understood the practice of reserving only for the Lord some words, acts etc., like the absolute superlatives and the place of honor, more than anything else reserve the kiss. We can talk to the soul that reserves the kiss exclusively for the Lord, because this soul understands that the kiss is the simplest and most effective act of consecration, I would even dare to say, the most like the act of God breathing love. The soul, aware of her

greater capacity, of her elevation, more capable of loving, rich of life, of the very life of God, feels the need of donating herself again and again. If the soul has expanded and become more capable, greater and more alive, becomes capable of receiving more the Lord, because she can comprehend and contain more, as far as I can use this word with God. Behold, the kiss! Behold this soul that does not cease to weep and kiss, that is, giving herself to the Lord and receiving him.

Let him kiss me with kisses of his mouth.

Jesus comprehends well all this in his heart and makes of it a great praise: *She has loved much*. Gracious mercy of God! How can one say that Magdalene has loved much? When can anyone love the Lord enough? Jesus does not simply say that it is enough but that is much: *She has loved much*. What can ever be too much for the Lord? What can be much for the infinite desire of God to be corresponded? What can be much for his infinite merit to be loved? We understand those words of the most enviable epitaph: *Amavit Deus Comgylum; bene et ipse Dominum - God loved Comgylum; and he too loved the Lord heartily*; this seems to be a great thing, and yet the Lord says: *She loved much!*

Only God can be enough for God. As so it is in this case as always! In the person that loves there is the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God is already in this soul that weeps and kisses. *Charitas Dei diffusa est in cordibus nostris per Spiritum Sanctum qui datus est nobis - the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us* (Rm 5, 5). This Spirit groans ineffably in the depth of the soul, and here is the perpetual crying, perennial expression of this groan of this interior Dove. The Holy Spirit continually embraces the Father and the Son from whom he proceeds, of whom is love; and here is the kiss. The presence of this divine Spirit in the loving heart that authorizes – so to speak – Jesus to say: *She has much loved*. And then we turn to the Holy Spirit, because it's not just crying with your eyes, nor just joining

your lips to a beautiful image of Jesus crucified. Weeping is difficult for us but kissing is very easy; because kissing is very easy it has no value; because it is lavished everywhere, it becomes the most ordinary thing. Here, it is a question of this Spirit of love that will make us truly rivers of love, which today manifests itself in this effusion of tears, and tomorrow in sparkling of light in the blessed eternity.

Providentially during these days we read the Gospel of the great promise. Today we call great promise, that of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, that of final perseverance connected with the practice of the first Friday of nine months consecutively and that is fine.

Our self-love, our egoism compels us to consider greatest and best whatever offers us security; this too is fine, and we say it without irony. But the great promise made by Jesus is that of the Holy Spirit: *How much more will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him* (Lk 11, 13). This is the first time that Jesus promises him. He promises him again in a solemn way after the last Supper.

In the Litanies of the Rogation days we will be imploring all the angels and saints for the gift of the Holy Spirit that he may be the spirit of our love, so that we too may deserve that praise, and live in the reality of much love.

Our Lord must be able to say of us: *He/she has loved much.*

CHAPTER 9

Anointing with Ointment

At the feet of Jesus the sinful woman continues to weep and spread this precious aroma filling the house with its fragrance. Precious vases and special perfumes constituted the wealth of the Orientals. The sinner brings to Jesus the most beautiful and the most precious thing she had. She leaves her house, departs from her home, from her habits, and bringing only this essence of perfume she approaches the Lord of the universe. Beginning with the consideration of the work necessary to extract the essence from flowers, barks or animal fluids, Blessed Justin passes to the spiritual work that is needed to extract from every action or event the spiritual essence. He then concludes: "It is a work that is either done with the heart or is not done ... The essence of holiness is obtained from all things in the crucible of the heart, in this lab of the heart, by this artist of our heart".

Behold a woman anointed his feet with the ointment.

Now comes something for us. The things we have spoken about and meditated before arrive to our soul. What we meditate now should touch us more sensibly. The tears of this pious woman bathe Jesus' feet and they place us in a serious mood. When we see others crying, even if we do not cry with them, we feel more serious. Even the smallest level of human sympathy, even what we feel for a stranger, simply because he is one like us, makes us feel a sense of pain when we see others crying. We are not ready and willing to echo any other weeping, no other tears excite human sympathy in the sense of affective correspondence, as the crying of fervor, and of devotion. The only problem is that we do not see this weeping easily.

We see many people cry for insignificant things, at least so they appear to us, but we are not in the same conditions. We do not see often one who cries for the Lord and does not want to be consoled by anyone because his weeping can last for all eternity in another form. Anyway, these tears never move us as to produce the feeling that causes them, and much less the kiss. Kisses go to the persons that receive them, but those who see others kissing may experience certain feelings that may vary from one extreme to another; it may cause feelings going from disgust to dangerous sensible excitement. In the kiss we see less than what we see in tears, and this seems clear in this life. In the tears we see something greater; we see the feeling of pain and we understand suffering better. In the kiss predominates more the elements of enjoyment and of love, and we do not understand deeply the sense of joy and of love. Now, however, a great scent invades the whole house. Perfumes seem directed more to the person of others than to the person who spreads them. The feet of Jesus do not absorb this scent; the perfume spreads throughout the house. In the other Gospel passage in which this scene is repeated, the Evangelist expressly notes: The whole house was filled with perfumes. Different people see different things in these waves of fragrance. Everyone in the house is inebriated by this scent. Among the sensitive feelings perhaps that of the smell is the second. The first sensitive feeling is taste, then smell, then hearing, then vision.

What about the sense of touch? We do not know where to place it, since touch is spread throughout the body and lends itself to so many kinds of sensations. In this sensation excited by the scent, the ideas also light up, and therefore one person thinks of one thing, and another something else. I say this thinking of all those who have meditated on this passage of the gospel and have made some reflections. In conclusion, what is this fragrant essence, this essence of smell for us?

In tears, weeping and kisses we see the effusion of the soul, directly and immediately in this love, in this exercise of love. In

this fragrant essence we see the entire interior world. The soul is in the world, she is the head of the world, and has to use many and many created things; which way should she take?

If we are to talk to children's catechism classes, or to sinners who have converted we say: Man has been created to know and love the Lord; all things are offered to help him reach that goal; he must use them as much as they help him reach the goal. This meditation is sufficient and fundamental not only for St. Ignatius, but also for all those who want to use the reason that God has given them. The only light of reason could be sufficient, without mentioning anything about the light of reason enlightened by faith, to understand that we must use all created things and people, angels, saints and even the Blessed Mother, in as much as they can help us to know the Lord. If a creature helps us in this, we use it, if it does not help us, we cannot use it. If the creature helps us a lot, we use it a lot; if it helps us little, we use it little and so on, in this relation and proportion. So we explain it to the beginners.

We are also at the beginning, but the beginning of something else. Thanks to the goodness of the Lord, we are not at the beginning of our faith, nor at the beginning of conversion, but at the beginning of something else, of a new level, a new union with the Lord. To us we can say: All things are given to us so that we may get their essence. Certainly in all things there must be an essence that the soul must know, collect and offer as a tribute of love to the Lord as the perfume of Magdalene. You know what it takes to extract this fragrant essence. It takes art first of all. A special art is needed to extricate the essence of perfume from everything. We think of the flowers, the barks of some trees, or the liquids of some animals when we talk of perfumed essence. Everything in the natural world, and much more in the supernatural order contains an essence worthy to be offered to the Lord and capable of perfuming the humanity of Christ and the all paradise. The soul

must be able to extract from all things this aromatic essence to be used in her relation of love with the Lord.

In reality we can say that all men are masters in extracting the essence of things. Every man from all that he does, knows and possesses tries to get the essence of pleasure, usefulness, and advantage. But we are talking about souls that are at the beginning of a divine union, and these souls actually are trying to gather not the essence of pleasure and usefulness, but the essence of the supernatural perfume we can offer to the Lord. All created things have no other purpose; they do not serve for anything else.

When this created thing, this created being is totally spiritual it is all essence; the work of extraction of essence has already been done by the creating act itself. For example, the angels are all spiritual essence; in them there is no need whatsoever to work in order to abstract the spiritual perfume; we can say the same, and much more so, of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The saints had to do a lot of work, had to go through many transformations before being presented to the Lord in the essence of their love. Now they are in heaven, all the work of purification and extraction of essence has been done; they are balsamic fragrance, as we repeat in the Easter antiphons of all saints and especially of martyrs: *Sicut odor balsami erunt ante te - they will be like balsamic odor before you.*

If we bring our flowers to the altar, we bring them because they represent the essence of beauty and for the essence of perfume they emit. We do not bring other things to the altar; all things could be brought to the altar because the lord has created them and all of them have an importance. We know that the Lord expects the best from man, the great administrator of the great factory of humanity; for this reason we search the best, what represents for us the most pleasing essence for our hearing, vision, sense of smell, for every sense and we bring it to the Lord. Essence of beauty in the flowers, essence of perfume in the incense etc.!

The angels, saints, the Blessed Mother and the humanity of Jesus express all the essence of the most pleasing fragrance. From all the material things that surround us we must extract the essence. They represent a great danger for us. They distract us from concentrating on the Lord, they distract us continually from the occupation of divine love, they distract us from our interior vocation and they distance us from the straight way of love. This happens because we seek in them other essences, the essence of our pleasure, of our advantage. When a soul starts to seek in everything the essence of holiness, of mortification, of adoration, an all-spiritual essence to offer to the Lord, to reverse on the humanity of Jesus, then we can go through the jungle of inferior creatures without being distracted from the Lord. This should be our occupation in all the exercises of active life if we do not want to be distracted, and, even better, find help for the exercises of our contemplative life.

As we concern ourselves or work with other things, we do so only to extract from them all the essence to collect in the alabaster vase of our heart and of our soul and offer it to the Lord every time we go to him and to his banquet, until the last day of the banquet that is this present life; when the alabaster will be broken and our own essence will come out and will inundate the heavens in the presence of the Lord, we will be like balsamic fragrance with the angels, the saints and the Blessed Mother.

The way of extracting from everything, from every encounter, from every relationship, from every creature this essence of holiness varies, but always will end up with a practice of abnegation. This mortification, this abnegation will be practiced at different levels according to the grace and capacity of the soul, the way is always the same: Some practice of abnegation. In every use of creatures, in every human relationship there must be the spiritual activity of abnegation and mortification.

Consider the harmony of things; while it seems that in this way

we deprive ourselves of creatures and persons, in reality we come to make ours the best that is in the creatures, persons, and things because we get the essence of holiness. Everything else is rubbish, and so all stuff to be eliminated. This is the exercise of mortification and abnegation; this purifying, selecting, eliminating all that is rubbish, all is a bark from which we extract the essence. This same essence is to be filtered into the highest degrees of abnegation and passive purification, and therefore becomes ever more pure, sharp, unpredictable.

The practice of universal abnegation and mortification is indispensable for those who want to start their journey to the divine union, for those who want to get closer and be united with Jesus Christ. Notice again, that Mary Magdalene first takes this vase of alabaster with the aromatic essence, and afterwards starts going towards Jesus. She leaves her house, goes out of her habitation, abandons her habits... bringing only this vase of perfume and then goes to Jesus. Out of all created things, she brings with herself only this essence of holiness extracted with renunciation and abnegation; she reaches the humanity of Jesus and opens up to a new capacity and effuses all her being in tears and kisses; this only after the offering of this essence of holiness collected from all things!

If we do not do first the constant and patient work of extraction of the essence of holiness from everything, and do not collect this supernatural product in the alabaster of our heart and soul, if this does not take place first, we will not be able to effuse our soul in those tears and kisses.

Now let us be clear; let us make sure to understand well; who does this work of extraction of the essence of holiness? It is a work done neither in the stomach nor in the brain. It is a work done in the heart, or is not done at all. The heart is this intimate laboratory, this crucible. Likewise the practice of abnegation and mortification either is done in our heart, or it is not done at all. It is

impossible to be mortified in our eyes, sense of touch, or in any other part of the body if we are not mortified in the heart; if this were possible it would be useless anyway. It is useless to mortify eyes, touch, taste etc... if the heart is not mortified.

The artist of our heart obtains this essence of holiness from all things in the crucible of the heart, in this lab of the heart. As in our physical life our heart has the function of gathering and purifying the blood and then pumping it - and in the blood there is physical life - so in our spiritual supernatural life our heart, our ability to love has the function of collecting from all things the essence of holiness that is in our body and throughout the church, which is the mystical body of Christ.

Now, in this present life, we effuse this aroma at the feet of Jesus. When we will be in paradise we will spread it on his head. So, let us always remind our soul of the necessity of this abnegation and mortification, abnegation and mortification of the heart. Those who want to please their heart in its sensible satisfaction will never know anything of the divine union with Jesus. The day will come when this heart will cease to palpitate because it is tired, and probably before the appointed time poisoned and aged by sensitive emotions. Dead before its time!

The human heart that searched in everything the essence of pleasure, of egotistical pleasure, will be the most putrid thing we can think of. If the heart has been totally recollected, completely concentrated on Jesus, if it has extracted from every thing all the essence of holiness, it will go on living for all eternity, it must live in eternity. Once again we pause to seek this grace through the intercession of the angels and saints during the Rogation days.

We keep repeating that jubilant prayer of love: "Suscipe me Domine - Take me, Lord". The soul begins to hear and yearn: "Take me with you, Lord, in the mystery of your divine ascension. Attract me to you; take me with you, Lord. Even if you let me live

longer on this earth, if you deem that there is something more for me to do or to reap, please, take with you my heart, (When we say "heart" we intend the soul in her most beautiful and most precious faculty of loving. Take it with you, Lord).

Take us with you!

Only following him, only elevating ourselves above our own self and above the world, we will be able to extract the essence of holiness from all created things.

CHAPTER 10

Your sins are forgiven

With very few words Jesus makes us understand the depth and the totality of the sinner's conversion. The Lord could have said much more, but he says what others can and must know about her, the rest remains hidden in the mystery of love. Because all her sins have been pardoned as recompense of her great love, the Lord gives to this repented, converted and sanctified sinner the very special vocation of announcing to the apostles the resurrection and ascension! Sublime vocation given gratuitously and freely by God to whomever he wishes!

I tell you her many sins have been forgiven.

Simon had raised that difficulty because he was aware of the fact that the behavior of that woman was not at all edifying. The Lord revealed to those who were present and to the future generations that all her sins had been forgiven. Saying: less is forgiven to those who love less, he makes us understand that with the forgiveness of her sins, she was pardoned also the penalty due to them. We know that when love is intense, it places the soul in the state of grace and extinguishes totally or partially the debt of pain. The love of this soul was truly intense as made evident by its manifestation and by the words of Jesus: *She has loved much!* Our soul is not totally satisfied because we would expect the Lord to say more to this soul, not simply: *Your sins are forgiven*; we would have expected some expression of friendship, of intimacy, that she be given some mission that would distinguish her from among all others, in proportion of this love.

Jesus praised her as no other person had been praised. Her

praise can only be compared to the greeting of the angel to the Blessed Mother: *Full of grace*. We could say that if the Virgin Mary had not corresponded to the fullness of grace with an incomparable intensity of love, *She has loved much* would mean more than *Full of grace*. I say this because in being full of grace there is the direct action of God, in *She has loved much* there is also the action of the creature: God fills with grace; the creature loves much.

We are well aware that in Mary there is no grace that is not transformed in love.

Many times, on account of our negligence grace remains lethargic, at the stage of potential. The Blessed Mother always corresponds to the fullness of grace with the fullness of love, both in potency and in act. After this, we would expect something else, but Jesus simply states: *Her sins are forgiven*. We understand well that in this forgiveness there is also the remission of the pain, and yet we would expect something more. In reality there is more, but it is not said.

What did those who saw her really know about her? They knew that she was a sinner. What should they know now? They should know that her sins have been forgiven and that is enough.

Souls have not been created to be displayed to the eyes of people. What happens in the soul does not happen just to be seen. The Lord reveals of that soul what is sufficient to correct people's negative image that had justly been formed of her; the Lord does not say more; he says the rest to her through light and interior word, and only to her.

What the Lord says externally is a great thing. He is stating that there is no impediment that keeps her from throwing herself in God's arms, and nothing holds the Lord from pouring on her the divine treasures.

Her soul is perfectly prepared to receive all spiritual treasures,

and the most intimate divine union. Her soul already fully enjoys all the fruits of redemption. The Holy Spirit had descended in her soul before Pentecost Sunday; the Blessed Trinity was already indwelling in her. She has started a new life made entirely of holiness and ascensions to higher holiness. All this is implicitly revealed in: *She has loved much.*

What keeps us from entering in union with God? There is always something sinful in the middle of the road. If there were nothing sinful the Holy Spirit would complete in us his work, which consists in uniting us perfectly with the Blessed Trinity. There is always an impediment of sin, a debt of pain, which is also an impediment, as it appears evident in purgatory. We should seriously keep in mind this principle.

There is always some fault that impedes us from enjoying the fruits of redemption, salvation, and perfect union with the Lord.

Any weakness in our intellect, any lukewarmness in our will, any unhappiness that afflicts our inner being, any indifference that we suffer toward the Lord, all that is sad, every element that is not light and peace says that there is some fault in us as such or any residue of fault. All this means that we do not really love the Lord, we do not deserve this praise, we are far from hearing those words!

We have already seen how forgiveness comes first from the part of God –as offering – and how the love of this soul comes first. The same applies to us. Even for us this offering of grace, redemption and sanctification comes first, and this should excite in us the intensity of love, this “much love”. As a consequence of this love we come to be truly purified from any sin, from any effect of sin, from any debt of sin, and we are prepared to enter into divine union. We do not deserve yet the praise *has loved much!* This is what the Lord reveals of that soul in this present situation. Later, in the house of Simon the Leper he makes a great revela-

tion of her. In that banquet in which she takes part, she occupies the same place, but she behaves as animated by a prophetic spirit. There, she ends up by breaking the alabaster vase apparently to splash - to the last drop - that perfume on the head of Jesus, but in reality she wants to indicate the breaking of her heart for the imminent passion. The Lord is speaking now clearly, making everyone understand the upcoming, imminent event.

The breaking of that alabaster indicates the breaking of Jesus' humanity! In that occasion our Lord says things that reveal more the love of Mary Magdalene; some other time we will meditate on this. Now I want to focus and remind the message that Jesus sends us through Mary Magdalene. Through her our Lord sends to the apostles the message: *I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and to your God* (Jn 20, 17). There were also other pious women, who had the privilege of seeing the Risen Lord, yet Mary Magdalene is chosen to convey this glorious message, this first mission from the part of Jesus in the mystery of his glory. We may think that the Lord should have entrusted this task to Peter; but vocation is a mystery and reserved to God alone. There is a canonical vocation for the priesthood, but every other vocation is reserved exclusively to God, in the sense that he chooses the messengers he wants.

It is a fact that the Lord sends this vocation in the most perfect and supreme form through Mary Magdalene: *go and tell my brothers: I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God* accentuating very clearly: *Tell them to follow me.*

What does this ministry of Magdalene mean?

Certainly it is not a casual combination, nothing happens by mere combination when we talk about the effectiveness of the word of God. Not even in our conduct happens something at random, in the sense that it is not God's will, disposition or permission; much more so in the action and in the direct words of God.

I see it this way: Magdalene's soul with her disposition of love

(and of that love!) and in that way, she is most apt to follow Jesus in his ascension; she is the most indicated to transmit that vocation; she is the one who climbs the most and the one who most attracts others to God. She should carry that message, so that those who receive it may understand that they must follow the Teacher as she followed him, they must occupy her place near Jesus. In reality only love elevates, and only the one who loves ascends; it is clear, we intend those who love Jesus. *I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God!* Only by loving me you can come after me to your God and to your Father.

Let us join these pious women, Mary Magdalene and the Blessed Mother. The Virgin Mary is totally absorbed at such height, in total silence that escapes our imagination, and much more our imitation. She is the Mother of all graces, and if the Lord calls and sends another Mary, more accessible to us, through this second Mary there is always the first.

Now the Lord presents to us the example of this other Mary, example of this exercise of such a direct, personal, effused and heartfelt love. We gather in the cenacle of love near these hearts that love Jesus and think of that praise: *She has loved much*. As our short prayer: *O my Lord, I want to love you wholeheartedly, I want to deserve your praise: "you have loved much". This is possible only if you send your Spirit.*

Mary Magdalene was in a favorable condition she had Jesus present. Many others had Jesus present and did not love him in the same way. In reality only the souls of good will were in a favorable condition. Good dispositions are in us, not outside of us; for this, at times, their absence may be more helpful than their presence, he himself hinted this. The mission of the Holy Spirit, object of the greatest promise, made by the Lord, is much more helpful.

King of glory ascending into heaven do not leave us orphans, send to us the Holy Spirit you promised!

CHAPTER 11

Your Faith has saved You

Jesus' words to the sinner: "Her sins are forgiven, she has loved much, your faith has saved you, go in peace" are a veil that hides and makes us only catch a glimpse of the intimacy of the love relationship between this soul and Jesus. Concerning human things we always try to say the most we can in order to appear more glamorous; in spiritual matters we always say the minimum; the most profound, the most precious remains always hidden in the mystery of love.

Your faith has saved you: go in peace

She has loved much are words of praise that can be compared only to the others: *Full of grace*; after them we would have expected something more than: *Her sins are forgiven*, and after these we would have expected another goodbye, rather than the simple: *Go in peace*. Our surprise grows for the fact that now Jesus attributes the salvation of that soul to her faith. Jesus first said that her sins were forgiven because she had loved much, now says: *Your faith has saved you*. We would have expected: your love has saved, because we know that love saves, and that when love is really perfect obtains for us forgiveness of sins even before going to confession. Love of God is font of every other merit, is the soul of all virtues, and without it everything is dead. We say, however, this is said about the external and what is external is always a minor element. The more and better is inside.

What can be said to others is always the minimum; the more and the better remain inside and cannot be said. At least, it is so

in spiritual things. In material things, the more and the better is displayed as we keep propagating and bragging about it, while reality will be, and - no doubt - is much flimsier. We love to appear more than we are, and to show of knowing more than we know.

Let us leave aside all this world of lies that demeans the ordinary personal and social life, all that happens in the world of faults and sins. We are at the banquet of divine love, in the presence of the Incarnate Word, that is, the divine Teacher and of a soul that corresponds to his love. What Jesus says of this soul to others is the minimum: *Your sins are forgiven, your faith has saved you*; the more and the better is what happens internally between Jesus and that soul. Jesus' way of talking is veiled; we have repeated it many times! Whenever and wherever there is Jesus there is the mystery.

Who is the Lord Jesus? He is the Incarnate Word of God, that is, veiled with humanity, and our Lord always talks ingeniously. We need to pass through the veil of the humanity and arrive at the divinity, go through the veil of words and arrive at the Word. Jesus says: *She has loved much*; in this phrase there is one word missing, a short and yet very big word. Her sins are forgiven because she has loved much: "Me" is missing! She has loved me much! That "me" must be there, Jesus doesn't say it; he veils it. The bystanders may or may not think, but that soul prostrated to the ground weeping, kissing and perfuming understands very well this declaration of Jesus.

She declares her love weeping, kissing and perfuming in such a humble manner, so silent, all tears and humility. Our Lord declares his love with very silent and vibrating words; if he leaves to our imagination the most important part, he lets us see it through a very transparent veil. When Jesus says *her sins are forgiven*, Magdalene hears correctly: *your sins are forgiven*. He expresses the minimum, the more and better remains within.

Of some prayers we say that they should not be prayers but only resolutions of the soul. Of some formulas we say that the soul should say them only to herself, or at most, to others. Concerning sin, for example, it is a shame to say to God: *My Lord, I do not want to sin*. I can say to myself: *Death, but no sins* with St. Dominic Savio; I can say it to the confessor, but to say it to others and to God is a shame, because we all know what it really means.

It corresponds to the language of a villain that tells his father: *I do not want to spit in your face, I do not want to throw you out of your home, I do not want to kill you!* This is not said. You cannot say it even with the best intention. It shouldn't even pass through the mind of a Christian, who loves the Lord, the possibility of offending him and offending him with infinite offense, with an offense that equates, in its entity, to a mortal offense of God, if God were mortal.

As in our language with God, so, in the language of God to the soul, *your sins are forgiven* seems to be the first effect, in reality it is the last effect. It is the first time wise, as a matter of fact the divine love first cleanses us of our sins and then elevates and unites us to the Lord. As far as value, as far as the preciousness of the effects that love produces in the soul, that is the last; we could dare to say that compared to the other effects the forgiveness of sins is of lesser value. The other effects: the elevation, union with the Lord, sharing of the divine nature, the deification of the soul are so elevated that they cannot be expressed in words, they cannot be manifested also for the inadequacy of human language; most of all they are not and they cannot be manifested because they enter into the secret of love.

Every angel has his secret with God; every saint has his secret with God. As far as what we know from what the saints – under obedience – have written in their autobiographies, or confidences they have made, it remains true that there is always something mysterious from the part of God, and of secret from the part of

the soul. It is not spoken about, it cannot be said, not because of unlawfulness (get rid of any idea of natural love), but because it is something so personal, essential in love, as essential is God, that there are no words apt to express it.

We do not understand how the soul is united to the body: How can we ever understand the way God unites himself with the soul? Since we cannot comprehend it, we cannot manifest it, and consequently it remains a secret of love between God and the soul. We can catch a glimpse of something, precisely only the human element. Jesus says to this soul: *Go in peace*. What does this mean? It means: We are reconciled now! I will return the visit! We will see each other often. We will be eternally together!

It is not a way of getting rid of an annoying person, *Go and do not come anymore*; it is not a way to dismiss a poor person to whom I have given alms in a pagan way. If I want to be charitable in a Christian way, I have to be happy and wish to do it again. How many things are contained in those words! We can imagine the way Jesus pronounced them: in a tone of great goodness, of great tenderness, a tone that expresses this new relationship of special intimacy between Jesus and that family for the sake of that person. The words in themselves do not say much, they simply say, *calm down your sorrow, for your tears were stirred by your sins, and your sins no longer exist*. However, she will continue to cry, but for a reason that is reduced more and more to love.

Your faith has saved you. We would have expected: *Your love has saved you!* In reality charity saved her, but love must be nourished by faith. If her love had not been nurtured by faith – and it really was based on faith – could not have been true charity, true love for God.

With this view we can say that our Lord does not admit a sensible, natural, human love, in the sense that the Lord does not delight in a love that remains in the sphere of flesh and blood.

When love is based on faith, on faith in God, in the divine perfections of the divine love *et nos credidimus charitati – we believed in love*, then it becomes supernatural and pleasing to the Lord. The more intense it is, the more it overflows and is felt also in the inferior part, then we have a complete love that takes the all being; in this sense love can be also sensible and also human, but not simply sensible and human, neither exclusively nor primarily. True love of God is above all supernatural, and then by redundancy it also becomes sensitive, human and not natural but connatural. Things are named by their main element; in this case the main element is the supernatural, and consequently all love based on faith, nurtured by faith is called supernatural. This abundance or overabundance of supernatural absorbs and super-naturalizes the sensible, human and natural element. The sensible, human and natural element is present but it is elevated and absorbed by the supernatural element.

We are elevated to the supernatural with all our being. As the person of the Word in the Incarnation assumed the whole man, soul and body, so in the love of God, the entire soul even in its inferior part is elevated, when there is this faith as foundation, basis or root of love.

Mary Magdalene went to Jesus not as to any other man, or rabbi. Through what she heard of him, she believed that he was the Messiah, the Son of God; she wept for her sins because they rendered her unworthy to get close to him. She believed, and that was the reason to detest her past; she believed and she approached Jesus to implore total forgiveness through the eloquence of her silence, of her tears and the confession of her humiliating sinfulness.

She went to implore from the Lord permission to follow, listen and offer him her service. She proclaims her love and our Lord says: *Your faith has saved you; your faith has been the beginning of your salvation, because it blossomed in your love.* We too expect this praise,

this declaration, and this encounter with the Lord. The praise we expect: You are a soul that has loved me much; the declaration: Your sins are forgiven; the encounter: Go in peace.

It is good to expect these things from the Lord and to think what will be our special way of dealing with him. We also need to humble ourselves and nurture our faith otherwise that love will never blaze up. From time to time we experience how this love flares up in our hearts and then quickly fades away. It is enough a sickness, a contradiction, an annoyance, a worldly preoccupation to dampen it. On the contrary, about the true love of God it is said that not even all the floods can extinguish it, such is the ardor and the power of that flame!

Let us elevate a prayer to the Lord. As many times we have repeated that prayer: *Lord, make me capable of obtaining from everything the greatest possible benefit for my soul.* This is prayer we should do in every circumstance, especially in those that more impede our love for God, more encumber our relationship with him. Now let us improve this prayer and say: *Grant that everything may nurture love in me.* For us it is not enough to say that all the floods cannot extinguish this love, we want that everything, even the floods may fuel in us the love of God.

There is in us this little flame that is stoked by good or bad weather, favor or rejection of men, approval or condemnation, youth and old age, poverty and wealth, pain and joy, life and death. Everything, everything stokes it up!

As we have to be indifferent to all material things, so we have the right to expect and the duty to ask that everything nurture the love for God in us. If it were natural love, this would be impossible. We cannot pretend from the Lord an ongoing miracle. Water is made to extinguish fire and we cannot expect it to fuel fire. Sickness weakens the affection, does not increase it: the sick person is totally concentrated on healing and does not focus on love, as if

the heart were not developing that living blood that gives life to affection. If it were natural love it couldn't be possible, we could not expect it because it would be against the nature of things. Supernatural love can be stoked by every element, because, with the divine grace, in every element it finds its alimentation. Only certain elements fuel natural fire, the others prevent, choke, and extinguish it. Supernatural fire, on the other hand, is of such a nature that every thing, every occurrence, every circumstance can become its nourishment; all things have been created and ordained by God for this purpose: to bring the creature to give the Lord the glory of love. All things are ordained to nourish charity in us.

So let us make this prayer: *Let everything increase in me the love of God*, and do it for a long time, indeed for the rest of our life, or at least until we find a better formula.

PART III

MEDITATIONS' OUTLINES

Outlines of Meditations

The series of articles: "On the Exercise of Mental Prayer" in the Vocationist magazine Spiritus Domini starts with the following outlines dedicated to the Reverend Vocationist Sisters.

As indicated by the title, these are real outlines, as if they were practical examples of how to conduct a meditation.

The outlines in question are varied; some are thematic, they develop a theme; others are example of meditations on specific Bible's words.

According to the teachings of Fr. Justin, the direct divine words, ipsissima verba Domini, those reported between quotation marks, as spoken by the Lord, must be the subject of our meditation every day. These outlines are practical guide for those who are beginners in the art of meditating.

A word of God is spelled out. The soul answers with a prayer or a request. The second prelude is the first reaction of the soul to the word of God. The body of meditation consists first in reading some passage on the subject of the meditation; instead of reading it may be listening to a sermon that illustrates that word or theme and afterwards the soul draws her own conclusions that can be summed up with something to do (resolution) or a prayer to elevate to the Lord in the form of ejaculatory prayer. This helps to keep in mind the theme of meditation all day long.

The style of writing in this outlines is different from the usual Justinian style, but the content, the soul of his writings is always the same.

Fr. Justin further develops the content of these outlines in the two volumes: Let Us Make Man.

1 – Consecrations

Objective – To possess and be ever possessed by God through the essential practice of religious life, which consists in doing, suf-

fering and praying every moment what in conscience we know to be of greater honor for the Lord and pleases him most.

Prelude I – Thus says the Lord: I created you for me; I destined you to me, why don't you want?

Prelude II – The soul answers: To whom can I go, to whom can I give myself if not to you alone and to you forever?

Development – Love wants to give unceasingly, and above all wants to give itself. At the same time, necessarily love wants to receive the loved one, the beloved.

This is the principle and the purpose of the holy law of consecrations between the soul and God.

There is no sweeter and more beautiful romance than the consecrations of the saints. I want to know this story, I want to repeat it, I want to make mine these consecrations.

There is no more sublime pathway than the one of the Society of Divine Vocations, called pathway of consecration and brings us from one feast to another, from one consecration to another until we reach divine union.

I want to go through all this divine pathway of consecrations, and I will begin to consider my consecrations more seriously and I will start from the one to the divine Trinity.

2 – With the Blessed Trinity

Prelude I – Let us ascend above the saints and the angels and let us prostrate ourselves before our Most High God in three persons.

Prelude II – Glory to the Father, to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, intimately!

Development – the soul deepens and repeats to herself and others these ideas: You alone are God. You alone! There is no other God beside you that is or might be God! You alone! The beginning and end of everything! I believe, I believe...

You alone are my God. You alone! There must be no other God, nor there can be any other besides you for me. You alone are my beginning, my end, my all!

How many idols around me and unfortunately also in me! Down every idol! Let it go into perdition. Do I want to be somebody's idol? For all I want to be the messenger of the Lord, the glorifier of the Lord God.

Divine Majesty, what do you want me to do? I am essentially yours. My essence is total dependence on you – grant that I may understand it! I cannot do anything against your will, as I cannot exist without your consent. How is it possible for anyone to forget this?

God is God and I am his creature! God is God and I am his little child! God is God and I am his last and first lover. God is my God and I do, suffer and pray every moment for his honor and delight. I want to really do, suffer and pray for it because he is the Lord my God, one and triune!

3 – With the Most Holy Trinity

Prelude I – Astounded, the soul hears the song: The man who did not understand that he has been honored can be compared to ignorant donkeys and becomes like them.

Prelude II – Trembling the soul answers: I acknowledge the abyss of my nothingness, I confess the abyss of my miseries, and I invoke the abyss of your love. I abandon myself totally in it and trust that I will be again what, from all eternity in your mind and heart, you wanted me to be.

Development – It seems that the three divine persons gazing the face of the soul that is meditating ask: Who are you, poor *soul*? You are unrecognizable! Where is the image and likeness with which you were created and for which you were loved? This is what your behavior has done to you. Your too natural way of living eroded the supernatural beauty of the divine image and likeness. The imprint of the beast now marks your physiognomy.

Under the gaze of the Lord, a great confusion encompasses, humbles and shakes the soul. Now it is a gaze of mercy, but wants to be a gaze of delight. The Lord wants to see again himself in you.

Now laboriously we have to destroy the image of the beast and reproduce even more shining the image of God. See, O soul, one by one what are worldly, diabolical and brutal features and resemblances in you. Follow the impulse of the Holy Spirit who from within dictates God's way in creating and sanctifying you.

4 – With the Most Holy Trinity

Prelude I – The Lord says: Let us make anew this poor dear soul in our image and likeness.

Prelude II – Create in me, O God, a pure heart and renew in me an uncontaminated spirit.

Development – The image and likeness of God in a soul must be all interior, very special, alive and worthy of God, the divine maker.

The communication of the divine nature to the human nature starts in us the realization of the divine image and likeness.

How much the divine nature is worthy to be infinitely desired, loved and appreciated!

Participation in the divine nature is offered to us through grace, through the sacraments, through acts of love and all other virtuous acts enriched by love. Maybe I do not appreciate them at all!

I am not longing for divine grace, I am not yearning for the sacraments, I am not dying from the desire for greater love!

I desire human nature in its worthlessness, vulgarity and brutalization. Shame on me!

Now I long for human nature in its elevations, transformations and ascensions to the divine nature.

I want to be the image of God! I want to be the likeness of God! May people say of me: How he is like Jesus! May the angels say of me: How he is like God! Amen.

O divine nature, make me worthy of you! O sacramental absolution and communions, how I wish to receive you every hour! But, who could ever impede me to make acts of love every moment? Thank you, my Lord.

5 – With the Holy Trinity

Prelude I – Thus says the Lord: Let us make anew this dear poor soul in our image and likeness.

Prelude II – The soul says: Command me, Lord, to come to you continuously.

Development – The image and likeness of the soul with the Lord is not perfect if it participates only of his nature; we need also to participate in his divine work.

This must start with the participation of the divine nature in as much as I cannot content myself to passively receive this divine gift. I must enrich and develop this participation by receiv-

ing with ever-greater frequency holy sacraments and by making more fervent acts of divine love. The gift of the divine work of making me image and likeness of God consists in developing in me the grace of this gift working with my intellect and will.

I apply my intellect to know of the being of the divine nature. My will works compelling me to imprint in my own self the unity, spirituality and love of God; reducing everything to unity and elevating everything to spirituality and transforming everything in love. I must humble myself recognizing in me the defective multiplicity of my illogical and messy work. The materiality of my external and interior work consists in the manifold and continuous lack of charity.

Spiritualize everything in the love of God and neighbor; unify everything in the love of God and neighbor. Isn't this a different way to express my vocation, my divine vocation and that of the entire Society of the Divine Vocations?

6 – With the Holy Trinity

Prelude I – *This is my beloved Son, listen to him* (Mt 12, 18).

Prelude II – I shall listen to what the Lord says in me.

Development – So that the image and likeness with the Lord may be perfect, we ought to participate not only in the divine nature and perfections, we must also make ourselves like the three divine persons, one God.

The Father says to us: This is my beloved son! Listen to him. In him I find all my delight. Those I want eternally with me, I want to be perfect images of my Son Jesus.

The Son says to us: Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. O divine Spirit! It is your mission to make all souls and me

understand what glory it is for me the fact that I can be and must be likeness of the Father and of the Son. It is up to us to be passionate and enthusiastic about this divine capacity and moral necessity to be like God.

O Holy Spirit, it is your mission to realize in us the image and likeness of the Father and of the Son and to stir up the soul to cooperate with you and to become also like you, O spirit of the Father and of the Son!

To be like the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in their perfections revealed in their operations! In the unique divine love there are infinite perfections as in the unique divine nature there are three persons.

How can we imitate all this? The soul is sinking into her inability, in her inadequacy and is confused by these high divine mysteries, and in these intimate humiliations comes the divine encouragement

7 – With the Divine Trinity

Prelude I – *Take and eat, this is my body* (Mt 20, 26).

Prelude II – *I shall remember my past and my soul shall rest in me.*

Development – As it is easy, pleasant and connatural to eat and drink, so the Lord has made it easy, pleasant and connatural to resemble God, to the point that in some mystical way the soul remains assimilated by God.

He has become our food. In the body of Jesus there is his soul with all his virtues and divinity, with his perfections and with him the divine persons, and he is given to us as food to eat and likewise his blood to drink.

Do it in memory of me! Not as a commemoration of a dead but

as a living reproduction of me in you through the assimilation with God.

In this way we perpetuate Jesus' remembrance by making every soul like him through his divine communion.

I shall remember the past and my soul shall rest in me. My soul melts at this remembrance. She melts in love under the fire of divine love. She melts and discards her first, harsh and sinful self and passes into the divine form.

The virtues of Jesus' soul, the perfections of divine nature and the operation of the divine persons pass into the soul! Divine Eucharist is not only the supreme cult to the divine Trinity, it is also the supreme revelation and communication of the Trinity to the soul and the soul's supreme elevation and assimilation to the Blessed Trinity. I will remember with my memory and my soul shall rest in me. Let all that is old pass by, and let everything be renewed, hearts, voices and works!

8 – With the Most Holy Trinity

Prelude I – *This is the chalice of the new covenant in my blood* (Lk 22, 20).

Prelude II – *I will proclaim your name to my brothers, in the midst of the Assembly I will praise you* (Heb 2, 12).

Development – I must be like my Lord God! Of his divine operations, which one he wants me to reproduce the most, or better, in which one of his operations he wants me as his cooperator?

Certainly he wants me as his cooperator in the work of redemption and sanctification: the divine works attributed especially to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; and in the special mission in the world of the second divine person that proceeds from the

Father, and of the Holy Spirit that proceeds from the Father and the Son.

This is the new covenant through which God wants to unite all souls to himself. The divine blood is poured out as price and seal of this covenant. The Lord needs cooperators to offer this blood and proclaimers of this covenant.

Here I am, Lord! Shouldn't I be very confused for having trampled that blood and for having suffocated his voice, alienated some souls from the covenant with God or lessened their fervor in the divine service? I remember...

I must admit that I do not fully understand this mission of being cooperator of the redeeming and sanctifying God; I do not feel enthusiasm and passion for it, and I do not see what I should and could do in this sense. O my God!

9 – With the Most Holy Trinity

Prelude I – Angels and Saints, who are ahead of us, prepare the way to the Lord.

Prelude II – Come, Lord Jesus! Let the Lord descend to his flowerbeds. Let the sovereign ruler of his kingdom come.

Development – I join all the precursors, angels and saints and travel through the world and to every soul of every time and place and cry loudly and sweetly: *Prepare the way to the Lord.*

Even more, I place myself in lieu of every ciborium, of every pyx and of every monstrance. I offer my chest, heart, mouth, eyes, hands and head as ciborium, pyx and monstrance of the most holy sacrament. I place my blood in each lamp and my bones in each censer: O my Lord, where do these thoughts come from? My Lord, they have been coming for years and my life continues

to contrast them. Lord, grant that they be not only mine, but they may be as were and are those of your mother most holy, our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament (only now I understand it).

Come, O ruler, sovereign, and conqueror! I really need that you come in all my being – in all my senses, my sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch; in my powers, memory, intellect, will and feeling; come and - allow me to say it -, come wounds of love! How sweet it is to speak this way! But how strong and harsh is the truth of the answer!

The Lord comes through the ways of virtue; have no illusion, through other ways you will never encounter or possess the Lord your God!

10 – With the Trinity

Prelude I – *Not like your fathers who ate the manna and died*

Prelude II – I will take the chalice of salvation and invoke the name of the Lord.

Development – We must get rid of the obstacles that impede the likeness of the soul with God in nature, persons and operations. After original sin there is in us a living and growing obstacle: the inclination to evil that leads to concupiscence and leads us always downward.

Everything we receive from the world, all that somehow feeds our senses and faculties somehow nourishes this monster and increases our interior evil.

Only one food can weaken and deaden concupiscence in us. Any other food enters in us as dead and nurtures in us this life of death.

Only the Eucharist is aliment that enters in us alive (and what

life!) and takes away from us concupiscence, a living death. *This is God's true good, wheat of the elect and wine that germinates the virgins.*

I really want to be an elect! I must nourish myself with this food. I really want to be virgin; I must inebriate myself with this drink. I want to see the entire world all elects and virgins; I must obtain that all people become daily communicants.

Not like our ancestor who ate the manna ... and died also spiritually because they ate it only materially. I must nourish myself with the Eucharist not only materially but simultaneously also spiritually, that is, with Jesus' virtues, works and spirit; thus I will obtain the elimination of every living and growing obstacle, and certainly also the achievement of perfect likeness and union with my God.

11 – With the Most Holy Trinity

Prelude I – The Lord says: *Ducam eam in solitudinem et loquar ad cor eius - I will lead her in solitude and talk to her heart* (Hos 23. 16).

Prelude II – Attract me to you, O my God and my all!

Development – The soul is let out of her inferior world of perturbations, sufferings, and passion – as through a secret door - toward the heaven of God Trinity; as if she were separated from the body, she remains alone with God in actual hope of intimacy of divine union, in a near and ever more imminent divine grace through which the Blessed Trinity might possess her entirely, completely. The soul carries within herself the desire that also her entire inferior part may follow, be elevated and transformed in that grace, because she must glorify the Lord with all her being, mind, heart and body.

In that divine solitude the soul comprehends how the divine Word is her mediator and her head; consequently all that the di-

vine Word says to the Father and in the Father – from all eternity – it is said also as mediator and head of humankind and of the soul; the best the soul can do is to recollect herself in a prayerful silence through which she says to the Father and in the Father all that the Word expresses; all that the Word is from eternity and for eternity. In this she does not pray for herself alone, but for all the millions of Jews, Mohammedans, Heretics, Schismatics, Infidels, militant atheists from which - it seems - she can no longer detach herself, especially in prayer.

12 – With the Most Holy Trinity

Prelude I - *Ducam eam in solitudinem et loquar ad cor eius - I will lead her in solitude and talk to her heart* (Os 23. 16).

Prelude II - Attract me to you, O my God and my all!

Development – The soul also understands and feels deeply how the Holy Spirit is her heart, her affection, her longing and song of love; and within her prayerful burning silence she applies herself with her millions, that is, all world and universes to say to the Father and to the Son, in the Father and in the Son all that the Holy Spirit says, all that the Holy Spirit is in the Father and in the Son, for the Father and for the Son. At this stage the soul feels that every word and work of her is all emptiness and nothingness if it is not adhesion and union to this divine act.

Not only the Son and the Holy Spirit but also the Father presents the soul to the other divine person as a living and personal image of them. The soul really is the living and personal image and likeness of one divine person for the others. A personal image representing the one whose image she is, and that cannot be united to anyone, except to the one whose image she is.

13 – With the Blessed Trinity

Prelude I - *Ducam eam in solitudinem et loquar ad cor eius - I will lead her in solitude and talk to her heart* (Hos 23. 16).

Prelude II - Attract me to you, O my God and my all!

Development – The union of the soul with each of the divine persons, of this personal image of the person she represents, is the most intimate union that can exist and that we can think of, after the union of the three divine persons in the unity of nature. The union understood, wanted and actualized freely by the three persons and by the soul is the mystical marriage of the soul spouse of the Trinity. On account of this union the soul is represented by each divine person, and at the same time, she represents each divine person to the other; so to speak, she is like a divine person to the other; while speaking in her own name she speaks from this heaven of union of grace *Pater meus es. Filius meus es tu – You are my Father. You are my Son*, in order to actualize the plea of the Gospel of love, *Ut unum sint - that they may be one*“.

The creation of the soul is a revelation and a gift of love that a divine person offers to the other, as to say: I esteem and love you so much, that apart from you I cannot esteem and love anything but your image! Apart from you I can do nothing but your image. Besides you there is nothing greater and dearer to offer you than your own image. I know that nothing is so beautiful and dear to you, worthy of you, that I can offer you other than your own image; this is the reason for your: *Let us make man in our image and likeness*. This is the eternal and divine reason for the creation of souls, as well as that of angels and everything else.

14 – With the Blessed Trinity

Prelude I - *Ducam eam in solitudinem et loquar ad cor eius - I will lead her in solitude and talk to her heart* (Hos 23. 16).

Prelude II - Attract me to you, O my God and my all!

Development – It seems, in this divine image and likeness, that is the soul, God made it possible to offer one divine person to the other, which was not possible in the divinity; or better, God reveals through the various forms of creation what a divine person is, does and offers to the other.

In this image and through this image each divine person adores, praises, sympathizes, helps, saves, consoles, embraces, kisses, owns, grants, contents, forgives ... the other person, because to her he gives everything that is said, done, given to his image and likeness, especially if it is personalized, and for this reason the soul is personal. Be glory to God and to his grace in the soul! Amen!

So at work! It will certainly require a lot to exclude any internal and external act that does not come directly from this divine origin, which is not accomplished in this divine union. This is the new purification of the soul, active and passive, to be promoted in me and in all, in the grace of divine union and for the grace of divine union. Oh, how smoothly and efficiently this purification is achieved when we work in union of acts with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, without the commotion of useless sophisms, without lacerating efforts of our faculties, but with simplicity and simplification of unifying union in the unity of holiness of my Blessed Trinity. Amen! Alleluia!

15 – With the Most Holy Trinity

Development - O divine consolation! Never human lover, far away from the friend, yearned and appreciated the portrait of his beloved as the Lord desires and appreciates the soul, his living image and likeness!

O dear image and likeness of my Father, you belong to me as the Father belongs to me, I embrace and kiss you eternally.

O dear image and likeness of my Son, you belong to me as the Son belongs to me, I embrace and kiss you eternally.

O dear image and likeness of the Holy Spirit, I embrace and kiss you eternally. O dear image and likeness of the Father and of the Son!

Through me, his image, likeness and representative, each divine person reveres the other! If God treats the souls with reverence, what will be the reverence of God to God?

O Father, Son, Holy Spirit! Through me, his personal image and likeness, each divine person puts his eternity in my time, his immensity in my space, his infinity in my smallness, his immutability in my dealings to honor and revere the other divine person, O God-Father, O God-Son, God-Holy Spirit! Amen.

16 – With the Blessed Trinity

Development – I am essentially image and likeness of God, the Father in my being and in my life. I am image and likeness of the Son, in my intellect and conscience, and of the Holy Spirit, in my will and my love. I am essentially image and likeness of the divine unity in my person, and of the divine action in my freedom.

I am essentially ordained and eternally given as a gift by one divine person to the other, in an act of infinite glory and love from one person to the other.

I am also accepted and possessed by each divine person, for the sake of that person whose image I am for her, for the sake of the person to whom I have been given as a gift, with the same love with which they love each other.

I am therefore almost equated and ineffably united to each divine person as a bride to the bridegroom according to grace.

For this reason the soul perpetually says: *O God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, O my God and my all*, with the intention of saying and giving to each divine person in the name of the other all that she is for the other, all that she wants to say to her with this image and likeness that I am.

This is what I want, mean and profess, even without understanding it thoroughly; it does not need to be understood. It is enough that my maker and giver, as well as the one to whom I am given and the one for whom I have been made, know it. It is enough for me to unite myself with them, with this permanent act. Amen!

17 – With the Blessed Trinity

Development –*Each divine person to the other!* O Father, Son and Holy Spirit, grant that my soul may be ever more your image and likeness, and as such ever more dear and loved by each divine person, and consequently ever more possessed and united to them, so that Jesus Christ may be ever more intimately and highly her head, the Holy Spirit her heart and the Father her life. Thus she will be always more like her God and always dearer, loved, possessed and united to him for all eternity, so that your extrinsic glory, O God, may be always more like your intrinsic glory. Amen. Alleluia!

When I offer and give, I am image of the Father. When I ask and receive, I am image of the Word. When I work and immolate myself, I am image of the Holy Spirit: I am a personal image related with the divine persons in these acts. Likewise in my thought and word, I am image of the Word, related with the Word and I want to express the Father! In my heart, and in its weeping and smil-

ing I am image of the Holy Spirit, I am related to the Spirit, and must and want to always exclaim: O Father, Son and Holy Spirit, O Mary, O Church, as the depth and life of my being manifests the Son from the part of the Father whose image he is. I perceive the meaning of my being image and likeness of God in the three divine persons and in this I become ever more aware of how dear I am to the three divine persons and how I can be ever dearer by committing my self and cooperating in perfecting myself as their image. Amen.

I feel that I cannot have any meaning, any act or relationship outside of the three divine persons. I become aware that I must consent and cooperate to all this in order to be such with all my freedom and personality. O, how I long to be ever more according to the design of the three divine persons! Thanks be to God! Nowadays all my prayer consists basically in uttering: *Father, Son and Holy Spirit* with internal, sweet, high, expanded and deep act of union with the three divine persons in what they say, do and are in themselves, and in what each one is and does in the other and for the other. In this way we make our act of faith before each action, and likewise the act of love in every action, the act of hatred for every sin and the act of contrition for every examination of conscience and confession.

Uttering the invocation: *Father, Son and Holy Spirit*, I praise the divine perfections and pray for all nations and for every soul. I include and express everything in this invocation; if I do otherwise I feel as doing something imperfect and not pleasing to the Lord, making exception for the prayers of the Breviary and of the Mass.

O my God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit! Even in the smallest things and incidents, in the atoms and instants, in the most fleeing acts and most subtle shades of feelings and circumstances!

18 – With the Most Holy Trinity

The soul keeps saying continually: *O my God Father, O my God Son, O my God Holy Spirit* intending:

To say and give to each divine person all that one divine person says, does and gives to me, as my beginning, my head and my heart, as he really is. The Word, receiving the souls that the Father has given him, in order to manifest the love that the Father deserves has become their head, the Holy Spirit their heart, and the Father their life. In this way each divine person presents the soul to the other, and in her name glorifies, beseeches, adores and loves the other divine person, while I unite my self to them in prayerful silence.

The soul keeps saying continually: *O my God Father, O my God Son, O my God Holy Spirit*, intending:

To say, do and give to each divine person all that one divine person says, does and gives to the other, in as much as she is “one” with each divine person, as spouse of each one of them, and consequently united through grace to the being, action and gift, to the divine relation that each divine person is for the others. I do not understand or feel anything else but love, in the luminous darkness, in the burning activity in the most alive, personal and highest expression of each divine person that attracts and enraptures all my being. Amen.

O Father, Son and Holy Spirit! Your image and likeness can think and talk only and always of you. You alone are the subject and object of all her thoughts and words, always more explicitly and intensely direct. Your image and likeness cannot praise and love you, my God, through any other means, in any other way or for any other objective, because, my God, you are who you are and the soul is essentially your image and likeness. O my God and my all!

19 – With the Blessed Trinity

Development – The divine persons say: We want to perfect ever more this our image and likeness, this soul and this family of souls. We want to perfect her in her being and in her action, in her state and in her acts both positively and negatively. As long as she lives in the world, we want to perfect her always more! With her all being, the soul wants to perfect her image and likeness of God, achieving her union with the glory, love and will of each divine person, God in the unity of the Trinity and within the Trinity. We see asceticism as the divine action that perfects that image and likeness of God that is the human soul.

Finally I do not encounter any internal difficulty that impedes this progressive work. I experience suavity and internal unction that oblige me to say to God the Father: I love you infinitely, I love you eternally; I love you immensely and immutably not on my own, but as a living image of the Son. In the name of the Son and with the voice of the Son I talk to the Father: “Father I love you immensely, eternally; Father I love you infinitely and immutably. I abandon myself into your hands, for you I immolate myself, to you I want to hand over all the world sanctified and made a host of sacrifice with me. *Ita Pater quoniam sicut fuit placitum ante te – Yes Father, because so pleased you. Amen. Alleluia.*

Ut omnes unum sint sicut tu Pater in me at ego in te – So that all may be one as you Father are in me and I in you!

20 – With the Blessed Trinity

Development – O my God Son, in the name of the Father, with the voice of the Father, I say: I love you eternally, immensely, infinitely, immutably. To you I offer all myself, you are all my life, only through you and for you I want and do everything. Only you are all my delight and only you I will glorify. Only Son, only

Father! To you I surrender everything, to you I entrust all power, for you I save every soul, as for me I want you in every soul, God Son. God Son in the divine nature, God Son in the human nature. Accept and possess this soul as your own Father, and make her always more like you, always dearer to the Father, always more worthy of the Father.

I think of the way and intensity with which the saints have loved the Lord. Some saints in special! St Theresa, St. Bernard, St. Dominic, St. Francis, St. Philip, Blessed Lillo and Blessed Suzo and St. Catherine! Heartfelt love because overflowing also in the inferior part; heartfelt, wanted and stirred also with true efforts, because we must want the most perfect, intense, and absorbent all my being in its flames. It seems that prevailed in them the sense of individuality, personality and distinction; the sense that seems to correspond to the reality of each individual human being, well distinct from every other person and from God, a distinct unique person; why now this seems to be imperfect, incomplete, causing unhappiness and very little glory?

21 – With the Most Holy Trinity

Development – The grace of the Holy Spirit spread in the hearts of the faithful and inflamed them with charity, which was an application and communication of the love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, proceeding from the Father, principle of every life and love. The love of the Father is the eternal principle of the divinity. The love of the Sacred Heart is a human-divine love; it is a meritorious love, fruit of grace and entirely, or almost entirely supernatural. The sense of personality, distinction and individuality of the three divine persons seems to be transpiring from their very words; if one person were alone, even though corresponding to the truth, to the reality of the personal, individual, distinguished character, somehow it seems to be imperfect, somewhat incomplete, so all alone.

Let us enter in the meaning, comprehension, conscience and realization of our essential dependence on the three divine persons. Let us enter in the meaning, comprehension, conscience and realization of our essential relation with the three divine persons. Let us enter in the meaning, comprehension, conscience and realization of the image, likeness and portrait of God Trinity that we are individually, personally and distinctively from God and from neighbors and yet always as image, likeness and portrait of the three persons. With this simple and complex understanding of this complete reality we love the three divine persons with their own very love that has become our love, with our love that is also their very love, and so we find ourselves in truth and love.

22 – With the Trinity

Development – Who tells me, who could ever tell me that this awareness was not in the saints, in those saints? They have displayed their love in the best way they could adapting their expressions to the human intelligence. Who will enable me to make the souls enter the meaning, comprehension, conscience and realization of this state and these uniting, complete, perfect and integral acts of the human-divine love of the image, likeness and portrait of the three divine persons? The one, who has showed you his mercy, has showed and will show it to other souls. I will be a poor instrument in the hands of the Word and of the Holy Spirit to call souls to this understanding, conscience and realization of their integral being.

My dispositions are a fist of mud. My deeds are dust. My feelings are the mud that together forms this fist of dust. Recognizing and feeling this is divine gift and action in the soul. Even, those acts and sentiments need to be purified to enter the image and likeness of God. So I hope. So be it! This fist of mud combined with the word of God, the breath of God, through the action of

the Word and the Holy Spirit, under the hand of the Father, becomes man, masterpiece, image and living resemblance of God. With the Word of God and the Spirit of God the new apostle will transform the world of mud into a world of glory of God, into a world of saints of God.

PART IV

ALL ALONE

All Alone

This chapter is a short meditation/elevation on my human condition; while I am yearning for union and communion with others, I do not find anyone who can really satisfy this need, and consequently I remain all alone. This solitude does not lead to desperation if it brings me to the "one to one" with my God, to the unique true union and interpenetration of my being with the three divine persons. It leads me to enter and enjoy divine union within the Communion of the Saints.

I

1. When you will send the angel of death for the last announcement ... (You have sent many of them to me, almost on a daily basis! My very body and soul are perennially announcing to each other the reality and need of separation.)
2. When you will send the angel of death, I shall receive that last announcement only and exclusively for myself, and, willingly or unwillingly, my spirit will withdraw from the entire exterior world with vehement concentration on its internal profoundness.
3. My spirit will withdraw from every beloved person with violent detachment in order to concentrate only upon you, and welcome you, Lord, so that when you come and take it, you may introduce it one on one to the divine judgment, from which it shall pass all alone to its eternity of reward or condemnation.

4. So, alone it came into this world, all alone indwells in its body, and alone it is responsible for all its acts before you, Lord. It is all alone in its thought, in its self-love and in each personal act.
5. All alone, that is, without any creature that is or could be close or related to it, because you alone, O God are at the same time ineffably one and really triune; each person of the Trinity, while being distinctly one, is entirely in each person of the Trinity and possesses entirely the other two persons.
6. Neither creature, nor human person is there for the soul. She is all-alone, and she cannot be entirely in another human person, nor can she have within herself another created person. She cannot find in human relationships anything that she can see as image and likeness of your divine circuminsession.
7. In everything I must think of you, my Lord. In you, in your divine persons are all the reasons of my life. In you, my Lord, in your very nature, are all the reasons of my being. Only with you I find myself at home, you wanted me only with you as image and likeness of your divine circuminsession.
8. I am all-alone from birth to death. Vain is every effort to unite myself intimately with someone else. I cannot go out of my own self to adhere to someone else, to be in or live within someone else. Even if I wanted, I can never open myself to others in such a way that I could receive and contain them in me and live within them.
9. My hands can hardly shake another hand; my arms can hardly hug a dear person and give to the soul a thrill of pleasure, which is always painful because it is a germ of what is mortal, and becomes even more painful for this sense of absolute impotence of full interpenetration, in vain sighed.

II

1. From this, as from any other thing I must think of you, my Lord! Because in you, my Lord, in your divine persons are all the reasons of my life! Only in your divine nature, my Lord, are all the reasons of my existence. Only with you I feel really at home, because you wanted me all for yourself, as an image and likeness of your divine circuminsession!
2. For this reason you created me as an individual, you wanted me all alone and have made it impossible for me to be in others, and at the same time you created me with the need to be with others, so that I could not be in anyone and would wrap all myself in you alone. Why the souls do not understand it? Why I did not understand it?
3. This is the solitude to which you call me and that you made in order to have and possess the souls for you alone! All the solitude of cells and deserts, of heavens, of abysses and cemeteries are good inasmuch as they offer the external silence needed to hear every sound, or external voice.
4. This is essential, integral and universal solitude that offers the interior silence in which we can hear and feel your voice, Lord, and in which no other voice or sound can penetrate. At the most, in this interior solitude, we can perceive a very unpleasant noise and hostile clamor that is immediately rejected by the soul.
5. Why does the soul escape so much from external silence and ends up by ignoring the interior silence, with fictitious, gross and voluntary ignorance, while being aware of her great, internal emptiness? My emptiness is always yearning for the fullness that only you are and only you can give! Only you, Lord!
6. Maybe it is the spirit of evil that for its own fault was left des-

perately alone, dammedly alone and wants to reduce every other spirit to the desperation of its damnation, with the illusion of other unions that cannot substitute divine union and cause the loss of divine union.

7. The damned and proud spirit that is all hatred and error would try to reduce even God to this solitude of damnation and desperation stealing from him all those that he has loved and called to the beatitude of his divine consortium, of divine nature, of his divine persons, snatching from him friends and children, the joy of his heart! The evil one does so insinuating the horror of solitude in the soul.
8. Now you have called me to this integral, essential solitude. Did you call me only now? You called and introduced me to it many, many times! You always wanted me all for you, all yours! Now I feel that I am appreciating it better and feeling it better! Grant that I truly follow and correspond to you better.
9. I understand it through the glimpses that the splendor of your truth causes in my intellect, through the wounds that your love opens in my heart, after the abandonment of your creatures and your mercifully harsh refusals, ripped and thinned out the smoky and dense clouds of my husk of earth and flesh.

III

1. You are all, distinctly in the entire universe and in each atom, with your real presence and effective action of creator and keeper. The whole world and each atom is distinctly, really and effectively in you, my Lord. I believe. Blessed are the pure of heart in which faith is clearer than vision.
2. In a most sublime way, you are entirely in the humanity of

Jesus Christ and elevate it to divinity, taking it in the second person, so the whole humanity of Jesus is in you, O Divinity, O Trinity, in the Word incarnated in it personally. My Lord! I believe. Blessed are the pure of heart in which faith is clearer than vision.

3. O incarnate Word you are entirely in the host, body, blood, soul and divinity; with you are also the other divine persons. More than being in you, the host is all you, because in it there is no longer the substance of bread; that tenuous veil of accidents is all lost and together sustained in you. I believe, my Lord! Blessed are the pure of heart in which faith is clearer than vision.
4. O Blessed Trinity you are all in the soul of the just that lives in your grace; this soul is all in you, O Blessed Trinity, with that most sublime reality that is the supernatural status that can elevate itself ever more in you, and ever more receive from you in your regretless and measureless way. I believe, my Lord! Blessed are the pure of heart in which faith is clearer than vision.
5. You are all, O my God! You are creator, savior, sanctifier; you are all in the supernatural act, meritorious for your creature; this act is all in you, in your grace and action, remaining distinct in a mysterious way the human and the divine element, in a mysterious, glorious, merciful and loving union. I believe, my Lord! Blessed are the pure of heart in which faith is clearer than vision.
6. You are all in me Lord, and I am all in you. O my God! I find all my self in you in the universal world, and all in you in the soul of every just, all in you in every spiritual act, because you are all in me and I am all in you. I believe, my Lord! Blessed are the pure of heart in which faith is clearer than vision.
7. The whole world, each consecrated host, every soul in the

state of grace and every supernatural act is somehow mysterious, that is why it is in you, but also in me, your dwelling place, O Lord! In that blessed solitude the soul finds in you also all other creatures from which she was segregated. I believe, my Lord! Blessed are the pure of heart for which you are always the only mediator and the instrument in which they encounter all their human brothers and sisters!

8. Besides this sweet communion with the saints of the pilgrim church, and besides the most sweet communion with the angels and saints of paradise, with our blessed mother, the Virgin Mary, I see, I catch a glimpse of another encounter, of another union between you, my Lord, and the soul in another solitude, because you will hide her, as it is written, *in abscondito faciei tuae - In the secret of your face*. Blessed are the pure of heart for they shall see God.
9. From this life, from this moment my soul longs for that encounter, and while longing, the soul ascends to that union with the effectiveness of the reality that you grant to the desires inspired by your Holy Spirit. If I will see all in you, and if in every human being I will gaze on you alone, and in you I will unite myself to you! In your face, perfect solitude that no one can penetrate, the blessed solitude for union with you!

PART V

IN THE SUPERNATURAL

In the Supernatural¹

This expression: "In the supernatural" seems like a conclusion of the previous chapter. From "all alone" we pass to "alone with him alone". We become one with the Blessed Trinity in her immensity, in the circulation of divine life ad extra; so much so that one cannot think of living far away, or separated from God, not even for a moment! It is beautiful to immerse ourselves in the divinity. It is necessary to remain in God and it is important to persevere and to pray for perseverance.

In perpetual communion

Man cannot use his external senses like irrational animals do. The beasts use external senses to establish contact with the external world; men must use them to establish a relation with the internal world.

The Christian, God's elect, cannot use his external senses and his superior faculties like other similar intelligent beings. Human beings use the senses to get to know universal principles; God's elects must place all their being to the service of the supernatural, in such a way that all their being may perennially be an incessant absorption and assimilation of God in his immensity.

¹ These are notes taken by a participant to a retreat preached by Blessed Fr. Justin; they were revised, corrected and published by Fr. Justin. Every subtitle is a synthesis of a meditation.

In the consecrated host, under the species of bread and wine, there is really our Lord Jesus Christ – true God and true man - in body and blood, soul and divinity, who immolates himself for us and gives himself to us.

In his immensity God is everywhere, and is in everything with his presence and power, not only to give and maintain the entity in every being and for the divine intervention necessary to each act, but also in order to give himself to us under the veil of things.

First Intimate Word

The Lord God-Trinity talks to us through the Word. The divine Word became flesh and talks to us through his humanity. Jesus, the Incarnate God talks to us above all through the lips of his opened wounds and with the voice of his blood. The first word of every wound is always a reproach! It opens to call with red vehemence the one who has opened it! While every wound tends to heal, he wanted his main wounds eternally opened and alive. His is a reproach of love and every voice of love can remain with the elect. They are closed to the reprobates; he closes himself completely to the reprobates because those wounds and that blood are for them unsustainable reproaches of anger. Every time I enter in conversation with the Lord in prayer, I always sense a kind of reproach; this too is a form of consolation and instrument of sanctification. If I were not to sense it, it would be a sign of bad disposition on my part.

Before God

In everything, always and wherever I may be, I am always in God's presence, personally committed to God; I find myself involved in God's interest; I find myself employed in God's design.

In everything, always and everywhere I am connected with God! Whenever I speak to any person in reality I speak to God; regardless of what I do, I am actually dealing with him; any sense and act that I could ever feel or do outside of this influence of divine presence, divine reality, divine relationship, is something wrong, false, rebellious or otherwise bad because it is outside of the truth. I am permeated with great veneration and wonder when I use anything; deal with any person, living in the light of this principle! I am dealing with God! Oh! How my soul feels secure above every disturbance and storm of the passions that shake the underlying atmospheres in which men suffer. When the soul rises, establishes and advances in this heartfelt vision of God and in relation with God, in everything, always and everywhere.

Among Spirits

We are well aware of the fact that we are not the first source of the thoughts that appear, cross and crowd our minds. As we were not, nor are we the first principle of our being and of our life, so we are not the principle of our operation and of our thinking. We are free to get rid of them or of accepting them; we are free to entertain or follow them, but their first appearing in our mind does not depend on us. These thoughts are not just lodged in the air; thoughts belong to intelligence in act, they are the product of an intelligent and living being, they are the produce of a spirit. We are in a sphere of spirits, which is totally in a forest. We become aware that these thoughts, these spirits want to attract our attention, our consent and with it our life and our soul. We see that these thoughts are grouped in two opposing camps or organized around a stronger one and led by him to a very regular siege, to violent attacks, to frightful threats, to proposals of alliance, to a peace contract.

The soul is in a perennial crossroad, in an ongoing struggle

between good and evil, in discouragements, between light and darkness, having with us the tremendous faculty of saying “yes” or “no”.

On Perseverance

If we were to talk about perseverance at the end, one could think of it just as a rhetoric conclusion. We talk of it at the beginning so that we may understand the primary necessity of perseverance. Final perseverance is like the end result of our daily perseverance; the general perseverance is the end result of particular perseverance. Perseverance of correspondence to every act of God’s love, with the fidelity to every commitment of love, with docility to every teaching of love, with generosity to every need of love, with obedience to every inspiration and cooperating with every divine action and guidance. Perseverance of constancy in every exercise and holy work until its completion and crowning!

At the end of every practice of piety and exercise of virtue, we should pray for perseverance, imploring perseverance in prayer and praying for perseverance. Amen.

PART VI

SPIRITUAL FORMATION

CHAPTER 1

Spiritual Formation

These guidelines for spiritual formation are real jewel, full of precious advices. Every life has its beginning in God and belongs to God. Spiritual life must begin with the word of God. Starting point for anyone who wants to live and progress in spiritual life is to listen, read, meditate and apply to oneself the word of God, which becomes in us word of life.

Prepare the way for the Lord (Mk 1, 3)

1. The divine process of the first creation is repeated in the life of every soul and in every work. Divine work advances day-by-day, phase-by-phase and epoch-by-epoch. Every day, every phase and epoch are new wonders of the glory of God working in the soul and in institutions, until the complete creation of the new man according to Jesus Christ is fulfilled in every human soul. Often, here and there, man interrupts the divine work; at times, by subtracting himself from the divine action, man demolishes the divine work and returns to the state of chaos anterior to creation: confusion of thoughts, affections, acts, states, all darkness of faults, errors, doubts, perturbations, discouragements and evil.
2. Spiritual work suffers a slow-down due to weakening of strength that keeps getting worse to the point of reaching a state of prostration that borders on fainting and death. By its very nature the work of creation requires a continuous and

progressive revitalization of the forces of the spirit and for this reason the Holy Spirit pours upon us from above the virtue and gift of fortitude. This weakening of forces is due to lack of nourishment, to irregular nutriment, inadequate substance of food, or to the monotony of the food of which the organism has become saturated, and therefore suffers from nausea; this tells me that food must be not only chosen, substantial and abundant, but also regularly taken and variously prepared.

3. We pretend to nurture our strength with our fantasy, sentiment or taste, but that is not food. The way is the intellect and its aliment is truth. The clearest symptom of extreme weakness produces a clouding of the sight that gives dizziness, likewise the weakening of the spirit, for lack of real nutrition, obscures the truth already possessed in the mind, and causes strange changes of behavior, with bitter surprises. The shadows fall and it becomes night. It is the hour of the power of darkness that is about to take advantage of our weakness. O Lord, make haste to help me.
4. Whenever in my heart there is a shadow between myself and any neighbor, whenever in my mind there is a dark point of ignorance or practical doubt in the soul, there, for sure there is the spirit of the world or of hell lurking and operating to my neighbor's damage and mine. Its first effect is always to cause impediments so that we may not walk toward the light; to cause other shadows to intensify the previous ones producing coldness in the heart, disturbance in the mind and bad mood in all life. Let there be light! Let us establish the exercises of light and let them function regularly in the soul. And there shall be light.
5. Every secret of evil that we hate to reveal to the ones we should make it known is like a dark corner where we have hidden the trash of the soul instead of throwing it away. The soul seems to be clean, but it is not. It is like a fold of the soul

that prevents her from receiving her full sun and weakens her in her impetus.

It is like a moist and black stone, under which nest many wicked worms that cannot withstand the light and flee at the simple lifting of the stone. But what is worse, it is a citadel of Satan in the soul. Every secret of good renders the good itself more intense and more diffusive. Every secret of evil makes the same evil more serious, more contagious, and more infernal.

6. We have to start all over again because the edifice of health has collapsed. And we restart! This situation is always serious due to the huge and serious work of clearing up debris and rubbish; this work of divine restructuring becomes even more severe when not even the foundations have been saved from ruin, but have been shaken, broken and demolished. This happens when faith too is dead, because it has been killed in the soul; and every principle of holy humility is drowned in the asphyxiating miasma of pride and of flesh. So we must start all over again from zero. A more direct and personal intervention of God is needed, and ... the good Lord intervenes. Only he can do it. He is the only hope of salvation for that soul. The good Lord intervenes. Let us start all over again.
7. First of all we need light and bread! No journey can start and be continued, no work can start well and be brought to completion without light and bread. The truth is light and bread. The light is God; the truth is his Word. Light and truth come to me in the word of God; this explains why the enemy places so many obstacles to its diffusion; when he does not succeed in it, he places many obstacles to its comprehension, and when he fails in this, he places many impediments to its application. I want to foil completely all his efforts. I must not, I cannot, I do not want to be satisfied by only listening to the word of God whenever an occasion happens. I must procure

it diligently and regularly drawing the word of God from its sources of divine Scripture, and from the Catholic teachings of my mother, the holy Church!

8. My poor human heart, in my weak human nature, is troubled at the thought of a new journey, of a new work, and of new struggles and fears to be subjected to unknown separations, wounds and immolations. My heart knows that the word of God is essentially a double-edged sword; a word that does not penetrate, wound and cut in the living flesh and heart, is not word of God. This effect of the word of God is very much true and real and I say to my poor heart: Be good and stay in peace, a flood of peace and sweetness awaits you! If your heart is like stone and ice, you will certainly suffer fire and brimstone. But if you are good-hearted, it will be something else, O my poor heart!
9. If you prove to be goodhearted and all docility to the word of God it will happen to you what happened to Samuel, that night! What happened to the Blessed Mother at the annunciation, what happened to Saul on that road! When the word of God finds a docile heart makes of him a prophet, an apostle, and his own mother! Make yours the answer and dispositions of these three persons, and not for some moments or for some acts, but permanently – let this be you permanent interior disposition: docility of heart! This is what Salomon asked for and God loved him for it; this is what corresponds more to your essential dependence on God in being and operating. *Fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum. Suscipe me secundum eloquium tuum. Let it be done to me according to your word. Take me according to your word.*
10. Speak, Lord! The word of God eternally resounds in God himself; likewise perennially it is addressed to the intelligent creature in so many different ways. Ordinarily I will not expect

to hear the word of God by way of senses. Through the way of the senses will come to me the word of men, the voice of things, not that of God! Through the way of the senses many times has come the enemy, and consequently that way has been profaned, soiled and unworthy to be used by God. I will be purifying this way of the senses always more in preparation of the glory of the resurrection, when the Lord will come through all the ways of the soul. The purification of the way of the senses will affect the purification of the interior ways through which I expect that the Word come to me.

11. He comes! At times he comes at the beginning, at times at the end and at times in the midst of prayer. He comes in the tumult of distractions, in solitude, in the occupations of my duties, in the harmony of sacred songs. I know for sure that he does not come at the moments that I choose for him to come with hidden irreverence. He wants me to be expecting at all times, but he does not expect me to establish the moment and the place, he comes freely whenever it pleases him. He comes, but always so suave, tenuous and light that many times I do not realize that it is him, or do not feel his presence. He does not want that I ask him to be more heavy handed with me because he does not give up his ways of divine sweetness to adjust to my harshness and dissipation. My hardness must sacrifice itself and be assimilated by divine attitudes.
12. He comes! Oh! How much light, peace and vigor of life! The soul enjoys a lasting peace, is strengthened and vivified. The soul must prolong as much as possible these effects of the interior word of God, must keep it lovingly and meditate on it (the occupation of the immaculate heart of Mary) and must implore that these effects may last until death. Not like those souls that build a house without any door or window, or only to the north, and lock themselves in as in a cocoon in which the worm dies without ever becoming a butterfly; as in a tomb

where no angelic trump ever arrives. Nor like other souls that succeed with their thoughtlessness to eliminate, one by one, all the rays of the soul's sun and for them the word is cold and dark, on account of their own faults. *Maria autem conservabat omnia verba haec conferens in corde suo – Mary kept all these words, meditating on them in her heart* (Lk 2, 19).

CHAPTER 2

Exercise of Light

It must become like a second nature for me, and I must do all that is possible to make sure that everyone comprehend and live the principle that I exist only for the glory of the Most Holy Trinity and to reveal the Trinity to others. This principle is the light of life and it necessitates my commitment to meditation, sacred study, spiritual reading, examination of conscience, spiritual direction and spiritual imitation, to spiritual conversation and to the apostolate of good example. The glory of God in us is inseparably united to our happiness in him. We take care of God's glory and God takes care of our happiness.

1. In Catholic teaching, moral integrated by asceticism is not the unique and entire banquet of the divine Word. The first and main banquet of the word of God is dogmatic theology from which originates moral theology. Dogmatic theology has a much greater role and development in the Holy Doctors and in the magisterium of the Church. The entire sacred theology: dogmatic and moral, asceticism and mysticism, in the entire teaching of the Catholic Church, must dispense to me the daily bread of light that I in turn will dispense to the brothers. I will continuously try to infuse or awaken the hunger and thirst of the word of God throughout the whole world, certain that this hunger and thirst will soon be satisfied in external and internal banquets of the word.
2. The principle that I am totally, exclusively and perpetually for the glory of my adorable Trinity and consequently to be the revelation and the delight of the Trinity is the light of life in

the supernatural order. Every step taken in the dark is a ruined work. Every act and state of mine out of this light cannot be perfect and cannot reveal the Lord, and much less please God, because it would lack the fundamental morality, which is the intention of wanting it.

3. I must make sure that this principle is kept shining ever more clearly before my eyes and the eyes of the whole world: It must become like a second nature to me, from which I cannot escape or subtract myself. Amen. I must make sure that I remain inviolably faithful to the practice of the exercises of light; otherwise I will inexorably fall into darkness. Amen. In my apostolate I must teach these exercises of light and enable the souls entrusted to me to practice them ardently. I will do the same for the souls I reach with my prayers. Amen.
4. And the light was made! The entire universe of cosmic matter was enkindled with light. In this light, the creation of the first days took place. Later the light was condensed on the great luminaries for the day and the night; from this came the first distinction between luminaries and illuminated. The same happens in the interior world. This light is my goal, i.e., the fact I am totally, exclusively and perpetually ordained to the glory of God, it must be centralized in many luminaries, in some exercises, concentrators and diffusers of light in life that we call: exercises of light.
5. Exercises of light: 1) those that focus on the divine truth in itself are: meditation, study and spiritual reading; 2) those that focus on the truth applied to the practice of life are: examination of conscience, spiritual direction and holy imitation; 3) those applied to the truth that we make to shine in the mind of others are: preaching, spiritual conversation and edifying good example. They are all unified in the life of faith, in the loving presence of God, in the enjoyment of God's presence and in the prayerful exercise of God's presence.

6. The Lord in his wisdom and goodness disposed and wanted that his glory in us be inseparably united to our happiness in him. Our happiness consists in God finding his glory in us. Our real possession and enjoyment of our happiness in God is proportioned to God's true possession and enjoyment of his glory in us. All this takes place both on this earth and in heaven; imperfectly on earth, and perfectly in heaven. Our internal happiness must always be considered as the indicator and measure of the great or small glory that we render or deny to God.
7. In the exercise and life of religion, in all the exercises of life of religion we find the glory of God and our happiness. Those who seek their happiness elsewhere, as all poor worldly people do, will never be able to find it, not even for a moment of human life. The entire human life is ordained to the practice of religion in its integrity, both for the exigencies of God's glory and for the necessity of our happiness. The whole world and each individual without religion is always in a state of barbarism, more or less refined, but always barbarism; if we want to say it better, we could say a diabolical hellish state of unhappiness and damnation, whose only way out is entering and advancing in acts and states of true religion.
8. One is our ultimate goal, but it presents two sides, one seen from the part of God and one seen from the part of the creature. From God's side is called: The glory of God; from the side of the creature it is called: our happiness; it remains however one goal. Even when we say that the primary goal is the glory of God and the secondary goal is our happiness, we intend to say that there is one goal seen from two different points of view of which the first is the glory of God and the second is our happiness. They are one goal! In reality the ultimate goal cannot be but one, otherwise it would be a contradiction of terms.

9. This unique ultimate goal is God's own ultimate goal and likewise our ultimate goal. This is our greatest glory and happiness because in our being and operating, we have no other goal but God's goal in his being and act. The being and operating of God cannot have any other goal but his own self in his own glory, because everything out of God is less than he is. The human and operating being has no other destination but God in his glory. Man cannot have an ultimate goal similar to that of God, as he is the image and likeness of God, but he has as his ultimate goal God himself. Blessed be God.
10. The glory and complacencies of God, from the part of God, the perfection and happiness of the creature on our part, one in the other, are the unique ultimate goal of human life. While understanding the ultimate goal in its inseparability, which of the two aspects should the creature pursue directly, attracting later the other to which is always connected? In this, there is a covenant and a competition of love between God and the soul. As if God were to say to the soul: "You shall look directly after my greater glory and complacence, and I will directly look after your perfection and blessedness." And the soul responds: That is very advantageous to me. Amen! Amen!
11. In the soul that loves God, remains certain displeasure at the immense disproportion between the supreme way in which God provides for man's happiness and bliss, and the petty way in which I provide for the glory and pleasure of God on my part. Principle of high consolation is the fact that Jesus Christ, the man God, lives in me, so that every supernatural act of mine, more than mine is Jesus'. The act of every member of the body more than being the act of a single member, it is the act of its head. From this head that is Jesus, every supernatural act that takes place in the soul takes on a value corresponding to the very value of Jesus, a divine person, and therefore worthy of God.

12. Very high principle of consolation for the soul is the fact that her perfection and happiness intended and actualized by God ultimately is the very glory and complacency of God, because he is glorified in making his creature totally perfect, and he is pleased in making the creature totally blessed, and in the fact that he himself with his gift is the total perfection and blessedness of his creature. The soul, with pure love dedicates and focuses all her self by directly and personally glorifying and pleasing without worrying about her perfection and happiness since she knows of this divine exchange and fusion of divine and human hope.

CHAPTER 3

Exercise of God's Glory

Every human being must be an apparition, an epiphany of the Lord for others. To be a theophany of God I must transmit light, warmth and beauty. The more I deify myself through divine imitation the more I become God's Theophany. Every human being is called to be a special, unique, unrepeatable theophany of a perfection of God.

1. What does the Lord expect from me, so that I may be all delight and glory of him? 1) He wants that I apply myself to receive and manifest in myself the perfection of his divine being and operations, (in this, it seems that I feel a ray of the first divine person, the Father). 2) He wants that I apply myself to know and contemplate, desire, acquire and assimilate all the perfection of his being and action, profuse in the natural and supernatural world, to the point of filling of admiration and overflow in his praise, (in this, it seems that I feel a ray of the second divine person, the Son). 3) He wants me to teach all the good I may be able to learn, and that I may donate all the good that I may receive, and that I may compel others to do all the good that I may be able to do (in this, it seems that I feel a ray of the third divine person, the Holy Spirit).
2. The glory and the delight of the Lord require that I apply myself to receive and manifest in myself the perfection of divine being and operations, so – what a joy! – I may be an apparition of God in the world, a personal theophany for my brothers. What will this world ever be, when each person will be

an apparition of God? What a paradise it is going to be when every blessed is an apparition of God to all the others! O creating idea present in my God, I adore you! In order to receive and manifest the divine being, I must cultivate grace, because only grace does and is participation in the divine nature and union with the divine persons. Simply making sure that I do not lose nor diminish it will not satisfy me. I will be burning to increase it unlimitedly *usque ad mortem, usque ad summum – till death, to the outmost!*

3. The poor piece of iron, so hard and so cold, longs to be immersed in the fire to get rid of its hardness, darkness and obscurity, to the point of becoming red-hot, undistinguishable from the fire itself, and yet remaining iron! That is it! Once it has become so beautiful, it starts thinking of a more sublime fire and longs for the sun, and does not have any idea of what may be beyond the sun. The soul, in God's grace, finds always the possibility of higher, and higher, more elevated and ever more excellent and more sublime levels for her participation of divine nature, in her union with the divine persons, and thus becomes ever more glory and delight for her God!
4. This sanctifying grace is totally lost with every mortal sin, even only one! It would be better to die! God's grace decreases with every deliberate venial sin. Some venial sins may weaken and make us lose many levels of grace in a short time! There are some venial sins that instantly reduce my level of grace; even if it is elevated to one hundred or one thousand, it reduces it to one only level; it brings me close to the abyss, hanging from a thread on the abyss. Again it would be better to die. What good would it be for a soul to gain the whole world, if in the process, she were to suffer a spiritual loss, even of one single level of grace? Grace also diminishes at every good act not done with due perfection, at the level of the previously accumulated grace. O my God, I really have no alternative, but to become a saint!

5. To the contrary, grace increases at every sacramental absolution that I receive on free matter¹ (Blessed be God)! It increases also at every sacramental communion I receive with due dispositions. I will then be hungry of sacramental absolutions and communions, and spiritual communions and absolutions. In which other ways does grace increase? I want to please ever more my God, I want to be ever more united with my God! I want to possess and glorify him ever more! Grace increases at every act of love, implicit in every virtuous act done for the love of God. It increases much more with every explicit, intense and perfect act of love! Blessed be God! I will dedicate myself to the act of perfect love, to the apostolate of the act of perfect love, so that we may all enter and progress in the state and relation of consummated love with God.
6. Would I have thus become that apparition of God I am meant to be? Will I be more that personal, living theophany I must be for all my brethren? I still ought to receive and manifest the perfection of the divine operations, and this part of my goal requires from my part the imitation of God. O divine imitation! Only program really worth of the soul in state of grace! I cannot imitate one I cannot see, and for this reason the Lord displays and carries on his works before your eyes. They carry your imprint, O Lord. Yet they are not you! That is why the Lord has made possible the incarnation! My God has become man, - my man-God, Jesus! Now we have it! Now I have it! O divine imitation of Jesus Christ, you make me another Jesus and God's apparition on earth. Amen!
7. Which perfection, in a special way, have I been created to reproduce, manifest and glorify? Certainly, it would be impossible for me to reproduce, manifest and glorify them all. How I would love to know it! Just as I would love to know who

¹ Free matter of confession are: venial sins and imperfections.

is my angel, what is his name, so I would love to know the divine perfection of which I must be manifestation and glory. In every spiritual work the main part is always that of the Holy Spirit. In all that pertains to God, there is always something mysterious. I must resign myself to the fact that I will never know which perfection I must manifest and glorify. It does not make any difference that I have the impression that knowing it I would imitate it better. Not so! Maybe, I could become more an exaggeration or a grimace of it. The seed does not have any idea of the flower that would come out of it. The program of the divine imitation in Christ is enough for me. Amen.

8. Divine glory and divine complacence want me to be perfect, not according to the model of this or that category of angels, but according to the model of my God and my Father, as he is revealed and communicated to me in Jesus Christ, who tells me: *Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect!* Blessed be God! If St. Paul tells me, and if with him any other saint would tell me: *Imitatores mei estote sicut et ego Christi – Be my imitators as I am imitator of Christ,* I would take it in this sense: *Be my imitators in what I have imitated Jesus.* So amongst all the saints there should be some kind of competition in imitating each one as much and as best he can, the only model Jesus Christ. Thus we will turn out to be living apparitions of God both in heaven and on earth, each one according to his grace, it will be absolutely impossible to go beyond grace.
9. Practically the divine glory and the divine complacence require my perennial formation according to Jesus Christ, the same goes also for every person, institute or moral person. The formation of Jesus in every person and in every family of souls does not happen differently from the first formation of Jesus, which happened entirely by the will of the Father, the mission of the Word and the immediate intervention of the Holy Spirit in the Virgin Mary. The Blessed Mother, humble,

loving and pure consented to the will of the Father, the mission of the Word and to the work of the Holy Spirit. Thus she became mother of Jesus then and forever in every formation of Jesus in the souls and in families of souls. I want to be all docility, fidelity and generosity of humble, loving and pure obedience to the work of the Holy Spirit and of Mary in the soul and in my work so that it may be according to Jesus Christ, and Jesus may be formed in them.

10. Every inspiration of the Holy Spirit, regardless of its objective and regardless from which of the seven gifts it may come to me, (O my seven suns shining in my supernatural heaven and influential in my supernatural world!) it will be accepted with veneration and entrusted with full confidence to the Virgin Mary, so that she may bring it to its maximum fulfillment in me. Through Mary I receive every grace, she is the Mediatrix of every communication of grace and the cooperator of every correspondence to the grace. Between the Spirit and Mary, the soul and the works will be formed according to Jesus. Jesus lives in a continuous growth in age, wisdom and grace in the eyes of God and of men, in the soul that remains subject to the Spirit and to Mary.
11. The theophany in man and in the works must happen in this way: In each one of us must appear a ray of God's goodness in such a way that whoever gets close may perceive the presence of God. People who deal with us feel a contact with God. The one to whom we give a look, a smile, a word or any other gift of one of our acts, feels that Jesus lives in us and through us he looks, smiles, talks and works in him. Likewise everywhere, from our goal, in our means, in our organization, and in our works, in our ways and from everything may shine forth and be felt the soul of the Church, the court of the angels and saints, the control and direction of the Spirit of God, the divine family of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit through every soul in her divine life.

12. The soul cooperates with the respective exercises of the light, with passionate spiritual reading of all biographies of Jesus lovingly compiled by Catholic souls, based on the Gospels; with profound meditation upon each act, state, teaching and work of our Lord Jesus Christ; with the prayerful reading of every biography of the saints and Christian heroes, as if they were so many pages of the life of Jesus, admirable in his saints, because living in his saints; even more with the correspondence to the grace of love, with the life of the spirit of love because it is proper of love, and only of love, to transport and assimilate us to the beloved. The divine formation of Jesus in us takes place and progresses through the strength and virtue of grace and of love.

CHAPTER 4

Ideals of Life

This chapter could be a separate section. Since it seems to be the logical conclusion of "Spiritual Formation" we publish it here as its continuation. This chapter reiterates some basic principles of the spirituality of Bl. Justin. The life of Jesus on earth culminates with his ascension to the Father. The Jesus "ideal and model" of the Vocationists, is the Jesus in the period that goes from the resurrection to the ascension. The Mount of the Ascension is the mystic mountain of the Justinian spirituality. The first volume of this work is precisely Ascension. The principle: "man is limited and successive" almost insensibly becomes: "Man is limited and ascensional".

1. The sublime style of Christian life, in its maximum efficiency, seems to be in Jesus Christ, in the period from the Resurrection to the Ascension. O Lent of glory! He is still in this world, but only to ascend to the Father, since he already belongs definitively to heaven, even with his humanity. Still he converses with men, but through the way and in the manner of supernatural and non-continuous appearances. He is in his humanity, but in a body all spiritualized by the glorious state, in which the signs of passion are a source of beauty and a seal of glory.
2. Jesus' soul is all in that affirmation, in that elevation: *Ascendo ad Deum, ascendo ad Patrem – I ascend to God, I ascend to the Father*. In order to infuse that aspiration in our souls, and in order to attract our souls to that elevation, he says: Behold, I ascend to the one who is my God and your God, my Father and your

Father! You too must ascend to him as I do, because he is also your God and your Father. He wants all his disciples present at his ascension, so that they may learn to elevate themselves after him and with him.

3. It is Jesus' last invitation and appointment to his dear ones, and, in them, to us all; he is the Son for whom the Father has prepared the wedding banquet, the one who has come not to be served but to serve and give his life for the redemption of all; He is the bridegroom of the banquet, the one who became the first servant of the banquet, who for three years had been calling and pressuring the invited guests to the banquet of his word, of his life giving flesh. Now this is the last invitation to his ascension for the supreme banquet of his glory in heaven.
4. His first words recorded in the Gospel imply the program of religious ascensions that must permeate and build human life. "Why were you looking for me?" (Through the streets of the city, in the houses of men, rather than through the roads to the temple and in the house of God?). "It is necessary for me to be in the house of the Father" As a child, he had separated himself from his holy family on earth. After having revealed more clearly his union with the Father, he clings to the family of the apostles, and ascends to heaven forever, even with his humanity, at the right hand of the Father, from whose bosom, without leaving him, he came amongst us.
5. Jesus' life, was a life of continuous dwelling in God's house and of continuous occupation in what pertains to God. Since God is fully known, served, loved, glorified and possessed in heaven, his life was a continuous ascension to heaven, as it is written: *Blessed the man, you have chosen and taken to yourself!* He shall dwell in your house and will receive all help from you, Lord, and he will experience in his heart continuous ascensions. No level, degree or progress will satisfy him, and at no stage will he stop, no station will deceive him, for within

his heart there is the spirit of ascension, which pushes, propels and raises him up to the heaven and throne of God.

6. An entirely celestial life – while still in the body, - in a mortal and passible body, subject to temptation, and yet spiritualized by the dominion of the spirit, by Christian penance, by a regime of purity and the labors of the apostolate, by the maceration of study and meditation and above all by the use of holy Eucharist. The body has become as recalcitrant to the solicitations of an enemy, armored to the blows of another and insensitive to the seductions of another enemy, and tells the creature: *Noli me tangere - do not touch me!* (Jn 20, 17).
7. A life that is still spent on earth but with open skies over the earth to flood it with the splendor of the sky and makes it like a vestibule of paradise and prelude of eternal feast, which makes the soul linger in pious practices and seek the desert, pleased with solitude and prolongs her prayer. Those who look with corporeal eyes say: *Here is a wounded heart*. The soul answers: *No, a healed heart*. Those who see with a spiritual eyes say: *Here is a solitary heart!* The soul nods: *Yes, but also a heart united with the divine heart that never betrays and abandons*.
8. An earthly life must be frequently in contact with men, and yet a life that for its fullness of the supernatural element, on account of a holy need and a saintly instinct, wants to enter into conversation with the neighbors, as in supernatural apparitions, exclusively to confirm the brethren in the works of faith, exclusively to communicate with the brethren in the works of charity, exclusively to organize the brethren in the works of obedience, uniquely for sacred ministry of elevating their hearts to heaven in prayer and then disappear from their eyes.
9. A life to which is continuously directed the invitation of the angels to the appointments with the Lord, on the holy moun-

tains of heroic virtues. A life that frequently receives the promise of new infusions of the Holy Spirit, not in a distant future but in an immediate one. A life over which hovers the divine breath that confers supernatural powers, communication of divine powers. A life endowed with all the blessings of apostolate, with all the effects of the divine mission: *Go throughout the whole world, teach all peoples, baptizing them and teaching them how to practice all that I have taught you* (Mk 16,15).

10. The divine powers make it a life of prodigy! Prodigy of virtue and of works, because prodigy of elevation to God and union with God. In my name they will drive out demons, which keep souls hindered from the elevations to heaven and chained to the world, dragged to the abysses, make men a mass of poor people, sick in the spirit and in the body. The hands of the apostles and of every saint of the Lord will drive them out in the name of God-Jesus and will relegate them to their dark places. Once the demons are driven out, those hands will be left to bless the sick. Once the cause of moral evil has been eliminated, even physical evils will be alleviated and healed. When the soul raises to holiness the body also nears perfect health.
11. Jesus ascends; a cloud envelops him and hides him to the world and to the eyes of his loving disciples. It is the Holy Spirit! The Spirit through whose work the Word became man, and we have Jesus. The Spirit who glorified him in the Jordan and on Mount Tabor, led him to the desert and to the cross now receives him. The Spirit led to heaven the sacred humanity of that divine person that is eternally in the bosom of the Father. O Holy Spirit, enwrap, accept and hide my soul to man, elevate and bring her to the Father.
12. Easter time does not end with the fall of the soul in the inferior state from which she came out in virtue of the resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus, but with the soul starting her

journey towards a higher end of the imitation of Jesus in all his mysteries, states and acts, contemplated in a much more vivid light, loved with love so much more alive as to seem sweet news. The novelty lies in the soul, in her greater participation in the gifts, fruits and beatitudes of the Holy Spirit, effect of redemption. Not in vain, Christian feasts take place every year in the spiritual world. They culminate in Pentecost. *In novitate spiritus ambulemus. Amen. Alleluia. - Let us walk into the novelty of the spirit. Amen. Alleluia*".

CHAPTER 5

For the Glorification of God Trinity

We must glorify the Lord as one divine person glorifies the other, acknowledging the divine perfections and operations. In the divine perfections we see the holiness, the greatness and beauty of God; in the divine operations we see the external reflection of God's perfections. Contemplating the greatness and beauty of the divine perfections and operations we cannot but remain ecstatic and praise God's marvels.

1. *Ille me glorificabit quia de meo accipiet* He will glorify me, since all he reveals to you will be taken from what is mine (Jn 16,14). If we want to glorify God in our life and with our person, we must elevate ourselves and get the idea of the glory that the Lord receives in his very divine life, one person from the other within the divine holy Trinity. We must elevate ourselves to grasp the idea of the glory that the Lord God receives in himself, one divine person for the other in the Blessed Trinity.
2. The Word glorifies the Father because he is eternally being generated by the Father, *Deum de Deo, lumen de lumine, genitum, consubstantialem* - God from God, Light from light, generated consubstantial.¹ In the divinity the Son reveals the Father as the word reveals the thought, as the thought reveals the mind, as the mind reveals the life. This revelation of the Father is the glory of the Father.

¹From the Nicean Creed.

3. In a like manner the Holy Spirit glorifies the Father and the Son because he is eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son as from one only principle of the third divine person. He, the divine Spirit, the only love of the Father and of the Son, reveals in the divinity all the love of God the Father and of God the Son. He reveals the substantial and personal love of the Father and of the Son for all that God necessarily loves, that is the divine essence, the divine attributes and the divine persons.
4. Every artist is glorified by the manifestation of his genius, i.e., his masterpiece; and there is no other true glory. Likewise every soul glorifies the Lord in as much as she manifests the Lord in his action, in his life in his person. In order to manifest him, the soul must take from what is his. What is not taken from God is not a manifestation, but a falsification of God.
5. Likewise, Jesus Christ, the man-God glorifies the Father and the most holy Trinity because he is the supreme revelation of the Father and of the Trinity. Jesus is the supreme revelation of the Trinity because his humanity has received and taken from the Trinity the supreme communication of what is true of the divine good, the hypostatic union through which human nature has received the divine person of the Word.
6. In a similar way every disciple of Jesus Christ, every elect glorifies the Trinity in Jesus Christ, in as much as he receives from the Trinity, or better receives and takes from the Trinity in Jesus Christ; in as much as he receives and takes from the divine truth, in the teachings of Jesus Christ; in as much as he receives and takes from the divine bounty, in the love of Jesus Christ; in as much as he receives and takes from the divine wealth in the merits of Jesus Christ; in as much as he receives from the divine action in the work of Jesus Christ, who is the redemption and the sanctification through the holy Church.

7. I will be very attentive to receive and take the best and the most that will be made available to me in the grace of every day and of every hour, from prayer, the word and example, from the Gospel, from the work and from the Spirit, from the Heart of my Jesus. I am aware that this receiving, taking and assimilating is directly proportioned to the love with which I love him. O love, you are the only human-divine power that transmits life, assimilates virtues and unites persons. Amen.

CHAPTER 6

Acts of Union with the Divine Will

“In his will is our peace” says Dante Alighieri. Blessed Justin took, as his motto-program G.A.U.D.I.U.M. – Gloria, Amor, Voluntas Dei in Universe Mundo - glory, love, will of God in the universal world. To see the will of God in pleasant and unpleasant things; to do always and everywhere the will of God is our glory and our joy. Since the object of the will is the good and God is the supreme good, it follows that a well formed will cannot but direct and strive towards God, and this not in single or frequent acts, but in a continuous state, that of divine union with the same highest good.

1. “God’s will!” Saying “God’s will” we take courage and resign ourselves, and we also express our making virtue out of necessity in our adversities. To me it seems very incorrect toward the Lord and therefore also very detrimental to the souls, this invoking, naming, or seeing *God’s will* only in sad, contrary, painful things. It’s not right.
2. It is not right for two reasons: First and foremost because in what is sad, contrary and painful, in general, there is the will of God only conditionally, and many times only permissively, which properly and strictly speaking, is not will of God in the sense we give to this expression in its common use. In all these cases, the direct object of the will of God is not that sad, painful, contrary things, in the way we see and express ourselves; the general and particular good cannot be obtained in any other way or through any other process but suffering.
3. Even more, it is not right for a second reason; we use to say

“God’s will” only, almost exclusively, in painful situations, and whenever we have to impose to our human will an act of resignation to suffering, of acceptance of pain; as if divine will and pain were the very same thing.

4. The very grave injury to God and the grave damage to the souls consist in the fact that in our erroneous mentality we combine the idea of the will of God with the idea of suffering and humiliation. The truth is totally different! God’s will is all life, joy and paradise; is all Father, Son and Holy Spirit, it is all infinite glory and love!
5. If we understand and fulfill it correctly, *will of God* is Jesus, Mary, holy Church; it is all salvation, consolation, elevation, sanctification and glorification of the entire man, mind and heart, soul and body, in time and in eternity.
6. In our painful experiences, we should say “God’s will” and make acts of union of our will with his will; with this we intend: God’s will, salvation from every evil! God’s will, consolation in every pain! God’s will, lifting up from every humiliation. God’s will, sanctification of every human act and state.
7. If we do not understand correctly what the expression “God’s will” must mean for us, we would not be able to unite ourselves properly to the will of God. We may end up by embracing, with our acts of resignation, some shadows of God’s will rather than the three divine persons in the will of God. We do not want to embrace shadows but persons.
8. We must say “God’s will” (invoking, exalting, adoring and embracing it) especially in all happy, joyful, luminous, vivifying, beautiful, great and delightful things; in them we find much more easily the direct, and not only permissive, will of God. In them God’s will is not conditionally but absolutely. They more easily give us the idea of the will of God whose object is absolute and infinite good.

9. Let no one tell me that in painful things, it is more difficult to do God's will, and therefore it is necessary to recall it expressly. In happy and pleasant experiences it is easier and therefore there is no need to recall it. In this, there is a harmful trick for the soul. In those things that are happy and pleasant the soul finds the delight of her human, natural will, minimally or not at all meritorious of eternal life; in delightful events the soul should elevate herself to the will of God and find her delight in the will of God with acts of meritorious and supernatural union.
10. In unpleasant circumstances the soul must, likewise, elevate and unite herself to the holy, sweet, beautiful and lovable will of God with acts of supernatural union, more than with acts or resignation to suffering. In this act of resignation usually enters some sense of passivity, which leads to inertia and misunderstood abandonment that breaks down and depresses the soul. In all things we need to react to physical and even more to moral evil.
11. This reaction to physical and moral evil is what God really wants when he permits moral evil, and when conditionally he consents to the physical evil of his creature. This reaction is neither rebellion nor subtraction of the creature from the providential divine dispositions. Reaction is properly the elevation and union of the human will to the divine will in every painful circumstance, in every uncomfortable object. This should take place also in joyful event. Always and in everything the soul must elevate, detach, and free herself from the casing of the matter, of the temporality and of the creatures in order to be connected with God.
12. This is what the divine will expects from us in every pleasant and unpleasant thing: the elevation of the human will to the union with the divine will, in sad things through the way of negation, in pleasant things through the way of affirmation.

In the divine will there is nothing sad that causes suffering and evil. In the divine will we find all that helps and gladdens us, but in an infinite level, without the faults and limitations of created joys.

O how much worthy of love, you are, O divine will (We sing with Saint Alphonsus, saddened by the death of Venerable Cafaro, his spiritual son, companion and spiritual director). Amen - Alleluia.

CHAPTER 7

Divine Presence

Blessed Fr. Justin used to have his first disciples memorize the verses of Metastasio: "Ovunque lo sguardo giro – Immenso Dio ti vedo. Nelle opere tue t'ammiro – Ti riconosco in me. –Wherever my eyes I turn – Immense God I see you. In your works I admire you. In me I recognize you". The awareness of God's presence, and the vision of God are the beginning of divine union. The Fathers of Christian asceticism teach us that the exercise of the presence of God is the first step in our ascension to Christian perfection. For Blessed Fr. Justin, the exercise of the divine presence is the beginning of divine union. As there are various ways and levels of God's presence, so there are various ways and levels of divine union.

1. It is necessary to know oneself in order to be able to fulfill the duty of self-purification work, elevation to God and imitation of Jesus. Let us all stand straight and march forward. In such a position we cannot see all that is below our head in our body without bending down, which causes us to slow our race and stop. Bending is ugly but stopping is worse. Walking in a standing position we see near and far the road we must travel. We can raise our hands to the level of our eyes and inspect the work we are doing and that needs to be perfected. Likewise spiritually of all that is inferior we only need to see the way and the work. Paying attention to any other thing will only cause us to stop, or at least to bend.
2. Standing straight and walking we cannot see our face with its eyes, cheeks, lips, forehead and hair. This teaches us that we must attend to someone else, not to ourselves, we are for

another and not for ourselves; this other is God, both in our neighbors and in himself. If we need to see our face we must use that perfectly created thing, that well-polished object, that gathers in perfect peace every ray, that faithfully restitutes every image: the mirror. Only one mirror can accept and reflect our soul: the most perfect spirit, the Lord God, on the background sketch of humanity in Jesus Christ. In God, and in God alone, I will see myself. Applying myself to know God I will also get to know myself. Amen.

3. Natural reason calls self-knowledge wisdom. Supernatural reason calls “eternal life” the knowledge of God Trinity through Jesus Christ, who is the supreme revelation and communication of the Blessed Trinity. This is eternal life! In this initially and essentially consists eternal life: in the perfect knowledge of the Lord God. Every spiritual progress in supernatural life presupposes and necessarily requires a progress in the knowledge of God. Every new level of virtues blossoms from a new level of knowledge of God. Every new flame of love is enkindled from a new refulgence of this truth. Without an increase in the knowledge of God there is no increase of merit, grace and divine union. *Haec est vita aeterna ut cognoscant te et quem misisti Iesum Christum – eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent (Jn 17, 3).*
4. The Spirit within us requires a sublime knowledge of God, because he wants in us a sublime love, with sublime blossoming of virtues, with a sublime fructification of works for a sublime union with God Trinity. All knowledge supposes the presence of the one who is being known to the learner, and an interior commitment of the learner to the one who is being known. We call “Vision of God” this special study of the knowledge of God, this special exercise of the presence of God, this special dedication of the soul to God. This internal vision should correspond with its continuity and universality to the external

vision of all things that we have in the light of the sun; we cannot subtract ourselves to the light of the sun and we keep our eyes open; it is enough to have our eyes open to enjoy the light.

5. Vision of God. Since his creature cannot see God immediately, he covered himself with a veil. The veil is not a padded blanket; the veil is not an opaque wall. Veil is a fabric of knits so large as to show quite clearly the object it covers. How beautiful the veil of God must be! The veil that the Father has extended on his Son, like the mother who adorns the cradle of her child. The veil that the Father and the Son have stretched out on the Holy Spirit, like a bridal veil that adorns the bride; the veil which the Holy Spirit has spread over the Father and the Son as a priestly veil with which the most sacred things of the temple are adorned. This veil is creation with all its forms and its varieties, with all its laws. Every natural transformation is like waving of this veil.
6. God wants to be known by everybody, is present to everybody and wants to be seen by everybody. He wants to be seen in his beauty, and this explains why he has covered himself only with a veil. Since he is bounty, by his very nature he must spread out. Since he is love, he reveals himself. He wants to be loved and solicits the correspondence of his creatures with his divine exhibitions of his perfections and persons. The creatures, however, with an unnatural effort pose their gaze on the veil, and only on a few knits of that veil. Thus the eyes of the creatures are blinded and cannot see God present in the ostensions of his perfections in the communication of his persons. And even when they get to know him, they do not apply themselves to seeing him.
7. Even when they know and apply themselves to seeing him they do not know how to live habitually in his contemplation. They do not do it only because they do not want to do it. It

behooves us to apply all the light of our reason and faith and all intellectual gifts of which the Spirit has gifted us, opening all the interior vision of the soul to sweetly, reverently and constantly search for, gaze and contemplate our God, whose presence, gaze, beauty, and amiability surrounds us from every side; he gives himself to us in every thing; he waits for us in every place; he accompanies us on every road, introduces us in every city, he teaches us in every study; in every work he precedes us and leads us by the hand. He is really everything for us; he really is our all for everything.

8. This particular exercise of the divine presence that we take the liberty of calling "interior vision of God" is the effect of the virtue of faith enlivened by charity and moved by the gifts of wisdom, intellect, science, knowledge and other actual graces. The soul, applying her self with these virtues and gifts to pay attention to God's presence, can be carried from the laborious discursive practice to the sweetly intuitive practice of the divine presence, and to the mystical forms of intellectual vision in the supernatural contemplation. The soul has only to cultivate the discursive form or to follow the intuitive form, or to enjoy the mystical form of this divine presence according to the gift of God.
9. Everywhere and always, in every creature and in every event the Lord is present to the soul under a veil. He is much more present with his indwelling with the state of grace, in every angel and saint, in the Virgin Mary and in the substance of the soul that applies herself to pay attention to this divine presence. Much more, for other titles and in other much more marvelous ways he is present in the divine Eucharist. They are like so many environments, regions and supernatural heavens where the Lord resides and manifests himself, and where he waits for the soul to let herself be led to contemplate him, to join him. The soul must not persist with useless and

rather irreverent efforts of not wanting to contemplate God, alternating from one of his heaven to another, almost to his whim, but must follow the impulse that she receives from the intimate attraction that she feels like a sweet call, turning in the direction of inspiration, both from outside to inside and from inside to outside.

10. Likewise the soul must follow the interior attraction to pay attention to her Lord God contemplated as unity and Trinity, and in this case paying attention to one divine person and to all three together. When attracted to one divine person alone, the soul should be aware that she is enjoying the influence of the other divine persons and in them she will find and love the divine person to whom she is attracted. So, the soul who feels a special attraction to the Father must know that it is the Spirit of the Son acting in her, and will not be able to find the Father other than in the Son, nor can she love and contemplate him other than with the Son and the Spirit, and so on for the mystery of the divine circuminsession and for the very nature of the three relations.
11. Vision of Jesus in the neighbor. Dealing with our neighbors does not impede the internal application to the divine presence, or vision, as we call it. People and the happenings of the world are also veils of God. In our neighbors for so many titles we see Jesus our head, to whom we are all incorporated. Nothing helps the growth of charity in all its forms and in all its expressions as much as the vision of Jesus in our brothers and sisters, not only in our superiors and in the priests but also in each and all our brethren. The spirit of faith in the exercise of the holy gifts gives us the grace to see Jesus in the various mysteries and states of his mortal life and simultaneously enables us to honor, visit, console, grow, defend, follow, listen, please him with all the devotion and love that the thought of Jesus awakens in us and the presence of Jesus operates in us.

12. We must truly study and examine this sublime exercise of the divine presence, with particular, general and universal application, so as to make of it a holy habit. Everything and everybody will lead us to that very special presence that is the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. To him will we orientate ourselves also bodily from wherever we are. We will multiply and prolong our visits until we can say that we live in his house. And much more so from his divine communion, we will take an idea and example for the volitional acts with which we will follow, perfect and complete every other vision of the Lord's faith in every thing and event, in every soul and in every chosen of the earth and of heaven. For through vision we aim, tend, and perpetually arrive with the help of his grace to communion with God.

CHAPTER 8

Goal in General

The Constitutions of the Society of Divine Vocations (Ed. 1986, art.2) state: "the general goal of the Congregation is to direct and lead all its children, and through them all souls, to perfect union with the divine persons, through communion with the most Sacred Heart of Jesus". Fr. Justin states: "You have been created uniquely and exclusively for the Glory of God, and you must ordain all yourself to that goal and everything must turn to the glory of the Lord".

In order to reach the glory of God is necessary the imitation of God and the reproduction of Jesus in us, because we have been created in the image and likeness of God.

1. Our dominant spiritual disease is the weakness of the will. So, there is a need of continuous treatment of strength, training exercise, to reinvigorate it. Cause of this weakness of will is the lack of strong convictions, that is, of great ideas, bright enough to ignite, excite, win and rapture us, that is to touch and move our will to implement them. This must be above all the idea of the goal, luminous, bright and dazzling and therefore convincing and enrapturing. Such will not be as long as we have only a general idea of the goal. The general idea is necessarily vague and confused, so it sparks a dull light, a tepid warmth, a dim voice and the will remains, before its enunciation, in its sleep, torpor and inertia, always waiting to be woken up, shaken and put into motion by a benefic and stronger power.
2. Life is a long and great journey from earth to heaven through

seas, deserts, cities, highlands, valleys etc. we have to go through it whole. Okay! Tell me through which sea, desert, city, mountains, valleys and highlands I must trace my journey. Whom can I walk with? Whom should I follow? If I can use some means of transport, what would be the most suitable for me in particular?

See, my soul: life is a great work to be accomplished and then present it on the Sabbath to the divine artist, who will reward, if he is satisfied with the work done perfectly. It will punish and, perhaps eternally, for unfinished and imperfect work. The Sabbath is the day of death. I understand! But tell me what is my work, my instrument and my sample, so that I can start working on it and bring it to completion.

3. Understand well, O soul: Life is a great battle to be fought against invisible enemies, and often also visible enemies. Decisive battle of your eternal fate, and of many other souls! Bloody battle, full of pitfalls and betrayals, which reserve many serious surprises. Your not well-used victories will prepare your defeats. I understand, but tell me who is my captain, my flag, my weapons, my place of combat, my particular enemy whose positions I must conquer, so that I can show my value.

Know, O soul, that for this walk and for this work and for this battle you need not a day or one hour less of all the days and hours of your life. Why then do you hesitate to start?

I cannot begin if I do not know what is the specific path that I must travel, the battle that I must fight, the work that I must present, complete and perfect.

4. Don't you understand, my soul, that life is a great trial to which the Lord has subjected the souls, before admitting them into eternity, and if they are found faithful, will possess heaven? It is a continuous test of all the virtues, above all of love in all forms and degrees. What is the special proof that the Lord expects of me?

See, you have been created uniquely and totally for the glory of the Lord, and therefore you must ordain all of yourself to that end, and everything in you, acts, states, deeds and relationships, must be of glory for the Lord. But what is the special glory that the good God expects of me? How could I make it if needing my cooperation, I am not aware of where to apply myself?

5. The glory of God necessitates the imitation of God, the reproduction of Jesus in you. In this consists your journey, work, battle and trial; to this you must apply yourself and in this you must spend your life.

Glory to God for such a lofty, worthy and everlasting goal that he deigned to propose and set for me. Being the Lord God infinite in all his perfections and works, from which angle and to which level do I have to imitate him? In which mystery and in which acts of the Incarnate Word must I reproduce Jesus in me, so as to render God the glory he expects from me? How will I know which is my personal battle and trial in their most detailed particulars, in all their parts and ensemble, so as to be totally inflamed, enthused and enraptured, and thus enabled day by day, while patiently treading my journey and work?

6. When I dedicate myself to reading the lives of the saints, with sincere interest and devotion, with the intention of reading in them as many pages of the life of Jesus (as it is Jesus who lived and lives in them), I feel like a spiritual sympathy, more alive for some works than for others, a more lively attraction for some exercises of virtue than for others. Although the style and literary genius of the author, other extrinsic elements, and the providential internal and external reasons of life may influence my impressions, everything contributes to the good of the elect, that is to help them to know and achieve their religious goal; they make me put together everything I like and benefit me most in the saints. All these things together make me see what I have to be and I must personally do for my God.

7. Every day it happens that while we are with our confreres, we cannot fail to see their conduct, receive their trait, feel their ways, and while we do not want to arrogantly arrogate to ourselves the office of being their judges, we cannot avoid forming in our mind a certain judgment and appreciation. Especially when we are dealing with people with whom we are in a relationship of kinship and friendship, we, with sharpness and sensitivity based on the intensity of affection, notice many things we would like them to be in themselves and for us, in an ideal world. By putting all these daily observations together, we get other ideas about what our practical goal is. We can also apply to the Lord the maxim: *do or don't do to others what we would like others to do or not to do to us*. We therefore convince ourselves that we must be for the Lord and do for the Lord at least everything we would like others to do or not do to us.

8. From all created things we must elevate ourselves to the knowledge of God going from the effects to the cause. From among all creatures the one that most reveals the Lord, in our present condition of mortal life, is man. From among all men, the one that more closely and more effectively reveals God to us is our own I. Consequently, from our own aspirations and attractions, from our own desires and needs, from our own tastes and preferences, and similarly from our repugnance and aversion, from our apprehensions and fears, from our worries and afflictions, in a word from every form of intimate sympathy or abhorrence, well perceived and understood, we feel authorized to detect the same divine needs upon us. We rise from our own experience to the knowledge of what God wants from us. It is one of the many applications of that fundamental principle - that is, *we are created in the image and likeness of God*, and this principle allows us to see something of the divine demands upon us through what we feel in ourselves.

9. When in us there is a certain abundance of light, fire and life, we are inclined to communicate and transmit it to our neighbors through all forms of apostolate. As we commit ourselves to work for the conversion and sanctification of souls, we always have in our mind a certain type of religiosity that we like to impress in every soul, as a spiritual seal, as a spiritual mold, according to which we would like to shape every soul. This ideal of supernatural life is made to shine in the soul by the Spirit of the Lord, not so much in order to impose it on others, but so that we implement it in ourselves from day to day.

10. Cultivating our life of prayer and progressing in the intimacy with our Lord, we are often carried (maybe also with anxiety) to ask God and ourselves: Who am I, Lord God? Who are you, Lord God? What am I for you, Lord? What are you for me, Lord? Our Lord usually does not let unanswered for long time the question of his creature, especially when it proceeds from love and is presented with humility of dispositions and purity of intentions.
You, my soul, what would like the Lord to be for you? What would you like the Lord to do for you? This is exactly what the Lord is for you, exactly what he is doing now in you. But proportionately you too, O soul, try to be this same and to do this for him. You and God are the two terms of a relationship. Now in every relationship, from one term one knows the other, from what the former is and from what the former does, one deduces what the other must be and do.

11. When I faithfully and constantly dedicate myself to the exercise of the vision of God in everything, and of God Trinity in Jesus Christ, and of Jesus Christ in every human being, I see myself in God as the soul's only mirror; the knowledge of the Lord starts to take shape in me with ever more lively ideas impregnated with his perfections, works and persons.

It is the image of the man-God in the mysteries and states, in the works and acts of the Incarnate Word. This image of Jesus Christ, the man-God that the Holy Spirit is forming in my mind, and somehow also in my fantasy, is the same one that the Holy Spirit wants to express in my life, in my work and person. The individual traits of this image that day-by-day are designated inside of me, indicate the individual steps that I have to walk, the parts of work to be performed, the phases of the battle to be fought and the rays of glory to be rendered to God.

12. From the examples of the saints, or better, from the examples of Jesus living in the saints, we will draw as many clues to the path of travails and battles that we must travel. From our personal likes and dislikes in our neighbors and in ourselves, we will draw as many indications of the ways and means to use in our journey. From the kind of perfection that is our ideal in the apostolate, and much more from the knowledge we acquire of the Man-God, we form an idea of what must be our last and complete type; from this follows the great importance and necessity of inner recollection and fidelity to all the exercises of piety; we must also try to transform the exercises of piety into exercises of light, through the prevalence of mental prayer. In these we know what we must be and do for our God, and we receive as many daily spiritual tasks for the progressive attainment of our goal. What is the unifying formula of these different exercises? And what is the whole reality, barely mentioned, by all these fragmentary exercises?

CHAPTER 9

Specific Goal

From the general to the particular goal the road is short. The man is image and likeness of the three divine relations, of the three divine persons. Let us enter into relationship, let us become a living and personal relationship with the three divine persons. Our reason for being is to know and meditate on our personal relationship, a love relationship.

It is necessary to establish and refine this relationship throughout our entire life. Only in this way we truly get to know ourselves, we really get to know our God.

1. As fulfillment and crown of all the wonders of the previous creation, from the creation of the angels to the creation of matter, the Lord said: *Let us make man in our image and likeness, to preside over creation* (Gn 1: 16). In the words *let us make* we rightly find a revelation of the Trinity of persons in God, and therefore of the three divine relationships of Father, Son and Spirit that constitute and distinguish the three divine persons. In *At our image and likeness* we find not only the exemplary cause of man, but also the final cause of creation. Man is therefore the image and likeness of the three divine persons, and of the three divine relationships. He is created to enter into relationship, more properly to be a living personal relationship with the three divine relationships. Man's relationship is differentiated in the fact that those of the Trinity are uncreated relations, he is a created relationship, but he too is a living and personal relationship with the Lord God.
2. In the natural order we are born from a relationship of love,

and soon we find ourselves in a relationship of love with parents and relatives; as we grow in age we necessarily enter in other relationships of love. We carry within our own selves the destination and capacity to enter and reproduce similar relationships of love; the same happens in our supernatural world with more holy, beautiful and alive relationships. We come from God, root of our being, and we are ordained to the love of God, our ultimate goal. Only the relationship of love explains our beginning and reveals our final goal; only the relationship of love enables us to come out from our principle and enables us to reach our goal. Only the relationship of love expresses the rapport between our beginning and our end; and it generates the moving attraction from the beginning to the end. Hatred does not create relationships. By its very nature, hatred fights, dissociates and tends to destroy and cancel all relationships.

3. To every essential and personal relationship corresponds a particular state of life. For every state of life there is a particular mansion. In every mansion there are determined internal acts and external works to be done. For every relationship we cultivate with the heart of God there is a mansion for us in the kingdom of God. Jesus assured us that: *In domo Patris mei mansiones multae sunt – in my Father's house there are many dwelling places* (Jn 14, 2); from this we conclude that also with the heart of God there are many relationships. We can say that there are as many relationships as there are souls; every soul has her particular physiognomy, her particular vocation and mission. Every soul has her own mansion in the kingdom of God on account of her own relationship with the heart of God; her own personally, her own exclusively.
4. We can group in various categories the relationships we may have with the Lord. If we consider God as first cause and main agent, we may have with him the relationship of means;

or relationship of instrument, or even more, relationship as member.

If we consider him in his dignity of teacher we can have with him the relationship of janitor, disciple or substitute.

If we consider him in his dignity of supreme king we may relate with him as subjects, soldiers or ministers.

If we consider him as our Lord we may be with him in a relationship of servant, friend and lover.

If we consider him in his Trinity of persons and exclusively in the supernatural order we may have with him the relationship of child, mother or spouse.

5. We can discover what is our particular and personal relationship with the divine person from the interior attraction and sympathy that we feel for that particular relationship that we like more than the others while we enumerate or consider them. In our interior attraction and sympathy we have a sign, image and likeness of that attraction and sympathy that God has for us. Our attraction to God is an effect of God's attraction to us. This attraction indicates to us the relationship that the Lord wants to establish with us, and for which he has called us to life, faith and grace. Since God is the first term of this relationship, the principle of this relationship, he is the entire cause of this relationship, we receive from him the revealing sign of the relationship we ought to establish and cultivate with him.
6. How important is it to know and meditate on our particular, personal relationship of love, which is our whole reason for existing? We must cultivate and perfect this relationship in our life on earth and for all eternity. In this relationship we find our state, our mansion and our work; in it are also indicated and offered the appropriate means. Every relation cor-

responds to a state; each state corresponds to a task. Each task requires a special work. It is necessary to know all this in order to do it! When we have known him in the fullness of the inner and supernatural light, then we will feel inflamed with holy enthusiasm. We will feel moved and pushed to that path, to that work, to that battle, to that enterprise. Only in this way do we truly know ourselves, we really know our God.

7. It is not necessary for us to make the choice of the state. Very imperfectly we talk about choice of state, when it comes to the service of God and our relationship of love with him: all religion consists in this. The choice belongs to him, because he is the supreme Lord. As he did not make us choose the time, place and family in which we had to come into the world; as he does not leave to our determination the individual external circumstances in which life flows, the place, the time and proximate causes of temporal death, so in his adorable will, wisdom and love he has already determined our relationship with him. Every choice of state, task, works and means is equivalent to knowing what the divine plan is for each one of us; and, once we have known it, we ought to freely will and execute it with the right use of human freedom; or reject it, or execute it badly with so many abuses of human freedom.
8. Every relation is between two terms, and the one that is the reason of our being and existing is the relation between God and us. First is God from which the relation originates. God's love for us first wants, forms, cultivates and perfects this relation of love with us. It could not be otherwise. Our part consists in corresponding to his love; that is, to consent to it, to receive it in an ever higher level and with an ever vast measure. It is part of the nature of love and therefore of God (and vice versa, because if it is God's nature, it is also part of the nature of love), the fact that the infinity cannot be given all at once and simultaneously; it gives itself progressively and in ever larger, deeper and higher waves; therefore it expects to find

ever larger, deeper and higher capacity. God made the soul an indeterminately dilatable capacity to receive the ever-greater gift of his God, in perpetual progress of intimacy in the divine union.

9. As in the divinity, the three personal relations are equal and distinct, in such a way that there can be neither inferiority nor superiority among paternity, filiation and *spiration*, so among all possible love relationships that can exist in the supernatural world between God and the souls, when we contemplate them in themselves and from the part of God, we feel that we can affirm that they are all equal. They are all unified in love, all sublimated in God. There may be differences from the part of the souls according to her correspondence with her all capacity, or with a more or less great part of it. Every soul that perfectly fulfills the commandment of loving God with all her heart, with all her soul, with all her strength will ascend all the steps on the great ladder of love, up to the supreme level of the perfect divine union, consummated in the supreme possible relation of love between the soul and God.
10. All the souls are called to the espousal relation because all share the vocation to life, to faith and to holiness. That supreme level of Divine union is the blessed objective of every vocation. All souls are the loved object of divine creation, redemption and sanctification. All these divine works naturally lead to that divine union. Even in this supreme state of love, there is an innumerable variety. Likewise, to the unique divine word *Let there be light* – let there be vegetative life – let there be animal life – countless species of beings responded in unity to that creating act. O my twelve thousand distinct roses flowering today in my orchard of the world! O, myriads of millions of stars, different in splendor, shining today in my sky! In a similar way, in the divine unity lives the Trinity of persons, Trinity of equal and distinct relations.

11. Life in the state of grace, that is, in the theological charity is the banquet of divine love. According to the counsel of the divine teacher, let us choose and place ourselves at the last place, even if our soul is enlightened and inflamed by the ideal of the most sublime relationship of love with God. We are his servants, and we want to be servants of perfect love. The Lord will be pleased and will say: *Ascende superius – come up higher*. Out of pure love for him we will ascend all the steps, one after another in order to get closer to him. Steps are made to enable us to ascend, not to make us sit on them. Come up higher to the place of the mother! “Higher”, to the place of the bride! Still higher, there is his place! One day, an hour shall arrive, when the Lord shall love so much his servant, and shall unite him so much to himself, as to invert mansions and work. *Et faciet illos discumbere, et transiens ministrabit illis -He will sit them at table and wait on them* (Lk 12, 37). The relation is consummated in unity. In the triumph of unity, triumphs the distinction of the terms of the divine relationship.
12. The book of Revelation says that one day it will be given to the elect in heaven a gemstone with a new name written on it (Cf. Rv 2, 17). That name is the splendor of the gemstone, that name is the all gem! A new name that says all that the soul is in her self, in her work, in her grace, in her glory; all that the soul is for her God, and all that God is for that soul. No one knows that name but only God, who gives it, and the soul that receives it. Eternal secret of love! Likewise, our personal relationship of love with God, and consequently our state of love, our mansion of love, our work of love in the kingdom of heaven: No one will know it adequately, for everyone it will have a mysterious angle. Secret of love! All that somehow proceeds from God, or pertains to God, shares the mystery of God that remains always a mystery of love. So, above all is our relationship of love with our most holy God.

CHAPTER 10

Following Jesus

In this chapter are given some indications about how to follow Jesus. Starting with the "sequela Christi", Fr. Justin in a simple and evident way helps each one of us to follow Jesus with great enthusiasm and determination.

1. *If one does not renounce all he has, he cannot be my disciple (Cf. Lk 14, 27). He does not say that such a one cannot be perfect or saint, or that he cannot reach the highest level of divine union, he cannot even be a disciple of Jesus! Lord, grant that I may understand the reason of the absolute necessity of this universal renunciation.*
2. *It is so simple, so evident. He who is attached to anything, to any person, cannot freely unite himself to his God, unless he would create the idolatric illusion of thinking that God would be all and only in that thing or person ... he who is inaccessible, uncontainable, infinite. He wants his intelligent creature all for himself. *You shall love me with all your mind, all your heart, all your soul, with all your strength.**
3. *More simplicity and more evidence! He who is tied cannot walk, and therefore cannot follow. Jesus wants us to follow him since he is walking. To better impress the idea of the spiritual interior journey, in the mind of the disciples, Jesus has inseparably connected his ministry, and even his teaching, to his continuous physical going from town to town, during his public life; from tribunal to tribunal; from one station to an-*

other, from one torment to another, in all his sorrowful journey.

4. The divine person of Jesus, in revelation and in reality, is linked to the idea of perennial movement. In all eternity he proceeds by way of generation from the Father; in time, he comes to us sent by the Father; in the incarnation he goes out seeking and uniting souls to himself in order to ascend with them to the Father. In every soul he repeats all over again all his life, step by step. He re-lives from the beginning all his mysteries, step by step. A continuous journey, a continuous ascension. So is the life of every elect, so is the life of his holy Church.
5. It is not enough to detach ourselves from many things, it is absolutely necessary to detach ourselves from everything, from every creature. Naturally, we mean a hearty detachment. Because even tied with a single thread, even very thin, the bird cannot fly unless you break it. The heart easily attaches itself to what we have, even only in use; since frequent use forms in us the sense of possession, it is necessary that we reduce to the pure necessity the things and the people we use, for our particular purposes. It is necessary that we frequently change these necessary things and people, if it is up to us to change them with others.
6. The creature to which we are more tenaciously attached is our own self, and not so much our body as our personality. The creature that more than anything else impedes freedom of movements, impulses and progress of the soul is our own person, with our exaggerated and maverick personalism. The master and Lord applying his doctrine, his grace of redemption and liberation from this particular impediment and enemy, pronounces the other very serious principle: *He who wants to come after me must renounce his very self, pick up his cross and come after me.* (Cf. Lk14,27).

7. Practically Jesus is saying: He who renounced everything and every person attached to him is free from all attachment to the outside world and can now become my disciple. He acquired the ability and power to be my disciple; he has placed himself in the remote mood of freedom of spirit to be able to follow me. Yet, he is not my disciple, because there is still an occult impediment that prevents him from following me: his will is not yet totally directed to me, is not inflamed for me and in transport to me. Your will is still crumpled and weakened by attachment to its entire internal world.
8. *He who wants to come after me must deny his very self.* So, every act of voluntary abnegation of one's sentiment, heart, opinion, intellect, will etc. is a further step in following Jesus. The more generous is my self-denial, all the more straight and faster will be this step; vice versa then, every voluntary satisfaction that I grant or procure to my feeling, to my heart, to my opinion etc. is a step I take in detour, or in the opposite direction of where Jesus proceeds and calls me, depending on whether it is licit satisfaction, but not necessary, or even illicit altogether.
9. To walk after Jesus I also need strength. Strength does not come from medication but from nutrition. Medicine is confession, very much necessary too! Nutrition is the Eucharist, and I need it every day. In the Eucharist I find the communion with the divine life. Food, however, is not only the Eucharistic communion but also the perennial union with the divine will. It is written: *I have food to eat that you do not know about. My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to complete his work* (Jn 4, 32-34). With these words we mean not only the acts of resignation, which do not find daily frequent occasions, but also the acts of union, in the fulfillment of every duty of the present moment.
10. Each loving obedience fortifies me; each disobedience weak-

ens me. I am weak whenever I fail to fulfill some duty. There is no other way to regain strength than to fulfill better any duty that needs to be accomplished. This is our daily story. Disobedience is the reason of the weakness of the lookwarm and obedience is the reason of the vigor of the fervent. Such weakness and such strength, of necessity have their repercussion also on the body, because the physical always resents the moral conditions. Jesus at the well of Sichar was really tired and exhausted, and yet he starts to evangelize one single soul, even though in those forms that may be called the apostolate of weakness. So thus he resumes, infuses and spreads vigor, drawn from the divine life, through the fulfillment of the Father's will.

11. Since we are in the supernatural world we need grace, which is supernatural life, in order to live, advance, blossom and fructify. We also need supernatural virtues, which are the powers of this interior life, without them supernatural life would be a life without its proper motion; it would be a paralyzed life in a state of violence and dying. They are the virtues proper of the Christian, whose life must be a constant interlacement and exercise of these virtues; and especially the theological virtues, from among them all. Charity stands out among the theological virtues. We need to exercise these virtues intensely, through explicit, particular and frequent acts, without which the virtues would be like paralyzed and dying members.
12. Our supernatural life is now in a state of way; therefore must be lived on the go. Evidently this path is not downhill, as it is an elevation to a superior, supernatural, divine order. Could it be flat? It cannot be since the one who says: *follow me*, concludes everything by saying: *I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God*. So it is an upward path. Now the extraordinary ascensions can also take place on the wings of the angels, in the arms of the Virgin Mary, in the impetus of

the Spirit, but supernatural life is not ordinarily made of extraordinary ascensions.

13. Supernatural life is made of ascensions, but, thanks to the Lord, at least for what needs our cooperation, our ascensions are all ordinary. These ordinary ascensions need some steps to be accomplished. Steps always suppose: 1) a difference of level in the ascending plane; 2) an effort in the person who goes up; 3) a certain novelty of external status and therefore also internal, because at each step we are no longer where we were before. Now this difference, this effort and novelty are constituted by the extraordinary element in the expressed and particular object of supernatural virtues; this extraordinary element excites in us the expressed and particular act of the corresponding virtue. We intend to say *extraordinary* not in the sense of the *miraculous*, but in the sense that it has something new, great, beautiful and therefore attractive.
14. We are often facing the principle that general things do not touch us much and therefore they do not shake us at all, or very slowly and dully. Likewise, implicit acts, even while attaining some advantages, are not sufficient to that exercise of virtues that is very effective in increasing and perfecting them in us. We need acts that are specific and explicit. These specific and explicit acts in turn must also be intense, very intense, to place, maintain and enable us to progress in fervor, which is the only normal state of the interior life. This explains the necessity of non-common, non mediocre, of the extraordinary element. The extraordinary is essential in spiritual life.
15. Only a truth that, through meditation, I see in a new light, as something important, because it is greater, more beautiful and sweet revitalizes my faith, conquers my intellect and enraptures my will. Only a gift, a grace, seen as a new promise, as more desirable because it is bigger, more beautiful and more sweet rekindles my hope, and reenergizes me completely to

use the most convenient tools in order to dispose me to receive it; and while I await its fulfillment it dilates the capacities of my being. Only if we are capable of seeing in the works and ways of the Lord a new manifestation of love, a new gift of love and an elevation to a new state of love, we will be able to experience the re-awakening of love and the flaring up of new and more generous acts of love.

16. The end of this ascensional life in the supernatural world is divine union with the Blessed Trinity. This divine union (which may be called: *nuptial supernatural*) is not hindered, but rather gradually prepared by supernatural union that we may call "Minor unions" compared to the major and supreme union with the divine persons. The major and supreme union, once started and consummated in us, does not impede the minor relations with our soul. Ultimately is always the divine love that offers and unites itself to us in any superior being that holily offers and personally unites himself to us. Divine love always receives and takes us whenever we offer and unite ourselves holily and personally to a superior being.
17. In the supernatural life everything is gift of God. In each gift we must consider the giver, and appreciate the help that it offers us to reach the giver. There is a great variety and difference among the divine gifts; in order to appreciate and use them, it is necessary to comprehend their distinction. There is a difference between a gift of a favor of grace and the gift of a person. The gifts of a favor of grace realizes in the soul an action of goodness, infuses and increases a virtue, it moves her to a virtuous act, enriches her with some merit and goes away. It must go away to make room for another favor. But the gift of a superior being donated to us by God, unites himself to us, remains with us; it is much more desirable, it renders much more glory to the Lord and is much more beatifying for us. So it is with the gift of the Guardian Angel that will always be

our angel; so it is with the gift of the virgin Mother and the gift of the three divine persons!

18. This superior being does not come to us for a simple visit, or to accompany us for part of our journey, to offer us this or that help, in this or that circumstance. He comes to give himself and to receive our self. He comes to stay with us forever, to unite his intelligence to ours. He comes to unite his will to ours, his action to ours, to fuse together the two lives. Our human element is elevated, enhanced and glorified by the union with this superior being, with this superior life. Only the highest, most stable and indissoluble form of human friendship can give us an idea of this spiritual union of the soul with her angel, with the Blessed Virgin, with the three divine persons.
19. *Et ex illa hora accepit eam discipulus in sua* – And from that hour the disciple took her into his house (Jn 19, 27); he took her as his, totally his, personally his, forever. Blessed is this favorite disciple! He immediately accepted the gift offered to him. The acceptance instantly followed the receiving of the gift; to the acceptance followed a perennial possession and enjoyment of the gift. To us the gift is given, but it is not always received on account of the incomprehension of our intellect. The gift that we receive is not always possessed and enjoyed on account of the lack of correspondence of our will; and, often even when we enjoy it, we end up losing it on account of our inconstancy of life.
20. At the entrance of the temple of life, on the first step of supernatural ascensions takes place the encounter and union with the angel. In the temple we find assembled the holy family of God on earth; we enter in it through the just Joseph, who is the head of the family, totally absorbed in the order of the divine incarnation. On the altar of this temple, in the divine sacrifice in which is renewed all that happened on the cross, is given to us the Blessed Mother: *Ecce Mater tua, behold your*

mother. At the end of the sacrifice, we receive the Word incarnate – sacrificed and sacrament, Jesus Christ; he commands us not to leave the temple-cenacle before having received the promise of the Father, made through his Word; that is, before receiving the Holy Spirit. Thus we reach the culmination of supernatural ascensions to the Father. Our Father!

Our supernatural life and work expand every time that a personal superior being joins us. One by one assemble and harmonize the seven colors of the rainbow and the seven notes of the musical scale. The song of the divine glory gets ever more loud, beautiful and sweet to the Lord, to the soul and to all being.

To our prayerful spirit is added another prayerful spirit, and our prayer becomes ever higher and more powerful. One more prayerful heart joins my loving heart with a transport of love ever more intense and powerful. Thus we have our mystic scale of divine union.

On every step we encounter and united ourselves with another personal superior being. At its pick there is the Most Holy Trinity. The soul ascends and descends. The soul ascends with the love of God and descends with personal love for the neighbors. Ascends as a Seraphim and descends as an apostle. Ascends to receive and descends to give. Both ascending and descending the soul does not leave the supernatural world of the divine life, communicated to us in Christ Jesus, without ever stopping to follow Jesus Christ.

PART VII

ILLUMINATION – PURIFICATION – UNION

ACT OF DEVOTION TO THE ANGEL

I stop to look at your face, O my Angel, and I see you all absorbed in the vision of the Lord, and I join you in adoring the Holy Trinity. I want to contemplate and love the Trinity as you do.

I stop to look at your face, O my angel, and I see you all inflamed with the love of God for my soul. I unite my love to the love of God for you. I make mine the delight of God in you.

You are the first grant and gift that the Lord has given me after the creation and elevation of my soul to enable me to start my journey and arrive at the supreme gift of the union with you.

The Lord wants that I introduce and revere you before anybody else. He wants you to be my first companion and that I unite myself to you; the Lord wants me to content and obey you before anyone else.

With all the joy of my heart I offer myself to your company, I submit myself to your guidance and entrust myself to your protection.

Let us establish between us an eternal friendship, O my angel, according to the desire of the Blessed Trinity that united us, and may the Holy Spirit of love of the Father and of the Son be in our midst to elevate and unite us ever more with Jesus to the Father.

In honor, imitation and union of your contemplation of the Lord I resolve to never let a day go by without applying myself for some time to the spiritual study.

In honor, imitation and union of your love for all the angels and saints I resolve to never let a day go by without applying myself for some time to the spiritual reading of the lives of the saints.

In honor, imitation and union of the perpetual communion of vision with which you nurture yourself in the love of the divinity, I resolve to never let a day go by without sacramental Eucharistic Communion.

In honor, imitation and union with your celestial comportment and that of all the angels and saints toward the souls, I resolve to observe always and everywhere, even alone, all the norms of Christian and religious etiquette.

O my angel, defend me from the enemy, keep him always far from me. O my angel, protect me against my own self; detach me always more from self-love. O my angel, elevate me always to heaven.

O my angel, make me and all mankind a living attention of reverence and obedience to Jesus; a living attention of desire of love for Jesus. Make me a total living conversation, vision, possession and enjoyment of Jesus. Amen.

ACTS OF CONVERSION TO JESUS

I

You called me Lord, and your angel was your first messenger, your first embassy of love to my soul. I turn toward you to answer and then return to my things and myself.

So many times and in so many ways you have called me, O Jesus, until you came in person to call me very closely; because you want me with you in a definitive way; you want me to be totally yours, always yours.

I saw your look; its sweet light covered with a beautiful, purple veil all your images and vestiges of creation; before me there is only your humanity, in which you reveal and communicate your divinity, the Father and the Holy Spirit.

I felt your presence in the deep and sweet peace that pacifies all my being, in the oblivion of each of every temporal preoccupation, in the austere joy that I cannot contain without pouring it into tears of consolation.

Stay with me, Lord, be my true and perennial joy. All my faculties, all my verses, all that is in me and all that I am say to you: Stay with me and be my true and perennial joy.

The soul wants to be all that you want her to be. You want her as you made her. All vision of you! All ear for you! All embrace for you! All intellect of you! All will for you!

You have turned me to you and I have paid attention to you, and here I am all light, peace, joy and strength of goodness for me and for my neighbors. Here I am all glory, love, and joy for you too. Stay with me, O Lord, and be my perennial joy.

I understand that you are all in yourself and all for me. I understand that you want me all for you, and that you have made me as your "little all". I adore, bless and thank you from now and for eternity in the Amen and Alleluia of paradise.

Make me always understand and practice self-denial in every other attention to things, to people, to myself, in order to concentrate myself in the integral and constant attention to you alone, O my Jesus, my Lord and my God.

O my God and my all!

ACTS OF CONVERSION TO JESUS

II

O my Lord Jesus, how many things and people distract me from you! I could say that all things and all people distract me from you, even sacred things in their external part, or somehow sensible!

Everything you have created and all that you dispose are ordained to help me know, love, serve, enjoy and possess you only initially and imperfectly on this earth.

I must make use of them only as much as they can help to reach my goal of knowing, loving, serving, enjoying and possessing you, and thus avoid many impediments and distractions that hinder my remaining all directed, applied and concentrated in you.

Also in the beneficial and necessary use of creatures as means to the end I should not indulge on them as usual, but with fervor pass over, elevate myself high, turn to you, apply myself to you, concentrate myself on you.

Make shine in me the most effective principles to this end; give to my mind a supernatural penetration and intuition; give to my will a perfect docility to follow your Spirit.

All created things are but steps to ascend to you. The steps are touched only by a part of the inferior extremities, and only just enough to take the momentum towards a higher step.

If I want to palpate with my eyes, with my hands, with my words, if I want to sit down on the steps, or simply rest, I no longer go up, and make them resting stations, which cannot be for me.

From your particular grace that I implore, I expect to always move forward and always see you in these very steps, even in the very short time that I pass over them. I want to see you, my Lord and my way!

Much more, O Word God, O my Jesus, allow me to see in every step by which I ascend a vestige of yours, so that I may not depart from you, so that I may treat every thing and person with the respectful attention of reverence I owe to you!

O my God and my all!

ACTS OF CONVERSION TO JESUS

III

Since all things are vestige of you, allow me to see your vestige in them. Your vestige is all their reality, beauty, love and harmony. Grant that I may see you, O Jesus!

All things are veil under which you hide to make yourself present, accessible, and sensitive to the souls, who seek you. Grant, O Lord that I may hear and see you in all things!

Much more, O Lord! Because all things are your image and likeness, grant that I recognize you in every neighbor and treat him, as I would like, as I want to treat you in person.

Grant that I may pay attention to you, O my creator and supreme Lord, O my king and my judge, in the person of my superiors, in the person of those who are invested with authority as your representatives.

Grant that I may pay attention to you, O my divine companion, in my peers, my equals, and my companions in work and in life.

Grant that I may pay attention to you, O divine child, divine infant, O divine Son of the Father and of the Virgin Mary, in each and every disciple and student, in every child and infant.

Grant that I may pay attention to you, O divine suffering and

crucified and dying! O divine prisoner of love in each one of my neighbors who suffers in the soul and in the body, in every agonizing brother!

Since I am and I want to be a soul that searches you, O Lord, I want to be directed, applied and concentrated in you, grant that I may feel that you are calling me, carrying and taking me through all things, O Jesus.

Give me a pure heart, as the pure of heart always see you as your angels. Cover me with the purity of the angels and of the Immaculate. May you be my purity, O Word, God!

O my God and my all!

ACTS OF CONVERSION TO JESUS

IV

O love, O my love! I would like to please you and find grace in your presence and be in everything object of complacency, as I am of predilection, so that you may be eternally happy and glorified for having redeemed and sanctified me.

I turn to you and I apply myself to you. I establish myself and concentrate on you; I consecrate myself to divert my attention from everything that is not you or that is not for you. I consecrate myself to always apply my attention to you alone.

To you alone I direct all my attention as directly and intensely, frequently and prolongedly, constantly and lovingly as I can, in the grace of your charity, presence and action.

I consecrate myself to divert my attention not only from all that is illicit or dangerous, but also from everything that is only superfluous and vain. Grant that I may pay as little attention as necessary to all that is necessary or convenient in temporal and sensitive things.

Much more I must and want to divert attention from myself, beyond the minimum necessary for sacramental confession, spiritual direction, the examinations of conscience, and reflections on the divine words and the examples of saints.

I must and want to divert attention from all unpleasant and

distasteful impressions, from all emotions of joy or sorrow and from all personal temptations and concerns, as if they were of no concern to me.

I must and want to divert attention from any return on myself, from any reference to me in external things, from any reference to myself in the narration of the things of others, from any affirmation or infiltration of the ego in every circumstance.

Grant that I never think it convenient or necessary to talk about myself either good or bad. Grant that I never presume it lawful to occupy others with myself, either verbally or in writing, both in the present and in the future.

All my things I entrust to you. I put all myself into your hands. I take refuge in you for everything and I establish myself in the silence of my being. Grant, O Lord that I may reassure and strengthen myself in contempt of my being, and that everything may pacify and beatify me in the complete oblivion of myself.

O my God and my All!

ACTS OF CONVERSION TO JESUS

V

O love, O my love! I would like to please you, find grace in your presence and be in everything object of complacency, as I am of predilection, so that you may be eternally happy and glorified for having redeemed and sanctified me.

I turn to you and I apply myself to you. I establish myself and concentrate on you; I will pay attention to you alone, to your persons, perfections and operations, and in everything else only to what, one way or the other, is ordained to you.

To you alone I focus all my attention as directly and intensely, frequently and prolongedly, constantly and lovingly as I can, in the grace of your charity, presence and action.

I want to focus all my attention on the divine nature! Only in you, divine nature gets closer to us and ever more reveals and communicates itself to us. Only in you, O Jesus, divine nature is united to our human nature, in the unity of your person, O Son of God.

I direct all my attention to the divine persons of the Father and of the Holy Spirit, who with you, divine Son, are one God; in you, O Jesus, the Father and the Spirit get much closer to us, they reveal and communicate themselves and become one with us.

I focus all my attention on the divine perfections of bounty and

truth of love, of mercy and justice of love, of omnipotence and wisdom of love; only in you, O Jesus, they get closer, reveal and effuse themselves in us for eternal life.

I direct all my attention to the divine works of creation and redemption, sanctification and glorification, which get closer, reveal and apply themselves to us in your mission among us, O Jesus, while inviting us to cooperate with you.

I want to focus all my attention on you, O Jesus of history and liturgy, O Jesus of Eucharist and paradise, O Jesus of Mary and of the saints! I want to direct all my attention to your function and dignity, to all your acts and states, to all your words and examples for adoration and imitation.

Since you are always present to me in every moment, place and circumstance, grant that I may be likewise present to you in every moment, place and circumstance. If I love you, I am with you always and everywhere. You, who love me, are likewise always and everywhere with me. So, it is no longer I but you, who live in me.

O my God and my all!

ACTS OF CONVERSION TO JESUS

VI

O my Lord and Master, thank you for making me understand how your confidences are revelations and communications of the internal exigency of love.

Ordinarily in men must prevail the practice of holy humility of not talking about their own self neither good nor bad; it is not the same between you and the soul.

You, Incarnate Word, you are the supreme revelation and communication of the Blessed Trinity, and consequently you are the supreme confidence of divine love.

Admit me to your intimacy, O my Lord; make mine all your revelations so that love may be nurtured and your union increase.

I desire, ask and expect your confidences. I did not love you very much, when I was not thinking of your confidences, when the fear of your justice and the confusion of my unworthiness were prevailing in me.

Then I loved you only potentially and as a beginner. Even now I do not love you, as you desire; if I were really in your intimacy I would have the proof of it in your continuous confidences.

Lord, you call me every moment, and I turn to you, I keep

looking and listening to you. I concentrate all my being in loving attention to you alone, O my all!

In heaven and earth there is nothing for me but you. All the rest is only an image and vestige of you. All the rest is absolute nothingness compared to you.

Talk to me, Lord. Talk to me about yourself. Tell me about your life in time and in eternity, in the angels and saints, in the Blessed Virgin and in the Father! Talk to me and pour your Spirit upon me, so that I may correspond to you as you wish.

O my God and my all!

ACTS OF CONVERSION TO JESUS

VII

O my Lord Jesus, I believe that you love me. Since you love me, I believe that you look at me and attract me to you and you always want to talk to me and you want me always more like you and united to you.

Now turning, converting and consecrating myself to you, I dare to plead you for your special gaze, for your loving attraction, for your intimate word, for your most uniting trait.

I expect from you the special grace of the spirit of faith and humility, of purity and spirituality of heart, which enable me to enjoy perpetually your vision, in this terrestrial paradise of my religious life.

Grant, O Lord, that I may see you under the veil of all created things, of every human happening, of every human being, of every external and internal situation of my life and of my brethren.

Grant that I may see clearly your divine will in everything that happens and that I may unite my will to yours in perfect union. Grant that I may see your glory in every thing that exists and that I may align all myself to it in perfect intention.

Above all, O my Jesus, grant that I may recognize, see, honor, serve and love you, O Jesus with the Father and the Holy Spirit

in my soul, in me, near me and ahead of me. Grant that I may be totally and always thrilled to live with you, in you and for you.

Oh, how I wish that my loving and constant attention to you might be true prayer that becomes always higher and more uniting with you, and always more fruitive of you.

Oh, how I wish that my loving and constant attention to you, in the grace of your heartfelt presence and of your beatifying union, might signify for me my being and living the perfect relation of love with you, O Jesus, O Trinity.

O Father, Son and Holy Spirit, elevate, absorb and transform me in that eternal, infinite, immense attention of love that you are for one another in your circuminsession and divine unity.

O my God and my all!

PURIFICATION

Purity of Zeal

O divine Lord, O divine Incarnate Word, establish me in the truth of what I am for my own soul, of what I am for those who received the mission to take care of my soul.

He who commits sin is enemy of his own soul. He places her under the influence of Satan, he sells her so that he can possess her; he abandons her in his power so that Satan might vent on her his bestial hatred against God.

Anyone who wants to work in his soul enters in the field of the heart, in the sheepfold of thoughts and desires and does not enter through you, O Jesus, unique way and door to the divine flock, he is a thief and murderer of his own self.

I have been such! Am I still such? In reality I still am a thief and murderer for others and for myself, whenever I care for others' soul or for my own soul for reasons, aims and objectives that are not supernatural.

Whatever is not done according to your intentions, and with your disposition, whatever is not imitation of you and union with you, everything that is not for your glory, love and will is dangerous and harmful.

And very easily leads to being deadly as a robbery and murder

of others and of oneself, and always offence to your majesty and torment of your heart. Grant that I may understand it and feel it alive, O my Lord.

Every time that I take care of myself and of others' souls for the sole purpose and motives of affections and material compensation, I am a mercenary unworthy and incapable of working in the spiritual field that is profaned.

Every time you entrust me to others and they come in the name of your majesty, to impose the demands of your holiness, the wolf-beast of the low nature awakens in me with its cravings and would like to make mayhem of the sheep.

O my Lord, I trust in you! Transform me into your lamb, take me back into your arms and shut me in your heart, and I will no longer be confused in my hope for the pastures of eternal happiness and divine life.

O my God and my all!

Spiritual Decay

A ray of your light, O Jesus, has revealed to me the method of the tempter to drag the souls of your chosen ones to the catastrophe of sin and its abyss of damnation. Let me understand and feel it in my personal occasions.

Your servant, by your grace, has come out of the state of sin and has placed himself at your service. He has brought back many victories over himself and over the triple enemy and has made many progresses upwards, and it is all in fervor.

Driven from the soul, the enemy does not find peace, nor can

he return to his chief without his prey, but presents himself to him to ask for infernal reinforcements and they approach the soul and surround her with an ever tighter siege.

With snare resulting from machinations that combine the mischief of many damned spirits and centuries of experience of human weaknesses, now one, now another approaches the soul with sweet talk.

They do not propose any evil because the soul disdained would repel them, but they attract her attention to a barely lesser good than that to which she had raised; they present it to us as something very convenient, almost necessary.

The soul perceiving a good so convenient, almost necessary, does not hesitate very much to turn to it, to want and practice it. So the poor soul smoothly descends one degree from the height reached.

She is really convinced of being highly elevated to the Lord, and of doing the good of his glory. The soul is still high, however no longer with a strong upward momentum, but with a soft downward motion.

The soul continues to do some good to others, but no longer does any good for herself. It is not good to cling to the less and leave the more. She thinks that she has followed an inspiration while she has fallen into a seduction, the temptation of the lesser good.

The poor soul did not pray enough, did not reflect enough. The soul did not look in the face the one who came to reason, to talk with her. She did not open up to ask for spiritual direction. She has started to walk towards the abyss.

O my God and my all!

Spiritual Darkening

O my only Lord, God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, grant that I may know the true light in your light. Grant that I may also know the deadly pitfall of my enemy, homicidal from the beginning and deadly in every act on the soul.

Every supernatural good is rooted in holy faith, and holy faith has its beginning in the grace of your word revealed, handed down, welcomed and meditated, believed and practiced rightly.

You have always done everything and continue to do everything, through your Word. Without the Word nothing was ever done or will ever be done. In your Word there is life, and through the word you give us life.

The one who is in the state of eternal death only acts to give death; he wanted to give death to Jesus, to the humanity assumed by the Word; now he wants to give death to his word in every soul, which must receive and communicate it.

He is constantly attempting to make sure that no one has everlasting life and that everyone remains in his state of eternal death; he keeps trying to hit God in his beloved creatures, with which the Lord wants to unite himself completely.

Thus the enemy tends to reduce, even with violence, to the silence of death every voice of forerunner of the word and to extinguish the lamp which enlightens and burns to prepare the encounter with the spouse who is coming.

He attracts the souls on the way to stun them with his many profane words and reduce them to be like a path trampled upon by anyone, and for this unable to receive any good seed.

The divine word falling on that pathway is trampled upon and

chopped by the feet of the many profane human words, and immediately Satan goes and takes away the good seed from their heart.

Doing so the devil leads the souls to lose faith and to perdition. O my Lord, I see the sneaky intervention and the great influence of Satan in all my imperfect disposition to receive, meditate and practice your word.

O my God and my all!

Examination of Conscience

O my Lord Jesus, constituted by the Father judge of the souls, you let the soul, for her greater good, perceive the serious revelations of her state of opposition to your glory, love and will.

You reveal to me that I ordinarily judge according to the flesh, approving and doing only what pleases my senses and feelings, according to my caprice and self-love, reproaching and rejecting the rest.

It is true, O my Lord and Savior, and I join you in reproaching and condemning my living according to the flesh; I beg you to establish me with your grace, in the criteria of your supernatural life.

You make me understand that I am on earth, that I am in this world, and that is why I do not understand, accept and follow you who are on high, you who ascend to the Father and expect every faithful to follow you.

If I persist to live as if I were of this world, as if life had no other

beginning and end than earthly things, I end up falling entirely into the tyranny of the prince of this world.

My acts are originated and directed by the devil, so that you rightly make me aware that I keep the devil as my father, even though I am a creature of God, that always remains my creator, but I cease to have him as my Father.

O my Lord and Savior, free me from this horrible tyranny and kinship; I reject it cordially from this moment, as I want to be completely liberated for eternity.

I do not want to please the world! If I please the world, I displease you. If I please men of the world, I am no longer your servant and friend, I am no longer recognized as a child by my God.

Bring me and establish me, O my Lord and Savior, in the greatest opposition to the world, to the devil, to the flesh. Bring me and establish me in the greatest union with you, my teacher and my God, so that I might ascend with you, in your Holy Spirit to God our Father. O my God, and my all!

Process in Consciousness

O my Lord, my God and my all! My life is stained. Every day, in every action of my day, I see and feel so many faults that I remain more than mortified, dismayed.

I entrust myself to you, I trust in you, O mercy, goodness, love of my Jesus. I entrust myself to you, and I trust in you, O mercy, goodness and love of my Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Each of my defects is like a germ of diseases that undermine

my physical life and then all together flow with their fatal influence of their origin, that is, original sin, they will give me death.

Each one of my faults is much more than obfuscation of my intellect, weakening of the will, turmoil of the heart; they undermine my moral life, impede and ruin my spiritual progress.

O my Lord, my God and my all! For the merits of the Savior, for your mercy, goodness and love free me from all this evil; it all happened to me through my fault, through my most grievous fault.

Give me all your hatred against every sin; give me that pain that Jesus suffered in his agony in the garden; give me your zeal of infinite love in fighting and destroying every moral evil.

The saving and vivifying virtue of your holy love softens and gives value to every penalty of guilt that I must pay, but replaces them all with its divine torment of spiritual fire.

I beg you, grant me your perfect love, O Lord my God, your love! For every fault is essentially an offense to you; only love can reduce and extirpate it, only love can preserve us and give fitting reparation to you.

O My God and my all!

For Spiritual Freedom

My love, my love, my love, draw me out of myself and make me live in you. I can no longer be and live so defective, and this evil will not cease until I will totally go into you.

Draw me out of my way of thinking, judging, sentencing and esteeming things, people and deeds and establish me in your thought and in your Word.

Draw me out of my way of desiring and enjoying, of fearing and hating, in all my complacency and aversion; establish me in your will, in your love, in your heart and in your Spirit

I feel in myself that my own hating and fighting evil is very flawed in its motives and ways. Draw and establish me in your divine way of hating and fighting evil.

I feel that my own love for souls and every act of my apostolate is too flawed for my motives and for my internal and external moods. Draw and establish me in your ways of living.

I feel that I cannot live as I should and as I could because I am still gloomy and stained, all undermined and influenced by enemies and I thank you for making me understand and feel it.

I will always be more or less defective and deficient as long as I do not go to live totally in you; and I will not be able to do it if you lovingly will not draw and establish me in yourself, O my love.

Only in you my being will acquire real life and bloom into its flower, will offer its fruit, and I will be for my neighbor and above all for you what I must be, that is as you want me.

O my love, my love, my love, how could I be happy to be in myself while you want me in you? Or to be what I am while you

want me to be as you are? So I want to be and I beg you to make me so.

O my God and my all.

Spiritual elevation

O my Lord and my God, I beg you with all my soul. Take me all to you. I intend to acknowledge, embrace and live all your infinite right over me, all my need of you.

Take me all to you. I intend to offer myself to you with all the oblations and consecrations of all the saints, especially of St. Joseph and of the Virgin Mary, with the oblation of Jesus!

I intend to honor and imitate the very act of love that you are in your nature that act of love that eternally makes your divine relations and unite one divine person to the other.

Take me all to yourself. I want to belong to you with all the titles of fidelity, justice, piety, religion and with all possible and imaginable bonds through which a free creature can donate herself.

I want to become totally your property. I want to combine and unite all these titles in the bond of perfect, absolute, consummated love, because I want to give all myself to you in love. I want to be totally possessed by your love.

Take me all to yourself. May the main actions, in their principle, course and end, in their original inspiration and in their execution, be all religious acts, acts of love. Make them totally yours.

I beg you, Lord, take also all my fantasy and all my sentiment. I

do not deserve that you take them, because they are so unworthy!
In your mercy, bounty and love take them.

I will not be totally yours until each and every act of mine is not totally love for you; a love so strong and constant as to absorb, elevate and offer all my being in all its potential actualized in love.

Take me all in your glory, love and will. Take me all according to your Word, according to your Spirit, O God Father, font and principle of the divinity and Trinity.

O my God and my all!

When you will have exalted me...

O my Lord Jesus, O my God and my all I believe that eternal life consists fundamentally in knowing you and the Father and the Holy Spirit in you. No one can know you unless the Father reveals you to him.

I believe, o my Lord, that eternal life is in you; eternal life is you; no one can have it unless he comes to you, unites himself to you. No one can come to you unless the Father attracts him to you.

No one can be united with you unless the Spirit of the Father and yours descends upon him and establishes him in the communion of supernatural life and in the relationship of love with the divine persons.

The knowledge of you that comes from the Father is dependent on our lifting you up as you say: *When you would have lifted up the Son of man, you will know who I am.*

Likewise, the attraction to you that comes from the Father in the Holy Spirit, you make it dependent on our exaltation of you since you say: When I will be lifted up from the earth, I will attract all to me.

Blessed are you, Lord! I want an ever deeper knowledge of you, I want an ever more vehement attraction to you. I want to come to you and live in you. Thank you for this good will.

I want your greatest exaltation in my intellect, memory and will so that my entire life in each of its acts may be attracted and settled in you.

I would love, O my Lord Jesus, to exalt you with all possible books to be written about your glories, with all possible temples to be built for your adoration, with all possible congresses to celebrate your triumphs.

I would not be able to do it! That would not be the true exaltation that would dispose me to receive the revelation of you from the Father; the attraction to you that comes from the Father and the Holy Spirit. Now I plead from you: your true exaltation.

You will understand who I am

When I will have lifted you up, O Son of man, O Son of God, O my Lord Jesus, my God and my all, I will understand who you really are, whom you are with, and what you say and do.

I will understand it in such a way that my knowledge of you becomes all love for you, and my knowledge and love become all imitation of you, and I enter in the assimilation with you in this life.

Then I will experience in all my being how truly eternal life is to know fully and perfectly the Father, and the Son, sent to me by the Father, and the Holy Spirit, sent to me by the Father and the Son.

Now, I glimpse, through your words, the features of what you are and the features of what I must become to be an image that conforms to you, and so please the Most Holy Trinity for eternal life.

You do not say and do anything that you did not hear from the Father; the Father never leaves you alone, because you always do what pleases him; you are in the Father, and the Father is in you, always.

I want to do the same and I want to become such. I never want to be alone, but always with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, in a living personal relationship of unitive love with each of the divine persons.

I will no longer want you to make my thoughts yours. I no longer want that you approve and support my words; that you cooperate with your protection and prosper my poor human works with your blessing.

I want and I pray that your thoughts and desires become my thoughts and desires, and that your words fill my heart and resound on my lips, and the cooperation to your works may be my whole activity and action, to please you.

Only in this way will I feel your company and union, for only in this way will you live in me, O my Lord. I no longer want to be alone and at the mercy of the world and of the devil. I do not want to be abandoned to myself because I would fall into death.

True Deficiency

I am becoming well aware, O my Lord, that my great deficiency is not so much my lack of patience and charity, my lack of modesty and recollection, my lack of faith and humility, lack of prayer and penance!

All these deficiencies may very well be in me, but my greatest deficiency is my lack of loving vision of your presence, my lack of loving attention to your word.

I think of you as being far away, as if you were absent. Even when I think of you as being present, it is like someone seeing me from far away that thinks of me indirectly, and wants me confusedly; as someone who loves me in the ensemble of humanity, or at best in the collectivity of his faithful and friends.

You are in me, at my side, around and ahead of me, you, O three divine persons, O supreme reality, O supreme relations, in a supreme reality for me, in a supreme relationship with me, and I pay no attention to you!

Because of this I live in perennial turmoil and agitation, in disgust and discontent, because I come to find myself in a state of violence, like someone who does not want to listen to the one he must listen to, does not want to look after the one he must attend, and does not want to deal with those he must deal with.

You do not cease to be inside of me, at my side, around and ahead of me with your infinite sweetness, with infinite courtesy and adorable reverence, because as God you love this soul of mine in particular and want her worthy of you and united to you.

O door of life, way of life, which seems narrow and tight to nature, while you are the door of life and the way of life. Out of

you there is nothing but death, there is nothing but narrowness, anguish and torment of temporal and eternal death!

I want to enter through you and place myself in you, in faith and hope, and become a total living relationship with the three divine persons, all presence to the divine presence, all attention to the divine testimony.

Now I beg you, God-Trinity, do not cease to give to my soul the divine witness of your love and all its needs, of your love and of all the subtleties of your love and of all its glories in me.

True Exaltation

O my Lord Jesus, give me the true idea and the correct practice of what must be for me and for my neighbor your exaltation, so that the souls may derive from it accurate knowledge of you, proper attention to you, genuine attraction to you, actual union with you.

St. Martha, doing to you the honors of hospitality, while also doing honor to herself, does not exalt you as much as does Mary, contemplating you, in silent attention, and in true union with you.

So in all the usual exaltations of men with which your good servants honor you (so necessary these too, and may they be blessed) I run the risk of wanting to exalt myself, and attract to me the esteem of the brothers, to elevate for me a throne in front of yours.

Save me from this danger, so that while working on your exal-

tation in front of my brothers, I exalt you more in myself, so that I may be for them only a step that they tread upon to come up to you, and may I be all glory of love for you.

Never a missionary or an apostle exalted you so much in his preaching as the Virgin Mary exalted you, welcoming, guarding and meditating in her heart all the words that concerned you, and then following you everywhere so as not to lose even one of your words.

If I reflect that the purpose of every external exaltation is to attract the gaze, and through the gaze attract esteem and love to the exalted object, I understand that true exaltation of you consists and takes place in the constant loving attention to you, in everything and above everything.

My attention, unfortunately, is addressed to the world, to men, to myself, and that's why the world-creatures are exalted in me, and that's why I exalt myself so much, and I feel the strong and continuous attraction of the miseries of the world, and I am conquered and deformed by them.

I must and I will divert my attention from the world and from myself, and concentrate it all in spiritual things, in supernatural values, in the motives of faith, in your presence and action, in your person, O Jesus, O Father, O Holy Spirit, my God and my all.

Take all of me, O Father in your attention to the Son. Take all of me, O Son in your attention to the Father. Take all of me, O Holy Spirit, in your attention to the Father and to the Son, so that you may be fully exalted in my whole life.

Divine Testimony

O my Lord, my God and my all, I believe that for your glory, love and will you enwrap and penetrate all my being with your divine presence; you want to elevate and transform me in your image and likeness to make me worthy of you, totally united to you.

I believe that you make me perceive your testimony, O Father, your testimony, O Son, your testimony, O Holy Spirit, through which you affirm your rights over me, my duties toward you, especially before every important action.

I believe, adore and want to always receive your testimony through every law, command, counsel, inspiration, and through the voice of the superiors, of good books, of good friends, of holy examples, and through the voice of my guardian angel and of my conscience.

You surround me with your testimony, you directly and personally, O God in me, O God beside me, O God before me, O God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and your testimony reveals to me the demands of your holiness, of your glory and of your will.

Only in Jesus, Mary and Joseph, your divine right was divinely recognized, your needs were fully met and your love was divinely corresponded to; therefore the imitation of Jesus, Mary and Joseph must be the practical norm of my life and of every life.

All the demands of your glory are but the rights of infinite love. All the exigencies of your holiness are the attractions of your infinite love. All the commands and counsels of your will are the desires and delights of your love.

Therefore, all my duties are the correspondence to your love.

I thank you and I bless you eternally because also my need is the correspondence to your love. I thank and bless you eternally because now all my convictions and decisions flow into the willingness to correspond to you, my love.

O divine Word, grant that I may see in you every act of mine as the Father wants it, so that he may find his delight in it. O divine Spirit, grant that I may accomplish in you every act of mine, so that the Father and the Son may find their delight in it. Grant that each and every act of mine may be filled with your divine presence, action and life.

I beg you, Lord, grant that the natural element of every act of mine may be always elevated to the supernatural; that the human element may be always and totally united with the divine, so that each act of mine may be entirely according to your divine grace, and that more than being my act, it may be act of God, and that more than I may be Jesus living in me.

Prayer and Fasting

O God truth, O God love, O God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit! O God Jesus, I adore you in your desire, counsel and command: *Be vigilant and pray, so that you may not fall into temptation.*

Grant that I may always live in the grace of your commands, counsels and desires, and may be always vigilant in prayer. Grant that I may never lend myself to the sad game of my enemy and yours, and that I may please you always.

I understand in your grace that the enemy always, but especially in certain more elusive points. can be won and driven away only by fasting and penance, and I must practice them both generously.

For this, O Lord, you give me an example of recollection in fasting and prayer in the desert, to teach me the tactics of the holy militia in the temporal life and deserve every grace of spiritual victories.

And now you give me to understand that I must fast and abstain from every superfluous element not only in food, drink and rest, but much more in fantasy, feeling, heart, memory, intellect and will.

Fasting is general abstinence from every conversation and reading, study, sight and word, look and curiosity that does not concern the necessary and convenient for the general and particular purposes of every duty of the state.

Under the superfluous, whatever it may be, internal or external, there is always hidden an enemy, a snare and suggestion. By refraining from any superfluity we discover and force the enemy to tempt us openly.

For this, in the desert, in fasting and in prayer, there is a face-to-face confrontation with the enemy, and a greater violence of temptation. It is impossible to see the devil unveiled without hating and overcoming him.

While the enemy is hidden in the superfluous, I approach, listen, follow him and I fall victim to him. O my Lord and Father, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil that ensnares itself in every superfluous thing.

O my God and my All!

Tactics of the Enemy

O my light and my sun! O truth and Word of God. Enlighten me on the tactics of the prince of darkness, the mortal adversary of the soul. Let it be electrocuted by your ray, and let the soul be taught and saved by you.

Many times your grace has taken and lifted me up and launched me towards you. The enemy in his superlative envy and spiteful pride has managed to catch me and slam me again into the quagmire of mediocrity, into spiritual decadence.

Your grace continually lifted me from the sensible to the spiritual, and the soul became more and more spiritualized in her feelings; your grace supernaturalized the soul in her intentions, and sacramentalized all things.

Converted to the inner life, the soul approached you, felt you everywhere, and met with you in her own self, where you dwell by grace. She found you in herself and joined you in your self coming out of her self.

The enemy aroused sensitive emotions more intense and apparently holy and very useful, and attracted me to something outward with false sweetness and for some ephemeral advantage, and at the end, I remained troubled, distracted and dejected.

Your grace took me back and lifted me up and pushed me towards you. I was invigorated, detached from creatures, and pushed with new youth to divine union.

I tried to reduce the multitude of things to the *unum necessarium* - *one thing is necessary* and simplified the multiplicity of my relationships in the unity of love and unified the plurality of my acts in the simplicity of love.

Again the enemy aroused difficulties and oppositions to the works of zeal that the soul was doing for your glory and that proceeded well while the soul attended directly to love you more and more, almost forgetting all the rest.

She deemed it right to end those difficulties and fight those oppositions; by doing she fell back into the multiplicity of exterior things, as many laces, in the outward sensibility, trap of the enemy.

Objective of the Enemy

A flash of light tore through the darkness and showed me the prince of darkness, in the darkest intention, in his most gloomy intention, in his most satanic intention for which he tempts us.

His sin, his state of sin, in which he is fixed for eternity, is always wanting to be like the Most High, to sit on the throne of heaven, to dethrone, to expel and to destroy God

The Lord can be knocked down from one only throne, that of human love, which is always free. From one heaven alone he may be cast out, from the heaven of the soul in the state of grace, during the present time of trial and imperfect freedom.

Satan alone can never achieve this infamous objective directly, he can only get this through the soul that freely listens to him, accepts his suggestions and satisfies his desires by sinning.

O supreme outrage that is done to the Lord by the soul that drives him away from her self, which puts him at the door, which postpones him to his enemy and makes possible to the devil in the world of human life what he wanted and could not obtain in paradise.

Supreme outrage that the soul does to her Lord God when she lends herself to be an instrument of the pride and rebellion of Satan; the soul that offers herself ready to procure in her this horrendously sacrilegious satisfaction.

Supreme degradation of the soul that becomes an instrument of the most infamous passion of the most infamous of beings! Supreme ruin of the soul that lets herself to be involved in the sin and damnation of Satan.

O infinite mercy, goodness, and love of God the Father, Son

and Holy Spirit, I adore you in your dignity, with which you treat us according to our present condition. You descend and come to live in the soul, which can betray and drive you out from one moment to the next.

O infinite mercy, goodness, and love of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, open our soul to understand all this evil which is sin, above all because it offends you, the only good, O infinite good, O unique God!

O my God and my all.

Poisoned arrows

My love, my love, my love! Behold, he whom you love is so sick; he is all-sick! Come and see that he is full of burning sores that you alone can heal.

The enemy surprised me in moments of exhaustion, in the distractions of vanity, in my superfluous things, in my priceless curiosities, in my morbid sensibilities, and threw his invisible arrows at me.

The arrow of human love has hit me. It was poisoned! For your mercy, I was not mortally struck by it. But in the meantime the poison spreads and I will end up losing my dominion if you do not help me!

My love, the enemy wounded me with the arrow of ambition so mischievously that I did not realize it until after the poison already spread in my secret intentions.

He wounded me with the arrow of hatred and even though it seemed to have dodged the blow, the bitterness and coldness with the neighbor tells me that the tip had penetrated me, and perhaps it remained in my heart.

O my Lord, what pains me most and makes me unhappy is that the enemy has left in me the arrow of doubt about your forgiveness, about your love, about your divine relationship.

O my Lord, I believe in your infinite love that you are yourself and in the infinite love that you are for me, and therefore I call you, I look for you and I trust to be loved and saved by you.

O my love, my whole being is a sore, a dying mass, because all my life is a mass of defects and deficiencies, but you can save, elevate and transform me.

Do not turn me away from your communion! Let the communion of your body and blood, soul and divinity bring and leave in me your Spirit of life and divine happiness.

O my God and my all!

Inspiration or Temptation

O my Lord I understand and feel that I am free, and at the same time, I am a creature, essential dependence on the creator; as with all my being, so also with all my work the first principle is not in my power, but it comes to me from you.

The initial idea of my acts does not come from me, but only the immediate determination is of my free will and makes the act all mine, and determines my responsibility in every act.

To determine, I had to choose between doing and not doing, between one thing and another, between one extreme and its opposite, and this decisive choice was made by two distinct and different thoughts and motivations.

Thoughts and motivations present in my soul are not vain realities, but belong to intelligent beings, in need of my consent, and revealing to me the presence at my side and the influx in my act of invisible beings.

Angels or demons? O my Savior, save me, O my Master, reveal to me which one is your messenger, which is your antagonist and my adversary: since both seem to push me to the good.

If the enemy pushed me to evil, I would immediately recognize him and would drive him out resolutely. But he also offers me some good! But your angel pushes me to a greater good, the demon to a lesser good.

He wants to stop me in the good achieved without pushing me any further, because the non-progress is already retreating. I understand, O Lord, and I thank you. The impulse to a greater good is your inspiration. The impulse to a lesser good is his temptation.

Meanwhile, I cannot subtract myself from this law! Either I correspond to your inspiration by launching and applying myself to a form and degree of greater good and I raise myself to you, or I stop and regress to a lesser good and fall into the sphere of Satan!

I cannot, I must not, I do not want to vacillate in choosing you, O my God and my all. I do not trust myself, on account of sad experiences of the past. O my Savior and master! O my way, truth and life, let me always choose without regresses, without interruptions, without slowing down.

O my God and my all!

With this sign you shall overcome

O my Jesus, every time I make the sign of the cross, every time I hold the cross in my hand, and I raise the cross forward, I mean to free myself and my brothers from every power of the world, of darkness and of every devil.

In your charity you have wished to win with wood and with the sign of the cross the one who with the wood of pride and with the sign of disobedience and with the lie of charity won, enslaved us and wanted us eternally as his damned slaves.

O Jesus! Every time you show me your Sacred Heart with its cross, its thorns, with its wound and its blood, I intend to offer my chest to receive it, to live entirely for you.

O Sacred Heart, you are the new sign and new pledge of victory against every power that opposes the soul and her sanctification, Jesus Christ and his kingdom, the Church. I intend to imprint you on my every act and every instant of mine!

With you, O Sacred Heart, I will be able to triumph in perfect charity over all the influences of the enemy, who through the shame of the laziness and envy, of lukewarmness and coldness, wants to drag me to despair and damnation of the loveless and Godless.

O Jesus! Every time there is evil to be fought, good to be conquered, bring to my memory and intellect the great sign of Mary Immaculate so that all my will is enraptured and corroborated.

May she move us to fight every evil, to conquer every good with the banner of the Immaculate and follow her in advancing to slaughter the enemy, and gather around her the brothers to share together the victory and ascend to heaven.

O Mary, O immaculate! Preserve from every evil this son of yours that the dragon wants to devour, save me from the immense river of lava in which he wants to drown my life, give me your wings to ascend to the Lord.

O my God and my all!

Humility Guarantee of Victory

O Jesus, every time I implore you, and now I intend to invoke you: banish from me, from my brethren and from the whole world the enemy that is devil and Satan, who stenches this poor world.

O my Jesus, every time I invoke you I intend to make all celestial beings exalt you with new glorification; and to have you acknowledged with new adoration from all terrestrial beings. Now I invoke you in a special way: prostrate all infernal beings.

Free me, O Lord from every diabolical influence, and in a special way from whatever makes me have a false idea of the power, presence and action of the enemy either superstitiously exaggerating or presumptuously denying it.

Let me enter and be perfected in vigilant prayer that you inculcate, because I do not want to fall into temptation. Let me enter and be perfected in that life of faith and mortification on which depends our victory over every enemy.

Let me enter and be perfected in that divine humility that always overcomes the pride of the enemy, in that divine humility that causes so much repugnance in the devil that impedes him to get close to me, or forces him to leave me alone.

Let me enter and be perfected in that divine humility that hides me completely from his knowledge, so that he cannot make or execute his invidious plans; that humility that elevates me triumphantly in heaven, in opposite direction to his falling into the abyss on account of his pride.

Let me enter and perfect that humility, which enables me to reach the highest mansions of heaven, lost by the devils because

of their pride; that humility that opens for me the heavens that pride has locked up for them forever.

Let me enter and perfect in me that divine humility that makes you descend to me while their pride make you withdraw far from them in your inaccessible heights. Grant me that divine humility that locks me in your heart, my paradise, lost for them forever on account of their pride.

Grant me that humility that is all the greatness and power of the Lady that crushes his head; the humility that is all the wisdom of the omnipotence, in the work of our salvation from damnation and temptation!

O my God and my all!

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BLESSED JUSTIN'S BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Lord does not create people just to occupy space. God has a plan, a vocation, a mission for every human being. Many of today's problems are caused by the fact that people are more concerned about finding a job, a profession, or a career, rather than their own vocation and mission in life.

A profession or career is something we do to live, to earn what we need in order to live. Vocation is something we do out of dedication and love. A profession can be chosen or inspired by our family or by human considerations but a vocation comes from on high and invites us to disinterested service of our neighbor.

Fr. Justin was born and called to help all human beings to discover and follow their vocation in life, because people find true fulfillment only by discovering and following their vocation. Therefore, all life, every activity, every act of service, every life-choice is seen as vocation. The title of the biography of Fr. Justin, "Chiamato per Chiamare-Called to Call", written by Oreste Anella SDV, alludes to the mission of this man of God.

The most important thing in the life of every human being is to discern his or her vocation. Justin, born on January 18, 1891, at Piana Napoli to Luigi Russolillo and Giuseppina Simpatia, from his earliest years felt a strong and clear calling to the priesthood.

An intelligent and sharp boy, Justin was known among his friends for his dedication to his studies and for his exceptional piety. He went to school with his aunts and received private lessons from them and from his parish priest.

When he was five years old he received his First Communion and fell in love with Jesus present in the Eucharist. In 1901, when he was only ten years old, he entered the seminary at Pozzuoli, his native diocese. Justin never doubted his vocation but more than once he feared that he would be unable to follow it because of the poverty which gripped his large family and because of the bouts of illness that accompanied him throughout his life.

When Baron Zambaglione, to whom his mother had asked financial help to pay the seminary fees, proved unresponsive to her request, both mother and son wept bitterly. On this occasion Giuseppina told her son, whose strengths she valued, "Don't be afraid, Mamma will make you a priest, even if it costs me my own eyes!" What would a mother's love not do! All the family, including the aunts, set about making sacrifices so that Justin could follow his vocation.

While all seems to be going well for the young seminarian, two painful events grieved the entire family: Aunt Enrichetta dies suddenly (she was the one who provided a notable amount to help pay the seminary fees) and Luigi falls from a scaffolding and is unable to work any more. There is no money for the seminary. Once again mother and son weep bitterly at the prospective of Justin having to leave the seminary. The superiors realize what is happening, and moved by it get involved in his case. Baron Zambaglione, this time at the bishop's request, agrees to pay half the fees. The sky turns blue once more!

As a result of his unsteady health Justin runs the risk on more than one occasion of being sent home from the seminary. The Superiors, who appreciate his holiness and his extraordinary intelligence, make some exceptions for him: they allow him longer holi-

days, provide him with a private room instead of the traditional dormitory, and sometimes even give him more nutritious food.

With his financial problems sorted out, Justin continues with his studies and moves on towards priesthood. During his holiday periods at home he discovers the seed of priestly and religious vocation in many young people. He starts to get them together, to give them catechism classes and to teach them Latin.

When Fr. Justin was later asked about the birth of the Vocationist Congregations he replied, "The Society of Divine Vocations was born from a seminarian, who used to teach catechism every day and sometimes the whole day." This statement explains how and why, on September 20th 1913, the morning of his priestly ordination, Justin makes a vow to found a religious Congregation dedicated to identifying and fostering and serving vocations.

The Lord always shows a certain preference for the poor and it is from them that he calls his chosen ones. Justin, a faithful follower of Jesus, pledges himself and his religious families to "identifying, fostering and serving vocations to the ordained ministries, especially among those who are less well-off".

The desire, determination and concern of Fr. Justin are shown in this statement, which sets the specific mission of his apostolate and that of his sons and daughters; "Poverty must never be an obstacle to following one's own vocation." Relying on Jesus's words, "The poor are with you always," the Vocationists continue to work in order to help poor vocations.

From his childhood, Fr. Justin is fascinated by God, hungers and thirsts for the word of God and becomes an avid reader of books on spirituality. The fire of divine loves burns within him and this fire must blaze. Justin stands out for his piety and his dignity in prayer. Often, both in the parish and in the seminary, he spends all his free time praying. In the parish his "Most Faithful" see him in ecstasy. In the seminary his school friends see him in ecstasy in

front of the crucifix; Fr. Salvatore Verlezza watches him in a state of ecstasy for 45 minutes, during the celebration of a private Mass, when he was sick.

On the day of his priestly ordination, September 20, 1913, Justin makes his vow of charity, promising to do always whatever would give the greatest glory to God. For his priestly ordination he only asks one gift: to have all the children of Pianura to receive Communion at his first Mass.

What attracts a lot of boys, generous benefactors and several priests who approach him and offer their assistance, is that interior fire that can be seen in this man of God who lives and tries to get others to live what he teaches and enjoins on those he meets along his path: "Become a saint...make yourself into a real saint, because all the rest counts for nothing".

Fr. Justin and his Vocationists nurture vocations and direct them to wherever God calls them. To accept candidates for discernment the Vocationists ask no money and no certainty of vocations, but the willingness to become saints.

While Justin dreams and plans community life with his aspirants, the opposition of his bishop forces him to parish ministry, in which he becomes ever more aware of the universal vocation to holiness, and this awareness confirms his commitment to fostering vocations to the priesthood and to consecrated life, so that they may become apostles of universal sanctification. He accepts the pastorship of St. George's Parish with the vision that the parish is like a womb in which a vocation is conceived and nurtured. Divine Providence prepares the birth of the first Vocationary in the rectory of San Giorgio's parish, where Don Justin serves as parish priest from September 20, 1920 until his death on August 2, 1955.

News of the opening of the Vocationary, which accepts and trains boys who feel called to the priesthood without paying anything, spreads almost miraculously throughout the regions of

southern Italy. The number of boys grows bigger by the day. In the presbytery and the area surrounding the church transformation and continual expansion are required. Requests come in from all over and Fr. Justin, like a good father, doesn't know how to say no. Later he writes in *Spiritus Orationis*: "When someone knocks at our doors, the hearts open much faster than the doors!"

The good people of Pianura welcome, love and sustain Fr. Justin's boys. Every day real and genuine miracles are seen, something that keeps the Vocationary existing and growing.

The parish of San Giorgio has the honor and glory of having sustained and nurtured the first Vocationary. Early on the Founder decides that "for the little Jesus to grow, we need Mary and Joseph." In other words, to help these Divine Vocations to grow, Mothers and Fathers are needed.

The Vocationist Sisters were conceived and founded to provide real mothers to the aspirants. Probably only in heaven we will be able to appreciate fully the heroism and services of the Sisters shown to so many young people. Without the zealous care and attention of the Vocationist Sisters, without their maternal affection, many young people would never have made it to the priesthood.

Fr Justin writes that one of the distinctive characteristics of the Vocationists is an industriousness that spurs them on to "do everything for everyone to bring them all to God". According to need he takes on the role of Founder, father, Superior General, confessor, housekeeper, teacher, spiritual director, preacher, writer and poet. This industriousness and zeal cause him to promise "never to waste time" and allow him and his companions to develop their capacities and talents in the conviction that recreation or resting do not consist in giving up but about changing activities. In accordance with the principle "contemplation in action and action for contemplation" Fr. Justin's life is all about activity and ascending to God.

The word of God and the Eucharist are the essential nourishment to any spiritual growth and to any effective ministry.

Most of the writings of Blessed Justin have been published in 27 volumes containing precious ascetical, philosophical, theological and formative principles.

Spiritus Orationis, is one of his masterpiece containing several autobiographical references and in many ways can be compared to the Confessions of St Augustine. What he writes in this book can be said of all his writings:

Through these prayers, every pure spirit and great heart can be part of that special relationship that the poor human (alas, too human) spirit is most mercifully invited during its earthly life...

These prayers are intended not to be formulas but to be read as a meditation, and because of their great richness, to be part of spiritual study.

They are divided into stanzas, like the psalms, in the form of strophes. (In fact, they echo very clearly certain aesthetic laws of interior rhythm to which they are intrinsically bound...)

(How lovely it seemed to him the fact that someone born a poet should renounce writing about the world of poetry in order to create poetry by the way they lived. And this in such a way that it could be sung later by some beautiful angel in the strophes of heaven: the only feast of glory! The only court of love!)"

One quotation from this volume gives us a taste of the depth and actuality of his teachings.

"Our dominant spiritual disease is weak will power. So there is a need of continuous treatment to strengthen, train and reinvigorate our will power. Cause of this weakness of the will is the lack of strong convictions, that is, of great ideas, bright enough to ignite, excite, win and rapture us, that is, to touch our will to implement them. This must be above all the idea of the goal, bright and dazzling and therefore convincing and enrapturing".

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