

St. GASPAR BERTONI



**FOUNDER of the CONGREGATION of the
SACRED STIGMATA of OUR LORD,
JESUS CHRIST**

**SOME RUDIMENTS
of his**

SPIRITUAL WRITINGS

SEASON OF ADVENT & CHRISTMAS

Part I [## 1 - 48]

Original Italian Title:

La Grammatica di Don Gaspare Bertoni – Meditazioni Quotidiane

Edited by Rev. Ignazio BONETTI, CSS – 1993

Translation into English printed in 1994
Electronic Edition: 5th Easter Sunday, 2005

TABLE of CONTENTS

Author's Dedication

Letter of + Mariano A. Magrassi, OSB – Arch-Bishop of Bari

Acknowledgments for English Translation

Preparation for Electronic Library

+

INTRODUCTION

FOREWORD: The Sources

+

PART I

ADVENT and CHRISTMAS

Waiting for Christ

The Christian Ideal

Life of Grace

Temples of God

God with us

Christian Newness

The Following of Christ

Spousal Love

Christian Joy

+

PART II

LENT

Penance

Penance & Charity

Penance & Prayer

Sin

Tepidity

Temptation

Conversion

Sacramental Penance

In the School of Christ Crucified

+

PART III

EASTER

Easter of the Lord

Our Easter

The Eucharist – The Eternal Easter

The Life of Faith

Love God above all things

Abandonment in God

Fraternal Charity

The Spirit of Love

+

PART IV
ORDINARY TIME of the YEAR
GENERAL THEMES

The Church
 The Word of God
 Liturgy
 The Roman Pontiff
 Priests
 The Religious Community
 The Laity in the Church
 Vocation to Ministry of the Church
 Corresponding with Grace
 The Fear of the Lord

RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

Prayer & Prayers
 Meditation
 Examination of Conscience
 Spiritual Exercises
 Spiritual Direction
 Christian Prudence
 Humility
 Poverty
 Purity
 Authority & Obedience

RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT

Making the Best Use of Time
 Study & Learning
 The Wisdom of the Cross
 The Apostolic Mission
 Preaching
 Apostolic Undertakings
 Perseverance
 The Last Things

+

PART V
SPECIAL THEMES - Fr. BERTONI's DEVOTIONS

The Sacred Heart
 The Stigmata of the Passion
 Espousals of the Virgin Mary and St. Joseph
 Our Lady
 St. Joseph
 Some Liturgical Feasts

+

+++

+

AUTHOR'S DEDICATION

To my Stigmatine Confreres:

Fr. Samuel Chameal, Fr. Julius Delmaso, Fr. Lucian Orlando Giovanni,
Fr. Peter Marchesini, Fr. Guido Mespilli, Fr. Camillo Santini,
Fr. Louis Veronese –

Remembering our 50th anniversary as Priests - and in memory of:
Fr. Lucian DalZoppo and Fr. Seraphin Piazzzi – who have preceded us in the Father's
House.

+

**U.S. PROVINCE
ACKNOWLEDGMENT for the ENGLISH TRANSLATION**

For the translation of this book:

Fr. Charles F. Egan, Fr. Charles J. Grady, Fr. Carmen T. Russo,
Fr. Giancarlo Mittempergher, Fr. Leonard Ferrecchia.
For the Final Revision: Fr. John Rungruangkanokul.

Our gratitude goes to each one for making these writings of our Sainly Founder
available in the English Language.

May these thoughts of our Founder be a guide in our following his footsteps towards a
true spiritual Stigmatine charism.

+

PREPARATION for the ELECTRONIC LIBRARY & COMPUTER NOTES

Fr. Joseph Henchey.

[The material has been arranged in such a way for it to be of help for those who might want to down-load – and there may be references as well to e material already found on the web site]:

www.st-bertoni.com

[NB: The original title of this work in Italian is: *La Grammatica di Don Gaspare. Meditazioni quotidiane, dagli scritti di S. Gaspare Bertoni.*

In the English speaking world, this unusual title might lead some to think of Cardinal Newman's *Grammar of Assent*, published in 1870 ¹. In the Introduction, Gilson writes:

... [Newman's] Essay does not pretend to elucidate all the problems raised by [his] complex experience, but it is an attempt to facilitate for others their first initiation to the Grammar of a Language, which he himself had not found easy to learn ... Literally speaking, a Grammar is an art and science dealing with the structure of a certain language ... The first duty of a grammarian is to teach the parts of speech

In seeking to be faithful to Fr. Bonetti's idea, this *Grammar* could mean the 'Fundamentals,' 'Basic Elements and Principles,' of Fr. Bertoni's Spirituality – this is a kind of an 'anthology.' I have chosen the title for the web-site English edition: *Some Rudiments of [Fr. Bertoni's] Spiritual Writings*].

+
+++
+

¹ Doubleday Image Books. Garden City NY 1955, with Introduction by Etienne Gilson.

PRESENTATION

It is frequent today to select special pages from an Author of a certain interest, assigning them to each day of the year, and harmonizing the choices with the spiritual climate of the various liturgical seasons.

This is precisely what Fr. Ignatius Bonetti has done with an intelligence moved by love, in this present volume. He has been a truly dedicated student of St. Gaspar Bertoni [1777-1853]. The ancients used to say: 'I fear the man of just one book!' The person who knows only one book however, can incite both respect and fear. Today the style is to devour books reviews and newspapers, with the style of using them, and then throwing them away. The end result is to hurry through the content of the texts rather superficially, and then forgetting all about them after some time. This may provide information, but does not help formation. However, one has spent a life time in fathoming the depths of the message of a single Author is in a position to offer you the most important pages, because he would be able to provide these for you to sip and relish, as is done for truly good wine. Rather than just wandering through time, this work is much like the old Latin saying: 'Don't ever let a day pass without at least a line!' Let no day pass without meditating on a text. This is truly what Fr. Ignatius has done here, by drawing on St. Gaspar Bertoni, from whom the Congregation of the Stigmatines has taken its origin.

I am very happy to present these pages, due to the personal knowledge that I enjoy that binds me to the author, and to his Congregation, present in the Diocese of Bari, where the men work with great dynamism.

The content of this book cannot be summarized in just a few well-chosen lines. However, I will be satisfied with just a few references, in order to move the reader to a more direct and prolonged contact with the texts being offered here, day by day, 'redeeming time'. As Paul said, and which was repeated by St. Gaspar, by making the good use of time which does not return again.

Whoever would run through even rapidly the titles of the individual pages would see unfolding a very rich gamut of spiritual themes: through Grace that allows us to be 'participants in the Divine Nature', to Joy: by passing through the austere path of penance. All the Christian virtues are touched upon, as the various cords of a harp, and the end result is a harmonious poem, in which Jesus Christ is chanted.

In Advent, as would be expected, the theme of expectancy of Christ dominates, and the yearning for holiness; while in Lent, there emerges the theme of Penance and the sense of sin, which lead to the feet of the Crucified. As is seen, this is not a contemplation that would move only on the emotional or sentimental level – rather this work provides a stimulus that shuffles all the cards of our lives.

In the Ordinary Time, the themes are broadened with a greater variety. This proceeds from the Liturgy, to the Church with her various subjects, through the Christian virtues, in order to blossom in the 'devotions' that were the more

characteristic of our Saint: the sacred Heart, the Stigmata of the Lord, the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph, seen particularly in the light of their Holy Espousals. The Holy Spouses have drawn in a particular manner the devout attention of St. Gaspar. This was proved to be what moved him to choose them as Patrons for his Congregation and propose them as model for the Christian life, especially for families.

I would like to bring out a few characteristic expressions that seem to me to be most significant: *to trust in God is a beautiful confidence!* This is the vibrant and convinced manifestation of a joyful and boundless trust, even to the complete abandonment into the hands of the Father. God is one Who never deludes you. Holy Abandonment is one of the fundamental components of Fr. Gaspar's spiritual teaching: that he was able to translate into a coherent life-style.

Fraternal Charity is looked upon as 'the best investment', i.e., the best manner for procuring your authentic interest, not only for a few days here on earth, but rather as that destiny that will know no end. 'I have only that which I have given' – is then noted thereafter.

And I also emphasize further the praise bestowed on 'simplicity', a virtue which merits, in my view, a particular attention: it is a matter of evaluating the most ordinary circumstances of life, without awaiting extraordinary interventions that are so rare, and of modeling oneself on an child, who receives all with simplicity and festively, because for such a person everything is new. And it is to the children such as these to whom Jesus has promised His Reign.

Fundamental in this teaching is that 'conformity to Christ Crucified', that recurs throughout the Saint's writings, as the source of his spirituality. To go to partake of these texts is like partaking of the pure waters of a mountain stream.

St. Gaspar participated personally in the Passion of Christ, by suffering in his own flesh and spirit for long years. As a result, he insistently invites all of us to contemplate in the wounds of Christ Crucified, the indelible signs of an indescribable suffering. These are also an indication of a boundless love, the price paid by Christ in order to acquire us for His Reign.

Rather than commenting on our own, I would like to explain to you, the reader, how this stream of spirituality has sprung up in the Church. Up until the 12th century, Christ on the Cross was figured as being crowned in glory, or as a priest vested in rich vestments: He was presented to be already Christ the Victor over sin and death. In this perspective, attention to His Passion, to the Stigmata, to the Pierced Heart, to His Precious Blood that was poured out, found very little space. The glory of the resurrection seemed to absorb the drama of the Passion.

However, beginning in the 12th century, especially in Cistercian circles. Then taken by the Franciscans, a way was opened up for a new manner of spiritual thought – which then became known as '*Modern Devotion*'. This was more attentive to Savior's humanity, and to the signs of His Passion. This would then be the root of the devotion

– that is by now, classical – to the Sacred Heart. And from this developed devotion to the Most Precious Blood and to the Sacred Stigmata.

It is up to us today to bring together these two aspects: the Passion of the Crucified and the glory of the Risen Christ. These cannot be separated, much like the concave cannot be separated from the convex: Jesus is at one and the same time the 'Suffering Christ' and Christ the Victor: *through the Cross out into Light*, as the ancients also stated.

As for the rest, I leave it all up to your discovery. This will be much assisted also by the rich Table of Contents and Analytical Index, which will allow you to excavate from within the texts themselves. It is a beautiful opportunity to follow along in a spiritual adventure. This is a journey that is full of fascination. The poor realities of this world – as St. Ignatius of Loyola noted – seem to provide for the moment a great pleasure. But when in exhaustion, you abandon them, you find yourself empty and disillusioned. When, though, you undertake the adventure along the ways of the spirit, then the joy that is ignited for the moment, continues even afterwards, and even tends to become greater and more intense. Just try it to believe it! And, so, have a good journey along the paths of the Gospel, under the guidance of a saint, who precedes you and leads you by the hand.

+ Mariano A. Magrassi, OSB
Archbishop of Bari-Bitonto

INTRODUCTION

Gaspar Bertoni is one of those saints who are noted not only for the perfection of their spiritual life, but also for the fact that they were chosen by the Lord to be teachers of holiness in His Church.

He was to carry out his spiritual teaching with various classes of people – with people who listen to his sermons, with the youth of the 'Marian Oratories', with the clerics of the seminary, and the priests of the diocese, with the religious men and women of various congregations, and above all with the members of the congregation he founded.

It was natural that these latter, who were the privileged chosen ones of the activity of St. Gaspar, should understand with greater clarity the meaning and the value of his teaching and to be aware of the need to give faithfully the practical application. The chronicles of the congregation clearly point out the zealous attention with which the sons of St. Gaspar used to follow faithfully the directions of their Founder, as expressed in his words and his example. 'Fr. Gaspar,' writes Fr. Giovanni M. Marani, the first successor chosen to lead the congregation used to repeat often in his Venetian dialect, 'acted in this way, or he taught us this.'² Whenever he had to speak regarding the activity of someone who was not toeing the mark, Fr. Marani would use this good-natured expression: 'My son, you lack the **grammar** of Fr. Gaspar!'³

We see then that Fr. Gaspar, so to say, had his own **grammar**. Obviously, we are not speaking of a book, but rather of his spirit, his style of life, of a collection of his teaching and behavior, which by word and example had the power to convey to whoever came in contact with him a safe rule to follow on the road of holiness. With this colorful expression, which reflects the scholastic surrounding to which the community of the Stimmate lived for so many years, Fr. Marani clearly pointed out the 'teacher's' flavor of the spiritual personality of St. Gaspar.

The purpose of this book is to present the **grammar** of St. Gaspar, hence, the title.

First of all, it is an anthology of his writings. Some are of the sermons he gave to parishioners, others are meditations and instructions taken from the many courses of spiritual exercises and retreats that he gave to the clergy or to various groups of seminarians; writings from his spiritual diary, or spiritual journal; from his correspondence, from the constitutions he wrote for his religious family. We have included other selections, which were not composed by him, but in a certain sense he made them his own, transcribing them from other authors, such as Fr. Alphonsus Rodriguez, and the Benedictine, Fr. John Mabillion, and are included in his manuscripts.

² **Cause of Canonization, Positio super virtutibus, Vol. 2. Roma 1960, p. 22.**

³ Fr. Joseph Stofella, *P. Giovanni M. Marani*. CS II, p. 124.

Regarding the literary ownership of the texts in this collection, at this point, a general observation should be made. The greater part of the passages are definitely original and properly, St. Gaspar's. But, we cannot ignore the fact that he himself stated this intention 'of not saying anything of his own'⁴ regarding the meditations that he gave in the seminary and during the spiritual exercises, but to rely completely on the Bible, on the fathers of the Church, on the theologians and spiritual writers, so much so that the meditations and instructions of St. Gaspar are to a great extent a collection of other people's writings. Even in his sermons to the people he made use of the writings of the best classical preachers especially those of the Jesuit, Fr. Paul Segneri. From the innumerable citations quoted from other authors, especially those from the Fathers of the Church, as a general rule St. Gaspar mentioned the sources. But this was not always the case, for sometimes the citations appear to be fitted to the meaning he has in mind. However, we have adopted the criterion of indicating here, as pertaining to the ***Grammar of St. Gaspar***, the texts, that are found in his manuscripts, even those from various sources.

Besides the texts that in some way belong to St. Gaspar included in the ***grammar***, are some testimonies given about him by his contemporaries, that are more organized and incisive, and they point out to us the master of holiness, who taught with his own example besides his words. We have also taken the liberty to include a few other selections written by some of the first sons of St. Gaspar, who were very faithful to his teaching and close to his spirit. They are sermons given when they were substituting for him on themes that are dear to the spiritual tradition of our Stigmatine family - themes, such as the Sacred Stigmata, the Holy Spouses, Mary and Joseph, themes which St. Gaspar spoke about many times, but left nothing written of these sermons.

The subject matter of this ***Grammar of St. Gaspar*** has been distributed into various sections according to the season of the liturgical year. This should serve as a book of meditation. The first part corresponds to Advent and Christmas. In the second part you will find selections attuned to the spirit of the Lenten season. In the third part the same goes for the Easter Season. The texts that touch on themes of a general nature are found in the fourth part, which corresponds to Ordinary Time, hence, this part is a bit longer.

The fifth part is made up of selective themes on various topics, some suggested by festivities in the calendar year, others presented for the choice of the reader, who can use them when and how he chooses. Thus the span of the liturgical year is covered – even though this is accomplished with a bit of liberty and without any rigidity – with the texts of the daily meditations drawn from the ***Grammar of St. Gaspar***.

One final word about the criteria necessary to follow in the entire course of this work. From the onset, we decided not to do a critical edition of St. Gaspar's writings, but rather a practical edition, which would be useful in this day and age of the texts which were written almost two centuries ago and were never intended to be published.

⁴ *Meditations on St. Matthew*, MssB 7342. cf. further ahead, n. 8, note 2.

Hence, there arose the need to adapt a little the literary form of the writings, so to speak, a sort of 'translation.' But, let me make it clear that this was always done with careful respect for the texts, and with the sole purpose of rendering the contents more understandable today.

A cordial word of thanks to those who have helped me in various ways to bring this work to reality. In a special way, thanks to my confreres, Fr. Bruno Facciotti and Fr. Pasquale Cavallo, who encouraged me to have this ***Grammar of St. Gaspar*** published by the Dehonian Press of Bologna.

We hope that the spiritual teaching of St. Gaspar Bertoni, which is distinguished for being deeply rooted in the gospels, hence is perfectly suited for our time, will be favorably accepted by devout Christians, and will produce substantial results of holiness and missionary zeal.

+
+++
+

FORWARD

The identification of the texts in this book has been arranged with the following criterion:

For each meditation the source, or sources, are indicated, whenever several texts are combined with other closely related topics, their source is also identified. As far as possible, sources are identified as coming from the Bible, the Fathers, and others on which St. Gaspar relied.

For the writing of St. Gaspar that have been published in their entirety: ***Spiritual Journey, Correspondence, Constitutions*** - recourse is had to the various volumes that have been printed. Likewise, a collection of his Early Sermons has been published under the title, ***Pages of a Christian Life***. Reference to this book should be made as far as possible for the selections of these sermons. Also his **Retreat Meditations** and **Instructions** are printed in the **CS** collection, in an incomplete form and with a certain liberty in the translation. From time to time, we refer to this 'collection' when the occasion arises.

For testimonies about St. Gaspar, we refer to the documents, ***Positio super virtutibus***, and to the ***Summarium Additionale***, and to the monumental biography in six volumes written by Rev. Nello Dalle Vedove.

Below are the principal works on which the documentation is based with the dates, abbreviations and initials that area found in the footnotes.

- MssB Manuscripts** of St. Gaspar - 5 volumes, compiled by Fr. Luigi Benaglia
- CF Constitutions** – compiled by Fr. Joseph Stofella, Verona 1950.
- EP Correspondence** – Compiled by Fr. Joseph Stofella. Verona 1954.
- MP Spiritual Journal** - Commentary by Fr. Joseph Stofella, Roma 1962 – translated by from Giancarlo Mitterpergher. Pretoria 1993.
- PVC Pages of a Christian Life** – by Fr. Joseph Stofella. Vicenza 1947
- CS Collectanea Stigmatina** - 4 volumes, Documents & Studies. 1957-1964.
- Positio super Virtutibus*** – Documents relating to the Process of Canonization
- SA Summarium Additionale** – Documents relating to the Process of Canonization

[NB: Among the Documents contained in the ***Summarium Additionale***, note worthy are the following:

- n. 20: ***Miscellanea Lenotti***. [pp.106 -195];
- n. 26: ***Life of the Servant of God. D. Gaspar Bertoni***. Verona 1858 [pp. 288-578], written by Fr. Gaetano Giacobbe. This is the first biography written about St. Gaspar.

BERTONI, *St. Gaspar Bertoni* - Written by Fr. Nello Dalle Vedove.

- **Vol. I: *Early Life of Ven. Gaspar Bertoni* – 1971.**
- **Vol. II: *Life and Thought of Bl. Gaspar Bertoni* - Part I 1975**
- **Vol. III: *Life and Thought of Bl. Gaspar Bertoni* - Part II 1977**
- **Vol. IV: *Gaspar Bertoni & the Stigmatine Community* – Part I 1981**
- **Vol. V: *Gaspar Bertoni & the Stigmatine Community* - Part II 1984**
- **Vol. VI: *Gaspar Bertoni & the Stigmatine Community* – Part III 1991**

+
+++
+

SEASON OF ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS

WAITING FOR CHRIST

1: **Christ is Coming. Let us revive our waiting.**

Christ is coming. The Savior is about to be born. Holy Mother Church is in these days awaits Him, desires Him, and longs for Him.

What does it mean that here we are all cold in our affections; that we pass through these days of Advent so happy and so joyful in waiting and in a lazy indifference; that being solicitous to untie ourselves to the Church, we are satisfied at most to agree with her exteriorly, by a superficial and languid ritual celebration?

Unfortunately, attachment to worldly things keeps our spirit impeded; the pleasures of the senses have taken away our heart, reducing it to a deplorable slavery. Yes, we believe in heavenly things, but we don't love them. We profess them exteriorly, but we don't enjoy them intimately. What a wonder, then, if we don't desire them, if they interest us very little?

O God! It is indeed now time for us to shake off this coldness, that we lift our spirit on high, accepting the invitation of the Prophet to see the joy that comes from God ***Look to the east, Jerusalem! Behold the joy that comes to you from God!*** [Ba 4:36]. This is the object to which we all must apply the attention of our mind.

Some already know by experience how beautiful and joyful the coming of the Savior is, since they have their heart warmed by divine love. But I, who am cold, and others like me, have need to pray so that we may succeed in persuading ourselves that even the most miserable sinners can participate together with the just and the saints in this waiting for a joy that is so pure and sublime.⁵

2: **Waiting for Christ and our poverty**

At first sight, one comes to think that only saints and the just are in a position to await truly with joy the coming of Christ, not sinners, who have within themselves too much deformity and lack of similarity.

That's not so. In fact, it can be said that in a certain sense sinners are in a position to enjoy it more than the just themselves: ***the Son of God comes from heaven to save that which was lost*** [Mt 18:11]. He Himself says that He has come to search out sinners and not the just: ***I did not come to call the righteous but sinners*** [My 9:13]. The name that He took becoming man, the name announced by

⁵ Sermons preached by Fr. Gaspar in the early years of his ministry, n. 26: 'The Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.' **MssB 946-948. PVC, pp. 225, f.** These sermons are a collection of 41 discourses given by Fr. Bertoni between Sunday, June 8, 1800 – when he was still a deacon – and Sunday, December 13, 1807, in his parish church of St. Paul in Campo Marzio, Verona. Regarding these sermons, prepared with extreme care and completely spread out to be recorded, his first biographer, Fr. Cajetan Giacobbe, testifies that they constitute 'a precious treasury of oratorical art and divine learning'. [SA, p. 565]. The sermon on the Advent of Our Lord Jesus Christ, from which the meditations of this chapter have been taken, was delivered on December 9, 1804.

the angel, is Jesus, that is, savior. **He will save His people from their sins** [Mt 1:21]. To us sinners, oppressed by the misery of our faults and shamefully held in slavery by our vices, the visit of the King of Heaven has been announced and directed that He wishes to free us with His grace and enrich us with His precious gifts. We must, therefore, feel with greater pleasure the approach of that day so longed for, happy and auspicious for us above every human imagination. That misery of ours which first confounded us so much and made us almost despair, now we see it becoming a reason for rich hopes. And all those who knew our old misery will admire the wisdom and power of God Who knows how to call those things that are not, as those which are [cf. Rm 4:19] and to choose the most abject and despicable creatures of the world to confound the most strong.

Let each one of us say: 'Rejoice, my poor heart, in the mercy of the Lord and He will satisfy all your desires.' **Take delight in the Lord, and He will grant you your heart's requests** [Ps 37:4]. To You, O Lord, I have lifted up my hopes. I trust in you, and I will never be put to shame for having hoped in You [cf. Ps 25:1]⁶.

3: The wonders of God's love

Let us be well aware of this: just as we are accustomed to love only those things in which we perceive some appearance of beauty and good, and seeing in ourselves only malice and ugliness, we imagine that it is almost impossible that God can love us. It seems an exaggeration that the Word of God would descend as the passionate lover of our soul, with the most tender and affectionate invitations, to call us to **His chaste and spiritual nuptials**. But every difficulty vanishes when we think of the difference that exists between our love and that of God. Our love is caused by the good that it finds in the object it loves. Because of this, we love only the good that lives in a person. The love of God, however, is not caused by the love that can be in us, but instead He causes it in us⁷. For this reason, God loves also things that do not exist, in order that they may come into being. He loves souls that are deformed by sin in order to adorn them, and reform them with His grace.

Let us look at the facts which are irrefutable. Who were those great saints who received the first fruits of the Spirit in the early years of the newly founded Church? Who were those unconquered martyrs, those illustrious confessors, those first Christians who were so fervent? They were once pagans, slaves of the power of darkness. They adored rocks, metals and wood. Their life and their habits were full of confusion. St. Paul said this to them: **You were once in darkness because your vices and superstitions, but now you are a light in the Lord** [cf. Ep 5:8].

How did they pass from the obscure abyss of sin to the luminous heights of sanctity? The Word of God came to make Himself man, in order that the pagan world, so blind and immersed in sin, might become **a beautiful spouse**, adorned with virtue and immaculate. The grace and kindness of Christ our savior, was made known to them and appeared to them. Thus, there is a prodigious change, worthy of the right hand of the Most High Lord.

⁶ Early Sermons, n. 25. 'The Advent of Our Lord Jesus Christ'. **MssB 949-957. PVC pp. 226-229.**

⁷ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 20, a. 1.

Who of us, upon hearing this, will not recover the greatest hope of being able to climb, with the grace of the Savior, ever higher than before when it had eventually fallen with its sins, if, as it appears from the history of those first Christians, ***where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more*** [Rm 5:20]⁸.

4: How to prepare ourselves to receive the Savior

The favorable time is already approaching; the days of our salvation are now very near [cf. 2 Co 6:2]. A gentle and happy hope has already been born in our hearts, and joyful affections of exaltation, love and desire now move our spirits. Now, having reflected on the resolution to 'wait for the joyful coming of the Savior', the time has come to reflect on the manner of putting that resolution into practice.

Whoever rushes to meet Christ with longing, should, when he nears Him, join with His good desires the pledge, in fact, the effective step of abandoning and leaving completely the crookedness of his habits and the proud haughtiness of worldly thoughts. Besides this, on facing Christ, he should become confused because of his past life, and become ashamed of his sins, confessing them with humble penitence.

May our Lord Jesus Christ give us the grace to do that especially in the Advent Season, to the end that, when our souls have been brought into His house, and He has deigned to join them to Himself by grace in this life, and to glory in the next, we, here on earth, and also in Heaven, can congratulate one another on the change in our happiness, and at the same time praise His mercy⁹.

⁸ Early Sermons, n. 25.'The Advent of Our Savior, Jesus Christ'. **MssB 955-961. PVC, pp. 230, f.**

⁹ o.c., **MssB 962-969. PVC, pp. 231-234.**

THE CHRISTIAN IDEAL

5: Vocation to holiness

God, Who has given us being and life, with his creating hand, has brought us into the world with this purpose: to know, love, praise and serve the Author of all good, and to promote His glory in this world, so as to merit a glorious reward and perfect happiness in Heaven.

Purchased with the Blood of the Son of God, adopted as sons of the King of Heaven, and made sharers of the divine nature by the gift of grace, we are no longer 'ours' but 'God's', to serve Him alone. We are no longer slaves of flesh and blood to take pleasure in perverse longings, but of the Spirit to allow ourselves to be led gently by its impulses and its dictates. We are no longer of the earth to serve the world, but of Heaven to work and live like saints.

How many Christians, on being invited to bring themselves closer to God, that is, to serve Him in their state of life with greater perfection, retreat from Him, struck with fear. They look on their spiritual life as an object of sadness and distress. Thus, they show clearly by their own experience how many errors anyone is exposed to anyone who wishes to judge the matters of the spirit from a purely earthly perspective. That is a huge deception. Many do not consider the interior consolation in which the true servants of God abound, so much more gentle as it is still more secret. This ***that hidden manna which no one knows except the one who receives it*** [Rv 2:17]. This is that ***continual feast*** [cf. Pr 15:15] which a soul enjoys in the security and peace of the heart. This is that conversation with uncreated Wisdom that is so kind from whom every weariness and even bitterness have been excluded [cf. Ws 3:6]. How great is the goodness, O Lord, which you have in store for those who fear you and serve you [cf. Ps 31:20].

The time is short, and the appearance of this world will soon have its end. Shall we wait for the night to catch up with us before we begin to work? Shall we wait until the Bridegroom arrives, before we provide more oil for our lamps which are almost out? Shall we wait until He invites us to the wedding before we begin to weave the cloth for our wedding gown?

Behold, I am coming soon and I will bring with Me My recompense [Rv 22:12]. That soul will be happy that will be well adorned and disposed to receive Him. Come, she will hear; come My Spouse, receive the crown which your Lord has prepared for you from all eternity. ***Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come, share your master's joy*** [Mt 25:23]¹⁰.

¹⁰ Early Sermons, n. 5: 'Devotion'. MssB 632-648. PVC, pp. 200-203, 205, f. This Sermon was preached on April 20, 1802. It is one of the richest in ascetical content: in it, Fr. Bertoni even with a certain dependence on the first chapter of 'Philothea, or Introduction to a Devout Life', of St. Francis de Sales, reveals himself by his own personal profound investigations as an authentic teacher of the spiritual life' [BERTONI 2, pp. 146, f.].

6: Holiness is for everyone

God calls everyone to serve Him; indeed, all can and it is fitting that each one aspire to sanctify himself in his state of life. The spiritual commitment must be lived in a different way by a cloistered religious and by a lay person in the midst of the world; in a still different way by a priest in the exercise of his ministry and by a father of a family in running his house; and surely different by a virgin consecrated to God and by a wife who is bound to her husband.

Devotion has wings to fly up to Heaven and feet to walk on earth. Although constantly in action, it knows how to rest peacefully with its heart in God. Its eyes are on guard to plan, to conduct itself in temporal matters, but it has another more acute vision that never loses sight of its final destiny, in order to consult with God in its every action, and to direct all things to His glory. With its lips, devotion speaks to men; yet, in the secret of its heart, it never ceases to praise and bless the Lord. So, while it has contact with the world, it keeps its soul in Heaven. And drawing God to itself out of love, devotion discovers Him and possesses Him in an outpouring of peace, and thus enjoys Paradise here on earth.

From this comes that admirable sweetness that clothes all actions. From this comes that unchangeable sameness of spirit. The world sees nothing that set is apart, nothing out of the ordinary in its goal, in its action, or in those duties that are proper to its function. So it is surprised when it is called upon to love, in devotion, something that is special and divine which it does not understand.

In prosperity, devotion doesn't get puffed up; in bad times, it does not give way to sadness. It rejoices in the happiness of others, as if it were its own. It divests itself of every singular whim, and has a respectfully appreciation of the talents of others, provided they are honest. Devotion willingly consoles those who are troubled in spirit. Open-minded with friends, it helps everyone without expecting anything in return. It awaits a reward only from God, Whom Alone is it happy to serve¹¹.

7: God is faithful: He does what He promises

God is faithful and by Him you were called to fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ Our Lord [1 Co 1:9]. What a grandiose thing St. Paul says here, what an immense gift he announces to us! We have been called to communion of life with the only-begotten Son of God. And how? By the Father. Called by Him, not introduced by our own initiative.

And because he has announced a grandiose thing, he also adds a certain proof that does not allow contradictions. He says in fact: ***God is faithful***, that is, true. That which He promised, He does. He has promised to put us in communion with His only begotten Son because He has called us precisely to this. His gifts, therefore, and the vocation He has given us, are without regret. Those things which God has promised surely have given to us as long as we do not pull away.

Even if we have been called to hard and bitter matters, it would be unpardonable to pull ourselves away. But He calls us to holiness, to liberation, to good

¹¹ Early Sermons, n. 11: 'Devotion'. **MssB 639-642. PVC, pp. 203, f.**

things prepared for us that neither the eye has seen nor the ear heard. It is God Himself Who calls us. What excuse can they give who do not run to Him?

Unless it is due to our fault, God never takes back the help that He has begun to give, and has promised to continue to give, as long as we persevere and reinforce ourselves in faith and communion with Christ. He never abandons us unless he is abandoned by us¹².

8: Aspire to the greatest charisms

The greatest gifts of grace belong in a special way to the vocation of the Church's ministers. To these, if they do not place obstacles in the way, on His part, God is prompt in giving an abundance, the first fruits, and the richest of these gifts, which afterwards, through their ministry, He bestows and spreads among His people, as it has been said: ***I will lavish choice portions upon the priests, and my people shall be filled with My blessings*** [Jr 31:14]. Even more often than not, those gifts belong in a special way to the vocation of those priests who, with a new spirit, have been called by the Holy Spirit, the innovator and restorer of all things, to renew and restore His Church on the indefectible rectitude and the strength of the First Rock¹³.

But it is not inconvenient to any Christian, who is called to enjoy the beatific vision in Paradise, to aspire humbly and without presumption in this life to the better and essential gifts of grace and charity, in conformity with the invitation of sacred Scripture: ***Strive eagerly for the greatest spiritual gifts*** [1 Co 12:31].

This is how God strongly attracts the souls He has chosen for a sublime communion with Him. Nonetheless, sometimes He may do this with a leap, as He did with St. Paul: yet, more often He does it with steps. There are very few who understand what God would do with them, if He was not impeded by them in His

¹² Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3386-3389**. Fr. Bertoni preached the Spiritual exercises many times to the Clergy – beginning from September 1810 – both in the Seminary of Verona and at the Stimmate: and for this ministry, he traveled to Mantua, where he gave two consecutive courses together with Canon Louis Pacetti. The material is subdivided into two sections, Meditations [MssB 2173-2687] and Instructions [MssB 2688-3808]; all of them were presented with absolute fidelity to the Ignatian method and with the rule of saying nothing about himself, to give room for the texts of the Word of God.

¹³ Meditations on First Kings, n. 16. **MssB 5469-5480**. The Meditations on *Primum Regum* - which is really First Samuel by today's more common numeration - make up the first series of Sunday and Festival Meditations given by St. Gaspar in the Diocesan Seminary, beginning from November 18, 1810, after he had been named Spiritual Father. In elaborating upon his reflections on the biblical text, St. Gaspar follows the traces of the highly allegorical commentary composed by St. Gregory the Great in the work acknowledged as authentic for the most part in *Primum Librum Regum*, and he develops chiefly the theme of vocation to the pastoral ministry. The Meditations of this first number 73 [MssB 4853-7340]. The texts of two other series have been reserved: 41 Meditations on the Gospel of St. Matthew –**MssB 7341-8153**], based on the Commentary of St. John Chrysostom [Homilies on Matthew], and 13 Meditations on Genesis, c. 1. [MssB 4618-4852], still under the guidance of Chrysostom. [Homilies on Genesis]. This is the source of this **GRAMMATICA 8** – St. Gaspar often referred to the Pope as the *First Rock*.

plans. We cannot imagine what God would do with us, and how much He would work in us, and through us, if we had not placed an obstacle to His grace, but had put ourselves freely and totally in His hands¹⁴.

9: Holiness and charity

So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God [1 Co 10:31]. Love for God and the search for His glory is what gives true meaning to a Christian's life. In the 'Holy of Holies' of the temple in Jerusalem, every object was made of gold, or gold-plated. Thus, every work of a Christian must be love, or done through love. Not paying much attention to the result of our work, but rather to the will of God gives us great peace, even if the results obtained, or even the work itself does not correspond fully to our expectations. God will not require an accounting of the results obtained, nor of the consistency of our work, but rather if we have done everything we could in conformity with the talents we have received. The Lord does not look at the 'how much', but rather on the 'how.' He applies to all the criterion with which He valued the offering of the widow, who ***from her property has contributed all she had*** [Mk 12:44].

So, be imitators of God as beloved children and live in love, as Christ loved us and handed Himself over for us [Ep 5:1]. 'One should be suspicious of a love that seeks selfish advantage by expecting something else besides loving itself. It is a weak love, a love which becomes feeble, or almost extinguished because its self-advantage is waning away. It is an impure love, a love which aims at something other than giving love. Pure love is not for sale; it is free like that of the **Spouse**. It is satisfied with itself; it doesn't seek any other reward beyond the object itself which it loves. This is enough; this is pleasing and for itself. Fruit of love is love itself. I love because I love. I love for love.'¹⁵

10: Perfection and simplicity

Holiness consists not so much in doing extraordinary things, as rather in doing well in ordinary things and things that have to be done¹⁶. I take great delight in hearing of the peace of your heart, the nest of the Holy Spirit, and on smelling from afar the sweet fragrance of that good perfume of Christ, with which He shows that He is in your soul, through the means of the grace of His charity and devotion. This makes me

¹⁴ **NB: Web-site Note: this is a principle often expressed by St. Gaspar in his Spiritual Diary: MP February 14, 809; July 15, 1809; May 18, 1811.**

¹⁵ Synopsis from Rodriguez, **MssB 8845-8851**. The text between quotation marks is from St. Bernard. *In Cant.*, Sermon 83, 3. PL 183, 1182. Fr. Bertoni, together with his friends, Fr. Matthew Farinati and cleric Cajetan Allegri, in the first years of his priesthood, had written a pamphlet, or synopsis of the celebrated work of the Spanish Jesuit, Fr. Alfonso Rodriguez, *Exercise of Perfection and of Christian Virtues*. [cf. **BERTONI 2**, pp. 259-266; 275-187]. In 1840, he then published a new edition of the Italian translation of the work, revising the text and presenting it with an editorial preface [cf. Correspondence, pp. 379, f.].

¹⁶ Retreat Meditations, **MssB 348**

happy sufficiently more than if you reported to me the greatest enterprise of the world.¹⁷

Recall always that saying which is everything to us: *busea e taneta*. 'Be Humble, Be humble!¹⁸ And indeed you will be pleasing to the Lord, Who, while seeming in the eyes of men to have drawn you out, in reality leaves you with in your own *busea e taneta*. In truth, this is what our Lord Christ said to us in other words: ***Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven [Mt 18:3].*** Since the Lord has given you grace greater than any treasure whatsoever, to reduce you to the littleness, the humility and the simplicity of a child, see that you always remain in this happiness: ***Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth [Mt 5:3-5]***¹⁹.

11: Desire for perfection

The first step toward wisdom is a very earnest desire for her [Ws 6:17]. The road to perfection must start out from the heart; it is not something that can be learned by force. If someone doesn't want it, neither diligence nor the means placed in action by others to realize it will be enough. To the sister who asked him what one must do to attain perfection. St. Thomas Aquinas answered simply: if you will it – if you will it, you will be saved. If you will it, you will make profit. If you will it, you will be perfect. When a person has a great desire for progress and growth in virtue, God takes so much please in this that He endows him and fills him with every gift of grace. ***To the thirsty, I will give a gift from the spring of life-giving water [Rv 21:6].***

There are, however, some who with words make good resolutions and desires, but they don't attempt to put them into practice, nor do they take it upon themselves to fight seriously. In such a case, real desires and authentic resolutions are not made, but rather just 'wishful thinking', in which 'one would like', but does not really will it. Those who have similar 'wishful thinking' can be compared to soldiers in a painting, who stand with the sword directed against the enemy, but they never deliver a blow.

Effective proposals are needed ***You have been told, O Man, what is good, and what the Lord requires of you: only to do right, and to love goodness and to walk humbly with your God [Mi 6:8]***²⁰.

¹⁷ This passage with those that follow in the present Meditation, are part of a Letter sent to his spiritual son, Fr. Louis Bragato, who in 1835 was chosen as Confessor and Chaplain of Maria Anna of Savoy, Empress of Austria. Of the cherished correspondence exchanged between Verona and Vienna, only a few fragments have survived.

¹⁸ The Venetian dialect saying – which means: 'Little hole, little den' – making reference to a child's game: but has an evident reference to humility and a hidden manner of acting.

¹⁹ Correspondence, pp. 309, f. Letter of **October 21, 1835**.

²⁰ Selections from Rodriguez. **MssB 8813**.

12: Holiness is a priority task

Perfection is our only end. On the day of judgment we shall be asked not what we have read or written, but what we have done; not how well we have spoken, but how holily we have lived. ***Seek first the kingdom of God and His justice, and all these things will be given you besides*** [Mt 6:3].

Let us observe this principle faithfully: that spiritual tasks, with regard to progress in holiness must always occupy first place, and should not be neglected for any reason. No matter how many and how substantial are the works concerning our office, or even imposed by obedience, it is never in conformity with the will of God that our spiritual duties be neglected. It is not obedience to the will of God that places obstacles to this faithfulness, but negligence or insufficient care that we often have regarding matters of the spirit²¹.

We should never offend some virtue in order not to damage some project. Many are deceived in this regard. Experience teaches that [if we do that] the project is damaged and sometimes destroyed. On the other hand, when virtue is safeguarded, God intervenes with His protection, and the project is confirmed, or should we say, improved²².

In particular, let us try to be faithful in giving God the time that we have assigned for prayer. If sometimes it is not possible, due to an unexpected urgency, to pray at the appointed time, it is right to have a certain hunger and desire to make up and fill the gap as soon as possible. Just as when one happens to be deprived of food, or sleep because of some unforeseen duties, an attempt is made at all costs to make up for this, and the necessary time is found. Likewise, it is God's will that we do the same with prayer²³.

13: Holiness: a global task

Everything must be done properly and in order [1 Co 14:40]. We note that first word, ***everything***. We must complete all our duties relative to acquiring perfection. Not some 'yes,' and the majority 'no'; not the majority 'yes' and the minority 'no'; not the smallest, neglecting the more important; not the more important, neglecting the smaller. In fact, take into account the small matters!

He who is faithful in a small matter will also be faithful in large matters. And instead: ***He who wastes the little he has will be stripped bare*** [Si 19:1]. A constant

²¹ Selections from Rodriguez. **MssB 8811**.

²² Spiritual Journal. **July 9, 1809**. By the title of 'Spiritual Journal' is indicated a spiritual journal that Fr. Bertoni kept from July 1, 1808 until June 26, 1813. Among Fr. Bertoni's writings it is the one that best reveals the personal characteristics of the Saint's spirituality. The period of time that it covers is very limited, five years in all, and with large empty spaces. The style presented is customarily very concise: yet, that writing is quite precious, both for the testimony it gives on the spiritual life of Fr. Gaspar, and for the teaching it contains. Fr. Divo Barsotti does not hesitate to say that 'a small book of these dimensions remains one of the great documents of the Italian spirituality of the 19th century.' [D. Barsotti, *Teaching of the Saints*. Rome: 1971, pp. 23, ff.. **BERTONI 2**, pp. 617, ff..

²³ Selections from Rodriguez, **MssB 8810; 8812**.

drop bores a hole into the rock, and a spark produces a conflagration. ***He who fears God does not neglect anything*** [Si 7:18].

God Himself has taught us these truths. However, it is not enough only to hear them; it is necessary to put them into practice²⁴. It is not enough to listen to the Word of God, putting into practice only certain things as we please. Even Herod listened to John the Baptist, and put into practice some of his teachings as he pleased, not, however, in that which concerned his predominant passion²⁵.

Woe if we begin from childhood to live carelessly! Little by little the first fervor is lost, and we fall into the weakness of spirit, tepidity, and laxity²⁶. While it is true, on the other hand, that noting the fervor of young people, the whole Church, in particular those who are already advanced in the way of perfection, feel lifted up in the fervor of prayer and want to cultivate a closer union with God²⁷.

I felt an inspiration to fight against small defects, as I did on other occasions against the big ones. I felt the determination to rise toward virtue with all diligence. The time in which I can serve God and promote His glory, and sanctify myself is running out more and more²⁸.

14: Let us make progress always

It is said of Jesus ***that He advanced in wisdom, age and favor before God and man*** [Lk 2:52]. ***Whoever claims to abide in Him ought to live as He did.*** [1 Jn 2:6]. But if he advances and I stop, I do not get by any means near Christ; rather, I distance myself from Him.

Not to move forward in the ways of the Lord means to go backwards. We find ourselves in the middle of a rushing stream. If we stop there, and make no effort to go upstream, there is always the danger to being carried downstream. If one does not wish to withdraw, he must force himself to advance.

In the concrete, it's better to set oneself on the way to perfection, not so much in general terms, but rather in detail, fighting to conquer our predominant passion or to acquire the virtue that we lack the most. Just as in school the pupil is not admitted to the higher course unless he has already passed the power ones, so, too, we cannot wait from the Lord for the higher gifts of grace unless we have corresponded to the earlier inspirations.

The same holds true for the struggle against sin and vice. ***He who wastes the little he has will be stripped bare*** [Si 19:1]. 'Big falls start with small ones.' I dare say something surprising', says St. John Chrysostom, 'but it seems to me sometimes that

²⁴ Retreats to the Acolytes, **MssB 4440-4443**. In 1810, Fr. Gaspar also had the duty of preaching the monthly retreats in the College of Acolytes: an ancient institution founded in 1440 for the formation of clerics destined for the liturgical service in the Cathedral. Eleven instructions are preserved [**MssB 4440-4614**], mostly concerning the theme of Sloth: suggested also by an admonition given to his clergy by the Bishop Liruti, in his Pastoral Letter of December 1810. [cf. **BERTONI 3, pp, 178. ff;/ 194, ff.**

²⁵ Spiritual Journal, **February 19, 1809**.

²⁶ Retreats to Acolytes, **MssB 4444**.

²⁷ Meditations on *Primum Regum*, n. 12. **MssB 5259-5260**.

²⁸ Spiritual Journal. **October 8, 1808**.

we must pay attention to avoid sins which seem small and negligible rather than to the grave sins, because the grave sins already frighten us, while the lesser sins run the risk that through negligence we may cause our spiritual ruin.²⁹

²⁹ Selections from Rodriguez. **MssB 8819-8823**. The text of St. John Chrysostom has been taken from his 'Homilies on Matthew', 86, 3. PG 58, 767.

LIFE OF GRACE

15: The beauty of grace

Let us walk in the new life [Rm 6:4]. The newness of the life is nothing else than the state of grace, something desirable in itself. Although the grace of God to make itself loved has many qualities, and all of them excellent, let us pause here now and meditate on one in particular: its beauty.

'There is a hidden and secret beauty of much greater power than that which is perceived by the senses, a spiritual beauty, which can be seen only by the mind.'³⁰ We have all seen it, because our heart was attracted to it and, as it were, taken by violence and bound up. This is the beauty of virtue. But we cannot stop here.

Grace is in an even higher order with respect to virtue. Virtue, which indeed attracts the heart so strongly, is in fact only a natural perfection of the soul, while grace is a supernatural quality and completely heavenly.

If I were to say that a soul in grace possesses such an excellent beauty that it comes very close to, and in fact, equals, that splendid and most pure beauty which is proper to spiritual beings, namely, the angels, I would be saying little, because the truth is that grace is a sharing in the very nature of God. It would, therefore, be necessary to know the beauty of God to have a real idea of the beauty of a soul in grace.

We speak of sublime matters, because the things to which we have been called are truly sublime. Called not only in the sense that promises have been made to us that are very exalted, but in the sense that we also are in possession of such precious gifts, according to the words of St. Peter: ***He has bestowed on us the precious and great promises, so that through them you may come to share in the divine nature*** [2 P 1:4].³¹

16: Communion with the Divine Persons

Our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ [1 Jn 1:3]. Thus St. John exalts the nobility of the **Church**, the **Spouse of Christ**, in which we become ***sharers of the Divine Nature*** [2 P 1:4]. It is this same mystery that St. Paul celebrates with astonished amazement when he says: ***God is faithful, and by Him you were called to fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ, Our Lord*** [1 Co 1:9].

All believers, therefore, are in communion with Christ and with God and by faith, hope and charity. This communion becomes stronger and more intimate the more faith, hope and charity are strengthened in them, and the more closely they seek to conform themselves to the life and conduct of Christ and engage themselves in spreading the Gospel in the world, just as the Apostles did. They were the first to live in the most perfect manner that divine communion, for they worked and suffered much for Christ, and spent their lives entirely for the glory of God and the salvation of their brethren.

³⁰ St. Augustine, *Treatise on John*. 3, 21. PL 35, 1405.

³¹ Early Sermons, n. 15. 'The Beauty of Grace'. **MssB 714-723. PVC, pp. 120-123.** Preached on January 1, 1803.

This communion is a true fellowship with God. Friendship implies a reciprocal love and a mutual exchange of goods. Now, the relationship that exists between God and the faithful soul is precisely of this nature, according to the teaching of St. John, and there is certainly nothing like this that truly manifests the marvelous and divine dignity of a soul in grace.³²

17: To live in grace

It is proper to know the admirable gift of divine grace, which has raised us above our nature, and has made us sharers in the very nature of God, and has placed us in this supernatural and divine order to which we have been called to work with our spirit, because we have to consider it a grave danger to descend even a little from this sublime order to return to our natural manner of thinking and of acting.

The theological, that is divine, virtues are precisely in that supernatural order. Since these virtues revolve around God, to know Him as faith, to depend on Him as hope, and to adhere to Him as charity – the less we think, or depend, or focus on creatures, the more these virtues will take on power and develop. From this a need arises for a very keen and well-defined diligence to preserve and increase these theological virtues, which are an exalted and supernatural gift of God, through which we have an intimate and familiar communication with His Divine Majesty.

The mercy and goodness of God are wonderful. If He sees that we, through human frailty, waver in those heights and are about to fall into our human lowliness, He puts His hand like **a loving Mother** under her sons [cf. Ps 37:24], so that they will not suffer harm, and with gentleness and power, He brings them relief. Let us, therefore, exclaim with the Psalmist, ***For me, to be near God is my good. I have made Him my Refuge*** [Ps 73:28]³³.

18: Grace: a capital fund to protect and increase.

Whoever has contemplated, even for a little time, the beauty of divine grace, cannot but feel a fire of pure love and fervent desires alive in his heart. If the grace of God is in us, what resolutions should we not make so as not to lose it ever! With such frankness and holy zeal, should we not decide to remove those occasions which, even remotely, tend to destroy it.

Moreover, if we have already wisely provided for this, how should we not force ourselves with divine help to increase and develop it more each day? ***The path of the just is like a shining light that grows in brilliance until perfect day*** [Pr 4:18]. The Lord has prepared little steps in our heart, like a ladder, in order that we may always climb up without every stopping until we finally arrive to see the face of God in heaven.

Lord, renew our spirit. Grant that it is directed anew by that rightness in which you have created it, elevating it to higher hopes in you, so that everyone can

³² Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3379-3381**.

³³ Correspondence, pp. 35, ff. Letter of **December 11, 1812**. It is one of the first letters written by Fr. Gaspar to Leopoldina Naudet [1773-1834], Foundress of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Family. The correspondence between Fr. Gaspar and the Servant of God took place between the end of 1812 and 1834.

experience, *How good God is to the upright; the Lord, to those who are pure of heart* [Ps 73:1]. And finally, no longer under the veils and in the obscure shadow of faith, but with unveiled face, according to what you have promised, may we contemplate you, to love you, and possess you for all eternity. O true center, only Purpose and Last End³⁴.

19: Grace and the sacraments

The soul without grace is like a dry field because of the heat of passion, the winds of temptation, and accordingly produces no fruit or struggles to do so. It is necessary to irrigate it, and its water is grace. Just as near a garden a river must flow, so, too near the soul a river of grace must flow. But the river of grace flows continually in the Church after the grace of Christ, who has merited for us the health-giving water.

The gardeners, near whose gardens the river flows, dig some channels and forcing the waters of the river into them, bring it about that the water that is brought into the gardens, quenches the thirst of all the grace, flowers, bushes and plants. We know that God has made some channels through which the water of grace can pour upon us. These channels are the sacraments. When we receive the sacraments, God opens these channels over us. God doesn't ask anything else of us except that we open our hearts up with the necessary dispositions, and that we don't obstruct these channels by sin or contrary dispositions. What is required of us is that we offer the necessary dispositions and not hinder the entrance of grace, but rather to favor it. The more we open up our heart, the more we are disposed, so much more abundant will the gift of grace be.³⁵

³⁴ Early Sermons. 'The Beauty of Grace'. **MssB 731-737/ PVC, pp. 126-129.**

³⁵ 'Manner of receiving Penance worthily'. **MssB 130-131.** It is a catechetical instruction given to the boys of the parish of St. Paul in Camp Marzio by Fr. Gaspar while he was still a seminarian, in 1798.

[NB: Web-site Note: Fr. Bertoni compared the Adige River in Verona to Christ, and the canals built into the fields to be like the sacraments, carrying life-giving water.]

TEMPLES OF GOD

20: Our heart is a temple of God

God wishes to consecrate our heart by making it a temple where He resides. St. Paul says: ***Do you not know that you are the temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you? The temple of God which you are is holy*** [1 Co 3:16, ff.]. In fact, as much as one can say that God is everywhere by His immensity, He nevertheless dwells in a special way in the heart of the just, to whom He not only communicates grace with all its gifts, but the Holy Spirit Who is the Author of every grace and gift.

Here, therefore, is this soul which God Himself has chosen for Himself as a pleasant and delightful temple, or palace, to reside in and to delight in. ***I found delight in the sons of men*** [Pr 8:31], that is, to converse with them in the deepest recesses of their heart. It is here that He calls us with a gentle invitation: Come, free yourselves from anxious cares, and empty yourselves of worldly affections, and you will find how good and know your loving God is.

How fortunate is this soul! Having found its love within its own heart, it can indeed say: ***My beloved is for me and I for Him!*** [Sgs 2:16], ***and I shall never let Him go!*** [Sgs 3:4]. What peace and serenity must this soul enjoy! St. Paul had already foretold it by saying that the just would possess great peace [cf. Rm 5:1]. It doesn't enjoy it only now in the present, but also in anticipation of the future, since, as the Apostle continues, ***We boast in the hope of the glory of God*** [Rm 5:2]³⁶.

21: The divine indwelling and the spousal chain

The Spirit of God, by making a soul share in His love, sanctifies it, and therefore, it approaches the soul as to a very cherished **Spouse**; it dwells in her, works in her, and takes delight in her.

If great honor is due to churches because they are the material temples of the divine majesty, how much more will a living temple, that is all splendid, and in which the most chaste and sublime **nuptials** between God and the soul take place, be honored by men and angels? ***I will espouse you***, He had already made this known through His prophets, ***in fidelity*** [Ho 2:20] in justice and in love. These are the precious gems with which He adorns her. What if we also want to see the robes of this

³⁶ Early Sermons, n. 8: 'Our heart made the Temple of God'. **MssB 576-579. PVC, pp. 302-304.** This Sermon was given on Sunday, December 13, 1801, for the celebration of the transfer of the Holy House of Loreto, whose Fast was then fixed by the Liturgy for December 10th. In fact, the title of the Sermon is: 'The Holy House transferred in our heart, or our heart made a Temple of God.' the suggestive terms with which young Fr. Bertoni introduces the sermon on the Divine Indwelling are worthy of our attention: *If it is true that all our sufficiency comes from God, and that of ourselves we are incapable of producing a thought that is good, I do not know to whom to attribute the origin of a holy thought that was formed in my mind and remained there with me afterwards, always with great constancy; to have to communicate it on this day to all this devout audience.* [MssB 575]. Effectively this mystery of the Divine Indwelling in the soul of the just is one of the chief points of Fr. Bertoni's spirituality. [cf. **BERTONI, 2, pp. 122, f.**]

heavenly **Spouse**? St. Paul tells us: [O God how splendid!] ***Put on the Lord, Jesus Christ*** [Rm 13:14].

What beauty, then, can be compared to that of a soul that God Himself adorns to make her His **spouse**? I lack the proper colors with which to paint her. Full of amazement, I will say with the Apostle Paul that whoever is united to God with a steadfastness so close becomes one spirit with Him through loving transformation³⁷.

22: United with God, we can boast even in tribulations

What happiness to have God within us! He is the Supreme Good that can perfectly replenish all our faculties, because in Him all perfection have been collected and all the resources capable of satisfying every heart according to its particular needs are found. Therefore, in Sacred Scripture He presents Himself as the ***hidden manna*** [Rv 2:17], and He says: ***Take delight in the Lord, and He will grant you your heart's requests*** [Ps 37:4].

The tribulations of this life, as much as they seem to place an obstacle to the free course of heavenly consolations, do nothing in reality other than to unite them to a greater supply, and they doubt the impetuous capacity, until finally they overflow. On account of this, St. Paul, in the name of all the just says: ***We boast of our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, and endurance, proven character, and proven character, hope. Hope, then, [O God, what beautiful words!] does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us*** [Rm 5:3-5]. Who can mistrust His love? ***Cast your care upon the Lord and He will support you*** [Ps 55:23]. God is liberal in our needs, a light in our doubts, a consolation in our suffering, a rest in our toils, our support, our strength and our peace.³⁸

23: I stand at the door and knock

Facing the invitation of the Lord Who wishes to make His temple in us, perhaps some soul, through excessive timidity, tends to draw back, thinking that certainly all these things are very beautiful, but are not for her.

I understand this: we are preoccupied with grave sins and our own misery. Yet, if only we could see Christ Himself standing at the door of our heart and listening as He asks to enter! Let us open the Scriptures and see what is written in the Book of Revelation, and hear the very words of Christ: ***Behold, I stand by the door and knock*** [Rv 3:20]. Yes, He is standing at the door of the heart, and what heart if not of the sinner, for He is already in the hearts of the just, well received, and as a peaceful owner?

He knocks at the door of the heart with many inspirations and much urging to place before our eyes the greatest happiness which can be attained through His grace. Yes, He is knocking. ***If anyone opens the door for Me, I will enter his house.*** He speaks like a guest who comes at night, that means, having forgotten every

³⁷ Early Sermons, n. 8: 'Our heart made the Temple of God.' MssB 580-584; PVC, pp. 305-306.

³⁸ o.c., MssB580-582. PVC, pp. 30-4-306.

offense and rejection, he wishes to live with the soul in the grand familiarity of friendship.

He does not merely say: 'I will come' – but, also: 'I will dine with him and he with Me'; that is to say, I will allow Myself to treat him with much confidence, familiarly enjoying myself with him as among friends. He will do the same for Me in this wonderful chamber of heavenly pleasures, using my sacraments, because I shall not disdain to receive Him at my table.

Now we see that Christ always speaks as a Guest, but quite rich and generous, who upon entering another's house, brings more gifts than he receives. O love! Yes, you have conquered. Our lack of sensitivity has no more excuses to deny entry into our heart to such a tender lover who asks to enter, and asks only to make us happy³⁹.

³⁹ o.c., MssB 585=587; PVC pp. 306-308.

GOD WITH US

24: Christ is born for us. Come, let us adore Him

Let us devoutly prostrate ourselves with the lively faith of the shepherds before our Infant King. **Let us go up to Bethlehem** [Lk 2:15] to adore Him. Let us ask that He receive our prayer and uniting it to His first whimpering, present it in the perfume of sweetness to His Eternal Father, to the end that as we intend with good will to glorify Him in Heaven, so also may He deign to bestow on us peace on earth. **Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth on those on whom His favor rests** [Lk 2:14].

Lord Jesus Christ, since you were born in this valley of tears, you have opened the ears of Your humanity to hear our weeping, and the eyes of Your body to cry for our sins. Open the eyes and ears of my heart so that I can understand Your words and do Your will. In Your birth You have not come as a stranger, but as our Lord, **among Your people** [Jn 1:11] with full right to dictate the law. **Hide not your commands from Me** [Ps 119:19].

But, to understand the wonderful spirit of Your love much light is needed. Well, then, **Your are the true Light that illumines every man** [Jn 1:9], and, even if we are darkness, **Your light shines in the darkness** [Jn 1:5]. In order that afterwards it may not happen to us that **The darkness has not overcome it, open my eyes that I may consider the wonders of Your Law** [Ps 119:18]. All this is Your free gift; therefore, we ask you for it⁴⁰.

25: Late have I known You, late have I loved You

Since the day of His birth, Jesus Christ has shown us in Himself the greatest poverty, sorrow and rejection. Hence, these are the only true goods⁴¹.

Let us move on. Let us say good-bye to the empty beauties and transient goods of this world, so as not to love anything but Him. Praise Jesus, our only love. Let us often have this loving name on our lips. Seeing in it the **portrait** of our most amiable Lover, we will recall to Whom we have given our heart today, so that we will be able to refuse it courageously to whoever tries to snatch it away from Him.

Here I am at Your feet, my Jesus. Yes, here is a soul, who, to run after so many curious vanities, has abandoned You, Supreme Good, the only Object worthy of my love. 'Late have I known You, ancient beauty, late have I loved You, eternal goodness⁴².' But now I cannot go on without knowing You; I cannot go on without loving You. My soul is all Yours. Wash it, clean it, adorn it, make it a worthy **Spouse** for you. Yes, it is all Yours⁴³.

⁴⁰ Meditations on *Primum Regum*, n. 6. MssB 5047; 5097-5098.

⁴¹ Spiritual Journal. **March 13, 1809.**

⁴² St. Augustine, *Confessions*. Book 10, c. 27. PL 32, 705.

⁴³ Early Sermons, n. 3. 'The Name of Jesus'. MssB 423-424; PVC, pp. 241, f. We possess two Sermons of St. Gaspar on the Holy Name of Jesus, both given on the Second Sunday after Epiphany: the first – from which the meditations of this chapter have been taken – in 1801; the second, in 1802.

In my three Christmas Masses: recollection and experience of the great benefit of my vocation. What a great blessings it is to be stripped of everything created in order to seek God alone. How God honors and loves His humiliated Son. O what a debt is ours to do for Him at least in part what He has first done for us⁴⁴.

26: Jesus Christ, true God and true man

‘When I say the name, Jesus’, says St. Bernard, ‘I propose to myself a man Who is most perfect, most holy, adorned with every beauty and virtue; and this same man I also propose to myself as God, Omnipotent, the Greatest Good and infinite. It is because of this that the name of Jesus is honey on my lips, melody on my ears, and gentleness in my heart.’⁴⁵

The angel who brought the name Jesus from Heaven said: ***You are to name Him Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins*** [Mt 1:21]. Now I seem to see much in this Name, that is, to see the Savior, the Mediator between God and man, who satisfies the divine justice for the sins of all the world.

St. Cyril asks this: ‘How can this Person be called Savior of the world if He is not God? In fact, if Jesus is not of infinite dignity, equal to that infinite God Who was offended by our sins, it cannot be understood How He paid a satisfaction equal to the offense. Therefore, Jesus is God!’⁴⁶ ‘But, if He is solely God’, adds St. Augustine, ‘how will He be able to be Mediator between God and man? Otherwise, it would have been God to give satisfaction to Himself, not the man-sinner to an offended God.’⁴⁷ The Name Jesus, therefore, insofar as it shows us the Savior of the world, gives us a man Who is at the same time God, with all the perfections that belong both to His divine nature and to His human nature.⁴⁸

27: Jesus, the most passionate and tender Lover

In Jesus we see the Savior, that is, God, **Who for us men and for our salvation came down from Heaven and became man** [Nicene Creed]. He has given His life to free us from our sins that had rendered our soul a slave of the devil, worthy of damnation. He washed this soul with His blood, adorned it with His grace to crown it finally with His glory. What else is there to see in all this if not the most passionate Lover?

It is proper to passionate lovers to love so forcefully that no difficulty checks them, no danger beats them down, and not even death frightens them. Unmindful, as it were, of themselves, they suffer, dare, and do everything to please and unite themselves to those they love. Sometimes it happens that love completely blinds them to the point that they don’t even see those defects by which the object loved has been made despicable in the eyes of all except their own. Again, the same ingratitude with

⁴⁴ Spiritual Journal. **December 25, 1808.**

⁴⁵ St. Bernard, Sermons on the Canticle of Canticles, 15, 6. PL 183, 847.

⁴⁶ St. Cyril of Alexandria, Book on the Trinity, 13.PG 75, 1166.

⁴⁷ St. Augustine, On the City of God, Book 9, c. 15. PL 41, 268, f.

⁴⁸ Early Sermons, n. 3. ‘The Name of Jesus’. **MssB 408-411, PVC, pp. 235, ff.**

which their love is quite often returned does not extinguish their flames, but it rekindles them even more. Well, then, Jesus is such a Lover.

Notice that this Lover in order to recover His Beloved says: ***Not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the Precious Blood of Christ*** [1 P 1:18]. And if the soul should fall again into the hands of the infernal enemy by sinning, Jesus will return every day to offer the same victim on the altar, and He will wash the soul with his Blood of which he opens a perennial font in the bosom of His Church.

What do you demand, my Jesus, with so much love? Only that it [the soul] love Me and agree to My chaste **nuptials**. I have decided to go to her in person, and in order that the refulgence of my rays might not make her shy to talk with Me, I have found the manner of hiding Myself under the veil of the sacrament, and of entering furtively, as it were, the center of her heart, where we can speak on the level of one on one. Here I stand waiting for her to consent to My desires⁴⁹.

28: Jesus, the most lovable Person

Jesus is the most perfect Man, Whose beauty, seen also from a distance in spirit by the Prophet, made him exclaim: ***Fairer in beauty are You than the sons of men*** [Ps 45:3], and that: ***Grace is poured out upon Your lips***. In His mind have been stored ***all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*** [Col 2:3], a holiness so perfect that it challenges its adversaries to accuse Him of even the shadow of fault.

Do we love the gentleness and goodness of heart? Ah, lovable heart of my Jesus, gentle, kind, lovable, clement, merciful, who ever has found You slow to take pity on his miseries, or hard to accept his requests, or severe to grant him pardon for his sins?

O Jesus, all lovable! Now I am not amazed that Magdalene, having her gaze fixed on You, has forgotten both loves and her lovers so as not to be able to love others than You, and not see and hear others except You and You alone. She has indeed taken the better part, and it will not be taken from her [cf. Lk 10:42]. What else will she do in Heaven?

In fact, what else will even we do if not to see God - seeing Him, loving Him - and loving Him to be blessed? But, in seeing Jesus, do I not also see my God? By loving Jesus, do I not also love my God? That God so perfect in every class of perfections who alone is sufficient to make blessed all the saints by His sight? And who else will, therefore, be the object of my love, if not Jesus?⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Early Sermons, n. 3. The Name of Jesus. **MssB 414-418; PVC pp.237-239.**

⁵⁰ Early Sermons, n. 31. 'The Name of Jesus'. **MssB 412-413; PVC, pp. 236, ff.**

CHRISTIAN NEWNESS

29: Blessed are the eyes that see what you see

Blessed are the eyes that see what you see [Lk 10:23]. These are words addressed by Christ to His disciples, not only to those present, who were the apostles and the others who followed Him, but also the future disciples among whom we are ourselves.

Our lot in fact is not inferior to theirs. What did they see to be called blessed? ***With your eyes you shall see your teacher*** [Is 30:20] as it was foretold by Isaiah. But in the same place it was predicted for the People of God that ***no longer will your Teacher hide Himself*** [ibid.]. And to us Christ promised: ***I am with you until the end of the world*** [Mt 28:20]. Does it mean that those ***who knew Christ according to the flesh*** [2 Co 5:16] will no longer be blessed than we who ***according to the flesh now know Him so no longer?*** [ibid.]. On the contrary, I read: ***Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed*** [Jn 20:29].

How, therefore, are ***blessed the eyes that see?*** There are two ways in which Christ can be seen with the senses and with faith. In the first way Christ was seen also by His enemies, but such a sight, far from making them blessed, was seen also by His enemies, but such a sight, far from making them blessed, made them more miserable. ***If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin,*** says Jesus, ***but as it is they have no excuse for their sin*** [Jn 15:22]. In both ways, with the senses and with faith, the Apostles saw Him, and therefore their eyes merited being called blessed. In the second and more perfect way, that is, by faith, we see Him now. Therefore, even if we lack the sight of the senses, we are blessed nonetheless as they are.

What blessedness is ours that God has called us ***into His wonderful Light*** [1 P 2:9] ***among those who have been consecrated by faith in me*** [Ac 26:18], ***that has illumined the eyes of the mind*** [cf. Ep 1:18], ***and justified our hearts by means of His law of faith*** [cf. Ga 2:16]. To sum it up, we see how happy our state is in His Gospel and in His Grace⁵¹.

30: The glory of our state

In the Law of the Gospel, two things must be considered: 'The principal thing', says St. Thomas, following St. Augustine, 'is the Grace of the Holy Spirit, and it is given by means of faith in Christ. The other is the letter, or the writing of the Holy

⁵¹ Early Sermons, n. 20. 'The Law of the Gospel' **MssB 818-831; PVC, pp. 23-25**. This Sermon was preached on August 20, 1803. It appears, right from its title, as one of the more challenging ones for St. Gaspar, and it is in fact one of the richest in theological content. His biographer, Fr. Nello Dalle Vedove, judges it also as one of the 'more fundamental and revealing of his spirituality' [**BERTONI 2, pp. 252, f.**]. In the solid theological optimism which appears in all the text, it is probably the deep root of the practical attitude of trust in God, and of holy abandonment and unchangeable joy that characterizes the spiritual life and teaching of St. Gaspar.

Gospel, in which everything which pertains to grace is contained.⁵² Now, just as everything is constituted and defined by that which is principal in it, so it must be said that the New Law is, first of all, the same grace of the Holy Spirit given to the faithful, which St. Paul calls the 'Law of Faith' [cf. Rm 3:27], Law of Spirit and of life in Christ Jesus [cf. Rm 8:2]. 'What are these Laws of God written in our hearts,' says St. Augustine, 'if not the same presence of the Holy Spirit?'⁵³ Consider how much the glory of our state is exalted.

In the Old Law, the Hebrews had temporal promises, worldly riches, visible wealth. And that was good for them, because they were 'servants', thus God promptly paid their wages every day. We are 'sons' and, as such, our Heavenly Father offers us no longer a daily wage, but prepares us for the inheritance that belongs to us. Since the wage-earner can show in his hand his payment, would we say that he is richer than the son who waits for his inheritance, to whom the Father says: 'Everything that is mine, is yours?' Certainly not.

And if there is someone, even among Christians, who in this life esteems more some part of present wealth than future glory, I don't wonder, since, as St. Augustine says, in the Law of the Gospel, there are very many who, Christians in name, but not in spirit, live under the Law, not in grace, and belong to the Old Testament, which begets slavery⁵⁴.

But those who truly belong to the New Testament understand well and enjoy hearing that which Augustine cries to each one of them: 'You are not called to embrace the earth, but to acquire heaven, not for an earthly but heavenly happiness, not to worldly success, to fleeing prosperities, but to an eternal life with the Angels⁵⁵.

31: The reign of God on earth

Our richness lies not only in the right to our future inheritance, we have already on this earth the possession of many very outstanding goods.

We possess in fact a thing whose price cannot be found, in comparison with which gold or silver cannot stand, and which surpasses in value all the exalted things that are greatly prized and admitted by men [cf. Ws 7:9; Pr 8:11]. And this is 'wisdom', which is proper to all those who have received the Spirit and the infusion of His Gifts, or the anointing of the same Spirit, as St. John says [cf. 1 Jn 2:27].

What then shall we say about the charity poured into our hearts [cf. Rm 5:5]? The angel of the Apocalypse speaking of it to the Angel of Laodicea, who was in fact lacking in it, even though well supplied with earthly riches, expressed himself thus: You say: 'I am rich and affluent and have no need of anything', and yet you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked. I advise you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may become rich. [Rv 3:17-18]. And in another place: ***Were one to offer all he owns to purchase love, he would be roundly mocked*** [Sgs 8:7].

⁵² St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, q. 106, a. 1.

⁵³ St. Augustine, 'On the Spirit and Letter', c. 21, 36. PL 44, 222.

⁵⁴ Idem. Third Sermon on Hagar and Ismael. PL 38, 32.

⁵⁵ Early Sermons, n. 30. 'The Law of the Gospel' **MssB 824-831.PVC**, pp. 26-29. The last citation from St. Augustine is from his Sermon 296, 6, 7. PL 38, 1356.

We can well say to all those who belong to the New Law in Christ: ***In Him you were enriched in every way, you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ*** [1 Co 1:5, 7]⁵⁶.

32: For the Christian, every day is a feast

Christ invites us: ***Come to Me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, for my yoke is easy and My burden light*** [Mt 11:28, 30]. 'It is not heavy', comments St. Augustine, 'for one who loves; however, it is heavy for one who does not love.'⁵⁷ To one who loves, everything is easy, everything is sweet.

Adversities, for the love in which the New Law consists, are easily tolerated by those who are faithful followers of the same Law⁵⁸. For the rest, what is there that is more gentle and pleasing than love? What is smoother than to be guided and directed by the Spirit of Love? This is the characteristic sign of those who in the New Law have received the adoption as sons: ***For those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God*** [Rm 8:14].

Where the Spirit of God is, there is liberty [2 Co 3:7]. True liberty, holy liberty, liberty for which Christ has freed us [Ga 5:14], according to ***the oath he swore to Abraham, our father, and to grant us that, rescued from the hands of enemies, without fear we might worship Him in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.*** [Lk 1:74-75].

This, therefore, is the happy state of those who live on the holy mount of God, that is, in His Church, planted with the Blood of His Son, of those who belong to the New Law of His Gospel⁵⁹.

⁵⁶ Early Sermons, n. 20. 'The Law of the Gospel'. **MssB 832-834.**

⁵⁷ St. Augustine, 'On Nature and Grace'. c. 69, 83. PL 44, 289.

⁵⁸ Cf. St. Athomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*. I-II, q, 107, a. 4, S 2UM.

⁵⁹ Early Sermons, n. 20, **MssB 836-840. PCV, p. 31, f.**

THE FOLLOWING OF CHRIST

33: Holiness and the following of Christ

Perfection which has its root and fulfillment in charity consists in the conformity of our life with that of Jesus Our Lord. And because this Divine Father began to work and to teach [cf. Ac 1:1], it must be said that we have been called to imitate His actions, no matter how special and incomparable in excellence they may be, just as they are expressed in His teachings.

That charity which because of the Holy Spirit has been given to us, is poured out into our hearts [Rm 5:5], from the moment of our birth, and still like a child, makes us resemble Christ, according to His precepts and with the works of every virtue. This is the common perfection of the Gospel, necessary for all the sons of God, members of the Church, regenerated in the life of His Gospel. This same charity, when it is nourished, grown, and made adult, conforms us to Christ according to His counsels, with the exercise of the heroic virtues. This is the perfection proper of the saints who are recognized by the Church as heroes, and as apostolic men⁶⁰.

We must transform ourselves into the image of Jesus⁶¹. We must do this so that our Heavenly Father may see in us an image of His divine Son⁶². Ask for the grace to follow Him and to have true zeal for His glory and for the salvation of souls. If anyone wishes to serve me, let him follow Me⁶³. O what a debt is ours to do for Him, at least in part, what He has first done for us⁶⁴.

34: With Christ at every cost

The highest degree of Christian perfection consists in being in this disposition: to have a sincere longing to imitate Jesus Christ and to be conformed to a poor God, a **crucified God**, a humiliated God, so that poverty is preferred to wealth, suffering to pleasures and humiliation to glory. This must be done in such a manner that even if one is obliged to live in a state of human grandeur, just the same he should cultivate an interior and continual tendency that brings him towards poverty. This means to have the spirit as Jesus Christ.

How sublime this degree, how perfect, how excellent! Whoever gives himself to God in this way will not be judged, but will judge others. But how distant I feel from you, my Jesus! I understand this when I see the horror that I experience for crosses and humiliations. And this makes me see also that I do not truly love You, o my

⁶⁰ Panegyric of St. Francis. **MssB 1797-1798**. This discourse was given probably in two parts: the morning and the evening – October 4, 1808, in the Church of St. Firmus Major in Verona. In composing the eulogy of the Saint of Assisi – to whom later he will always be specially bound – particularly after he will have founded his Institute at the Church of the Stigmata of St. Francis - St. Gaspar takes the occasion to present as it were a systematic treatise on the theme of the following of Christ. [**BERTONI 2**, pp. 746, ff.].

⁶¹ Spiritual Journal. **February 26.1809**.

⁶² o.c., **July 30, 1809**.

⁶³ o.c., **February 29, 1809**

⁶⁴ o.c., **December 25, 1808**.

Savior, because if I loved You, I would wish to imitate You, and I would love what You love. No, my God, one cannot love You without loving crosses and humiliations. And similarly, one cannot love these crosses without loving You, by the fact that only Your love can inspire us with feelings so elevated and contrary to nature.

I offer myself, Lord, to follow You, but it is necessary that You draw me to Yourself, notwithstanding the contradictions of my proud reason and my senses: ***Draw me after You and we shall run*** [cf. Sgs 1:4].

Grant, o my Jesus, that I love You, so that I love Your inseparable companions: suffering, humiliation and poverty. Let it be my pleasure to renounce all the pleasures of the world, not to boast, with Your Apostle Paul, except in the humiliations of your Cross [cf. Ga 6:14]. Finally, may Your poverty and Your suffering be my only riches, and may they take in me the place of everything, O my adorable and loving Jesus⁶⁵.

35: The radicalism of the Gospel

A strong [inner] movement to follow Our Savior more closely at the cost of life through poverty and humiliations⁶⁶. Great tenderness toward the son with much lively faith, and a great desire for union and association with His pains and humiliations and a petition for grace to suffer and to be rejected by him⁶⁷.

This is how St. Francis follows Christ, not closely, but by His side; not near, but united; indeed, not only united but transformed. Francis does not seek for consolation, for the delights and the gifts of Christ; he seeks Christ. Christ naked on the Cross, in His ignominies, in poverty. And this [he sought] right from the beginning of his journey; thus, beginning where others barely manage to reach their goal. ***Whatever gains I had, these I have come to consider loss, because of Christ*** [Ph 3:7]. For this he leaves, refuses and rejects everything. Because he wanted nothing less than Christ, and Christ wholly entire⁶⁸.

Whoever serves Me must follow Me [Jn 12:26], imitating Me in the manner of living. One must make a sketch of what happened in the life of Christ, following Him even to death. the young man, whose eyes the Holy Spirit has opened, and who feels a strong and ardent desire to glorify God not only with deeds, and wishes to follow Christ with the closest imitation of His life and to be next to Him in the Passion itself, trampling human respect and even hating his own life: this person has the most beautiful disposition of a priestly vocation⁶⁹.

⁶⁵ Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2577-2579. CS I, pp. 210, ff.**

⁶⁶ Spiritual Journal. **September 25, 1808.**

⁶⁷ O.c., **September 27, 1808.** It is worth the bother to reveal the chronological coincidence between the two notes of the Spiritual Journal given here and the period in which St. Gaspar was preparing the panegyric honoring St. Francis.

⁶⁸ Panegyric of St. Francis. **MssB 1869.**

⁶⁹ Meditations on ***Primum Regum***, n. 14. **MssB 5350.**

36: To form the design on the Prototype

He walks undoubtedly in the presence of Christ who in everything looks to Him and aims at directing his own life on His example, recognizing that he has come on earth to offer us in His humanity the image of the New Man⁷⁰.

The Servant of God, behind close doors, prays in secret [cf. Mt 6:6]. And with that the Lord explains the way in which to obtain, preserve and increase His spirit. Beautiful in this regard is the image of St. Gregory. Whoever has a small flame lit, but weak, and is afraid it can't keep burning, shelters it from the wind and nourishes it with what is necessary, with little twigs, cutting wood and dividing it into small, minute pieces⁷¹. Therefore, keep your heart recollected, and in it guard the Spirit received through prayer. Read the Gospel often, and examine the sayings and deeds of Christ the Lord in detail, and by reflection and discussion apply to yourself what helps you most in the circumstances in which you find yourself. Form yourself on that model in which all the saints found inspiration.

Do you wish a beautiful model also as do beginners who train themselves in drawing? Take the life of a saint and from it you have the advantage to comfort yourself and direct yourself right up to the perfect ability to form the design on the Prototype, that is, on the life of Christ our Savior, Author and Perfecter of our faith Heb 12:2. And entrust yourself utterly to God and keep your eyes ever toward the Lord, for He will free your feet from the snare [Ps 25:15].⁷²

37: A perfect follower of Christ: St. Francis

Perfection, which is born of charity and ends in charity, consists in conformity to Jesus Christ. Perfect conformity to Jesus Christ is the characteristic of the sublime holiness of St. Francis.

To speak of this most holy hero is to speak of the most perfect spirit of penance; of the most sublime spirit of the Cross, and of the most inflamed spirit of love toward Christ crucified. These words of Christ in the Gospel are well applied to him: ***If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself*** [Mt 16:24] – this is the spirit of penance. ***Let him take up his Cross***, this is the spirit of the Cross. ***Let him follow Me***, this is the spirit of love. These are the beginnings, the progress and the fulfillment of holiness. All this is to speak of St. Francis. He managed to become, as it were, the same spirit as Christ, so that he too could say: ***Yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me*** [Ga 2:20] by a complete and perfect transformation of love. He reached a point where he lost everything of himself, to find himself completely in Christ, in such a manner that St. Francis can no longer be found except with Christ, or even more, in Christ. I would say that St. Francis could barely be distinguished from Christ, despised like Christ, poor like Christ, wounded like Christ. A saint so highly transformed by love, could only die of love⁷³.

⁷⁰ **ibid.**, MssB 5372. It is a thought taken from St. Gregory the Great. **First Kings**, Book 2, 41. PL 79, 107.

⁷¹ St. Gregory the Great. *Moralia* of Job 25, c. 7, 15. PL 76, 328.

⁷² Correspondence, p. 313. Letter to Fr. Bragato, **June 4, 1836**.

⁷³ Panegyric of St. Francis. MssB 1796-1871, *passim*.

38: Apex of the following of Christ: spousal love

A great many people follow Christ for temporal reward. But the mercenary having reached the door is paid and remains excluded from the house. Many follow Christ as servants, through fear, they follow but from a distance, and standing far away, they do not share in the secrets of their Lord. ***The servant does not know what his master is about*** [Jn 15:15].

Some follow Christ as sons, through a love rather interested in their inheritance. But the sons are often more loved than loving, and they despise their father if he gives orders contrary to their tastes, even though they are reasonable and useful, but difficult and arduous. ***Sons I have reared and raised, but they have disowned me*** [Is 1:2].

A few follow Christ as friends, who base their love on the reciprocal exchange of gifts, but if the gentle influence of these gifts stop and is substituted instead by sharing in the misfortunes of a friend, they abandon him. These very people who had been called friends by Christ' ***abandoning Him, fled*** [Mt 26:56]: ***All search for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ*** [Ph 2:21].

Very few follow Christ as lovers, wherever He may go, whether to Tabor, or to Calvary, and attracted by His perfume, run after Him. However, they don't succeed in keeping up with Him, but with leaps, just like a giant. ***Like a giant joyfully runs its course*** [Ps 19:6]. But the Bride, an adult in the School of Love, is not drawn by his perfume, but by the right hand of the Spouse. Holding tightly to Him and supporting herself on Him, she proceeds at an equal pace, and with Him she does not run but flies, ***supported by her Beloved***. [Sqs 8:5]⁷⁴.

⁷⁴ Panegyric of St. Francis. MssB 1866-1868.

SPOUSAL LOVE

39: Only one spirit with the Lord

The soul that loves God is called a **spouse**. These two names, groom and bride, indicate the greatest union between two people. The groom and the bride have everything in common: the house, the table, bedroom, their very persons. ***A man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife and the two of them become one body*** [Gn 2:24].⁷⁵

Happy is that soul which merits hearing these words addressed to her. Happy is the person who will know how to be so vigilant and attentive to the Spouse's visit and to open immediately when he arrives and knocks at the door. If anyone of us ***in the early morning turns his heart to the Lord Who has created him and prays before the Most High and opens his mouth in prayer*** [cf. Si 39:6, ff.] and strives afterwards to prepare the way of the Lord and to smooth the street for our God [cf. Is 40: 3], will he not surely receive from the Lord His blessing and mercy from God his Savior? [Ps 24:5]. He will certainly be visited and the time of his visit will never be ignored. Therefore, the watchful soul will discover the **Spouse** even from a distance and will recall the desire she had for him who advances in haste, and suddenly will know him when he is near and really present. It will know how to distinguish with inexpressible joy the eye that contemplates it, and to hear the voices of exultation and love with which he calls it.⁷⁶

41: Visits and proofs of God's design

You observe the man with each new day and try him at every moment [Jb 7:18]. With that, God makes us understand that in His visit He helps our hearts to progress in virtue, and then, leaving us for a time, allows us to be tempted.

He does this because if, after granting us virtues we were not shaken by temptation, we would be induced to glory in those virtues as if they were solely a conquest of our own. Therefore, with the purpose of seeing that our spirit keeps the divine gifts, and at the same time may come to recognize its own fragility and weakness, God, by visiting it with His grace, elevates it to the heights of virtue, and then retiring, makes it see how weak it is in itself.

This is confirmed by some episodes related in sacred Scripture. Elijah visited at dawn by God, opens the skies with His word; then, immediately afterwards, seized by the fear of the Queen Jezabel, felt so weak before that woman that he had to flee to the desert [cf. 1 K 19:3]. Thus, St. Paul, carried up to the third heaven, penetrated the secrets of Paradise, but then found himself struggling with his flesh, and felt the weight of another law in his members, and he laments that his spirit should be tortured by this inner rebellion [cf. 2 Co 12:1, ff.].

Accordingly, God visits in the morning, and immediately after His visit, He puts the soul to the test, since in granting His gift, carries the soul on high, and withdrawing for a while, lets man see to himself. We shall always experience this condition until

⁷⁵ St. Bernard, Sermon on Canticles. 7, 2. PL 183, 807.

⁷⁶ Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3399-4001**.

that time when, freed radically from the stain of sin, we shall arrive at the state of the promised incorruption⁷⁷.

42: The secrets of divine love

We must never forget that divine word which tells us that He, Whose delights are to be with us, because of the special love He has for us [cf. Pr 8:31]. With His loving providence plays with the souls that He loves most, ***playing on the surface of the earth***. Furthermore, we will do well, as the Apostle Peter points out to us, to turn our attention to that word as to a lamp that shines in a dark place [cf. 2 P 1:19].

We should not wonder that the Lord hides Himself and at the same time reveals Himself, as if with a ray for His knowledge, because this beloved Savior of souls ***stands right behind our wall, gazing through the windows, peering through the lattices*** [Sgs 2:9]. But, if we wish to see His face unveiled, even in this world, that is, to have a clear knowledge of Him and His goodness and of His Providence around us, He ardently strives to see our face, for He continues to say in that same Song of Songs; ***Show me your face*** [Sgs2:14]. If we strive to hear His voice, He also desires to hear ours more. ***Let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet and your face lovely*** [ibid.].

O wonderful secrets of divine Love! O deep abysses of His charity! When will it come about that we will be so abandoned like ship-wrecked survivors in this immense sea, so as not see any more the shores of this wretched land of ours? To sum it up: ***Happy is the man who takes refuge in Him*** [Ps 34:9]⁷⁸.

43: Respond to the invitation of the Spouse promptly

I rose to open to my lover, with my hands dripping with myrrh... I opened to my lover, but my lover had departed, gone [Sgs 56].

In the **Spouse** of Canticles, we can recognize the soul which is drawn by Christ to a greater perfection and to **the mission for the conversion of others**, but who does not obey promptly; but rather, with hesitation and delay. In the end, having repented of that sloth, she presents herself to her **Spouse**, offering myrrh, which is mortification, and penance in reparation for her sloth. But the Beloved goes away from her and no

⁷⁷ Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3038-3041**. This selection is taken from St. Gregory, *Moralia*, 3, c. 29, 48. PL 75, 83.

⁷⁸ Correspondence, p. 28. Letter to L. Naudet, **November 26, 1812**. This elevated mystic consideration refers to a concrete situation. The Bishop, Innocent Liruti, who wanted Fr. Bertoni to become Spiritual Director of the Seminary, had thought to relieve him from the office of Chaplain of the Work of Mother Naudet. A formal decision had not yet been made, but word had reached the Servant of God and produced the effect of an authentic cudgel blow: also because of a certain secrecy from which she felt excluded and which left everybody in a painful uncertainty. By way of testimony, it is proper to mention here also the few lines that follow in the same letter to L. Naudet in the cited passage: 'For the rest, I do not doubt at all that the Lord will give plentiful light to your prudence in transacting this business. As far as I'm concerned, it seems to me to be so disposed in the Lord in the Lord to go wherever He tells me. 'Go', meaning to obey, as when he tells me to 'Come'

longer gives her that heroic grace which the soul had rejected when it was first offered, but now gives a minor one. He denies to her the spiritual joys and consolations and that fruit, the conversion of souls, that she would have obtained if she had promptly obeyed the invitation of Christ.

The **Spouse** somehow punishes the sloth and delay of the **Bride**, compelling her to remain waiting, and just as, when He wished to introduce Himself, she was not ready to accept Him and to bring herself to meet Him, so He, in His turn, does not accede to her wish with any speed.

What harm sloth produces, and how much fatigue it costs those who have given in to it is also seen by what is said afterwards with regard to the **Spouse** of the Canticles. After she hesitated and did not open the door immediately for the **Groom**, she was forced not only to go to the door, but to run through the city, stumbling on the guards by whom she was wounded [cf. Sgs 5:6-7]. Thus, with great difficulty she finds her coveted **Spouse**, but if she had obeyed promptly to the invitation, she would have been able to avoid these misfortunes⁷⁹.

⁷⁹ Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3027-3031**,

CHRISTIAN JOY

44: To serve the Lord with joy

God loves those who serve Him happily and give everything they can [cf. 2 Co 9:7], not with sadness as misers, nor through necessity, or force like tax-payers, but with a prompt and joyful spirit.

Usually, we are inclined to serve voluntarily and joyfully when the Master we serve is a person of great dignity and worth, when he doesn't order difficult or weighty commands, when he prays well, giving abundant recompense for the service received, and treats his dependents with kindness. But all these things are realized in a most perfect manner in God. In particular, ***His commandments are not burdensome*** [1 Jn 5:3]; in fact they are light: ***My yoke is sweet and my burden light*** [Mt 11:30].

And also, if in the service of God much fatigue, tribulation and suffering are encountered, everything becomes easy and light with the help of divine grace, and with the hope of heavenly glory. The recompense, then, that the Lord reserves for us is greater than we can ever imagine, or hope for. Because, in addition to the richness of the gifts which He gives us in this life, He will afterwards give us Himself, as He already promised to Abraham: ***Do not fear, Abraham, I am your shield and your recompense*** [Gn 15:1].

And yet how many are those who serve God with sadness of spirit! They remain reluctant and see everything black, ready to pass judgment on this person, or that one, about everything they have to make bitter comments, they make huge trials and prefer harsh sentences. It is a diabolical vice that brings on so much uneasiness!

The true servant of God will make every effort to cast out of his spirit this diabolical sadness that takes away spiritual consolation, and renders them hateful to God and to their neighbor, and burdensome to themselves⁸⁰.

45: Spiritual consolation

Spiritual consolation is a free gift of God. Because of this gift, acts of virtue are easily performed – in fact, with delight and zest, with the heart inflamed with affection, while the deeds of the flesh become insipid and bitter.

Spiritual consolation brings with it above all else peace, interior quiet, joy, light and clarity in the knowledge of divine matters, elevation of the mind, and hope fixed on God, and fervor of charity.

Part of spiritual consolation is also that just evaluation of earthly realities through which it knows how to despise the glory, display and vanity of the world, and at the same time it learns how to reject the errors proper to worldly mentality which lead one astray from the search of the true sense of life, after the example of St. Paul, who considered everything ***as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord*** [Ph 3:8]. The soul, visited by the consolations of the Holy Spirit, despises even the terrors of the world, those terrors that are the result of violence, swindle and cunning. Faith and hope are stronger than all worldly terrors.

⁸⁰ Retreats to the Acolytes. **MssB 4538-4554.**

Spiritual consolation brings us also to praise God for His incomprehensible judgments, and for the designs of His Providence, as well as for all His gifts of grace. It stimulates the desire to serve God, not by force, but by devotion, with strength and humility, not searching for one's own interests, but those of Christ. Finally, it inflames in the heart an ardent zeal to procure with every means the glory of God, and to fight, with all its strength, for the victory of Christ⁸¹.

46. Fervor and joy

In difficulty, the human soul is strengthened, and in idleness, it is weakened, because good works are the food of the soul. **My food**, says the Lord, **is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work** [Jn 4:34].

Therefore, we see how all the servants of God who exhaust themselves in praying, meditating, preaching, and in the other activities which redound to the glory of God and the salvation of others, are happy, rich in spirit and full of spiritual gentleness. While on the contrary, the tepid are afflicted, sad, annoying toward their neighbor and themselves. Because of the dryness of their spirit, prayer, meditation, and every other spiritual activity become a nuisance to them, and they turn to search for worldly pleasures.

These are like the sons of Israel who lamented and murmured due to their fatigue. They became tired of that most delicate food, the manna, while they missed the onions of Egypt. Just as those ungrateful people despised that heavenly and delicate food and desired cheaper things, so also are the lukewarm who are tired of spiritual foods and delights, and desire worldly pleasures. People such as these cannot even turn themselves to show any understanding and compassion for their neighbor, because they are hard and dry. Ah, miserable ones, how they are lacking in good works, which form, instead, the delight of fervent souls⁸².

47: How to defend interior peace

Be of good spirit and put all your trust in God; thus it will be well placed and will produce more fruit than one could expect.

Hide yourselves, if you can, from those people who hinder, or disturb the time of your recollection, or your duties, and learn wisely how to find a place for yourself for comfort and rest in body and spirit. Then you too, may be able to say: **I am sleeping, but my heart is awake** [Sgs 5:2]. Attach yourself in every way to that tranquility and undisturbed peace, free from every form of disdain and of bitterness, which St. Paul recommends so much [cf. Rm 12:18]. Seek nothing but the kingdom of God and His justice [cf. Mt 6:33]. Find your delight in the most holy will of God, and conform yourself to it.

⁸¹ Meditations on *Primum Regum*. Nn. 8, 9, 10. MssB 5042-5178, *passim*.

⁸² Retreats to Acolytes. Mss 4532-4537.

For the rest, may the Lord console you and reward you for your fatigue, your alms-giving, and your mortification. Store up for yourselves good merits for eternity. Everything comes to an end, and ends quickly, but eternity never ends. That which is not eternal is not anything, as St. Teresa says⁸³.

Let us do our part according to the grace that God gives us. God will certainly do His part, and I do not wish to know what He intends to do. I am satisfied in believing firmly that God can do whatever He likes, and He always does the better thing, even if He is very distant from our little views and sometimes even contrary. ***I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall ever be in my mouth [Ps 34:2]***⁸⁴.

48: An Apostle of Joy: St. Zeno

The countenance of St. Zeno was always happy, his brow always serene, his look always peaceful, his lips always smiling, his speech always gentle, his look always pleasing and composed, always joyful and modest, always lovable and venerable.

Since charity, both in prosperous and in adverse affairs, is always content, so it is always happy. Indeed, this is the characteristic of charity: cheerfulness which is nothing other than a sign of a good and devoted will, and therefore, it is also the flower and ornament of every virtue. Again, this is the reason why it is much loved by God, and without it our gifts are not acceptable to Him [2 Co 9:7]. As it is dear to God, thus it is dear to all, and to the Veronese in a special way, it should have been most dear to see it in the countenance of their St. Zeno. Since by nature they had a happy and pleasant character, they would not have easily adapted themselves to manners that were dissimilar to their own. Those former citizens of ours were accustomed to the cruel and popular games of paganism and to the same of vices. They could not find in themselves their original peaceful cheerfulness until that day when they saw it suddenly, like a miracle, in St. Zeno. They felt immediately enraptured to love it and to strive to acquire it again. The joy of St. Zeno was a perennial source of even made others cheerful at the very sight of it.

But should this man have ever been troubled? Yes, indeed, and very much so. Should he not have found himself ever in distress? Certainly, and quite frequently. But, all this was outside of him, while interiorly he was nourished by that hidden manna that no one recognizes except those who receive it. Because those who know how to conceal themselves in God consider as nothing all their tribulations, as if they didn't belong to them.

Furthermore, the cheerfulness of the countenance of St. Zeno wounded their hearts and was like a dart that was noted for its efficacy. What kind and how great was the effect of this dart was well discerned by the great number of pagans, who, every

⁸³ St. Teresa of Jesus. *Life*, 20, 26. Works Rome 1969, pp. 200, ff.

⁸⁴ Correspondence, pp. 324, f. Letter to Fr. Bragato, **May 11, 1841**.

year, during the Easter celebration, were baptized by St. Zeno, so much so that the entire city was led to baptism through his work.⁸⁵

†
†††
†

⁸⁵ Prayer in honor of St. Zeno. **Mss B 2082-2085**. In August 1839, solemn festivities were observed in Verona in honor of St. Zeno, to celebrate the finding of the Holy Patron's body, which occurred in March of the preceding year. St. Gaspar was among the speakers appointed for the occasion: and he delivered the panegyric on Sunday, August 14, 1839. We are talking about a powerful discourse, accurately prepared in his rather troublesome conditions of health: and that stirred much admiration [cf. **BERTONI 5, pp. 646 ff.**]. On that occasion, St. Gaspar also had occasion to give another exceptional proof of his humility. When the secretary of the Bishop came to ask him for the manuscript of the panegyric so that it would be published, he dodged saying that it was not worth that honor. He acceded only by obedience to the bishop; but in handing over the pages, his eyes rimmed with tears. [ib., p. 659].