

# St. GASPAR BERTONI



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

SOME RUDIMENTS  
of his

## SPIRITUAL WRITINGS

**EASTER SEASON**

**Part 3 [## 97 - 146]**

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**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 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary as Priests - and in memory of:  
Fr. Lucian DalZoppo and Fr. Seraphin Piazzzi – who have preceded us in the Father's  
House.

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**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.

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**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](http://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 <sup>1</sup>. 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].

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<sup>1</sup> 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 12<sup>th</sup> 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 12<sup>th</sup> 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.'<sup>2</sup> 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!'<sup>3</sup>

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.

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<sup>2</sup> *Cause of Canonization, Positio super virtutibus*, Vol. 2. Roma 1960, p. 22.

<sup>3</sup> 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'<sup>4</sup> 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.

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<sup>4</sup> *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.

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## 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.

- MS Manuscripts** - 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**

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## SEASON of EASTER

### EASTER of the LORD

#### **97: From death to life**

During these past few days, we have completed our prayers of penance, and we have seen our purification fulfilled. So, today, we celebrate Easter. We feel that we too have risen with Christ, and walk in the newness of life. So let us hasten with the disciples to find Christ in Galilee.

From fear and contrition, let reach out with assurance and confidence for the mercy of God. From the joy and consolations of this world, through repentance and sorrow, which come from God, we now move forward to a holy joy, to a real spiritual joy in the Holy Spirit. We no longer experience as much pain when we recall our past offenses. Rather, we rejoice and are filled with the desire for eternal rewards. Happy are we today who share this feeling of joy together.

Let us move on our race to Heaven so as to reach that goal toward which we set out, without ever turning back, I don't mean in our stride, but even by glancing backwards at the miserable world from which we have detached ourselves.

***If then you were raised with Christ***, St. Paul solemnly declares, ***seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Think of what is above, not of what is on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden now with not of what is on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden now with Christ in God*** [Col 3:1-3].<sup>5</sup>

#### **98: Contemplation of the Risen Christ**

Let us imagine that we see Him as He appeared to His disciples, fully alive, with the scars of His wounds shining brightly, inviting us to Heaven, where He is about to return. Let us ask for the grace to share in this great joy with our Savior.

The glorious life that Christ assumed in His resurrection was truly a new life. If we desire that the resurrection be real and perfect in us, then we must transform ourselves into that new life, and bring about a change, a reform, both internal and external. ***Just as Christ was raised from the dead, we too might live in newness of life.*** [Rm 6:4].

From the Risen Christ, who can no longer suffer, we should learn a cheerful indifference in all the events of our human life, a tranquility of spirit, which cannot change, and an extraordinary peace of heart.

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<sup>5</sup> Early Sermons, n. 38. 'Spiritual Life': **MssB 1297-1300**. PVC, p. 289. This sermon, which was delivered on Easter Sunday, April 5, 1807, is noteworthy because it shows the deep understanding of the Word of God, especially St. Paul. Fr. Nello Dalle Vedove states: 'The Resurrection of Christ was seen by the writers of that time as an historical fact of great importance; hence, they exerted all their efforts to preserve the apologetic value for our faith. Quite different is the kerygma contained in the Paschal Mystery of Christ, which becomes our Easter. In this sense, St. Gaspar seems to have been ahead of the times in the modern trend of evangelization' [BERTONI, 2, p. 534].

The dazzling brightness that surrounds the new life of Christ should reflect in our mind that Christian wisdom which lifts it above all created things, and lets it see God Himself. From this, through prayer, a very clear and practical knowledge of all that concerns our perfection and salvation will result.

To all, the gift of 'agility' which carries the risen Christ from one place to another in a second, we must correspond with promptness and fervor in all our tasks, in order to accomplish good works and be pleasing to God.

To the gift of 'subtlety', which renders the body spiritual, and allows it to go everywhere, we must correspond with a life according to the spirit, a life of living faith, a faith that is free of all impression of sensible things. This kind of faith is the result of spiritual death.<sup>6</sup>

## OUR EASTER

### **99: Death to sin**

St. Paul teaches: ***Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus, and we could also add, and washed by the Blood of Christ in the sacrament of Penance, which is a painful Baptism, were baptized into His death? We were indeed buried with Him through Baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life*** [Rm 6:3-4]. What do we mean by death to sin? Never to sin in anyway. This was accomplished by our baptism. Penance has renewed our resolution. It has rendered us dead to sin. Now with great care we must carry out this resolution, so that, no matter what sin, or inordinate passion, or perverse desire suggests to us, we must be totally deaf, never following these suggestions. We must persevere motionless, as if dead.

A dead person does not talk about another; he does no harm or violence, speaks no calumny; he does not persecute anybody; he does not envy those who do good; he does not insult those who are bad; he does not give in to any lust of the flesh; he does not stir up the flames of hatred; he does not flatter the rich and powerful of this world; he is not moved by useless curiosity; and seeks not the powerful of this world; he is not moved by useless curiosity, and seeks not the applause of the world around him; he does not seek honors, and never seeks revenge for any offense. Pride does not puff up; ambition does not excite him; vainglory does not move him; the false riches of this world do not attract him; unbalanced rage or anger never upset him, and the delicate beauty of a face does not enthrall him.

This is what it means to be dead to sin, never to enjoy the things of this world, inordinate attachments, and the pleasures of the world and the flesh.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2637-2640**. In this meditation, we have adopted the adaptation already made by Fr. Stofella in the study concerning the Retreat Meditations, as found in **CS I, pp. 230-232**.

<sup>7</sup> Early Sermons, n. 38. The Spiritual Life. **MssB 1304-1308. PVC, pp. 291-293**

**100: Risen to New Life**

After speaking of a future resurrection, St. Paul demands another kind of resurrection, that is a new style of life in this world through a change in our habits. When someone who is dissipated becomes chaste, when one who is greedy becomes generous, when an angry person becomes meek, this is a resurrection here below, and is the beginning of a future one.

When you hear this new life spoken of, you should strive to become very different and make a great change in yourself. But it makes us cry when we think of how much virtue the Apostle demands of us, and then notice how weak we have become after baptism as a result of our becoming rooted in our vices. It is like after tasting the heavenly manna, we return to look for the inferior food of Egypt. How many times have we been strengthened through Penance and freed from slavery of sin, and then fallen again into our old habits of sin, and freely bound our hands with those shameful chains.

Now, however, since in this Easter time we have risen through grace and are dead to sin, how can we dare to abuse such mercy? Instead, why can we not persevere with great vigilance? Penance not only cancels our former sins, but also strengthens us against future ones. In this sacrament we have done our part through contrition, accusing ourselves, and expressing the desire to amend our ways, so then we must take care and be on our guard that we not become defiled again.

Once again St. Paul speaks to us: ***If we have grown into union with Him, through a death like His, we shall also be united with Him in the resurrection*** [Rm 6:5]. Just as the body of Christ which was buried in the earth brought about the salvation of the world, so we, buried in the sacrament of Penance, have brought about fruits of justice, sanctification and many other gifts. Later on we shall receive the gift of resurrection.<sup>8</sup>

**101 Hidden with Christ in God**

***Your life is hidden with Christ in God***, says St. Paul [Col 3:3]. Now let us see in what sense this hidden life with Christ in God consists.

The new life granted to us is the life of grace that we possess, and it is the life of glory that we are looking forward to. Both are hidden from the eyes of the world.

The world ignores this new type of interior life, which is spiritual and holy, and even loathes it and considers it as something gloomy and dead. Further, this new life appears to the world wrapped in the humble form of mortification, of apparent sadness and tribulations. Grace, virtue, and divine gifts, which can be called the soul of this life, are wrapped in the center of the heart and spirit. St. Augustine says: 'The good are hidden because their goodness is hidden and the thing they love is neither visible nor corporeal, therefore their merits are kept secret like their rewards'<sup>9</sup> St. Gregory the Great clearly points out that whoever cultivates virtues, truly lives hidden with God. 'Whoever loves to mortify himself greatly rejoices in the rest he finds in contemplation.'

<sup>8</sup> o.c., MssB 1305-1308. PVC, pp. 293, f.

<sup>9</sup> St. Augustine, Commentary on the Psalms, 53, 3. PL 36:621.

He appears to the world as a dead man, and he hides himself in the midst of interior love from all the troubles of this world'<sup>10</sup>

Thus we can see the true meaning of a man risen with Christ. Can he still enjoy the base things of this world? Can he seek for anything in this world except those heavenly supernatural things that he will love with in Heaven? ***If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Think of what is above, not of what is on earth*** [Col 3:1-2].<sup>11</sup>

### **102: Elements of the life of glory**

The life of glory, which we look forward to with hope, is understood even less by the world, because the world does not understand the glorious life to which Christ has risen, and is now living with the Father. This is why St. Paul says: ***Your life is hidden now with Christ in God. When Christ your life appears, then you shall appear with Him in glory.*** [Col 3:3-4].

St. Augustine illustrates this passage with an analogy. During winter, even that tree which is green seems to be dead, but when spring comes, its roots give life to the leaves, and it bears fruit again. Such is our life. It can be compared to winter at those times when Christ, our Sun, is far away from us, and is hidden from our eyes, surrounded by dark clouds. We are just like the plants that are dried up and without leaves, without any sign of beauty. Within us, however, we still have deep roots of charity which are alive and living in God, as is His life supporting soil. Summer will come when Christ appears in His glory, and then we shall live again in His resurrection and produce leaves and fruit which will be the glorious gifts of everlasting happiness.<sup>12</sup> St. Augustine exclaims: 'O most sweet Jesus, may this pact with you be strong. Let me die to myself interiorly, so that you alone may not live in me.'<sup>13</sup>

***Et I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me,*** cries St. Paul [Ga 2:20]. In another place he says: ***Our citizenship is in heaven,*** [Ph 3:20]. Again he tells us: ***But you are not in the flesh, you are in the spirit,*** and further: ***I long to depart from this life, and to be with Christ.*** [Ph 1:23]. These are the deep sentiments of a man who is dead to sin, who no longer enjoys the things of this earth. These are the profound sentiments of one who lives hidden with Christ in God, who searches only for the things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. What sweet ecstasy of a soul carried away by the joy of these holy thoughts.<sup>14</sup>

### **103: Heaven**

To Heaven, then, let us turn our thoughts, to Heaven all our affection, to Heaven all our heart, for there is our treasure, our life. There we will find delights without thorns; pleasures without sadness; honor without envy. We will be filled with an abundance of divine consolations [Ps 36:9].

<sup>10</sup> St. Gregory the Great, *Morals in the Book of Job*. Book 5, 5-6. PL 75, 687

<sup>11</sup> Early Sermons, n. 38. *The Spiritual Life*. MssB 1309-1312. PVC pp. 294-296.

<sup>12</sup> St. Augustine, *Sermons on the Old & New Testaments*. XXXVI, 4. PL 38, 216..

<sup>13</sup> id.

<sup>14</sup> Early Sermons, n. 38. *Spiritual Life*. MssB 1318-1322. PVC 297-299.

In the meantime, since our life is hidden, let us be crucified to the world and the world to us. Indeed let us mortify ourselves. St. Paul tells us: ***Put to death, then, the parts of you that are earthly*** [Col 3:5]. That is to say, since you are already dead to sin, persevere in this death through mortification. Mortify your passions, which, even after doing penance, come alive in many ways, and they are, as St. Paul explains: ***Immorality, impurity, evil desire, and the greed that is idolatry. Because of these the wrath of god is coming. By these you too once conducted yourselves, when you lived in that way*** [Col 3:5-7]. ***What profit did you get then from the things of which you are now ashamed?*** [Rm 6:21].

Do we want to turn back now? To dig up our sins? To become slaves? To spoil the overflowing redemption of Christ, and cancel out the price of his blood? Oh, no, no! To heaven, to heaven, to eternal life we are called. We are already on the way and making headway. Let us continue on, until we reach our goal, our heavenly homeland. From all eternity god has enrolled us as citizens of heaven. We are his servants, his heirs. Let us quicken our steps with enthusiasm, determined to reach our goal. Christ awaits us and has already prepared a place for us, even a throne.

To Heaven, then, to Heaven. ***If then you were raised up with Christ, set what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Think of what is above, not of what is on earth*** [Col 3:1-2].<sup>15</sup>

## THE EUCHARIST – THE ETERNAL EASTER

### 104: The Sacrifice of the New Covenant

***Everywhere they bring sacrifice to My name and a pure offering*** [Mt 1:11]. This is that sacrifice which is totally pure and holy and is offered in every place on earth by all people. We know through faith that this pure and holy oblation is the sacrifice of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist. There is nothing in the whole world which magnifies the name of God and celebrates His glory so much as the Eucharistic sacrifice, in which Christ offers Himself as a victim to God through the hands of His priests.

The Eucharist is called incense above all because it is the sacrament of the Body of Christ burnt in the fire of charity on the altar of the Cross, on which He has softened the wrath of God with His sweet perfume, and reconciled man with God. The Eucharist not only represents, but really contains Christ immolated for us, burnt with sorrow and love as a sacrifice to God.

Incense symbolically stands for the fervent prayers and aspirations of both the priests who consecrate the Eucharist and the faithful who receive and consume it. The angels offer to God: ***Bowls filled with incense, which are the prayers of the holy ones.*** [Rv 5:8]. Therefore, let us leave that table like lions, spitting fire, ready to strike terror in the devils, with our minds and hearts filled with the love with which Christ, our leader, has inflamed us.

The Body of Christ is a truly pure and holy oblation that cannot be defiled by any unworthy act, or ill will, either on the part of the priest or the faithful. The Eucharist always maintains its purity and its sacramental purifying strength, even in those cases

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<sup>15</sup> Early Sermons, n. 33. The Spiritual Life. MssB 1318-1322. PVC pp. 297-299.

which the celebrant may not be worthy.<sup>16</sup> The Eucharist is able to cleanse us not only from sin, but even from the root of sin, of concupiscence, of temptations, of passions. It is capable of removing even the occasion of sin and to confer the strength to overcome them.<sup>17</sup>

### **105: The Sacred Banquet**

***Come, eat of my food*** [Pr 9:5]. This is how the Lord invites us: behold the table I have prepared for you, that food on which the angels and saints of heaven nourish themselves. This is the same food I offer to you, pilgrims and exiles of the earth. ***Take and eat, this is my body, this is my blood.*** [Mt 26:26, ff.] With which I have redeemed you from your sins and from the slavery of your enemies.

Look at how much suffering, and what kind of death it cost Me to prepare this table for you. The best way to show your gratitude is to correspond to My desire that you constantly approach this table. To whom shall you go to receive life, if you do not come to Me, who alone is able to give it to you? Who will give you peace of mind, who will satisfy the desires of your heart if not I, who am your beginning and your last end? I am your Father, teacher, friend, and brother. And if you are sick, I am your doctor, I am your health, and one day, I will be your happiness and your glory.

If I were to sit here on a throne with all the splendor of my majesty, I could understand your timidity; but since I am hidden in the Blessed Sacrament and well known to people, why do you not approach Me with great confidence, knowing that My delight is to be with you? [cf. Pr 8:31]. Who does not want to hear these loving words and accept that moving invitation deep within his heart? Happy are they who listen to the divine voice; happier still are they who keep it and put it into practice<sup>18</sup>.

### **106: Spiritual medicine**

Some say that if we would consider ourselves worthy, then we could easily receive the Eucharist. But, we are sinners, full of imperfections, and far removed from that fervor that we notice in practicing Christians. Hence, we hesitate to receive it more out of fear of condemnation than for our salvation.

He who reasons in this fashion bases his actions on that saying of St. Paul: ***Whoever eats in an unworthy manner, eats his own condemnation.*** [1 Co 11:27, 29]. But, we need also to reflect on the advice that the Apostle adds: ***A man should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup.*** [ib]. From the constant practice of the Church these words have been interpreted with certainty in this sense: a man is obliged to examine his conscience, and if he is aware of any grave sin, he must hasten to cleanse his soul in the sacrament of Penance, with the firm resolution never to sin again. Having done this, without any fear, he may eat this Bread, about which St. Augustine says: 'Partake of It for It is bread, not poison.'<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> cf. Council of Trent: Sess. XXII, c. i. Denz. 1742.

<sup>17</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3438-3443.**

<sup>18</sup> Early Sermons. N. 17. Frequent Communion. **MssB 770-772. PVC pp. 110, f.**

<sup>19</sup> St. Augustine. Tract on John XXVI, 11. PL 35,1611.

Recall the warm reception given by the father of the prodigal son, who returned to him after dissipating his patrimony on bad habits. He confessed his sins, and immediately he received the most tender signs of affection. He was clothed in the finest robe, and brought into his father's house for a festal banquet.

Those who stay away from receiving this sacrament because they do not feel any sort of fervor act in the same way as persons who are cold, but do not want to approach the fire, unless they first warm up. But, the Eucharist, as St. John Damascene says: 'Is a lighted pieced of coal that gets rid of the cold and lukewarmness'<sup>20</sup>. And those who keep away from the fire become colder likewise, those who, with different excuses stay away from the heavenly fire, find themselves spiritually frozen and hardened.

St. Bonaventure tells us: 'It is healthy and useful to man to receive this medicine frequently, and try to receive it with the greatest devotion. But, even if sometimes he feels dry and without any fervor, trusting in divine mercy, let him receive It with confidence. If he is unworthy, let him remember that it is all the more necessary to see the doctor the more your feel sick.'<sup>21</sup>

### **107: The right disposition**

Let us reflect on the table where we are seated at the Eucharist. That table which the angels look at with amazement and at which they dare not to look because of the splendor that radiates from it, at this table we are fed, and are changed into one body and one flesh with Christ.<sup>22</sup>

The great effect of this sacrament, as St. Thomas teaches, is to transform us into God, and to make us one with Him out of love.<sup>23</sup> What faith must be absorbed, what hope should strengthen us, with what charity must we be inflamed, with what innocence must we be adorned if we are to receive the Lord and be transformed mystically into Him?

If it be true that disposition must be of the same category as the form, as the philosophers claim, then undoubtedly a divine disposition is needed in order to receive divine food, a commitment to regulate life in such a way that it is supernatural and divine, radically different from carnal and mundane life. God alone should be the object of our will and intellect. God alone should be present during our conversations; God alone in all our actions. Nothing should remain that smacks of the world, that savors of the flesh and senses.

Let us examine our life, and if we notice that it is not what it should be because it is still influenced by the world, let us take steps to change our ways by diligent practice of virtue, and bring it to that point to which the Eucharist urges us.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> St. John Damascene, On Orthodox Faith. Book IV, c. 13. PG 94, 1150.

<sup>21</sup> Early Sermons. Frequent Communion. **MssB 764-769. PVC, pp. 107-110.** The quote from St. Bonaventure is found in the *Perfection of Religious*.

<sup>22</sup> cf. St. John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew. 82, 5. PG 58, 743.

<sup>23</sup> St. Thomas. *Summa Theologica*. III, q. 73, a. 3, ad 3m; q.75, a.1.

<sup>24</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3469-3472.**

**198: The attraction of love is love itself**

Jesus gave His Body and Blood, His very being, to His disciples to show the richness of His love for His people. Just as in the Incarnation He unites our flesh hypostatically to His divinity, so likewise in the Eucharist He unites sacramentally that same flesh and divinity to each one of the faithful who communicates, so that we become a divine person almost like another Christ and God.

Christ loved us to the end [Jn 13:1], that is, He loved us with the greatest everlasting love, leaving Himself entirely in the Eucharist, because He is always present to us, so that we might live in him, converse with Him, and let Him know about our difficulties, our temptations and all our troubles, so that we might seek and ask His help. ***I found delight in the sons of men***, as He says in the book of Proverbs [8:31].

Do we find our delights with Him, or do we find them in the world? Christ loved us in this manner in order to kindle in us joy and also endeavor to love Him ardently. Love is like a magnet: one loves because he is attracted by love. Let us give ourselves entirely to him, to Him, who being God, gave Himself entirely to us, and He does this every day. Let us give ourselves to Him without any reservation, to Him who has given everything to us without holding back anything of Himself.

St. Cyprian wrote during the time of persecution: 'The most difficult and bitter struggle is at hand. For this, the soldiers of Christ must prepare themselves with undefiled virtue and with strong faith, recalling that every day they drink the chalice of the Blood of Christ, so that they may shed their own blood for Christ.'<sup>25</sup> It was this chalice that inspired St. Lawrence to face the flames, St. Sebastian the arrows, St. Ignatius the lions, and all the mother martyrs many other forms of torment. They did this to return love for love, life for life, their death for the death of Christ. It was the Eucharist that gave the martyrs strength and joy. That is the reason why during the time of persecution the Christians received Communion every day, and they even carried the Eucharistic Bread to their homes.<sup>26</sup>

**109: Benefits to be had from the Eucharist**

When I recall in the Gospel the great devotion of the people, who, neglecting other concerns, followed Christ, and the gracious generosity with which the Master rewarded them by feeding them with the bread He had multiplied, I like to make a comparison with the devotion of the faithful toward the Blessed sacrament, and the great diligence with which these people approach the altar to meet their Lord and Master, who is present under the sacred species.

If we can admire the devotion of that first group, then we can esteem more the faith of these people of today, a faith that assures them with an absolute guarantee that they will find here that which their senses cannot see. Greater then is the gift of grace with which Christ responds to their love, since He does not just multiply earthly bread, but gives Himself as food to nourish their spirit abundantly. It is right to point out the example of these faithful ones for the edification of so many tepid Christians, who rarely, or as if by others' force, approach Christ in the Eucharist.

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<sup>25</sup> St. Cyprian, Exhortation to Martyrs. C. 6. PL 4 686.

<sup>26</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2594-2599.**

One of the most frequent excuses alleged by those Christians who are not practicing is that their duties, such as taking care of their families, do not allow them either the time or the opportunity to frequent the sacraments more often. The thought comes to mind to ask them if these tasks keep them from sitting down each day at their earthly tables. Is not the Eucharist the food of the soul? **My flesh is real food, and My Blood is real drink.** [Jn 6:55].

Yet, if they were to approach Christ more frequently how much help they would find for their tasks and other earthly affairs! Uniting themselves to true wisdom, who is Christ, they would be well informed as to how to act with prudence and skill in their tasks. If only they would charge up their energy at this Powerhouse, they would feel invigorated, and be able to sustain the weight of the cares that overburden them, without feeling weighed down, in keeping with the promise of Christ: **Come to Me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest.** [Mt 11:28].

How true it is that our loving Savior not only enjoys conferring graces on souls, but also keeps a special eye on the worldly concerns of those who faithfully approach Him. <sup>27</sup>

### **110: St. Gaspar's Mass**

He celebrated Mass with the greatest devotion, and he was upset when he was unable to celebrate Mass because of illness. Even when he was confined to bed, he wanted to assist at Mass every day. This was celebrated in the chapel next to his room. Likewise, he wanted to receive Holy Communion each day without fail. <sup>28</sup>

The Eucharistic celebration was the greatest pleasure of his heart. It was here that his spirit found a treasure trove of graces and spiritual gifts which seemed to transform him into another person. He longed for the blessed hour to celebrate mass, and when it was time, he was overjoyed. <sup>29</sup>

Those who had the good fortune to assist at his Mass relate that such was his modesty and devotion, such his recollection, it appeared as a form of rapture with God, that they were moved to compunction and affection of heart.

In fact, the composure and modesty with which he celebrated Mass, the distinct and careful recital of the prayers, the lifting up of his spirit, was evident, portrayed the image of a perfect priest, a real messenger of the Lord' [MI 2:7]. <sup>30</sup>

### **111: Contemplation of the Eucharist – living experiences**

During the Eucharistic prayer of the Mass, I felt as though my mind opened up so that I recognized the One I was speaking with. Likewise I felt great devotion and an increase of love in my prayer. The followed certain outbursts of my heart toward God. It was just like a person who is surprised by a good friend he had not seen for a long time and then, when he does see him, he has the urge to embrace him.

<sup>27</sup> Early Sermons. N. 17. Frequent Communion. **MssB 756-762. OVC pp. 102-105.**

<sup>28</sup> G. Giacobbe, *Life of the Servant of God, Gaspar Bertoni.* 1858. SA p. 102-105.

<sup>29</sup> *Positio*, p. 121.

<sup>30</sup> *ib.*

Then came the desire that the vision would become brighter, and a longing to reach the Greatest Good. But since I was in public, and fearful of my vanity, I resorted to thinking about some grave sins. From this came the realization of His goodness and love, and I broke into tears which lasted until after Communion.

In the meantime faith and confidence grew apace with humility and loving reverence. Finally, at Communion time I felt greatly moved and experienced feelings similar to my first Communion day as a child, feelings that I had never experienced since that day. This recollection lasted for more than an hour, and actually remained with me through the evening.<sup>31</sup>

During Mass, I experienced brief but vivid impressions and a great feeling of the Divine Presence, confidence, love and the desire to be transformed into Him, so that Jesus would live in me and not I any more. This grace of union did not last beyond Mass, but it returned as I was on my way to do an errand for family matters, just as when I was in Church.<sup>32</sup>

There was a rather vivid sentiment of reverent love for the presence of the father during the Canon of the Mass. It was accompanied by a loving confidence and love for the Son. At the Consecration, I experienced a sense of priestly dignity in representing the Person of Christ before the Father. Then followed an even greater tenderness and profound humility in holding Christ in my hands right after the Consecration. Here was the greatest good joined to the greatest evil, the Purest to the most impure; the Most Holy, to the greatest sinner. This feeling lasted until after Communion, and was followed by compunction until evening.<sup>33</sup>

## THE LIFE OF FAITH

### 112. The excellence of faith

I would like to raise my voice like a trumpet [cf. Is 58:1] and let the world know the reasons why I glory in my faith. They are reasons that are common to all those who participate in this glory. First through faith, the believer loves and glorifies his Creator. Second through this same faith, he is then loved and honored by his Creator.

Thanks to our faith, we have from God a conscience and an appreciation that is proper to the Divine Nature, superior to the capacity of our human nature. The eye cannot see, nor the ear hear, nor has it entered into the heart of man those things that God has hidden from the wise and [prudent of this world, but by means of faith, He reveals them to the meek and humble of heart who fear Him and glorify Him and love Him by believing [cf. Mt 11:25]. God alone knows and understands Himself. We need to follow the inspirations He deigns to grant us humbly and gently. From God we have to learn what is needed to know God, because we know only what He Himself manifests to us.

Believing in self-surrendering that an intelligent creature offers to his Creator, a self-surrender that is not stupid, or foolish, but reasonable, and hence, glorious for him who recognizes the most beautiful boast and adornment of his nature. Believing

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<sup>31</sup> **Spiritual Journal**. October 9, 1808. Feast of St. Dennis – St. Gaspar's [31<sup>st</sup>] birthday.

<sup>32</sup> o.c., October 25, 1808.

<sup>33</sup> o.c., December 11, 1808.

renders the intellect as a servant of faith [cf. 2 Co 10:5], but this servitude comes not from weakness or ignorance. No, it comes from a generous soul and from a truly rational thought, from a mind that is truly sublime and superior to the ordinary way of thinking. To believe of God things that are superior to our human intelligence requires great strength of soul, together with genuine and sincere charity.

Certainly he honors God who follows the precepts that God manifests to him through his intellect, and those that He has written, so to speak, in nature. But the one who honors Him more is the one who elevates himself to Him through his faith.<sup>34</sup>

### **113: Difficulties of faith**

The glory of virtue increases much more when there are greater difficulties that oppose it. Now, then, he who believes needs a mind that is very strong in order to combat and put to flight all thoughts and reasoning that are contrary to the faith. It is a tough and dangerous battle that we must wage against our own reasoning. Our faith represses that arrogance of comprehending the incomprehensible. Faith makes us attentive and careful to study and meditate on the mysteries which are revealed by God. What glory here is to the faith that can lead the human spirit to the haven of truth, guiding it successfully amid so many reefs.

These are difficulties that are inherent to man. Now, while on the inside faith is battling against inane reasoning, on the outside a fight breaks out against innumerable adversaries. Hence, it is necessary as St. Paul says: ***There have to be heresies among you in order that also those who are true believers among you may be known*** [1 Co 11:19]. Against humble faith they use shameful irreverence, and often employ force and arrogance to crush the timid or use cunning and trickery to deceive the naïve ones.

However, we must admit that the greatest difficulty that man can experience in his belief comes from the very object of faith, namely, God. This may seem like a paradox, but it is from this that comes the greatest glory that we can render to God with our faith. St. Thomas teaches that what appears more certain in itself turns out less evident to us because of the weakness of our intellect which finds itself in the face of all these very evident truths just like a bat in the bright light of the sun.<sup>35</sup>

This is the reason why so many doubt some articles of our holy faith which are really very true in themselves. This happens not because there is little certainty, but because of the weakness of our intellect.

Who is that noble eagle with strong eyes that can stand the flash of such light, and can penetrate with a scrutinizing look into the depths of this inaccessible ocean? The spirit of faith. ***The Spirit scrutinizes everything, even the depths of God*** [1 Co 2:10].<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Fragment of a discourse on Faith: **MssB1552-1557**. This is a text of a sermon which was to be given on the IIIrd Sunday of November 1812. This sermon is incomplete because of a grave illness which in that year brought St. Gaspar to the brink of death [BERTONI, 3, p. 404].

<sup>35</sup> St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 1, a. 5 ad 1m.

<sup>36</sup> Fragment of a sermon on Faith. **MssB 1558-1568**.

**114: Work with a spirit of faith**

To seek God alone, to see God in everything – this is to make oneself superior to all human things<sup>37</sup>. Seek God alone, and noting else, neither consolations, nor self-satisfaction<sup>38</sup>.

We should not listen to the voice of our timid nature. God has shared His divine nature so that we would not live and work any longer according to our nature. We need to judge our strength not on the basis of our first nature, but on the second which was granted us by our adoption as sons of God. Let us take care then not to impede the strong and marvelous effects of our second nature with weak thoughts and affections of our first nature.

Let us allow God to enter freely and take possession of this heart which He loves so much and desires to unite with Himself. We know the time of His visit. Let us implore all creatures and our own senses not to bother our soul when it is at rest in the bridal chamber of the Lord. Nothing more is needed. In His own good time, He will bring forth fruit to precious, so lofty, so noble, worthy of such holy and sublime nuptials.<sup>39</sup>

**CHRISTIAN HOPE****115: Trust in God – it is a great trust**

Oh how the ways of God are different from the ways of men! If only we could learn them so as not to get lost. Like Abraham, father of all believers, we need to believe **hoping against hope** [Rm 4:18]. Blessed are they who close the eyes of their blurred vision when the most wise hand of God takes ours to lead us and to govern us! Our journey here below is short, but our stay in the house of the Lord will be eternal and unchangeable. **The sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed to us.** [Rm 8:18].<sup>40</sup>

Everything that God does is the best. O hands that are so wise, and how they work in secret. Let us trust Him always and we will never be disappointed. In so far as suffering is concerned, let us recall the words of Christ. **I will show them how much he will have to suffer for my name.** [Ac 9:16]. Take courage; take courage. This is the better portion that God reserves for those who are dear to Him, but it is not a morsel for everyone.<sup>41</sup>

Let us trust in God, for it is a beautiful trust, and let us distrust ourselves. **But for me, to be near God is my good, to make the Lord God my hope** [Ps 73:28].

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<sup>37</sup> **Spiritual Journal** July 30, 1808.

<sup>38</sup> *ib.* December 23, 1808

<sup>39</sup> **Correspondence**, p. 65 Letter to L. Naudet. Feb. 1813.p. 322.

<sup>40</sup> o.c., p 322. Letter to Fr. Bragato, august 27, 1840.

<sup>41</sup> o.c., p. 37. Letter to L. Naudet. December 14, 1812.

When it becomes necessary to **undergo many hardships** [C 14"22] with hope we shall have easy access to His glory for which our hearts continually desire, and in which our heart will find no rest until it rests in God for whom it was created.<sup>42</sup>

### **116: Deep calls unto deep**

Oh how great must our hope be in God! Not great only, but very great. **They that hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar as with eagles' wings. They will run and now grow weary, walk and not grow faint.** [Pls 40:31].<sup>43</sup>

Let us recall these words of Scripture: **Deep calls unto deep.** [Pos 42:8]. The deep of light calls out to the deep of darkness; the deep of mercy calls out to the deep of misery. If our wickedness is great, the mercy of God is much greater. **How great is your goodness, O Lord, which You have in store for those who fear You.** [Ps 31:20]. He hides it not only from the eyes of the world, but even from those eyes who need to receive it, for they do not see it no matter how near it is and ready to rain down in abundance. Yet, when they come to it, taste it with its unspeakable flavor, and touch it in an inexpressible experience, they do not understand, nor, are they able to realize what it is, because of the weakness of their intellect.

God loves us with a great love, and it is so rich and powerful that it outdistances every kind of measurement that we can imagine about Him, about His goodness, His kindness, His love. Our expressions, even those strong ones, are mere trifles before such Majesty, and we cannot help being confused. Let us rise above all this and expand our hearts all out of proportion. As St. Bernard says: 'this Spouse comes to meet great souls, and He will strive to work great things in them'<sup>44</sup>.

### **117: Earthly life is a rough sketch of heaven**

Our Lord wants us to do His will on earth as it is done in Heaven, that means, not partially, but totally, and without anything getting in the way. In the short time before our being taken up into Heaven, let us live like angels, even though we are only men, and let us transform our stay here on earth into a rough sketch of Heaven. Our Lord came down from Heaven to show us how we should live on earth.

**How shall I make a return to the Lord for all the good things He has done for me?** [Ps 116:12]. Here is the answer: **The cup of salvation I will take up, and I will call upon the name of the Lord** [v. 13]. Here is what will follow: generous patience and loving trust in prayer. **My vows to the Lord I will ay in the presence of all people** [v. 14], and in His own good time will follow: **Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of His faithful ones** [v. 15].

It behooves us then to cry out with joy in the midst of our troubles. **O Lord, I am Your servant, the son of your handmaiden** [Ps 116:16]. Then freed from the troubles, chains, and restrictions of our defects and inclinations, let us continue our rapture of: **You have loosed my bonds. To You I will offer a sacrifice of**

<sup>42</sup> o.c., p. 323. Letter to Fr. Bragato. September 26, 1840.

<sup>43</sup> **Correspondence**, p. 24. Letter to L. Naudet, Nov. 16, 1812.

<sup>44</sup> o.c., p. 40. Letter to L. Naudet, Dec. 1812. The quote from St. Bernard is found in his Sermon 32 on Canticle 8. PL 183, 949.

**thanksgiving.** Having tasted the hope of those first proofs of the fulfillment of the divine promises, with our hearts intoxicated with love and ready for the undertakings of God's glory, we shall repeat more with our actions than with our words: ***My vows to the Lord I will pay in the presence of all His people; in the courts of the house of the Lord, in your midst, O Jerusalem.*** [Ps 1126:18].

May His holy name be blessed and glorified by our words and actions forever.<sup>45</sup>

### **118: Earthly goods – heavenly goods**

Earthly goods certainly exist. However, they are not adequate for our good and can never satisfy us.

The object of a heart, whose desires are almost infinite, cannot be anything less than an infinite God. How can we imagine that small and limited things can satisfy it? If our heart is as vast as the ocean, how can a few brooks fill the immensity of its desires? Oh! In Heaven, it is in Heaven that we will find something appropriate for our heart, a God who is infinitely good.

My God, only You ***will show me the path of life, the fullness of joys in Your presence, the delights of Your right hand forever*** [Ps 16:11]. It was for this that You gave me a heart that is insatiable, so that I would remember that it was for You alone that You created my heart, and it will not rest until it rests in You<sup>46</sup>.

Although we know that we must renounce the goods of this earth in order to gain those of Heaven, it would be insane to prefer the present enjoyments for those of the future. But this is not what was asked. God did not forbid Adam to eat all the fruits in paradise. He forbade him to eat from only one tree. So it is for us. Are the pleasures you enjoy good, harmless and honest? Enjoy them in peace.

But we must deprive ourselves of those false pleasures that are bad in themselves. When it is a question of depriving yourself of a dishonorable pleasure that dishonors your intelligence with its malice, when you should be enjoying other pleasures that are lawful, so much greater would your stupidity be to lose the everlasting goods<sup>47</sup>.

### **119: Change the night into day**

Our beloved Lord always notes that it is not in vain that His real servants repeat with trust the words of holy Job: ***Change the night into day.*** [Jb 17:12]. David also said: ***For you darkness and light are the same*** [Ps 139:12]. Oh how much God is glorified in His gifts and in the humble faith of His servants! What tongue can possibly praise God as much as He deserves, and tell of the love with which He loves us, and cares so diligently for us, more than a mother for her children?

In the days of light, when God consoles us by showing His living face to us, let us get accustomed to trust completely in Him, even for those times when He is hidden from us, just like a mother who plays with her children. She enjoys having them hunt for her, calling out to her, and even sobbing and crying. Oh, how blessed is our Father.

<sup>45</sup> **Correspondence**, p. 44. Letter to L. Naudet. Dec. 21, 1812.

<sup>46</sup> St. Augustine *Confessions*, Book 1, c. 1. PL 32, 661.

<sup>47</sup> Early Sermon, n. 5. The Ascension. PVC pp. 11-13.

What will He do for us in Heaven, after we have passed through all our trials, if even now He shows us so much goodness? It is almost like He is playing with us on this inhabited world. Pr 8:30]<sup>48</sup>

**Happy the man who makes the Lord his trust** [Ps 40:5]. Oh, how the word of God brings comfort to His faithful people. His goodness, His wisdom, His power – God offers all this help to the one who trust in Him. How can he not be blest? What can he lack, **who dwells in he shelter of the Most High?** [Ps 91:1]? Let us read this entire Psalm with great attention, and let us conclude with St. Paul: **In hoe we are saved.** [Rm 8:24].<sup>49</sup>

## LOVE GOD ABOVE ALL THINGS

### 120: Our heart is made for God

God is the greatest good; we are miserable sinners. What is more fitting for the infinite Goodness, who is ready to share His perfection without any limits, than to find a soul who, on the one hand, is ready to receive every good gift, and, on the other hand, is completely deprived and wanting? Even among men, those who are really open-minded are happy to find, or to meet those who are not so rich as they are, but those who are poor and indigent, so that they may share with them their own riches. How much more does God act like this!

In fact, God is not content to wait for those who are in need; rather, He goes in search of them. He calls them, crying out loudly with the voice of Isaiah: **All you who are thirsty, come to the water. You, who have no money, come, receive grain and eat. Come, without paying and without cost, drink wine and milk. Heed me, and you shall eat well, you shall delight in rich fare.** [Is 55:1-3 Christ Himself declares: **The Son of Man has come to save that which was lost** [Mt 15:24], **that they may have life and have it more abundantly** [Jn 10:10].

Our heart is made for God, and outside of God, there is nothing that can be compared to Him. In fact, what remains of those strong desires, those never satisfying longings for something that is good, for some pleasure which stirs up new cravings, if not the disparity, between the goods of this world, and the capacity of our heart, which is so great and almost infinite in its desires that nothing satisfies it, if not something infinite?<sup>50</sup>

### 121: Respond to love with love

I call to mind how the God-Man, from the first moment of His life right up until his death, was so dedicated to the cause of the salvation of mankind, following the mandate from His Father and the inclination of His own love, that He gave everything of Himself for us. For us He became incarnate. He did not labor, He did not preach, He did not suffer – if not for us. Finally He did not live and He did not die except for us,

<sup>48</sup> Correspondence, pp. 320-322. Letter to Fr. Bragato – August 27, 1840.

<sup>49</sup> o.c. p. 323. Letter to Fr. Bragato. September 26, 1840.

<sup>50</sup> Early Sermons, n. 12. The Love of God to be imitated in the Life of St. Aloysius. **MssB 658-661. PVC pp. 170-172.**

desiring that not one drop of His blood should remain in His veins because He wanted it to be shed completely for us. This was ***so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for Him, who for their sake died and was raised*** [2 Co 5:15].

I will also call to mind all those special graces that I received from God during my life. I will recall the hundreds of time that I received special providential care that kept me far away from many dangers, that saved me from many sins and the occasion of sin, and did not let me lie in the state of sin, and thus receive eternal damnation, but kept me close to Him as the object of His mercy.

With great affection, I will call to mind how much my god and savior has done for me, how much He suffered for me, and how many gifts He has showered on me. He has granted me grace, pardon, adoption, heredity, faith, hope and His love. ***He did not spare His own Son, but handed Him over for us, how will He not give everything else along with Him?*** [Rm 8:32].

Meditating on these things, I ask myself what must I do? There is no doubt that I am obligated to offer up my very being, all that I possess with the greatest affection.

*Take, O Lord, receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will. All that I have and possess, You have given to me. To You, O Lord, I return it. All is Yours, dispose of it wholly according to Your will. Give me Your love and Your grace. For this is sufficient for me.*<sup>51</sup>

## **122: Love God in His creatures**

Not satisfied that He gave Himself to us with so many benefits, God continues to give us of Himself through all His creatures, to whom He never ceases to grant them life, their very being and all the gifts they possess.

God is in His creatures above all through His essence, which is closer to their being than our soul is to our body. He is there through His power, and He gives them not only the power to operate, but He Himself operates in them, as the principal cause. God is also present in His creatures through His goodness and providence, governing them and directing them to the service of people, guiding all their activities for our welfare. He gives light to the sun, so that it may brighten us. He gives heat to fire, so that it may warm us; He gives taste to our food, so that it will nourish us.

So then, if God makes Himself known to us in all His creatures, we must look for Him in them. We must use these creatures properly for the glory of God and His service. Since God doesn't make use of His creatures except for our welfare, so, too, on our part, we must use them for His benefit. Whenever we experience the good things that happen to us through these creatures, such as the beauty of light, the comfort of heat, the taste of food, we should attribute all these benefits to God and thank Him who brings about so much good for us through them.

Hence, we are called upon to be grateful for all the good things we receive, and to give thanks to God from ourselves first, and then for so many people who are ungrateful and never give a thought to say thanks. It is only right that we be careful never to abuse these creatures, or to become excessively attached to them, or even to use them as a means of committing sin. That would be the epitome of ingratitude: to

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<sup>51</sup> Retreat Meditations **MsB 2654-2658**. This was taken from the theme: 'Contemplation as a Help to Spiritual Love', one that was developed from a text of St. Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*. nn. 230-234.

turn against God the good things He has given us. Finally let us not forget to offer our sacrifice to God, by reducing at times the use of things out of love for Him. **We love God, because He first loved us.** [1 Jn 4:19].<sup>52</sup>

### **123: Give yourself to God without reservation**

God has loved me so much that I cannot hold back on Him from now on. The very thought of this makes me tremble. Why should I not be all for God after the mercy He has shown me? How can I hold back anything for myself, since I have received everything from Him? My heart will never agree to such a choice.

When I consider how limited I am, and how much I could do for the glory of God by using everything of myself for His service, I blush at the thought of holding back anything. There is no security for me to follow a compromised way. I know very well that I would easily fall into terrible excesses.

Only those who give themselves entirely to God can hope to die peacefully. Only these will enjoy a happy and peaceful life. If you want to do much for God, you must belong completely to Him. If you hold back even a little from Him, you will be less able to do great things also for your neighbor.

This is the condition on which depends a living faith and a strong hope. If we ask God for these gifts with confidence, we will obtain them without fail.

If it were possible to experience disappointment and sorrow in Paradise [this is a thought of St. Teresa], it would be that we have not done everything we could have for God. To have done everything, this will be the greatest consolation of the Blessed in Heaven. The one who has acted toward God in this way will not be judged, but will judge the others. The great commandment to love God with all our heart cannot be perfectly fulfilled except in heaven<sup>53</sup>

Why has God given this commandment without any limit? Because in this life we must force ourselves to rise as high as possible toward perfection.<sup>54</sup>

### **124: Let us love God**

Our soul is an adopted child of God, for it bears the imprint of His likeness and His clear image. Through grace, it was created superior to its nature, like God, and immortal. The angels consider it an honor to be of service to it. Christ is its brother, and with Christ it shares a heredity and a kingdom. Our soul adorned with so many great qualities, and of such high origins, to whom shall we espouse her? To whom, if not to the Divine Love?

God asks us to love Him, and He promises us eternal life, and gives Himself as a reward to those who love Him. He has preceded us with His love. Before we ever existed, He loved us. We were not even able to thank about Him, and already He had a tender love for us. He showered on us an abundance of good things both of nature

<sup>52</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2659-2662**. This is another aspect of Contemplation used to inspire Spiritual Love. [cf. Previous Note]

<sup>53</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*. II-II, q. 184, a. 2 ad 2m.

<sup>54</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2580**. This was taken from a Retreat given by St. Claude de la Colombiere. [cf. **BERTONI**, 3, p. 159].

and of grace, and we were not able to recognize this favor, and much less, the hand that bestowed these gifts.

Then finally we came to know Him, and repaid His goodness with the barest ingratitude. But He did not cease to love us, ingrates and enemies that we are, rather He seemed to increase His love for us. Let us look at the Cross. It speaks very clearly to us of how the God-Man has saved us with the price of His precious blood. So, then, to whom shall we give our heart, if not to God? Let us love God, let us love God.<sup>55</sup>

### **125: St. Aloysius – a lover of God**

It is said that when St. Aloysius became aware of God when he reached the age of reason, he had already begun to love Him. We see him as a young lad searching for God in solitude in the hidden places of his own home. Just as God is ready to manifest Himself to whoever seeks Him in simplicity of heart, so Aloysius was careful not to let any thought or affection distract his mind or occupy his heart. To this end he guarded all his senses with rigorous care.

From his early youth, his spirit was raised to a very high contemplation of divine beauty, and as his knowledge increased, so did his love. His first Communion lit in his heart a flame of love for God, which blazed and burned to the point that it reflected in his eyes and on his face. With what great progress did this fire burn inside of Aloysius! The world tried to hold on to him in his life at Court, but his strong love opened up the way for him to leave there and unite himself more closely to God in religious life.

Here his love increased to such a point that in the few years here on earth, it is difficult to say whether Aloysius loved or rather God loved in Aloysius.

In his mind there was no one else but God. In his will and in his affections there was no one but God. Even all his exterior occupations not only were done for God, but in them there was a certain something of the divine that uplifted the hearts of those who observed them to think of sacred things with a much greater effect than any other means that we use to stir up our fervor. Look to what great heights the love of his God brought Aloysius.<sup>56</sup>

## **ABANDONMENT IN GOD**

### **126: How great is your goodness, O Lord!**

The Holy Spirit attracts some souls to a higher perfection, such as total abandonment in God.<sup>57</sup>

Very few understand what God would do with them if He were not hindered in His plans by them.<sup>58</sup> This is true not only for individuals, but also for communities. On

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<sup>55</sup> Early Sermons, n. 12. The Love of God to be imitated after the example of St. Aloysius. **MssB 669-671. PVC pp. 173, ff.**

<sup>56</sup> Early Sermons, n. 12. **MssB 662-666. PVC pp. 172, f.**

<sup>57</sup> **Spiritual Journal.** October 12, 1863.

<sup>58</sup> This maxim appears frequently in St. Gaspar's writings. Fr. Joseph Stofella says: 'This is the cornerstone of St. Bertoni's spiritual teaching. It is based on St. Ignatius [cf. BARTOLI, *Life of St. Ignatius*,

our part, we need great diligence in carrying out what is needed so that we do not place any hindrance to what God can and wants to do on His part: ***I feared, O Lord, Your work***, says the Prophet [Hab 3:2]. If we walk with diligence, and encourage others to walk together in a common bond, we will see works so magnificent from the hands of the Omnipotent God that we will not only experience bewilderment, but overpowered by confusion and amazement, we will be overwhelmed. ***How great is the goodness, O Lord, which you have in store for those who fear You, and which, toward those who take refuge in You, You show in the sight of men*** [Ps 31:10].

May the love of Jesus our Lord be the incentive that constantly encourages us and urges us on. ***The love of Christ impels me***, [2 Co 5:4], since He runs with great strides to meet us. ***Behold, I am coming soon***. [Rv 22:12]. ***Come, Lord Jesus*** [v. 20]. ***The Spirit and the Bride say: 'Come', and let him who hears, say, 'Come'*** [v. 17].<sup>59</sup>

Let us remember those two sayings of our Lord: the first, ***Without Me, you can do nothing*** [Jn 15:5], and the second one, ***I can do all things in Him who strengthens me*** [Ph 4:13]. Let us learn to await the outpouring of the Spirit and love according to the command of Christ [cf. Lk 24:49], then, clothed with virtue from above, we will find the impossible an easy to do.<sup>60</sup>

### **127: Blessed is he who loses himself in this abyss**

The Lord wants us to remember Him, and that all our thoughts and affections be rooted in Him. If, because of this, we forget other things, He will remind us of them, or in His Providence, He will bring about results better than we could have accomplished with all our thinking and remembering. In a word, we are always diligent when we love God.<sup>61</sup> Blessed is he who can forget all other things and never forget God.<sup>62</sup>

Blessed is he who loses himself in this abyss, who hurls himself into this ocean, desiring to be shipwrecked. A little child is never more secure than when he sleeps in his mother's arms, having abandoned all worries about himself. The child does not see, he does not hear, he does not speak, but his mother sees for him, hears and speaks for him, and whenever she wants to, she can wake him up, since she is so near to him.

We must not be satisfied to follow only the 'perfumes' of the Lord [cf. Sgs 1:3; 4:10], but we must ask with courage and confidence: ***take me with You*** [Sgs 1:4]. Then He will take us by the hand, and we shall feel our spirit close to God, and

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Book 4, c. 37]: 'Very few understand what God would do with them if they placed themselves entirely in His hands, and let His grace work in them.'

St. Gaspar tended to synthesize the doctrine of his great teacher, but he gives to his thoughts a personal touch, calling everyone to complete correspondence with an impulse of love, so that he might conclude with an uplifting thought.

<sup>59</sup> **Correspondence**, pp. 61, ff. Letter to Naudet not dated.

<sup>60</sup> o.c., p. 96. Letter to Naudet. August 31, 1813.

<sup>61</sup> **Correspondence**, p. 96. Letter to Naudet, August 31, 1813.

<sup>62</sup> o.c., p. 31. Letter to Naudet, December 1, 1812.

become one with Him. Then, not only will we walk and run, but jump with giant steps.  
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A man of prayer undertakes those plans that the Lord assigns through His Providence. He does not anticipate or precede. Everything is in order, everything is tranquil. He is not hasty; he is not hurried. He waits for the proper time and circumstance. Thus he follows the Lord. But to receive the inspirations that assure, confirm and enlighten his conscience concerning God's plans, much prayer is needed.<sup>64</sup>

### **128: Our life is in God**

Who is able to extol worthily, I don't say all, but even one divine benefit?

The basis of all is certainly our being, which was not given to us only once at our creation, but is renewed constantly with God's supporting activity. God keeps His creatures in existence, affirms St. Thomas, by continually giving them that life which would fall into nothingness if He were to withhold His action which is continuous and necessary.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, that omnipotence which God used to create us out of nothing, He continually uses to preserve us right up to this moment so that we can open our eyes and recognize the gift that perhaps formerly was not known and not sufficiently appreciated.

Together with our own existence, God gives us life. Have we ever noticed how many and hidden are the sources on which the life of our body depends? There isn't a machine that contains such a complex harmony of gears that are so subtle and delicate. Have you noticed how numberless are those accidents that occur in the course of life and are apt to bring on death? From the little that we know, let us imagine the careful and vigilant assistance that is required on the part of the Supreme Creator to maintain all temporal life. And if we recognize that this life of ours, which we have preserved until now, is His gift, then let us be mindful of our obligation to take good care of it.

O Great and Excellent Benefactor! What great care Your Goodness has for us! Now we understand the meaning of those words of the Apostle: ***In Him we live and move and have our being.*** [Ac 17:28]. We are in God as in the one who preserves us in life, giving it to us every single moment, and not only are we in Him, but we live in Him from the moment that He preserves in us that life which He has given us in our being.<sup>66</sup>

### **129: The gifts of God**

The principal gifts of God are those that pertain to the spirit and lead us to Heaven.

The first of these great gifts is faith, which God lavishly bestows on us even now. Isn't it a fact that without this free gift of mercy we would have been shipwrecked

<sup>63</sup> o.c., Letter to Naudet. August 31, 1813.

<sup>64</sup> St. Gregory the Great, *Meditation on Primum Regum*, n. 32 – MssB 6192.

<sup>65</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*. I, q. 9, a. 2.

<sup>66</sup> Early Sermons, n. 21. Divine Gifts. MssB 843-851. PVC pp. 129-132.

in the midst of the stormy waves of a raging sea, in the midst of violent winds, in the midst of so much wickedness? If we look at the customs of our times and those who have lost their faith, and recognize that we are more deserving to be deprived of such a grace, we shall appreciate as a great benefit of God the fact that we have been preserved in the faith.

Another gift, also very important, is preaching the word of God. This is the usual and most effective way to bring about the conversion of sinners, and the sanctification of the just. It seems that God has doubled His gift of the Spirit to those who preach the Gospel. Never before have they spoken with greater fervor and freedom.

Let us be on our guard not to misuse such singular gifts. Let us be very careful of them, because if we do not change our ways soon, we will be very disappointed when we find ourselves abandoned, especially after the extended and patient concern that has been shown us. However, if we are resolved to dedicate ourselves completely to God and to do what we can to convert others, then we can expect to receive even greater gifts. If God is kind to those who are His enemies, how much more will He regard those who are reconciled to Him and are His friends?

Let us lift up our hearts and raise our voices and than this loving, infinite and unexcelled Goodness! <sup>67</sup>

### **130: God is good to us, even though we are unworthy**

Let us consider for a moment to whom God grants His greatest gifts, and so frequently. Is it to His obedient sons? To friends who are concerned with His honor? To His subjects who observe His laws?

If this were so, it would be a very big surprise that a Sovereign so powerful and exalted would lower Himself to be concerned about such poor lowly people. But that he would shower gifts and favors on those ingrates who have abandoned Him, and even on those who rebel against Him – this is beyond all amazement!

Is it not true that these very people are ourselves? Can we say that we really honor our Heavenly Father as we should? If we abuse Him publicly in every corner of the town, in every street, in every nook and cranny? ***Holy and awesome is His name*** [Ps 111:9]. Where is our obedience to His laws? What about us, who are dedicated Christians, we cannot easily say that we are not to be numbered among the rebels. Not only those who sin do wrong, but also those who omit their duty of fraternal correction. They also sin whose duty it is, and have the opportunity to halt some wrong doing, but do nothing to stop it.

In all humility, let us admit that we are sinners, and in our confusion we know that God continues to bestow His gifts on us nonetheless. Even though we are unworthy and deserving of punishment, God showers even greater graces upon us. <sup>68</sup>

### **131: For those who love God all things work out well**

God provides all the needed talents according to the scope of one's vocation. We should never have any doubts about this, not even when we are faced with difficult

<sup>67</sup> Early Sermons. N. 21. Divine Gifts. MssB 866-870. PVC pp. 1345-136.

<sup>68</sup> o.c., MssB 856-864. PVC p. 133.

tasks. God does not hesitate to help us in small tasks or in big undertakings. These latter, under a certain aspect, are more worthy of His attention, even if it is true that for God, who is infinite, everything is small and of little account. On the other hand, every small thing of little account is very great when it is done for Him.<sup>69</sup>

Blessed are they who trust in Divine Providence. They have nothing to fear of anything upsetting their plans or of anyone putting obstacles in their way. Providence conducts everything to its proper end, sweetly, and at the same time, powerfully. It takes care of all things, both those that are pleasant and those which are unpleasant, and the will of men, whether they are good or bad, equally serve it. **All the Lord wills He does in Heaven, on earth, and in the seas in all the deeps.** [Ps 135"6]. **There is none that can resist Your power, o Lord** [Est 4:4]. **We know that all things work for good for those who love God** [Rm 8:28]<sup>70</sup>. We should not be surprised that He continues to work for our benefit when we see Him ascend the cross out of love for us.<sup>71</sup>

O how good is the Lord, how He exceeds all our praise! Therefore, we should never cease praising Him as much as we can, because He is happy to be loved, admired, and praised by us miserable little wretches. We must continue to hope that our misery will one day be changed into glory, and we will be like Him. May He be thanked, blessed, and loved forever.<sup>72</sup>

### **132: Walk on the waves**

Whoever finds himself in the midst of the waves, let him remember that the Lord is with him, even though He is asleep on the boat. Let him remember the *Come* of Jesus to Peter [Mt 14:29], and how he was able to walk on the water. O most loving and hidden Providence of God! Who should fear, abiding in the hands of the Lord, and under His protection? [cf. Ps 90:1].

We find ourselves constantly in a sea of activity, of troubles, and yet we carry on. Even though at times we find ourselves in darkness, we trust that the good Lord will lead us to light.<sup>73</sup> You too must place your trust in God. It is He, with the bread cooked on the hearth, who enabled Elijah, who was afraid and worn out, to undertake a long journey. [cf. 1 K 19:7-8]<sup>74</sup>

Let us be sure to entrust our prudence to the loving Providence of God always and in every event. Thus it will redound to His glory. We must be sure that all our desires and interests are dedicated to Him. If we have the patience to wait, we will see all our desires not only fulfilled, but even exceeded.<sup>75</sup>

He who trusts in the Lord will never be confounded, or embarrassed. But the Lord, our God sometimes brings about insults different from what we had planned, so

<sup>69</sup> **Correspondence**, p. 46 – Letter to Naudet. January 9, 1813.

<sup>70</sup> o.c., p. 53. Letter to Naudet. January 15, 1813

<sup>71</sup> o.c. p. 85 – Letter to Naudet. April 15, 1813.

<sup>72</sup> o.c. p. 54 – Letter to Naudet. January 15, 1813.

<sup>73</sup> **Correspondence**, p.326. Letter to Fr. Bragato. Nov. 1842.

<sup>74</sup> o.c., p. 327. Letter to Fr. Bragato. April 11, 1848

<sup>75</sup> o.c., p. 156. Letter to Naudet. Dec. 1822.

that we understand that: ***Unless the Lord built the house, they labor in vain who build it.*** [Ps 127:1].<sup>76</sup>

### **133: The Lord makes the stars shine at night**

The works of the Lord have their trials, and thus God shows that it is He who guides and brings His works to fulfillment, holding back the hand of man through the difficulties He permits. Thus man humbly yields to the hand of Divine Providence, and sees that both perseverance and the outcome depend entirely upon it.

When it is night for us, it is day for Him, who knows very well what He must do. We must lift up our hands to Heaven when we do not know where to put them, nor what is better to ask of God. ***By night lift up your hands toward the sanctuary*** [Ps 134:1-12]. This is a lesson that God teaches everyone who frequents His school. ***And the night will shine as the day*** [Ps 139:12]. Here is another lesson our Father showed us from the beginning, drawing light from darkness, and, in His goodness, He is ready to explain this to us even today, transforming the darkness of our works into the adorable splendor of His glory. Meanwhile, ***Trust in the Lord and do good.*** [cf. Ps 37:3].

Let us never lose heart! IN Paradise every day will be bright. There we shall never lose sight of God. But, while we are on earth, night and day alternate. We continue on our journey. Even at night the Lord makes some stars shine. And if it happens that on a stormy night we pause for a while, walking by the sea, and turn our eyes to look at the waves, this does not mean that we have lost our way, but that we have hesitated a little. Then the Lord will chide us: ***O you of little faith, why did you doubt?*** [Mt 14:31]. At the same time He will sustain us with His right hand and then we will find ourselves safely in the hand of God. Blessed be the Lord!<sup>77</sup>

### **134: The Church – a Model of Abandonment to God**

This is how you should proceed: when the way is clear take a step forward, then wait to take a second step until little by little the way becomes clearer. If we are in doubt about certain aspects of our work, the Lord, with His gifts of hope, charity and consolation, will sustain us as we wait for the proper moment to begin our task. When all is clear, He will strengthen us to bring it to a conclusion.

This seems to be the way His Spouse, the Church, operates. Being assured of the help of the Holy Spirit, she doesn't stop seeking light in order to act. When she sees the way clearly, she doesn't stop working, studying, or consulting, so that she might proceed further operating in the open light. When she is impeded in her work, she awaits the proper time, trusting in God. In both of these actions, her abandonment in God is always consistent. This is truly a perfect model for our own abandonment in the Lord.

What a beautiful virtue is this act of abandoning oneself in the arms of Divine Providence, when we ourselves cannot function. But it is a greater and more perfect virtue when, according to the order of Providence, we can and do function with our

<sup>76</sup> o.c. p. 253. Letter to Naudet. March 21, 1829.

<sup>77</sup> o.c., p. 31. Letter to Naudet. December 1, 1812.

hands, and yet do not cease to abandon ourselves completely into His hands. This seems to be like the one who said: **Yet I live, no longer I** [and consequently, operate], **but Christ lives in me** [and, as a consequence works in me] [Ga 2:20]. And again: **Whoever preaches, let it be with the very words of God** [1 P 4:11].<sup>78</sup>

## FRATERNAL CHARITY

### **135: The deep roots of Christian charity**

Charity is above all a perfect friendship between us and God. However, in the sight of God, it extends to our neighbor, since he comes from God and belongs to Him. He was created by God in His own image, He was made His son and was redeemed with His Blood, and capable like us of obtaining eternal happiness.

**Now you are Christ's Body and individually parts of it**, St. Paul teaches us [1 Co 12:27]. Since we are all members, we must be concerned one for the other, for our temporal welfare, and more so, for our eternal salvation.

We note in our own body, how one member helps, supports, sustains, guides, defends, and nourishes the other, and from this mutual concern comes the health of the body as a whole and of each individual member. But let us suppose that each member looked out only for what was proper to itself. What would happen if the foot just stood still refusing to carry the other members, and what if the hand did not carry food to the mouth, and if the mouth, while enjoying the pleasant taste, did not send the food to the stomach, or the stomach kept everything for itself, thus depriving the other members of needed nourishment? What would happen? The body would die and so would all the members.

The same would happen to us if each one looked out only for what was his, even though we are one body in Christ and His members. What an amazing teaching! Therefore, we must look after each other [1 Co 12:25].<sup>79</sup>

### **136: Christian charity is kind**

**This is My commandment: love one another as I have loved you** [Jn 15:12]. The charity of Christ contains different qualities that should serve as a model for us: it is kind, helpful and all embracing. If one of these qualities is lacking, it is not Christian charity. Above all, the charity of Christ is kind in everything He does. Even in His external manner, He follows a consistent standard and moderation. What did He not have to endure from a rude and unbelieving crowd? With what graciousness did He not deal with so many hostile spirits and adapt their ways so as to motivate them and win them over, indeed, to: **become all things to all?** [1 Co 9:22]. How much rejection He suffered without complaining, how much resistance and contradiction from His apostles, poor fishermen, without any education or refinement. What did it cost Him to train them! They had frequent disputes and quarrels among themselves.

<sup>78</sup> **Correspondence**, p. 98. MssB 9262-9265. Letter to Mother Naudet. October 26, 1813.

<sup>79</sup> Early Sermons, n. 6. Charity toward our neighbor following the example of St. Aloysius. **MssB 525-544. PVC 175-181.**

He did His utmost to make peace among them by living with them and sharing their company in spite of a certain distaste that they must have caused from time to time.

Thus Jesus was able to say in all truth: ***Learn from Me, for I am meek and humble of heart*** [Mt 11:29]. Let us learn how we too should be like Him.

What about me, have I learned to put up with the weakness of others? Others must also put up with mine. It would be an injustice to demand understanding and pardon from others, and not extend it to others myself. Any defects of others should serve to purify and strengthen my charity, not to weaken it. I must live with those people who have their own ideas, just as I have mine, with those who have their own hang-ups, prejudices and faults. It is not up to me to change those people. Besides, these things may never be solved. To maintain peace and charity, there is nothing to do except adapt myself to them as far as possible, and to win them over by my kindness.

***Blessed are the meek, they shall possess the earth*** [Mt 5:4]. That is, they will know how to reconcile hearts. A little more control over myself can prevent many troubles, and it is worthwhile to sacrifice oneself in order to stop them.<sup>80</sup>

### **137: Christian charity is helpful**

Christ used His Divine Power to shower His grace on those whose defects He had to endure with great kindness. ***He went about doing good*** [Ac 10:38], driving out demons, comforting the afflicted, healing the sick, raising the dead, announcing the kingdom of God, and wearing Himself out for the salvation of souls.

I am not able, as Jesus was, to perform miracles for my neighbor. However, there are occasions every day when I can help others. This is what Christian charity does. But do I possess the fervor and commitment needed for this? Or am I rather one of those who is indifferent, caught up only in their own affairs, incapable of making a sacrifice to please someone else?

If, because of my office, I have an obligation to help my neighbor, and to provide for his needs, how do I carry out this obligation? Do it do it willingly, with love and punctuality?

Jesus Christ clearly warned us that we will be treated by His Father in the same way that we have treated our brothers. Based on this, what can I hope from God, and with what assurance can I pray that He will shower on me an abundance of His grace?<sup>81</sup>

### **138: Christian charity is universal**

The charity of Christ is wonderful in its extension. As He was sent by His Father to all people, and because of His Father He loved them all, He gave Himself equally to them all, loving them without any distinction or exception. Both Jews and pagans received from Him the same teaching and the same healing of body and soul. He never showed any disdain for the poor, the miserable, neither did He show any preference for the rich and powerful.

<sup>80</sup> Mission at S. Fermo Major. **MssB 4217-4222.**

<sup>81</sup> Mission at S. Fermo Major. **MssB 4217-4222.**

Even those who were openly against Him and were unkind to Him found Him ready to do anything for them that they expected. It was up to them to obtain all the graces of which He was the dispenser, provided they asked the Divine Lord. On His part, not only was He ready to do this, but He called them, invited them, and even looked for them.

What about me? If I do not strive to reach this goal in my charity toward my neighbor, then my charity is imperfect, or even false, because it is not authentic Christian charity. Christian charity motivates us to love our neighbor out of love for God and because of Him. This motive is not limited. To confine it to certain people only, without extending it to others, destroys it and absolutely annihilates it.

For this reason, the Son of God and then the Apostles, when recommending to us the practice of charity as one of our more essential tasks, used a very general phrase: Love your brothers, love your neighbor.<sup>82</sup>

### **139: Fraternal Charity – the best investment**

O Lord! Today everyone looks not only for his own interests, his own pleasure, his own profit. ***They seek their own interests, and not those of Jesus Christ*** [Ph 2:21]. Even ourselves we seek for nothing more than what we need. Yet, when we think of it, we realize that we will never get what we need unless we take to heart the needs of our neighbor.

We are sure that all our benefits are in the hands of God and depend on Him. Have we ever reflected on the fact that God has linked our benefits to the care that we should care for our neighbor? This is how it happens, as we read in sacred Scripture. We find written in the Old Testament: ***He who gives to the poor suffers no want*** [Pr 28:27]. On the contrary, he who ignores the requests of a needy neighbor will experience want. In regard to spiritual benefits which are more desirable, speaking through the Prophet Isaiah, God Himself says that the soul of the one who is generous to his neighbor shall be like a watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail [cf. Is 58:11]. Again in the Book of Proverbs, we read: ***He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor will himself also call and not be heard*** [Pr 21:13].

In the New Testament, the Gospel tells us: ***The measure with which you measure will be measured out to you*** [Mt 7:2]. In his letter, St. James says: ***Pray for one another that you be healed*** [as 5:16]. Then, having pointed out the efficacy of such a prayer, he concludes: ***Whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his ways will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins*** [Jas 5:20].

What further advice do we need that is clearer, more solid, and more explicit? Let us impress this clearly on our mind, that if we want to obtain our own benefit, we must also help our neighbor find his, and, as charity teaches us not to seek only our own interests, this is really the true, or rather, the only way to obtain it.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Mission at S. Fermo Major **MssB 1223-1225**.

<sup>83</sup> Early Sermons, n. 6. Charity toward our neighbor. **MssB 535-542. PVC, pp. 178-181.**

**140: Judge not and you shall not be judged**

***Why then do you judge your brother? Or, you, why do you look down on your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God ... So then let us no longer judge one another*** [Rm 14:10-13].

Let us be on our guard not to suspect others, for this is poison to friendship. In fact, it is a hidden and very serious disease, which is capable of withdrawing us from God and wounding fraternal charity.

This is a form of pride. Maybe this is why so many people who are striving after holiness are so tempted. From humility flows simplicity which helps us to look at our own faults and see where we fail. ***Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own eye?*** [Mt 7:3]. If you happen to notice something that you find displeasing in someone else, look carefully to see if there is anything like it in your own life, if so, root it out. On the other hand, if you notice some quality that pleases you in others, check to see if you also have that quality if so, take care of it, and, if by chance you do not possess it, try to acquire it.

If you wish to cultivate genuine charity toward your neighbors, weep for the faults they commit, and rejoice at the graces they receive, and for the progress they make. It is a beautiful thing to compete in having regard for one another, and as far as possible, to speak well of everyone, with deep humility to regard others more important than yourself, without seeking your own interests, but those of others [Ph 2:2-3]<sup>84</sup>.

**141: Charity and reconciliation**

Through charity God binds us together with our neighbor and with Himself, so that our best interest and that of our neighbor is the glory of God, and His Divine Majesty. ***That they may all be one*** [Jn 17:21]. Charity acts in such a way that united, or rather, made as one with the great number of our brothers, we become one with God. ***As you, Father, are in me and I in You, that they may be in us as one*** [Jn 20:21].<sup>85</sup>

If through human weakness any quarrel or misunderstanding should chance to spring up among you, let every care be taken by those involved to come to a reconciliation, so that by mutual satisfaction, they may return to the good graces of one another. St. Paul says: ***Do not let the sun set on your anger*** [Ep 4:26].<sup>86</sup>

Let us love each other with genuine charity. Let us be careful never to give the slightest offense either by unkind words, or much less by our actions. If, by the slightest chance, you are offended by another, try to bear it peacefully out of your love for Jesus. If it should happen through human weakness that you offend somebody, try to make amends as soon as possible, ask forgiveness, and show great kindness so that all bitterness and resentment will be avoided.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>84</sup> cf. Rodriguez, **MssB 8853-8956**.

<sup>85</sup> **Correspondence**, p. 74. Letter to Naudet. March 6, 1813

<sup>86</sup> **Constitutions** of our Founder, n. 191.

<sup>87</sup> Taken from a pamphlet entitled: 'Constitutions and Rules for the Youth Congregation,' which was adopted by St. Gaspar for the Marian Oratory. [cf. **BERTONI**, 2, pp. 319-325].

**142: A Martyr of charity – St. Aloysius Gonzaga**

**Charity does not seek its own interests** [1 Co 13:5]. Among the characteristic notes of charity mentioned by St. Paul in his Hymn of Charity in his 1 Corinthians, this statement is most accurate and specific.

St. Aloysius has given us a truly outstanding example of this virtue. He did his at the time of the terrible plague that broke out in Rome. Forgetful of looking after his own life, he endangered it by caring and comforting those who were stricken by the disease. It was in the public hospitals where this sickness was rampant that he contracted the plague, and in a short time died. Truly, charity does not seek its own interests.

But even before this happened, this same kind of charity moved him to give up his desire of entering a monastery of contemplatives, so he entered the Company of Jesus, where through the constant practice of discipline, new battles prepared him to enter his chosen field, and to carry the weight of the hardest and most difficult missionary tasks for the good of his neighbor and the glory of God.

Dear Saint, set our hearts on fire with just a spark of your burning charity, so that a genuine flame will rise up in our hearts, and extend it in favor of our neighbor, and deserve to rise up even to Heaven, where in uniting itself to God, who is the immense Fire of charity, it may find blessed peace for all time.<sup>88</sup>

**143: The apostolic charity of St. Zeno**

How is it possible that this one man in so short a time could destroy and get rid of so much wickedness that had long dominated the world? In a word, it was his charity. This charity became apparent as soon as he arrived in Verona, and was evident in his humility and cheerfulness. Thus he was able to rout idolatry. It was his charity, made visible in his modesty and sanctity, that is, with all the heroic virtue and heavenly gifts, especially his wisdom, which constantly flowed from his mouth, that was able to wipe out all heresy.

This charity, which St. Zeno was able to transfer from his heart into the hearts of the faithful, put an end to whatever was left of former wickedness, and completely renewed and restored society. This great Father and Doctor truly brought about the very thing that he had written in beautiful sentence: **Caritas transit in populum = 'Charity flows into the People.'**

He loved his people and his people loved him. The Veronese saw in their Bishop so many virtues, such wisdom, and so much charity that they all placed themselves under his care and under his direction. This wise man gave the law to his flock, rather, he gave them that which constitutes the end or scope of every wise legislation, that is, charity, which should hold together all society in a strong, but sweet bond.<sup>89</sup> Mutual love based on courteous conversation binds them together by a mutual knot, and all society to its leader.

We can rightly say thinking of Isaiah [6:6, ff.], that St. Zeno was the angel, full of sweet charity, who was enlightened, active and effective, who took the burning coal of

<sup>88</sup> Early Sermons, n. 6. Charity toward our neighbor. **MssB 529-546. PVC pp. 176-183.**

<sup>89</sup> St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, q. 99, a. 2.

the divine word and touched the lips of those people whom idolatry and the Arian heresy had contaminated and divided. Thanks to that touch of the living fire of charity, they were renewed and reunited in confessing the name of Christ. The things with which our Doctor held the lighted coal to their lips was the Sacred Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, which he used to explain the true faith to his people. Thus, he was able to assure that the Church of Verona, under the inspiration of his teaching, was glorious and without any stain of vice, error, or any of its former defects.<sup>90</sup>

## THE SPIRIT OF LOVE

### **144: The guest in our soul**

***The love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us*** [Rm 5:5].

The Holy Spirit has been given to us with all the richness of His gifts, and, not only that, but also the very presence of Himself, and hence, the presence of the Holy Trinity. It is this friendship, established by the grace between God and man, that requires the presence of a friend, the Holy Spirit, in the soul of the just with the intent to unite Himself to it in a very intimate way, and to live there as in a temple, where He may receive the homage of love, worship and adoration.

The Holy Spirit, together with the Father and the Son, come to reside in the soul of the just as in His own temple, and remains there in profound humility. The three Divine Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, come to us and we approach them. They come to us in the splendor of light, while we approach them, opening the eyes of our spirit, so that we may be enlightened from within. They come with the power of divine help, and we approach them, opening our ears in obedience. They come with the richness of their gifts, and we approach them with humility that prepares us to receive them.

In the divine plan, this indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our hearts is a reality that is not fleeing and temporary. It is permanent and everlasting.<sup>91</sup>

### **145: How to welcome the Holy Spirit and His inspirations**

The Spirit of the Lord which came to Samson [cf. Jgs 14:6] likewise comes to the just man, so that he may accomplish spiritual and heroic deeds. Thus the Holy Spirit directs and governs our life just as a pilot directs his ship, or as a coachman drives his coach. Not only our body, but also our soul is subjected to the reins of the Spirit. The Lord desires that all the powers of our soul be subjected to the Spirit. Baptism and the sacraments are not enough. If you do not allow yourself to be guided by the Spirit, you will lose your adoption.<sup>92</sup>

Divine inspirations are like the heralds who announce the arrival of important people of this world. The heralds of Divine Majesty expect to be listened to and accepted, and we must follow what they tell us. When we have prepared everything

<sup>90</sup> Sermon in honor of St. Zeno. **MssB 2110-2121.**

<sup>91</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3332-3396.**

<sup>92</sup> Retreat Meditations, **MssB 3232.**

according to their instructions, the Lord of Heaven and earth will come to visit us. Therefore, let us prepare a worthy place for such a guest!

***It is man's task to make his heart ready,*** say the Scriptures [cf. Pr 16:1]. Therefore, let us strive not only to be diligent in preparing our soul for the visits of the Divine Majesty, but let us the utmost and the most intense diligence, so that we will always be prepared.

***Let nothing prevent you from paying always,*** says the Holy Spirit [Si 18:22]. Guarding silence, being careful not to prolong your conversation unduly, avoiding all frivolity – this is how to have your ear ready to hear the sweet messages of our Creator.<sup>93</sup>

#### **146: The wind of Pentecost**

***Arise, north wind! Come, south wind! Blow upon my garden, so that its perfumes may spread abroad*** [Sgs 4:16].

If the north wind, that cold wind which causes everything to become numb and freeze, signifies the spirit of evil that invades the wicked and blocks out the seeds of goodness, then the south wind, which is a warm wind, is like the Holy Spirit, who, coming into the souls of the elect, frees them from all indifference, and makes them fervent in carrying out with enthusiasm everything that is good and perfect.

Let the wind fade away, and let the south wind come and blow through the garden of the Spouse and spread its perfume. Let the evil spirit depart from the Church, and from every soul; then let the Holy Spirit come in. When the Holy Spirit comes, He will stir up the fire and charity in our heart, and free it from the apathy of indifference.

Then the aroma will rise and spread, because with the coming of the Holy Spirit, the soul which was once cold and indifferent will be truly moved to do good works. Then soon the report of the good being done will reach your neighbors, and upon hearing this, they will likewise be moved to do good works. **Thus, through the work of the Holy Spirit, the aroma of virtue will spread abroad, a holy garden will blossom, and after the flowers have faded, much fruit, tasty and substantial, will flourish.**<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> **Correspondence**, p. 68. Letter to Mother Naudet. Feb. 28, 1813.

<sup>94</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3013-3014**. This is an excerpt taken from St. Gregory the Great's work, on the *Song of Songs*, c. 4, 21. PL 79:515 ff.