

St. GASPAR BERTONI



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

SOME RUDIMENTS
of his

SPIRITUAL WRITINGS

ORDINARY TIME

Part IV A [## 147 - 224]: GENERAL THEMES

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TABLE of CONTENTS

Author's Dedication

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

Acknowledgments for English Translation

Preparation for Electronic Library

+

INTRODUCTION

FOREWORD: The Sources

+

PART I

ADVENT and CHRISTMAS

Waiting for Christ

The Christian Ideal

Life of Grace

Temples of God

God with us

Christian Newness

The Following of Christ

Spousal Love

Christian Joy

+

PART II

LENT

Penance

Penance & Charity

Penance & Prayer

Sin

Tepidity

Temptation

Conversion

Sacramental Penance

In the School of Christ Crucified

+

PART III

EASTER

Easter of the Lord

Our Easter

The Eucharist – The Eternal Easter

The Life of Faith

Love God above all things

Abandonment in God

Fraternal Charity

The Spirit of Love

+

PART IV
ORDINARY TIME of the YEAR
A. GENERAL THEMES

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

B. RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

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

C. RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT

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

+

PART V

SPECIAL THEMES - Fr. BERTONI's DEVOTIONS

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

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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 50th 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

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

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

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

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

[NB: These reflections for the Lenten Season were edited for the Electronic Library during my preparation for a Parish Mission for the Cathedral Parish, St. John the Evangelist, Lafayette Louisiana, *Laetare Sunday* Week, March 2005.]

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

PRESENTATION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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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.

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

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

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

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

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

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ORDINARY TIME OF THE YEAR

GENERAL THEMES

THE CHURCH

147: The Church, Bride of Christ

Lord, You guide Your Bride with your right hand [cf. Sgs 1:3] while we follow in the aura of your fragrances [ibid], heeding the instructions that the Church presents to us by her words, deeds and by her commandments, which are all products of Your grace.

Lord, You draw all things toward the plans of Your adorable Providence with the tenderness and efficacy of Your grace: ***and I – once I am lifted up from earth – will draw all men to Myself*** [Jn 12:32]. This is the way You lead Your Bride, who is our Mother, the Church, and Your children and hers, who are ourselves.

But, You guide your Bride, as it were, by the hand: by the right, as it were, so that she not so much follows, but rather accompanies You. You share with her maternal care the achievement of Your paternal Providence over us. We, like delicate little children, are not able to keep up with You Who do not take steps, but jumps, and giant ones at that! [Ps 19:6]. We race behind You, trailing the fragrance of Your graces and following the teachings of our Mother. If we cannot follow You with the ardent affection of a Bride who has attained maturity in the school of love, we will tag after you with the first fruits of our most tender, youthful fervor.⁵

148: The Church, mystery of communion

The Church, the Bride of Christ, is a living image of divinity, presenting to us its principal feature: unity. ***Holy Father, keep them in Your Name that You have given Me, so that they may be one just as We are – so that they may all be one as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me*** [Jn 17:11, 21]. Unity through the fusion and binding of its parts constitutes both the unchanging beauty and the invincible power of the Church: beautiful as the moon, brilliant as the sun, terrible as an army arrayed for battle.

Christ's spirit flows down profusely from His Head, and it increases in whatever measure each one is disposed to accept it. If a hand is severed from the body, the Spirit, which emanates from the Head, and teaches each member through the body, will not touch it, and so it will remain lifeless. If we want to receive the Spirit, which flows from the Head, we must strive to be united and cling to one another.

⁵ Meditation on Primum *Regum*. N. 7 **MssB 5004-5006**. One notes in this meditation, the deep, theological profundity of St. Gregory's approach to the truth of the Church. One can also notice the Church as the Spouse of Christ, and the Mystery of Communion, much before the time of the Church's institutional and juridical aspect [cf. Marginal Number **97**]. His familiarity with Scripture, especially, St. Paul makes us aware of St. Gaspar's truly prophetic insight.

Therefore, we are assiduous in safeguarding unity in the Spirit by means of the bonds of peace ⁶. ***In unfeigned love*** [2 Co 6:6], like those, who have nothing but charity, and perfect charity at that, on their tongues, while they separate themselves from one another and induce others to part from unity ⁷.

There should be no diversity in doctrine, or divisions by parties among us, but a single spirit of faith should enliven all of us, because we are one body. There is only one supernatural end toward which we strive, just as there is only a single hope to which we have been called. There is only One Who has proposed this purpose to us, and guides us toward this goal. If there are many shepherds who tend us, they do so only by His authority, and in His Name: ***There is only one Lord*** [Ep 4:5]⁸.

149: The Church, teacher of faith

My Mother, the Roman Catholic, Apostolic Church teaches me, while God instructs my Mother. It is possible that I can run into some difficulty: for example, there is the doctrine of Divine Predestination and there is the doctrine of human freedom. How these two tenets are reconciled does not impact my faith; I left it up to theologians to investigate the problem. As for me, loyal [to my faith], it is enough to believe. I revere the Mystery, I respect the opinions of theological schools, I reject heresies.

Within the Church, the sovereign Shepherd redresses any deficiencies in faith and practices through the efficacy of exact interpretation of the sacred Scriptures and tradition. When St. Jerome found himself bewildered by the problem of understanding [the Mystery] of three Persons in God, he did not rely on the light of his own mind, nor on his prodigious erudition, but submitted himself to the authority of Peter's Chair.⁹

Peter has responsibility for all the flock: if a single shepherd is deficient, he hastens to correct and rescue him. The Rock is not wanting: ***You are Peter and upon this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it*** [Mt 16:18]: they will neither prevail against the edifice nor against the stone on which it is founded, because if a stone of the foundation falls, the whole building falls. Peter authoritatively corrects with boldness and truth: ***strengthen your brothers*** [Lk 22:32]; and he does so with meekness in order to encourage repentance.

⁶ Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3656-3675.**

⁷ o.c., **MssB 3311.**

⁸ Early Sermons, n. 35. 'The Rule of our Thinking and Acting.' **MssB 1238-1239. PVC, p. 261.** This sermon was preached on the Feast of the Epiphany [January 6, 1806]. It is presented as one complete tract on the Word of God. The title elderly manifests the profound attitude of St. Gaspar when meditating on the Word of God. It is an attitude of total submission to it, but [as a guidance] for his teaching, and as a pattern for the conduct of his own life. Fr. Divo Barsotti wrote: 'It is very difficult to find other spiritual writers who make such an extensive and proper use of the Scriptures. It is his whole interior life that is supported by the texts of the Scriptures. These are the guide, the Rule of his action. He models himself on them. From these he draws light and direction for his own journey.' [*Magistero dei santi*. Rome 1971, p. 74]. On this subject, compare *The Word of God. Rule of Thought and Action of Blessed Gaspar Bertoni*. By Joseph Furlani, CSS. Rome 1983.

⁹ cf. St. Jerome, Letter 15 to Damasus. 2. PL 22, 355.

If I were to collide against this Rock, I could fracture my head; but, instead if I were to rest against it, I would be sheltered¹⁰.

150: How Christ governs His Church

The fundamental means used by Christ to establish His Church are the Sacred Scriptures, prophecies and miracles. ***Now this is eternal life, that they should know You, the only true God, and the One Whom You sent, Jesus Christ*** [Jn 17:3]. Therefore, study of the Scriptures is the required way to know God and Jesus Christ. By means of the Scriptures, the Lord has given His Church as many strong protections as there are divine commandments, and as many weapons as there are counsels that lead to sanctity.

Christ, therefore, directs His Church by means of the teaching of Pastors, the preaching of priests, and the administration of the Sacraments. These means are efficacious in themselves, even when some who are entrusted with these ministries are not always exemplary. Even if priests, at times, perform them unworthily, they, nevertheless, fulfill God's will to nourish His faithful. They give life to others, at the risk of destroying themselves spiritually. The vanity and avarice of certain priests who preach, say Mass, serve in parishes, and having almost killed themselves with studies when they were young, still accomplish God's plans, even if they suffer their own damnation.

Christ guides and governs His Church even throughout periods of tribulation: ***Amen, Amen, I say to you, you will weep and mourn, while the world rejoices; you will grieve*** [Jn 16:20]. Our Savior has effectively placed on His holy Church the weight and suffering of His Cross, so that He can then enrich it with the most excellent gifts of heaven, ***but your grief will become joy*** *ibid*¹¹.

151: The sufferings of Christ's Bride

The Church, which is governed by the grace of her Spouse, in a powerful, but, at the same time, amiable manner, actively cooperates with that grace: and in a similar way, she governs and conducts herself. Because of the fact that she reaches the aim of her activity – that is, the perfection of grace in this life and glory in the next – especially through tribulations, it is useful to pause a little to consider the system of this admirable government, in which, both the Divine Providence of her Spouse, Who rules her, and the singular virtues of the Church stand out. It is by these that she comports herself in the manner that corresponds to her spirit.

It must be understood that the Church will never be free from tribulations. There are not only persecutions that are present, so to say, in wartime; there are also various sufferings that afflict her in times of peace. Let us mainly reflect on the hardness of heart of so many sinners, and on the perverse stubbornness prevalent among a great part of the chosen people. There are many unbelievers today, even among some priests who proclaim themselves modern, setting themselves up against the Church and against priests who remain faithful.

¹⁰ Meditations on *Primum Regum*. nn. 50 & 51. **MssB 6789-6824**.

¹¹ o.c., n.3. **MssB 4890-4904**,

But, the Church offers [us] a tremendous lesson by her sufferings. She is afflicted, yes, but she does not permit herself to be preoccupied by distress. On hearing the voice of her Spouse, the Church tempers her afflictions with inner consolation. Moreover, we see that these hardships produce in the Church the effect of a renewed fervor in preaching and a more vital confidence in prayer. It should be said, furthermore, that from all this, a harvest of greater perfection in detachment from riches and worldly honors emerges.

O Lord, make us always conform to the spirit of the Bridegroom [Christ] and of His Bride [the Church], so that, accepting in the same way the sufferings of the Church, in view of the wonderful plans of Your Providence, we can reap the intended fruit of Your mercy¹².

152: Persecution in the life of the Church

Lord, You have called us to the House of Your Son, where by the words of the Apostle, You have predicted persecution: ***Anyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus can expect to be persecuted [2 Tm 3:12]***. Help us to follow the example of the Holy Church, so that we may be in harmony with You. May we become sons who are not ungrateful, or unworthy, but rather faithful imitators of You, just as the Church is towards her Spouse. Help us to understand the spirit of your Bride, the Church, so that, knowing it, we will love it; living it, we will desire it; and desiring it, we will open our mouths to ask it of You and our hearts to draw it to ourselves.

Let us consider before all else the cause and the basis for persecutions. On one side, there is a zeal in the Church to convert mankind to the Gospel; and on the other, there exists sinners' obstinacy. The Church, for her part, contends in battle with prayer and with true preaching, which is the fruit of prayer. On the other side, the sinner fights back with a yearning to do harm to the Church, while cunningly probing to find it at fault. The Church, however, does not proffer any pretext: ***Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of slander falsely against you because of me [Mt 5:1]***.

Persecution then intensifies when the Church, on her part, reinforces the struggle by preaching with more ardent love and confidence in her proclamation of the Gospel. The opposite side then escalates its intolerance by going so far as to prohibit evangelization.

But, let us also consider the consequences of persecution. History tells us that not just a few persecutors were converted by means of the Church's patience. Thus, the Church's longing to further extend the Kingdom of God increases, and the stubborn resistance of some is largely compensated by the conversion of so many others¹³.

¹² o.c., n. 4. **MssB 4909-4930.**

¹³ o.c., n. 5. **MssB 4933-4955.**

153: The Church's conduct during persecution

The Church's enemies sustain their persecutions mainly by calumny. They claim that the Church is ambitious, attached to worldly goods, directly in opposition to true religion and the Gospel. But, she gives the lie to those calumnies, revealing in herself an absolute disdain for the spirit of the world, enduring tribulations with patience, conducting herself in a detached manner with sincerity and purity of intention, demonstrating how all her ministry is directed to the realization of God's Kingdom. The very fact that in the midst of persecution's travails, the Church perseveres in fidelity to her task of preaching the Gospel, with love and courageous strength, is an incontrovertible proof that she proceeds in truth and justice.

The Church's marvelous freedom is a great scandal to her enemies, often providing them with a pretext to intensify their persecution. But, the Church proceeds fearlessly on her path. By her inner most unalterable freedom she always gives proof of meekness, while she intensifies her humility and refines the spirit of disinterestedness, of self control, and purity of intention.

Lord, we have known your Church's sufferings, which equally portray Your admirable Providence and the prudent, virtuous conduct of Your Bride. We adore Your most wise dominion and we say that we will imitate Your spouse while complying in every way to your summons: ***If a man wishes to come after Me, he must deny his very self, take up his cross and ... follow in MY foot steps*** [Mt 16:24]. Help us to carry, and not drag the cross along: that we may do so willingly in order to boast in the same way as [St. Paul's words]: ***May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*** [Ga 6:14]¹⁴.

¹⁴ O.C. Mss 4942-4964.

THE WORD OF GOD

154: God has spoken

Man is ordained to God as to an end that surpasses reason's comprehension. Now, this purpose must be known by mankind, if they are to direct their intentions and their actions toward this end.¹⁵ However, only God alone is able to enlighten man concerning these truths which exceed and transcend human reason, which, moreover, are so necessary that salvation depends on them. ***Eternal life is this: to know You, the only true God, and Him Whom You have sent, Jesus Christ [Jn 17:3].*** Tertullian says that when one deals with the souls' salvation, man must turn to God and direct himself according to God's laws. There is no better teacher of salvation than the very author of salvation¹⁶.

Now, God has spoken. He has spoken in many ways through the Prophets, to the ancient Fathers, and finally, He has spoken through His Son to the Apostles. Moreover the Holy Spirit has spoken even more fully to them, instructing them concerning every truth pertaining to salvation: ***When He comes, however, being the Spirit of Truth, He will guide you to all truth [Jn 16:13].*** We have the books of the Prophets, we have the evangelical books from the Apostles: here, therefore, is God's Word revealed in the Scriptures.

Furthermore, the Apostles, communicated orally with their disciples, leaving to the Church a repository of many of these truths revealed to them. These truths are recalled by the common consensus of the Holy Fathers, by the authentic definitions of the ecumenical Councils, or of the Supreme Pontiffs, and through the universal understanding and usage in the entire Church: here, therefore, is God's Word revealed in Tradition. God has spoken: what more should we ask for? We have Eternal Truth to direct us, why should we allow the false opinions of men to deceive us?¹⁷

155: Christ our Light

We are directed toward Christ, that is, toward truth and life. ***I am the way, and the truth, and the life [Jn 14:6].*** But, this Truth, this Life, which is the ultimate goal of our desires, surpasses human intelligence. ***No eye has ever seen without You, o God, what You have prepared for those who love You [cf. Is 64:3].***

We have therefore to flee from the opinions and judgments of worldly wisdom, if we want to achieve this blessed goal; and, if we want to find the star, that is the infallible guide which will direct us to this goal. In fact, that star is the same Christ, who, because He is truth and life, is also the way to achieve eternal truth, and to arrive at the life to which we aspire. ***I am the way, the truth and the life [Jn 14:6].***

St. John goes on to say that Christ is the true light that shines on every man who comes into this world. He is uncreated Wisdom, the Word of God, and therefore,

¹⁵ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*. I, q. 1, a. 1.

¹⁶ Tertullian, *De Anima*, c. 1. PL 2, 689.

¹⁷ Early Sermons, n. 35. 'Guide for reasoning and acting.' **MssB 1216-1221. PVC, pp. 252-255.**

has the words of eternal life: **Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life?** [Jn 6:68].

But, this teaching of the Word is difficult for human reason because it cannot comprehend it [cf. Jn 6:60]. It is necessary to step back and distance oneself from human reasoning in order to understand it. The star appeared to the Magi only outside Jerusalem, outside the halls of mundane politics. So, it is God's Word that is the only infallible guide for our thinking and our activity in order to reach the supernatural divine goal to which we are called¹⁸.

156: Sacred Scripture

We not only have what is needed in the Holy Scriptures, but also what is more useful to understand what is good, to discern what is bad, to correct our habits, to rectify our attitudes: what else? – to become saints and experts in every good work [2 Tm 3:16, ff.]¹⁹.

When the Sacred Scriptures are meditated upon correctly, they engender appropriate ideas about these things because they are organized according to the order of Divine Wisdom which inspired them. They fashion one's spirit, developing it, and intrusting it. One learns to recognize God and His greatness and omnipotence. One learns to know what are the duties of a creature, namely, obedience to the Creator²⁰.

God's Word in the Scriptures must be the principle of both our thoughts and of our actions if we want to arrive at truth and salvation. The Apostle admonishes us: **Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teaching** [Heb 13:9]²¹.

The purpose of teaching the Bible is to practice the truths contained therein. It is, therefore, imperative to meditate on them and to adopt them as a guide for our behavior. In order to read Sacred Scripture properly, it is necessary to be on guard not to bend God's Word to our own way of seeing things, but to seek instead to make our way of seeing things conform to the Word of God²².

157: How to read the Bible

Sacred Scripture is not so easy to understand. Many of God's words cannot be understood by the human intellect because, even though God's words are clearer than the light of the sun, the darkness of human concupiscence stands in the way. Necessary purity to overcome this darkness can only be achieved by mortification of all disordered passions. Since this purity is so difficult to attain, it is necessary, in

¹⁸ o.c., **MssB 1211-1214. PVC, p. 251.**

¹⁹ o.c., **MssB 1222. PVC pp, 225.** [All Scripture is a breath of God and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and raining in righteousness].

²⁰ *Meditations On Genesis*, n. 3. **MssB 4650.**

²¹ *Early Sermons*, n. 35. **MssB 1223. PVC p. 255.**

²² Jean Mabillon, *Treatise on Monastic Studies*. This is the classic work of this Benedictine Scholar of 1600, that St. Gaspar summarized for L. Naudet. Cf. **BERTONI 3**, pp. 473, ff.]. **MssB 8944.**

addition to diligence in the mortification of passions, to persevere in prayer, uniting oneself in the commitment to the faithful observance of divine law. With the help of prayer and charity, truth will be revealed to our eyes.

The immediate dispositions for a profitable reading of the Bible are humility, simplicity and fidelity. Humility: by renouncing every ambition for fame or personal glory: ***Although You have hidden these things from he learned and the wise, You have revealed them to he child-like*** [Lk 10:21]. Simplicity: to be satisfied with those inspirations which the Father of Lights deigns to grant us. Often while reading the Bible we are hindered by our intellectual pretensions whenever we want to know and put up for discussion what should be simply accepted. Fidelity: so that we venerate truth, no matter whether it remains hidden from us, or whether it is clearly revealed to us. Thus, St. Peter was not scandalized like those in Capernaum at the apparently difficult words that Jesus used. [cf. Jn 6:99]. Perhaps Peter had already understood the secret of His discourse? No, he did not as yet understand, but he respectfully believed that those words which he did not comprehend at the time were nevertheless true.

There are two common enough faults that must be avoided: curiosity and undue haste. One derives from the other. Reading, we believe that we can quickly find the food right away, but this is not so; it is necessary to prepare for it. Certainly, the best grain is there but not without the chaff. If there is bread, it must first be baked. Perhaps we are not ready yet to eat. The first of the Holy Spirit is needed to bake it. It is prayer that enlivens and fires it up²³.

158: Meditating on Sacred Scripture

All Scripture is inspired of God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, correction and training in righteousness so that the one who belongs to God may be competent and equipped for every good work [2 Tm 3:16]. It must be investigated with humility and with a boundless admiration for divine excellence. Scripture so greatly exceeds even the human talent of the most illustrious people as these same geniuses are so inferior to God. They see of that spiritual greatness only that much that God in His generosity deigns to reveal to them. No one is so perfect in knowledge that he cannot make further progress, because every human progress always remains below God's heights, He, Who has inspired Scripture.

Sacred Scripture seems to present itself to us like a vast forest, which, at first glance appears to be homogeneous, but then, little by little, as it becomes familiar, one sees how many plains and valleys it contains. We find that there is much to discover which previously we could not even imagine.

Moreover, it is so admirably ordered in such a way that while continuing one's search, one realizes that there always remains some shadowy area to explore further. There is no danger that while acquiring familiarity one will lose interest. Moreover, one reads it more willingly as it becomes apparent every day that there is more to comprehend, because it always offers us something new²⁴.

²³ This passage is from J. Mabillon: o.c., MssB 8940-4861.

²⁴ Meditation on *Primum Regum*. n. 1. MssB 4855-4861.

159: St. Gaspar and sacred Scripture

From the time he was a major seminarian, St. Gaspar had read and studied sacred Scripture many times. Once a priest he made it his principal dearest study. He always had the more applicable sacred texts ready at hand. This was his guide and his 'calling card.' In the various circumstances of life, these helped him to act with confident security and calm.

That which he himself practiced, he habitually encouraged others, who came to him, to do the same, to be solaced by his encouragement, counsel and conversation. They were left so impressed by the unction and efficacy of his sayings and scriptural quotations, that it seemed that God Himself spoke to them by His mouth.

All this became natural and spontaneous with him; it became part of his nature and his very life blood. It is no wonder, then, that up to the last years of his life, he always had the books of Scripture, and the writings of the Fathers at hand. All this is one of the greater legacies that he left to his sons. Not only did he recommend to them the loving study of God's Word found in divine scripture and Tradition, but he ordered that they should always be read and consulted in every circumstance, making it their constant meditation.²⁵

He had read the works of almost all the holy Fathers and studied sacred Scripture with the help of the most renowned commentators. It seemed that both were transformed into his life blood, so much so that his speech, it may be said, became a fully scriptural language²⁶.

160: God speaks through the Apostolic Tradition

The same God, who speaks in the Scriptures, also speaks in the tradition that is found God Himself has given us these holy, and at the same time, most learned Fathers as Shepherds and physicians to render His Elect more perfect, in order to complete the great work of salvation, and to build the Mystical Body, which is the Church. This was done so that we would not be like vacillating children, tossed about by every wind coming from the teaching introduced by malice and cleverness of men in order to entangle us in error [cf. Ep 4:14]. Moreover, St. Paul says: ***It is He Who gave Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers in roles of service for the faithful to build up the body of Christ.*** [Ep 4:11-12].

Whoever is truly wise, or wants to become wise, ***explores the wisdom of all the men of old*** [cf. Si 39:1], as the Holy Spirit tells us. The words of the wise goad us on: ***The sayings of the wise are like goads*** [Qo 2:11] which encourage a sinner to conversion: ***like fixed spokes are the topics given by one collector*** [ibid.]. The teachings that proceed from the counsels of the saints are firm and well grounded, like fastenings planted from on high. They are proffered through the unanimous consensus of all the teachers and doctors by the one Shepherd, Who is Christ, Who is God. Although there were many who teach, the author of doctrine is only one, that is, the Lord.

²⁵ G. Giacobbe, *The Life of the Servant of God, Gaspar Bertoni*. Verona 1858. SA, p. 182.

²⁶ *Miscellanea Lenotti*. SA, p. 462.

As to more than these, my son, beware [Qo 12:12]. Follow the foot-prints of the elders, do not deviate from their authority.²⁷

161: The Magisterium of the Church

It remains certain that the Word of God revealed in the Scriptures and in Tradition is the only infallible norm of our belief, our hope and of our actions if we want to find truth and attain salvation. What, then, will happen to the poor, ignorant people who cannot read the Scriptures? Furthermore is it enough for the learned to read the Scriptures? No, it is not enough for the learned to read the Scriptures. The Magisterium of the Church is essential for both the learned and for the unlettered.

The Church has authority top propound God's Word, to explain it, and to determine its proper meaning. The unlettered one need not despair; he has a living, visible universal teacher, the Catholic Church. The learned need not be presumptuous. He has over him a judge who is also living, visible, infallible and supreme; the Apostolic Roman Church. Does anyone perhaps, believe himself to be sufficiently instructed, so that he only needs the sharpness of his reasoning? 'We', says St. Augustine, 'believe in order to understand; we do not understand in order to believe'²⁸; and what else is faith if not believing what is not seen?

Does anyone think that he is sufficiently holy so that all he needs is his own private inspirations? 'Let us be on guard against these arrogant tendencies', again St. Augustine exclaims, 'rather, let us reflect on what the same Apostle, Paul, even while directly instructed by the voice of god, and by the Holy Spirit, was, nevertheless, sent to a man to learn what he had to do, and Cornelius was entrusted to St. Peter to learn from his mouth that which he had to believe, hope and love.'²⁹

We must depend on the shepherds which the Holy Spirit has elected to rule God's Church. From these legitimate shepherds we must expect to learn all that is explained and declared to be the true meaning of God's Word as revealed in the Scriptures or in Tradition, as the only infallible norm for our belief and actions. This we must faithfully and constantly follow if we want to attain the knowledge of truth, and to possess supernatural, eternal beatitude, which we hope for in God, and with God³⁰.

162: The Word of God, font of all wisdom

Attention and reflection on God's Word and on His works are the foundation of all true wisdom. If someone contemplates and pays attention to other things while neglecting to heed the Teacher of Truth, Who is God, he acts like those children who focus on their toys while their teacher is explaining a lesson in School: they learn nothing. There were so many philosophers in Athens and in Rome resembling ants who seemed intelligent and lived according to a well-regulated social organization but did not know the real meaning of life.

²⁷ Early Sermons, n. 35. **MssB 1224-1226.PVC, pp. 255-257.**

²⁸ St. Augustine, *Tract on John 40*, 9. PL 35, 1690.

²⁹ St. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*. 6. PL 34, 18.

³⁰ Early Sermons n.35. **MssB 1235-1240; PVC pp.260-262.**

God is order, and His works are well ordered: ***You govern all things justly*** [Ws 12:15]. God is truth: ***God must be true*** [R, 3:4]. Go is omnipotent: ***His Name is omnipotent*** [Est 4:2]. Sinful man, on the other hand, is totally disorganized; he is a liar [cf. Rm 3:4]; he is weak, and like one who is reduced to nothing [cf. Ga 3:6].

If we listen to God, we will succeed to put order into our soul, mind and heart. We will all know truth, and we will walk with it as in a great light. We will stand our ground even if everything crumbles around us. If, on the other hand, we place our confidence in worldly men, in self-styled philosophers, or even theologians who do not have God for a Father, nor the Church for a Mother, we will find ourselves in chaos of disorder and bewilderment. We will end up walking in darkness, evening the shadow of death.

Seeing everything in God's light, we will then learn to care for both the things of heaven and of earth with proper regard and with due respect, for they are always God's works³¹.

163: God Word and the Church's unity

Let us now proceed, walking worthily toward the goal to which we are called. ***I, then, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, with all humility, gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace*** [Ep4:1-3].

'With all humility': one must walk worthily in this vocation by submitting our intellect with humble respect in order to believe the Divine Word.

'With gentleness': by not opposing the authoritative judgment of legitimate shepherds, all of which come from the enemies of the faith, of peace, and of the Church.

'Bearing with one another through love': All of us, who walk together united by the same calling, should help each other with mutual love, each one by carrying the other's burden.

'Striving to preserve the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.' By the grace of God, we possess this unity in the Spirit, i.e., of the faith; it is up to us to preserve it. However, vigilance, solicitude, and diligence are needed to effectively safeguard it. It is maintained by means of the bonds of peace and charity if we remain well unified and linked to one another by love. Then, all of us unified, will have a great attachment to the shepherds of the Church, whom we must follow, especially the supreme Shepherd, the Roman Pontiff, the heart of unity.

The one God, the goal of our bliss, and Father of all, invites us to this blessedness. He transcends everyone by means of His truth to enlighten us in order to know it. In all things, He expects us to find it; He dwells in all of us by His grace, as the intimate Principle that moves us to seek it [cf. Ep 4:6]³².

³¹ Meditation *On Genesis*. n. 4, MssB 4666-4672.

³² Early Sermons. N.35. MssB 1235-1240. PVC, pp. 260-262.

LITURGY

164: Faith and Worship

Religion is the virtue by which we render due and supreme worship to God as Creator and Lord of all things. This worship is a testimony of the divine greatness, and at the same time expresses the submission of our whole being to God.

We are made up of body and soul. God, Who created the soul, has also formed out body. Therefore, if the Spirit recognizes its Creator, is it not right that the senses should acknowledge his greatness? And if the mind has the happy lot of being able to discover the marvelous beauty of his divine reality, who can forbid the tongue to see His praises, to proclaim His glory, to bless His Name? The heart rises to God, the eyes are raised towards the mountain from which help comes, and without my even realizing it, I find my hands lifted in prayer [cf. Ps 121:1]. Filled with consolation, I offer my Spirit to God as a sacrifice of delightful fragrance, and my body also exults in the presence of its members as a living host to serve God. ***My heart and flesh cry out for the living God*** [Ps 84:3].

When Christ affirms that ***God is Spirit, and those who worship Him, must worship Him in spirit and in truth***, [Jn 4:24], He certainly does not intend to condemn external worship, but to clarify that interior worship is preeminent. It is to this that religion principally tends.

An external devotion without the heart is a corpse of devotion. The should of devotion in the heart. This, and nothing else, is what Christ intended to express with those words³³.

165: The Meaning of Signs

The human mind must be led by the hand of sensible things to reach God. From this comes the need to use material things. It is by these visible signs that the human mind becomes stimulated to perform proper spiritual acts of the soul through which it establishes union with God.

God desired to make Himself bodily visible in Christ Who came to earth to reconcile the world to Himself. The reason being that He was able to enter our hearts more easily through the faculties of the senses. Christ also instituted the Sacraments, and under these a material and sensible signs, He diffuses grace and charity in our spirit. When lost by sin, He restores it, increases it, and confirms it in the one who possesses it. Having abolished the ancient sacrifices, He made a new one that is perpetual. This, too, is perceived in the sacramental species which on the one hand hid the mystery, and on the other make it known in a more excellent way.

Yet Christ promulgates in the Gospel a new law, all spiritual and all love, which consists essentially in the grace of the Holy Spirit, and also orders that the internal

³³ Early Sermons .n. 36. **MssB 1243-1256**. The defense of external worship made in this Sermon –October 5, 1806 – presented also a character of a particular actuality at that time because of the Jansenistic mentality widely diffused in the Veneto. St. Gaspar waged a great battle against Jansenism, for which he had to suffer. Fr. Nello Dalle Vedove affirmed that he was in the center of the Jansenistic controversy in Verona. [**BERTONI 3**, p. 554].

affection of the soul be joined to the external expression of language, and the works made visible by the hand. The announcer of the Gospel, St. Paul, proclaims: ***For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved*** [Rm 10:10]. And Christ Himself declares: ***Everyone who acknowledges Me before others, I will acknowledge before My Heavenly Father.*** [Mt 10:32]³⁴.

166: Participation and Testimony

Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Heavenly Father [Mt 5:16]. I have been blessed in secret by my God. I do not have to hide under a blanket of silence His secret favors. Also, ***I will bless the Lord at all times, His praise shall ever be in my mouth.*** [Ps 33:2], and I will invite my neighbors to rejoice and thank Him with me. Since I believe, for the same reason, I also speak [cf. Ps 116:10]. Nor do I hold the truth known by me as a prisoner of an unjust pretense, or in a timid shameful silence.

To each of us the Lord has entrusted the care of our neighbor. Therefore, let us manifest our religion, confess our faith, and express our devotion. The glory of God wants this, the usefulness to our neighbor obliges us, and our own interest demands it. We are called to defend the honor of our Father, to sustain the weakness of our brothers, and to increase in ourselves the great gifts of grace.

No human respect. We do not fear men, even when they ridicule us. We fear, however, ***him who can destroy both body and soul in Gehenna.*** [Mt 10:28]. We freely serve Him Who for many reasons is our Lord and has acquired the right to our fidelity. He was the first to receive humiliation and punishment, and in the end, will repay our service and have us sit with Him on His throne of glory³⁵.

167: The value of Liturgical Ceremonies

The rites and ceremonies with which the Church has adorned her liturgical celebrations are really full of significance, and very useful, and not something indifferent. In fact, they are the exterior signs of piety and interior feeling. Besides, they are also a help and nourishment to this piety and interior feeling. Moreover, the ceremonies aid not only in nourishing feeling and sentiment, but also in understanding faith. St. Augustine makes it clear that he was impelled to accept the dogma of the presence of original sin in children before baptism by the fact that in the ancient rite of this sacrament the subjects were exorcised, and those present had to renounce the devil and his works, on their behalf³⁶.

The excellence of the Christian religion, essentially spiritual, is not easy for us to perceive because we are made of body as well as spirit. Thus, the mysteries are not presented to us in their bare essentials, but, so to speak, they are dressed and adorned so that they appear to the senses in a light of an outer splendor, and then they are seen with greater ease and more accepted by our mind. One can say that the

³⁴ Early Sermons, n. 36. **MssB 1252-1256.**

³⁵ Early Sermons, n. 36. **MssB 1257-1266.**

³⁶ St. Augustine. 'Concerning the merits and remission of sin', c. 34, 63. PL 44, 146.

ceremonies represent for religious worship what salt is for good, or the outside for the marrow.

Finally, it must be remembered that the ceremonies are an integral part of divine worship. Man must worship God with body and soul, as it is instituted by the Church. 'Let us think, says St Cyprian, 'that we find ourselves in the presence of God, and it is the eyes of God that we should please even with the posture of our body and with the expression of our voice.'³⁷

168: Liturgical buildings and furnishings.

Lord, I love the house in which You dwell, the tenting place of Your glory [Ps 26:8]. David amassed for his son much gold and silver for the construction of the majestic temple which was one of the marvels of ancient times. With greater reason ought we to embellish and enrich our churches, where the altars are reddened not by the blood of animals, but by Christ Himself, the Divine Immolated Lamb.

No comparison is possible between the palace of a grand person, even among the great ones of this world, and the house of God. Yet, those who are but a handful of dust often are resplendent by their magnificence and sumptuousness, both externally and internally. Meanwhile, the house where the King of Kings lives sometimes reeks of poverty and squalor, and to cover the bareness of its walls, they use the remnants of worn out wardrobes.

Christ, Himself shows us how He desires the splendor of sacred temples. ***He will show you a large room that is furnished. Make the preparations there.*** [Lk 22:1]³⁸.

On his part, St. Gaspar did not omit anything for the beauty and décor of what he needed for his Church at the Stimmate. While he loved frugality at his table poverty in his clothing and furniture, for his own use and that of his followers, he wanted the very best and the most sumptuous for the divine table, the vestments of the priest who had to ascend the altar, the sacred vessels of precious metals.

He wanted the veils, vestments, linens, sacred vessels, furniture of every kind, and whatever was needed for the altar and for the celebration to breathe elegance, décor and propriety³⁹.

169: The reason for images

In the evening, while contemplating a picture of the Holy Trinity, I experienced great reverence and love for the three Persons. The Eternal Father, who had his arms outspread was explaining His mercy to me and communicating His gifts with ease⁴⁰.

Images serve to inspire us to virtue, the same way that the arguments of spiritual people move us. Who can ever repeat the grandeur, the multiplicity and the attraction of those virtues which those good images present to us, and the silent, yet

³⁷ Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3590-3595**. The passage cited is from St, Cyprian, 'The Lord's Prayer, 4. PL 4, 538.

³⁸ Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3582-3584**.

³⁹ Cajetan Giacobbe, *Life*, SA, p. 512.

⁴⁰ Spiritual Journal. August 24, 1808.

eloquent thoughts that enlighten us by seeming to enter our heart through the eyes? This is one real school of every kind of virtue for all ages, under all conditions, and in every time and circumstance.

Certainly, in order for an image to move us to devotion, it must have beauty and a pleasing expression of affection. In this regard, the Orientals put us to shame since in their paintings we notice a strict modesty and an extraordinary devotion, whereas in our case, certain images, painted or sculptured in a style often worldly, instead of moving us to devotion, provoke distraction, incite vanity, and sometimes give real and true scandal. However, the good result of nice images is confirmed by the common sense both of the learned and the unlettered, of the just and of sinners, of all who derive strong incentives to refute sin, to calm passions, and to love virtue⁴¹.

⁴¹ Academic Oration on the special cult of images. **MssB 1517-1519**. A tract of a discourse delivered on April 18, 1806 – always in the Church of St. Paul in Campo Marzio – in defense of the special cult offered to the images of the Madonna and St. Anna, present in that Church, a cult that was particularly contested by the Jansenists [**BERTONI 3**,PP. 484, ff.].

THE ROMAN PONTIFF

170: Where Peter is there is the Church.

One must remember that with the invisible spirit of the Church comes a visible Head also; the spirit of Jesus Christ, not the human spirit, nor that of human reason, but one of faith. The Church is visible, therefore its head must be visible. Without the Head the body is only a trunk. We believe in the spirit of Jesus, and human reason comes to a halt. Thus, let us submit to the Head, removing all human presumption, if we wish to live and remain standing. It is impossible to live without the spirit, and without the Head it is impossible to live or to remain standing. A member without the spirit cannot live, but it is joined to the body and Head, it is able to stand and revive itself.

Those members cut off from the body, or Head, cannot survive, cannot stand, for they are impaired, they rot and are lost. There are also today some who have a great knowledge of the old time, who keep dragging their old ways, and do not recognize the spirit of the Church, nor its visible Head. But it is another thing to mention the old ways with the Spirit of God, which now become new, changed by the Spirit. Without the Spirit of God, they are old, stale, and rancid. It is the Spirit of God that makes all things new⁴².

The Roman faith is the faith of the Catholic Church. Wherever Peter is, there is the Church⁴³. Where the Head is there is the whole Body. Whoever relies on error staggers, reels and falls. Whoever stands on divine truth is firm and serene. It wasn't any earthly power nor the Councils that founded the Chair of Peter. It was the Word of God Who created heaven and earth⁴⁴.

O Lord, close the ears of our hearts to the voice of the serpent. Open our ears to the voice of Peter, so that our senses will never deteriorate, nor ever spoil the purity of our faith, so that we may show our spirit as a chaste virgin to You, who are the Spouse of Faithful souls⁴⁵.

171: Let us listen to Christ and His Vicar

When we treat of faith, not metaphysical or political controversies, we must submit to the authority of the Head of the Church, upon which is founded the House of God, and is the support and foundation of the truth. Let us listen to Christ and His Vicar. If we remain alone like Noah, who remained alone against everyone, we few will enter the ark, outside of which there is no salvation. Here note the words of St. Paul: But we if we or an angel from Heaven should preach a Gospel other than the one Peter through his successors teaches, do not believe him, for the punishment is eternal death and the separation from God [cf. [Ga 1:8](#)]. Rome is silent. She is silent because she has already spoken, reproved, annulled, cancelled all the Gallican doctrines, that are nothing else but the opinions of men even if they came from

⁴² Meditation on *Primum Regum* n. 18. **MssB 5608-5647**.

⁴³ St. Ambrose, Psalms 40, 30.PL 14, 1134.

⁴⁴ Meditation on *Primum Regum*. N.30. **MssB 6160**.

⁴⁵ O.c. n. 35. **MssB 6311**.

Bossuet. She is silent because if she speaks after ten or twelve Pontiffs have already spoken, there is nothing left except to excommunicate. She is lenient as God Himself is, waiting for one to recognize his errors and to seek forgiveness. ***Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both body and soul in Gehenna*** [Mt 10:28].

We must be very careful that we are not led astray, that we are not deceived in the simplicity of our hearts. Let us close our ears to the voices of those who lie, or deceive. Certainly truth has a price. But Christ our Lord paid a greater price. The salve should not be better than his lord. ***Amen, amen, I say to you, no slave is greater than his master*** [Jn 13:16]⁴⁶.

172: The Successor of Peter, model for all pastors.

The teaching and conduct of the Chief Pastor is the right rule for good spiritual government for all the Pastors of the Church, and, therefore, it is the source of common happiness for the faithful. The goodness and happiness in other Pastors in governing depend a great deal on how they conform their life to the way of virtue proclaimed by the Chief Pastor.

The Holy See has always spoken with clarity and freedom. It reproved and made known existing evils. If at times she has chosen a way of prudent and temporary pretense, never has she fallen for the flattery of the world's powerful ones and never in servile weakness. Here is a concrete rule for Pastors. He, who is distant from that criterion of judgment in evaluating things, even if at the beginning he may have some success, will soon become aware that he is deceiving himself. He who cuts himself off from the faith of Rome is outside the communion of the Church. Because the Church is nothing else but the union of pastors and faithful with Peter.

One cannot remain neutral, because the form of virtue and the conduct of the Holy See is governing our consciences becomes the true norm for good governing that is proposed to all pastors. So much so, that when they act in this manner they are all in agreement. The dogmas of faith are not opinions. What is proposed by Peter are truths that must be firmly believed.

Lord, give us the grace to be faithful with all our hearts to Peter. Let us lose our life rather than obedience. This is what Christ did⁴⁷.

173: The Pope and the renewal of Pastoral ministry

Because of the unfailing strength of the First Rock, we receive an invitation or general calling by the Spirit to confess Christ publicly before the world by words and deeds, without human regard or fear. ***I tell you, everyone who acknowledges Me before others, the Son of Man will acknowledge before the angels of God*** [Lk12:8].

⁴⁶ Correspondence, p. 262. Letter to L. Naudet, probably in September 1829. In February 1829, there appeared in the Diocesan magazine a Declaration by Archbishop de Quelen clearly inspired by the principle of Gallicanism. This was the reason why St. Gaspar wrote this letter and it explains his particular tone [cf. Fr. Stofella's Introduction to this letter, o.c., p. 261].

⁴⁷ Meditation on *Primum Regum* nn. 47- 48. **Ms B 6634-6707.**

Whoever wishes to be My servant, follows me. ***Whoever serves Me, must follow Me*** [Jn 12:26], says Christ, imitate Me in the way of living. Let people see in us a copy of Christ and His Apostles. We must have the courage to follow Him to the bitter end, even to death. ***If anyone comes to Me without hating... even his own life, he cannot be My disciple*** [Lk 14:26].

That youth, whose eyes have been opened by the Holy Spirit and who firmly rests on the First Rock, has a very strong desire to glorify God, not only in words, but also with his life, even to confess openly faith in His Son. He serves Christ by following him in strict imitation of His life. He desires to follow Him in His Passion, trampling on human esteem, even hating his own life. He is the one who is best disposed to become a priest.

Lord, a steadfast spirit renew within me [Ps 51:12]. Renew it from old and crooked ways which we have been following through our sins and our adherence to the maxims of the world helps us never to lose that divine spirit which you wish to impart to us⁴⁸.

174: In the name of the Pope, a complete plan of reform

It is through the unfailing strength of the First Rock that the creative Spirit manifests His plan of reform, or restoration for a holy ministry that foresees the end of the old spirit, above all, informing new ministers, and then in opening for the former ministry a way of reforming itself.

There is need for new ministers, formed with a new spirit by the Holy Spirit, Who renews and restores all things, to renew and restore her ministry. Through this the Church will shed the old human spirit by bringing to life a new and divine one through the firm and true foundation of the First Rock. The forming of new ministers according to the Spirit of God means that there is a need of educating our youth to a living faith, and a constant dedication to contemplation, so that they are able to focus on heaven and not on earth. Their intention should be focused on Christ, striving always to please Him, having Him as their model and conforming totally to Him.

Once the old ministry has been reformed, a new one must be formed. The Holy Spirit through the unfailing foundation of the First Rock acts to see that the old ministries are involved with: confessing the faith openly without uncertainty or fear, imitating Christ in His Passion, without the comforts of life even scorning death; joining with good priests to search together for God's glory, without being an egoist or attached to one's family, seeking heaven, and no longer worldly things or honors⁴⁹.

175: How to put into effect the plan of renewal

Those whom God has chosen to put into effect the reforms in ministry must be persons of prayer and recollection, besides being persons of wisdom and prudence. They should know when to start by making their plans and designs perfectly clear, so that they will not cancel any plan or design uselessly. The Lord remained secluded for thirty years before He began His Mission openly, thus teaching us how we should

⁴⁸ o.c., n.14. **MssB 5348-5350.**

⁴⁹ o.c., nn, 14 & 16. **Mss 5365-5373 and 5511.**

prepare. In this way, the risk of having to quickly undo what was done irresponsibly, will be avoided.

After prayer and prudence, the method of proceeding must be ascertained, and one must await from God the opportune time before acting. In the meantime, one should work to prepare the people involved, with kindness, imitating the Lord and His Providence, and following him. One should strive to highlight the beauty of virtue and the spiritual value that will be had. This will involve and attract people and imbue them with a new spirit. One ought to be very patient in reforming people, who are dominated by worldly spirits, helping them not to fall into desperation.

If one possesses a great deal of charity and true love, then it is the opportune time to move in fulfilling this renewal. ***But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high [Lk 24:49].*** This charity which comes from heaven is easily distinguished from false and earthly zeal.

The characteristics of charity are prudence, magnanimity and discretion: its activity is not rushed into immaturity and immoderation. In the same charity – which is also characterized by fortitude – will choose the most opportune moment and will not delay its action, due to human respect. In its own time, it finds avenues in the heart of righteous and upright people who appreciate it. It wins over the arrogance of perverse people, who learn to fear and respect it. The human spirit is timid and cowardly when confronted by true virtue and the Spirit of God. Therefore charity appears to be a great gift of God and His authentic witness⁵⁰.

176: The Pope and the denouncing the abuses in the Church

The channel to denounce and condemn the worldly spirit in the Church is the Vicar of Christ on earth. ***I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail, and once you have turned back, you must strengthen your brothers [Lk 22:32].*** This First Stone is straight and solid. In its indefectible integrity one sees and reproves the draftiness and lack of good spirit in other ministers of the church. Thanks to its absolute steadfastness the divine spirit is renewed or confirmed, where once it was wavering or even extinct.

Meanwhile, the other foundation stones of the hierarchy of the Church are solid and firm, in so far as they are supported by the First Stone. This Stone will reprove the abuse of the divine gifts, caused by the negligence and the weakness of certain pastors and expressed by the scandalous conduct of many priests. When, thanks to the manifestation of the good Spirit, on the one hand, one is able to know the greatness of the sacerdotal dignity and on the other, the abuses that some do with it, the faithful begin to experience a renewed feeling of veneration for the priesthood and at the same time, feel sorry for those who do not correspond worthily to their vocation. They are able to realize the great dignity of the priest, and also the greater ruin of those who fail.

O Lord, assure us with the light of your Holy Spirit, so that through the darkness of the world we can keep our eyes fixed on the integrity of that First Stone, which you have placed as the foundation, upon which all the other stones are made even. We are grateful that You have given this first indefectible rule in Your Church so that in the

⁵⁰ o.c., n. 16 b. **MssB 5515-5537.**

uncertainty of our thoughts, we can have a defense against all errors and a sure guarantee of the truth⁵¹.

177: Never against the Pope

There have always been, and even today, under the pretense of reform, those who appear to be fighting against the evil spirit, but in reality, are fighting against the Church, always referring to the past. They declare that they want to remain in the Church; therefore, they react against the threat of excommunication, but they themselves have separated from the faith of the Catholic Church. God has allowed them to cut themselves off.

They appeal to the better years in the history of the Church, and they place their attention and their studies on those times, claiming that the Church of today is blind. But they are the blind since they do not see the light. They act as one who is blind, who in broad daylight says: 'Let the light in'. They have gone from the integrity of that Rock upon which they were founded. They are separated from the unity of the Church. They claim to be holy and perfect, relying on the pretext of their knowledge of the ancient traditions of the Fathers. They alone are the depositories of the true light. They, therefore, resist the voices of the real preachers of the Gospel, and even the voice of Peter, who throughout the centuries has always received great respect by being decisive even in the discussions of the Councils. Rome has spoken; the argument is ended⁵².

To bring about a real renewal in His Church, God makes use of holy preachers, who have been renewed by the Holy Spirit, and remain firm in their devotion to the First Rock. Through their efforts, God builds a new spirit removing the impediments to the newness of the Gospels, and preventing the risk of their becoming old.

O Mary, beautiful as the moon, resplendent as the sun, formidable as an army in battle array, behold your army and that of your Son. Be favorable to them, so that they will have no fear of the enemy, but rely on your strength and on the power of Christ⁵³.

⁵¹ o.c., n. 13. **MssB 5309-5336.**

⁵² St. Augustine, Sermon 131, 10. PL 38, 734.

⁵³ Meditations on *Primum Regum*. N. 17. **MssB 5571-5702.**

PRIESTS

178: The Priest and the faithful

It is impossible to say whom here on earth God wanted to exalt more than priests. ***Thus should one regard us as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God [1 Co 4:1].*** This is the proper attitude that Christian People should have concerning their priests, so that when they see a priest, they will say: There is a Minister of Christ, a dispenser of the divine mysteries, and ambassador of the great King.' St. Paul tells us: ***So we are Christ's ambassadors, as if God were appealing through us [2 Co 5:20].***

Priests have given us new life through Baptism, and we have put on Christ, thus becoming members of that Body of which He is the Head. If we have grown and have been able to enjoy the riches of the Spirit, we owe this to the priest. It is the priest who feeds and nourishes us with the wholesome food of the Word of God. It is the priest who each day prepares the rich banquet, and distributes the Bread of Angels. It is to the priest that has God granted authority to remit sins: ***Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained [Jn 20:23].*** If we remain secure in the peace of our hearts, if the enemy does not prevail against our spirit, if we are even threatened by the Divine Justice which we have provoked, we are still the recipients of His Divine Mercy. It is the priest who presents to God each day the official prayer of the Church, seeking peace and tranquility for all people.

By nature and birth, the priest is like everyone else. Yet he is superior to the laity, almost like an angel because of his office. Yet, he is threatened on all sides with the same tribulations, assailed by the same enemy, meets with the same dangers, if not greater ones. Just as the priest helps the faithful to attain their salvation, so, too, should the priest be helped to obtain his salvation through the prayers of the faithful. Oh yes, let us pray for priests!⁵⁴

179: Chosen from the world

I have chosen you out of the world [Jn 15:19]. This fact of being distinct from the world signifies that we are not longer of the world. ***You do not belong to the world [Jn15:19].*** A priest must be separated from the world, detached from it crucified and dead to the world. Separated not by living in it, but by not sharing its spirit and sentiment. It is not enough to wear the garb of a priest which distinguishes him from the world. One must have the spirit. How many priests have the worldly spirit! They are not even ashamed of dressing and living according to the standards of the world!

Detached from the world. How very sad that priest be, who in force of his priestly character, should be different and separated from the world, but in reality is not really separated from it. He would not have any consolations either from God or from the world. He would be a 'chimera' neither secular nor priestly. He would not be a secular because of his priestly character which distinguishes him from the world. He would not be priestly because he still belongs to the world.

⁵⁴ Early Sermons, n.13. Respect for priests. **MssB 674-694. PVC pp. 183-190.**

Crucified to the world. ***The world has been crucified to Me, and I to the world*** [Ga 6:14]. If the world knows that I am a priest does not accept my principles, but I readily accept its axioms, then I am a priest in name only. ***If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a slave of Christ.*** [Ga 1:10]. If I wish to conduct myself as a true priest, and to be truly convincing, the world should be my cross, and I certainly should be a cross to the world, because of the difference in our sentiments and principles.

Dead to the world. It is not enough to be crucified, because one can be on the cross and still alive. One must be dead to the world both inside and out. The world to which I have to be especially crucified is within me. This is more dangerous than the one outside me, because this is made up of the three concupiscences mentioned by St. John: ***Concupiscence of the flesh, of the eyes and the pride of life*** [1 Jn 2:16]. We must be way of this world, since it is in me and part of me. One who is dead does not see, hear, feel, speak, become angry, or show pity. This is how I must be dead to my passions and to the inner and outer world⁵⁵.

180: Sent into the world

There is a widely diffused thinking among the people that the life of a priest is rather comfortable, tranquil and easy. But the truth is that he who wishes to follow the vocation of a priest must be ready to renounce all comforts and amenities, and to assume a hard and difficult life. He must be accountable from the moment he enrolls in the army of the Lord. He is not called to a life of comfort and pleasure but to hard work and worry. He has before him the example of the saints and the glory of the apostles. Let us recall our heredity, made up of many labors. St. Paul happily stated: ***I have toiled harder than all of them*** [1 Co 15:10]. It is a boast, but without a trace of vanity or weakness. Therefore, if it is true that he has labored harder than all, still the apostolic mission is not completed; there is still much more to do. Let us go out into the field of the Lord and we shall see very clearly how it is still full of bushes and thorns. Let us go out into the world. This is where we should work, for it has been entrusted to our care. Let us go into that field, not as land owners, but as workers, ***in toil and hardship, through many sleepless nights, through hunger and thirst and through frequent fasting*** [2 Co 11:27].

Where in face have we gone? Where is the spirit of the Apostles? Where is the modesty, the humility, the toil, and the zeal of the primitive Church? This was the vocation of the apostles and the dignity of the princes of the church. Thanks be to God that it has not all disappeared, not even in our time. Our era has also a Pius VII!

As a priest, I should never hesitate to imitate the example of the Apostles, and like them, reach out to the poor, to visit hospitals and prisons, to hear confessions of the uneducated, to take care of the wants of those in need, to give instructions to those who are unlearned, and to become all things to all people and to be zealous for their salvation⁵⁶.

⁵⁵ Retreat Meditations **MssB 2264-2270**. cf. also Meditations on *Primum Regum n. 5*, **MssB 4964**.

⁵⁶ Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3756-3762**.

181: The laying on of hands

The laying on of hands means that the one ordained is consecrated and offered to God as a victim. This was also the practice in the Old Testament. The priest laid hands on the victim that was to be offered to the Lord [cf. Ex 29:10]. What this rite meant was that by their hands and power, they handed the whole matter over to God. So, too, the children of the Israelites laid hands on the Levites, who were then distinct from the others, as they were offered and consecrated to God [cf. Nb 8:10].

Let priests realize that through the laying on of hands they are consecrated to the Lord in order to dedicate themselves entirely to Him, living no longer for themselves, but to sacrifice their own life in the sacred mysteries [cf. 2 Co 12:15] above all, in view of obtaining the salvation of their brothers and sisters.

The laying on of hands brought down the protection of God. Thanks to this, those upon whom the hands were imposed, were totally guided by God as His own sons. This protection gave them power and strength, and kept the power of evil from them.

The laying on of hands also recalls that those who receive Holy Orders carry out their ministry under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, upon Whom they can rely as guide in all their actions⁵⁷.

182: Priestly holiness

Detachment from the world, crucifixion and spiritual death are very high degrees of sanctity. Yet, we have to admit that this is only a part of the priestly vocation, which in some way is shared in common with religious. The religious are also called to sanctity, but with this difference, however, the religious fulfills his vocation by aspiring and tending toward holiness. But, the priest can only fulfill his obligation by being perfect and holy. The former is on the road to holiness, while the latter is in the state of perfection.

There is also another difference. The religious has more means to use: solitude, vows and his daily rule. The priest has nothing else in the world but dangers and distractions that are quite strong and intense. Perfection for the priest is a commandment. I was free to choose the priesthood or not, but since I am a priest, I can no longer renounce my obligation to be perfect.

God has chosen me to be a priest, and has separated me from the world. He has raised me as high as the heavens are over the earth by giving me the power over the Body of His Son. I call God down to the altar and He heeds my voice. How much sanctity is needed for this! How pure must those hands and those eyes be to be a witness of this mystery! How holy should that tongue be that pronounces these words! How holy should that heart be that receives his God!⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Retreat Meditations. **MssB3801-3803.**

⁵⁸ Retreat meditations. **MssB2271-2277.**

183: Union with Christ

Every undertaking of sacred ministry, which is carried out in force of his vocation and priestly ordination, is the work of Christ. It is Christ Who baptizes, Christ Who absolves, and Christ who consecrates through the priest. Hence, we must be guided by the hand of the Principal Worker as a living, chosen instrument. Christ is the first and absolute Model of the priestly perfection. ***Be imitators of me as I am of Christ***, said St. Paul [1 Co 11:1]. The priest is like a sacred seal on which he must produce a real living image of Christ, so that, on his part, he may transfer that image to others. But the image of Christ and that of this corrupt world are not compatible. If I wish to make an impression of the one, the other has to be eliminated.

Let us prefer to have Christ, as the ***Pondus Cordis***, the center of our love, the scope of all our intentions. The priest is sealed with the character of Christ in that he might realize that he has been placed under His dominion in everything. Therefore, may the principle, the means, and the goal of our devotion be Him Who is the Principle, the Means and the goal of priestly power and action.

Let us always look to Him as the Way. Let us always seek Him as the Truth. Let us always love Him as the Life. Let us get close to Him because He Himself is the Way. Let us nourish ourselves from His founts of truth and wisdom. Let us draw the water of life let us drink it and become inebriated with it. ***Yet, I live no longer I, but Christ lives in me.*** [Ga 2:20]⁵⁹.

184: Work in all ways

But you, be self-possessed in all circumstances, put up with hardship, perform the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry [2 Tm 4:5]. This means that a priest must preach, evangelize, both in word and in holiness of life. The faithful must see the priest as not seeking his own advantage and comfort, but because of the Gospel he is ready to meet at once all kinds of difficult sufferings, urged on with the love of God. It is said of St. Cyprian that his Passion to preach was so strong that he desired martyrdom in the very act of speaking about God⁶⁰.

We must follow Christ, our Leader, and also the Apostles who are our guides. Let us set this old and insensitive world on fire with our fervent zeal and endless charity, so that with the Apostles we may one day hear these words: ***Amen, Is ay to you, that you who have followed Me in the new age, when the Son of Man is seated on His throne of glory, you yourselves will sit on twelve thrones*** [Mt 19:28].

When the Divine Judge will sit to examine the life of each one and to decree his eternal fate, He will not ask about our wealth, or income, or even what culture we have possessed, but how did we use them, how many people we have converted and what means we used, how many poor people we have converted and what means we used, how many poor people have we fed, or refreshed, or visited, and to what extent did we face the dangers, the ridicule, the persecutions, the tribulations, in order to

⁵⁹ Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3426-3428**.

⁶⁰ Pontus. *The Life and Sufferings of St. Cyprian*, c.14. PL 3, 1554.

obtain all this. The world needs to witness authentic examples of a truly evangelical life⁶¹.

185: Holiness and Mission of the Priest

We have been called not because we are the only ones to serve God, but so to act that our brothers and sisters also praise and serve God, so that together we might obtain our salvation.

But how can anyone make saints of others, if he himself is not holy? How can anyone rescue souls from the tendencies of this world, if he himself is not on solid ground of great holiness? The world, the devil war especially on those who have undertaken the mission of saving souls. How can one save himself from deception and temptation if he is not fortified with solid virtue?

We must be concerned for the good of not only those few souls who are near us, but also the souls of the whole world. This requires much prayer. St. Gregory the Great says: 'No one should presume to seek the priesthood if he has not acquired through prayer a great familiarity with God, so that he is able to bend the will of God to his, as Moses and Elijah did'⁶². ***Thus I have searched among them for someone who could build a wall or stand in the breach before me to keep Me from destroying the land, but I found no one.*** [Ezk 22:30]

Receive the Holy Spirit, whose sins you forgive are forgiven them [Jn 20:22]. Behold a power all divine. *Who but God can forgive sins?* [Mk 2:7] Thus He has placed us between God and people, because on God's part we represent the people, on their part we represent God. The priest must be a heavenly man and earthly angel. We have to live to that degree of perfection that is called for by our vocation. The facility with which we assume these duties and the little spiritual care with which we perform them are not sufficient motives at the Last Judgment to exonerate us from giving an account of the holiness that these duties require.

In order to carry out our obligations, we must put an end to following our own ways and following more closely the ways of the Lord. Let us go forward with great concern, for we are people who carry an enormous burden – the burden of our sins, and even more, the care of all the world⁶³.

186: Sacerdotal responsibility

The dignity of the priesthood should make us tremble⁶⁴. Let us take stock of our service before the Lord calls us⁶⁵. Let us examine well how we occupy the chair as teacher of the people of God. Because it is not the chair that makes the priest, but the priest who makes the chair. It is not the place that sanctifies man, but the man who sanctifies the place.

⁶¹ Exercises and Instructions. **MssB 3763-3775.**

⁶² St. Gregory the Great, 'The Rule of Pastors'. P. 1, c. 10. PL 77, 23.

⁶³ Exercises and Meditations. **MssB 2278-2284.**

⁶⁴ Spiritual Journal. September 15, 1808.

⁶⁵ ib.

The sin of a priest carries double malice. It causes many sins on the part of the faithful. Who can tell the damage to souls? The tendency to imitate is founded on the weakness of the imitator. He is accustomed to imitate bad examples rather than good ones, like a hammer bangs and destroys a statue more rapidly than it takes to make one. Thus it is, that the example tends to destroy virtue with greater force than when attempting to promote it.

This common power of every bad example becomes especially harmful when the example comes from a person who is well esteemed and more accepted because of learning. Since these not only teach sin by what they do but they also take away the same which is like a dam which prevents the spread of evil. A scandalous lay person is like a large stone that rolls on a field. The damage that it can do is limited. A priest that gives bad example is like a large stone that rolls down a hill, and because of the steepness of the hill, who knows what damage it will cause?

Let us look into ourselves and examine our conduct, and if, by chance, we find that we have cooperated in any way to harm the work of grace in our brother, or sister, let us hasten to remove the damage done to their edification. Let us rebuild the temple, which by our words or deeds, or by our imprudent actions, we might have caused to crumble⁶⁶.

187: Priest and Eucharist

Every day we receive Christ with the intention of becoming God-like, but in fact, we are not God-like men, and maybe not even spiritual men. In fact some priests are ashamed of this title. Instead they think of nothing else than to be a great preacher, a man of culture, a man of talent, a man of business, or a social priest. In other words, priests involved with the world and the flesh.

O how sad! Woe to us if we do not recognize the Body of the Lord. Oh, what an accounting for so many Masses!

Certain priests never voluntarily remain with Christ. They do not even do so at the altar. Talking with Christ is something they leave to the pious faithful. They would rather speak of worldly things and events. If they speak of Christ, they do so, not because of Him, but as a duty. They do not consult Him in prayer, nor seek His help and protection. Meanwhile they are intent in seeking the protection and support of men. They confide in those who do not love them, or who even hate them, rather than in Christ Who loves them passionately.

The Apostles remained with Christ. St. John rested on His chest. They heard His sermons and followed Him into the garden. Here are the effects of Mass celebrated by a good priest: he enjoys spending time with Christ; he finds rest and peace in Christ; he is attentive to divine inspirations; he is able to silence the voice of the world and its passions; to follow Christ even in times of trouble. The apostles themselves would have had fewer temptations, if they had not been found wanting in prayer⁶⁷.

⁶⁶ Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3348-3371.**

⁶⁷ Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2595-2600**

188: To know and to do the will of the Father

This is how those must act who are called to be spiritual fathers, and as members of Christ Whom they generate in people's souls by their preaching and through the administration of the sacraments. Faithful in thought and Action as Abraham; prudent, just, brave, and moderate as the Patriarchs. Moral science of theology, human or divine, is not sufficient. One needs the human and divine moral and theological virtues. **Whoever does the will of My Heavenly Father, and not merely knows it, is My brother, sister and mother** [Mt 12:50]. Peter was ignorant, and Paul rather unimpressive. Yet, the ignorant one and unimpressive one knew how to confound the philosopher and to silence the rhetorician.

Sad to say many priests are apostolically sterile, because they never attain any maturity of perfection. **Until we attain to mature manhood, to the extent of the full stature of Christ** [Ep 4:13]. They lack even the roots of charity, or they are dried up, because they have not nourished themselves with prayer. **Withered and dried up my heart, because I forgot to eat my bread** [cf. Ps 102: 5]. Cry not only for themselves but also for their children. Mothers and nurses who feed babies eat a lot and they are dispensed from fasting. Priests are dying of hunger, how can they feed their children?⁶⁸

Pray, my dear Ecclesiastics, pray. Let us always be faithful to our meditation, so that we come to know how to behave in the house of the Lord⁶⁹.

189: Like Jesus in the temple

Jesus remained in the temple of Jerusalem, and besides the time He spent discussing with the teachers, the rest of the time was spent in vigil before his Eternal Father, praying for the welfare of the world and for all the people who entered the temple. To His parents who found Him there three days later, and who expressed their anxiety, Jesus said: **Did you not know I must be in My Father's house?** [Lk 2:49]. We learn from this that His principal duty and all His concern are to be in the service of His Heavenly Father, without being distracted by other things.

So, too, the priest. **We have to do the work of the One Who sent Me while it is day** [Jn 9:4]. I need not be occupied with the world, the flesh, love of myself, or to seek after my own interests, or tastes, but with the interests of God and His good pleasure. For example, to hear confessions of the uncouth and unlettered may not be to our liking, but it is to God's.

Jesus remained in the temple to begin His work concerning the glory of God, such as His discussions with the teachers which he carried out with admirable modesty, humility, discernment and zeal. In this way, He gave us an example of the virtues that we should use in carrying out our priestly duties in the church.

We should enjoy carrying out these duties from our youth. If we do not begin while we are young, then as older priests we will be worn out and sluggish. We need to become young again. Even the elderly recite [at the beginning of the Mass] **I will go**

⁶⁸ Meditations on *Primum Regum* n. 2. MssB 4876-4881.

⁶⁹ o.c., n. 5. MssB 4962.

to the altar of God, the God of my joy and gladness [Ps 43:4]. God wants me to be young always, not in years, but in fervor.

On the other hand, those who are young, should not judge, but respect the elderly. Christ knew more than the teachers, yet He did not teach, but questioned and responded. There are clerics who are very proud and brilliant in their studies who ridicule the elderly as being ignorant. How many priests labor without insight and prudence? Thus they keep on doing and undoing their work. How many are without zeal, except for their own interests? If they do not become like the Child Jesus, they will not enter the Heavenly Kingdom [cf. Mt 18:3].⁷⁰

190: The priest and humility

Let us learn from Christ to yield to others, indeed taking the last place. The prestige, honor, and the glory of a priest should be humility. St. Thomas was asked by what sign could one recognize a person of holiness and perfection. His answer was humility, abusing oneself, shunning honors and praise, accepting ignominy and injury.

The humbler person is at peace with everyone, the proud one is always in litigation. How many quarrels, what envy and jealousy among confessors about the accommodations, the confessionals, the penitents, and the order of precedence, with so much scandal to souls.

He fulfills every justice, who is able to anticipate everybody in showing esteem and honor, and who is able to support the offensive attitude of others. **Bear one another's burdens, and so you will fulfill the law of Christ** [Ga 6:2]. The highest justice and sanctity consist in this, that although he possesses the highest degree of virtue, he would like to be the lowest in humility⁷¹.

Christ wishes to repress in us the desire of showing off, which is so natural, and the root of all disorders. There is nothing more efficient to moderate in us this obsession to show off in the world and to distinguish us, than the example of a lonely God Who voluntarily remains unknown in the world. This example takes away all the pretext that I could have and which my self-love is so ably to suggest. It tries to deceive me into thinking that this is the glory of God and the salvation of my brothers, that this is a necessity in certain occasions, that it is most convenient, and that it serves to maintain charity, that sociability is necessary in life, that solitude is useless, that it hinders one from using the talents he has received. These are all specious reasons but vain ones. Am I to contribute more to the glory of God than Jesus Himself? Instead of the maxims that suggest this spirit of the world, Christ has come to teach me the way altogether different, that is, the love of remaining unknown⁷².

191: The priest and his relatives

Jesus remained in the temple without letting His parents know [cf. Lk 2:23], because He did not want them to be a hindrance to Him in carrying out freely the work which was ordained for Him by His Heavenly Father.

⁷⁰ Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2489-2493.**

⁷¹ Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2551-2554.**

⁷² o.c., **MssB 2502-2503.**

There are priests, who, when they accept assignments, or in the discharge of their duties, let themselves be conditioned by the human ambitions of their relatives. But if the ambitions of his relatives are a risk to his priestly duties, he should recall what Jesus said: ***If one comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple*** [Lk 14:26].

Jesus wanted to show us how we should be detached from flesh and blood and from the worldly love of relatives, leaving them, and not hesitating to displease them whenever we need to dedicate ourselves with greater diligence to our heavenly Father. He also showed us that we should not remain with them any longer than necessary, if contrary to the will of God.

If there was a motive to think that relatives, or any other person in the world, were an impediment in fulfilling the will of God, either through ignorance or good faith, or even a dishonest intention, it is better to leave without saying anything, even though this might bring them displeasure, or have them complaining about me. All the more should I trample on all this with a strong and determined spirit to fulfill the will of God. ***Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of Me*** [Mt 10:37].

Even more, if my parents or any other persons that I ought to love and respect as my own father, try to force me to do what is contrary to the law of God or the Church. ***We must obey God rather than men*** [Ac 5:29]⁷³.

192: The temptations of a priest

Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and favor before God and man [Lk 2:52]. The priest is called to follow Christ and to grow in perfection. ***No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God*** [Lk 9:62]. People must also be able to see our effort for perfection.

But, in fact, where is our progress in perfection? We seek advancement in our career and in our assignments. But as regards virtue, perhaps we have regressed from where we were as clerics. What resolutions, what hopes we had at that time! And in regard to learning, we must admit that perhaps we knew more then.

Today many priests consider it a dishonor to despise openly the world [even though we do this in our preaching]. Oh God, what a shame! Thus, this crazy world gains honor, because many still slavishly respect it. Some priests feel that they give scandal if they make fun of the world. Blessed are these Scandals, St. Teresa would cry.

The desire for honors and dignities is the vice of priests. A terrible affliction in a priest would be vainglory and envy. And priests do not even confess these.

It is time to admit that the great snare is possessions to which many ecclesiastics are attached. Self-interest is another very subtle snare, which is hardly noticeable in a priest. Happy is he who can escape this snare. Thus, there are principally three grades of temptations: riches, honors and pride. Moved by these one risks the danger of falling into all other kinds of vices. The martyrs were strong in the face of violence, free in spirit and in the confession of their faith, because they were free of self-interest and love of life and of the world⁷⁴.

⁷³ Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2483-2486.**

⁷⁴ Retreat Meditations **MssB 2496-2623.**

193: The secular world and the priestly world

We realize that the earth is nothing but a passage-way, a river which flows without stopping until it reaches the sea. What self-interest should I have in all that I observe? I see much agitation, grandeur, pomp, fortune, prosperity, whose splendor is dazzling.

In the ecclesiastical state, I see certain status, certain tasks, certain privileges and diversity of duties which, though not understood by the secular world, yet continually provoke worldly sentiments.

But, above all, I should recall what was said by a saint: 'All this is not God; all this is not heaven; this is not my goal.' Therefore, I must be insensitive to all this, and not take account of it. In what innocence and freedom of heart could this disposition keep me! I would like to live like a true priest, because I would live as a man dead to the world, like **those of whom the world was not worthy** cf. Heb 11:38⁷⁵.

'Obey', St. Gaspar told a newly ordained priest, 'obey your parents and be a reverent imitator of their virtues. Obey your bishop with submission of mind and heart. Obey the pastor of the Church to which you are assigned. Whatever the flesh or the world suggests, listen and follow Christ only, of whose mysteries you are now a dispenser, without heeding the secular or the priestly world.'⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2643-2644.**

⁷⁶ Cajetan Giacobbe, *Life*, SA, p. 558.

THE RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

194: Community and Communion

Let all have as the aim and distinctive sign of their vocation that saying of our Lord Jesus Christ. ***This is how all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another*** [Jn 13:35].

If we must practice charity towards all, then we must practice it especially toward those who are our spiritual brothers, as the Apostle tells us: ***Whoever does not provide for relatives, and especially for family members, has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever.*** [1 Tm 5:8].

Let everyone keep before his eyes, as a norm of this harmony, that which is written in the Acts of the Apostles about the conduct of the first Christians, from whom all religious orders have their origin and form. ***The community of believers was of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions were his own, but they had everything in common, and they were distributed to each according to his need. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying the favor with all the people*** [cf. Ac 4:32; 2:46, 48].

Let everyone to the best of his ability keep this union of charity and concord, shunning everything which is opposed to it, namely, dissensions and discords, all of which must be studiously avoided, keeping in mind the words of Psalm 133: ***Behold how good it is and how pleasant where brethren dwell as one***⁷⁷.

195: The value of perfect observance

In a religious community, where even the smallest rules are observed, there the spiritual strength of religious life will remain unchanged, and there will be peace among the brothers. But where even the least breaches of the rule are neglected, little by little the whole community is undermined and destroyed⁷⁸.

In fervent as well as in relaxed religious communities, there are defects. In the former, they are corrected and considered abuses; in the latter, they are disguised and pass into use as custom⁷⁹.

In a religious community, when each member does not attend diligently to his own perfection, the community cannot function properly; and if it operates, it does so without spirit and languidly⁸⁰.

196: Fraternal communion and a life of faith

The growth of fraternal communion depends especially on our spiritual progress, for as true charity, that is, the love of God and Christ, increases, so also the union among the confreres is increased and perfected in so far as each one is united to God and to our Savior.

⁷⁷ CF ## 187-190.

⁷⁸ Spiritual Journal. May 24, 1810.

⁷⁹ o.c. July 22, 1808.

⁸⁰ o.c. October 11, 1808.

Because this bond of unity is especially strengthened by prayer and meditation, according to that saying: ***In my thoughts fire blazed forth*** [Ps 39:4]. Therefore this undoubtedly is the surer and sounder way of acquiring this unity.

Moreover, there is nothing which causes us to love another more than to perceive his special endowment of virtues and gifts of the Holy Spirit, and to contemplate him as the image of God painted with the most beautiful colors of grace. I, therefore, all strive to grow these virtues and gifts within themselves, and to consider them often in others, and if they regard others as superior to them, rejoice over their spiritual gifts, and give thanks to God; then, mutual charity will flourish among them in a wondrous manner⁸¹.

197: Religious vows and charity

One virtue never excludes another. Nor are they opposed to one another. When, however, it seems that prudence or charity requires a certain choice, there is little to fear that this might be in contrast with poverty; neither do they act contrary to the religious vows. The vows are only a means to charity, which is the end. It is the end that determines the way all the measure to all the means⁸².

Fraternal communion in a religious community is accomplished in great part through the bond of obedience. The same can be said of poverty and humility, or the contempt of worldly goods. Among temporal goods are honors and dignities, together with riches and the comforts of life. Contempt for the former, no less than for the latter, proceeds from the love of God. Moreover, the poor in spirit and the humble, since they honor all, are deeply moved by all.

The characteristic means, however, to promote fraternal communion is poverty. It is the highest degree proper to religious by reason of their vow. In the religious state all things are in common, hearts, minds, bodies, and everything necessary for subsistence and the way of life. In the Acts of the Apostles we read: ***the community of believers was of one heart,*** and then adds: ***no one claimed that any of his possession were his own*** [Ac 4:32]⁸³.

198: Dialogue and fraternal conversation

Every day after meals, the confreres should gather together in the same place, if possible, to engage in familiar and friendly conversation. It is fitting that this be enjoined upon all without exception for motives of health, but mainly to foster charity. 'Friendship grows with conversation, and is destroyed by being habitually silent.' [Aristotle]. St. Teresa tells us: 'Charity increases through communication'⁸⁴.

So, too, when confreres make frequent visits, the good religious should receive them not only with patience, but with joy. Even this, thanks to the exchange of conversation between the confreres, will contribute greatly to our daily relaxation⁸⁵.

⁸¹ **CF ## 221-223.**

⁸² Correspondence, p. 174. Letter to L. Naudet. No date.

⁸³ **CF ## 224-226.**

⁸⁴ **CF # 250.**

⁸⁵ **CF # 253.**

The principal end of conversation is the salvation of souls. For the most part, this is to be realized by conversing with others, speaking to them of divine things, kindly and prudently. Let the confreres realize that they derive much benefit from the conversations they hold among themselves, which quite often should be about the things of God⁸⁶.

Keep in mind that the diversity of opinion is quite human. One should speak clearly, weighing one's words and in a serene manner. On the other hand, strife, rash judgments and the obstinate defense of one's opinion causes much displeasure. These must, therefore, be avoided by all with the greatest diligence⁸⁷.

In his Rule, St. Augustine admonishes: 'One should never quarrel, or at least, end it as soon as possible, lest tensions lead to hatred, and a mountain be made of a mole hill.'⁸⁸

199: Fraternal correction

Do you feel the need to correct a brother? First of all, begin with weeping for your own sins and praying to the Lord; then take your brother aside and seek to admonish, counsel and exhort him.

Let us look at the example of St. Paul: ***For I fear that when I come, I will find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish; that there may be rivalry, jealousy, fury selfishness, slander, gossip, conceit and disorder. I fear that when I come again, my God may humiliate me before you, and I will have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, the immorality, and licentiousness they practiced*** [2 Co 12:20, 21].

Declare your affection for the person you intend to correct, seek to persuade him that in advising him of his faults, you wish to counsel, to cure, and not to judge or even less to denounce. If you wish to cure him, do not hesitate to embrace or kiss him. Doctors do this sometimes, especially when they have to treat of a difficult malady, and then they are able to get the patient to swallow the necessary medicine⁸⁹.

From the dutiful and reciprocal obligation for the spiritual good of the confrere should arise the inclination and disposition of soul to give correction with great charity and at the same time to accept in the right spirit correction made by others⁹⁰.

200: Snares of common life

Let no one displease or offend his brother, even jokingly, either in public or in private. Let everyone beware of even nurturing in his heart any malicious and adverse sentiments against his brother.

The chief element of charity is to anticipate the mutual rendering of service, and in paying honor. On the other hand, the manifestations of domineering and of

⁸⁶ CF # 255.

⁸⁷ CF # 202.

⁸⁸ CF # 205.

⁸⁹ Retreat Instructions. **MssB 2791-2792**. The quote is taken from St. John Chrysostom, Homilies on Law, 3. 5. PG 49, 54

⁹⁰ CF # 264,

commanding cause alienation of souls. Let everyone abhor every tendency to command or to assume the air of dominating, for it savors of pride and offends charity.

If anyone, because of some duty assigned him, has to assume the role of leader, let him not be over-bearing, but rather indicate what has to be done. The advice of the Apostle [Ga 5:13] should be heeded: **Serve one another in love.** Thus, what St. John Chrysostom said of the ancient monks may be verified: 'Not one of them is seen as the giver, or receiver of wrongs, or to give or receive commands, but all of them are numbered among those serving.'⁹¹

201: Do not talk against one another

Often self-love disguises detraction as zeal, charity, or the necessity of defending oneself or others. The real motive is passion. One has to pay the penalty for it to God and to shed many tears over it⁹².

What good can come from fasting and abstaining from meat when we devour our brothers? He who commits detraction eats the flesh of his brother, chews on the flesh of his neighbor. Thus, St. Paul speaking to the faithful says: **If you go on biting and devouring one another, beware that you are not consumed by one another** [Ga 5:15]. Let no one say that he commits detraction only when he utters what is false and when he slanders. When you backbite a confrere, even if what is said is true, you are culpable. The Pharisee in the gospel spoke the truth concerning the publican, because that is what he was, a sinner. Yet, this did not give him an advantage because the publican **returned to his home justified, while the other did not** [Lk 18:14]⁹³.

The evil of detraction either in word or gesture should never be found among confreres for any reason whatsoever. Let everyone beware of even nurturing in his heart any sentiments that are not good or unfavorable to his confrere⁹⁴.

202: Pay no heed to detraction

One must not only avoid speaking evil of another, but must also avoid listening to a detractor. He should not listen to such talk, calling to mind the words of the Psalmist: **Whoever slanders his neighbor in secret, him I will destroy** [Ps 101:5]. Say also to our brother: do you ever praise anybody or do you ever say anything good about another? I willingly listen to nice things. But if you wish to speak evil, I intend to shut off this kind of talk. I will not be a party to this dirt.

What do I gain by learning that someone is not so good? It seems to me that from this I gain only harm and damage. Let us talk with him. Then, let us take to heart our own woes, and how we should render an account of our own sins. Thus, we would direct this curiosity and the desire to investigate to ourselves and to our way of living. What excuse can we have, or how can we obtain pardon if we never call to mind our own faults, while we curiously scrutinize others?

⁹¹ **CF ## 193; 195.**

⁹² Spiritual Journal. August 9, 1808.

⁹³ Retreat Instructions. **MssB 2786-2790.** St. John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Law, 3. PL 49, 53.

⁹⁴ **CF ## 193; 194.**

Did you hear a bad word against your brother? Let it die within you; be assured it will not make you burst. [cf. Si 19:9]. How do we understand? ***Let it die within you.*** Extinguish it, bury it, do not let it come from you, or spread it. Above all, do not tolerate others speaking evil. If detractors know that we are more averse to them than those whom they are accusing, they would cease once and for all from this terrible habit, and they would correct their own sins. Since it is always true that detraction and calumny only generate hatred and discord, so too speaking well of others and giving praise are the principles of peace and friendship⁹⁵.

203: The community of St. Gaspar

‘Several pious secular priests gathered together in Verona about twenty years ago. They sought perfection for themselves by living a community life like religious, and working for the common good according to their possibility and circumstances. In spite of the fact that these priests perform their duties without fanfare and live humble, quiet lives, nevertheless they are well-known, greatly loved and esteemed as saints by the clergy and the people.

‘Their superior, Fr. Gaspar Bertoni, is a learned and pious man, who is able to rule his community kindly, yet firmly, so that only one spirit animates them all. They are one in all things.

‘If you speak to one of them, you will find that he is of the same mind and heart as the others. If you want to know what their principal characteristic is, it is a combination of humility, charity and affability.

‘They live a very poor and self-sacrificing style of life. Their rooms are simple and so is their furniture. Throughout the house one sees a cleanliness that is admirable. The small church has been marvelously restored and is remarkable for its cleanliness and decorum. The priests assigned to preach weekly and are available to hear confessions. They use their own house as a public school, where a good number of young people are educated free of charge.

‘They will not accept gifts of any kind from anybody. This detachment is very great and becoming to those priests. They are greatly revered by all. I do not know what other title to give them except that of *The hidden pearl of the Veronese clergy*.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Retreat Instructions. **MssB 2793-2798**. St. John Chrysostom, ib.

⁹⁶ Louis Schlor, *Philanthropy of the faith*. Rome 1840. Cited in SA, p. 66.

THE LAITY IN THE CHURCH

204: The laity and holiness in the Church

There are many lay persons in the Church who are more committed than many priests in responding to their vocation of being called to holiness. They lead a spotless life and accomplish good works. We can learn from such exemplary people. 'The unlettered', says St. Augustine, 'rise up and take Heaven by force, and we, with all our learning, still struggle with flesh and blood.'⁹⁷

Hence, the reason for a priest to blush and to tremble on seeing so many of the laity in the midst of the world more occupied than he is in seeking spiritual perfection, and, in effect, being more perfect. How many are truly more mortified, chaste, humble and charitable⁹⁸.

It can happen that a young man aspiring to the priesthood is scandalized in his vocation by a worldly priest who does not give good example. Yet, we clearly see how Divine Providence, at times, in such cases furnishes great help by the constant memory of real charity in the lives of many lay people. Thus, he is able to accept this help, overcoming the scandal given by worldly priests and unwilling to let lay people supersede him in perfection. This is a sign that he has a great disposition to become a priest.⁹⁹

It is heart-breaking to see so much holiness in a lay person, and so much imperfection in a priest¹⁰⁰.

205: The laity and the Apostolic Mission

Not only priests, but under their direction the laity too can offer themselves to work in the organization of the Marian Oratories. They must cooperate in seeing that all goes well. This is what St. Gaspar did in his day. He made use of exemplary lay people to care for the good governing of the established oratories, and he entrusted them to be yeast in finding new ones.¹⁰¹

Some young people, who were well prepared, were used by St. Gaspar as bait to bring in those who were abandoned or far away from the Church, and the fishing was good. They succeeded, above all, to worm their way into the heart of the wayward youth, little by little, and convinced them by their example to enter the Oratory. Once there, having met St. Gaspar, they were drawn by him to become priests, to confess their sins, and to change their way of living. More than once they became exemplary Christians¹⁰². Many of these young apostles especially the zealous ones, had a real missionary spirit in their secular role, that could be the envy of any religious.¹⁰³

⁹⁷ *The Confessions of St. Augustine*. Book 8, c. 8. PL 32, 757.

⁹⁸ Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2240-2276**.

⁹⁹ Meditations in *Primum Regum*. N. 11. **MssB 5226-5228**.

¹⁰⁰ Spiritual Journal. **December 2, 1808**.

¹⁰¹ Cardinal Louis diCanossa, Pastoral Letter on Oratories. Verona 1898. **BERTONI 2**, pp. 384, f.

¹⁰² *Miscellanea Lenotti*. SA, p. 146.

¹⁰³ Cajetan Giacobbe, *Life*. SA, p. 346.

There was a special group, the cream and the back-bone of the Oratory, who possessed special virtues. St. Gaspar used their talents to send them here and there, wherever there was a need. The Director needed only to hint, and they were ready to act. This group was made up of young people and adults who enjoyed coming together to receive spiritual formation. When the others were out playing, they occupied themselves in reading the lives of the saints, or some other spiritual book, speaking of informative and edifying topics, concluding with some spiritual song¹⁰⁴.

206: St. Gaspar and the formation of the laity

After having spent the entire Sunday with the young people in various activities at the Oratory, St. Gaspar met in the evening at his home with the young people closest to his heart. This took place not only on Sunday evenings or the evenings of Holy Days, for soon he began to meet daily with these young people and the adults of the Oratory who were free from work. They passed these evening hours in spiritual reading and conversation. Everyone was able to express his viewpoint, or ask for explanations. St. Gaspar answered all promptly and graciously, and in such a way that he satisfied their every request. He left them well instructed and formed¹⁰⁵.

At the Stimate the Oratory flourished to such a point that neither the Church or the Chapel of the Conception was able to hold them. He formed a group of about thirty young people and adults from the best and most fervent ones, those who were noted by their recollection, their frequency in receiving the sacraments, their devotion and piety. This group met in his house in the Chapel of the Transfiguration. Here special instructions and stimulating topics about perfection were discussed.

Since this chapel was next to St. Gaspar's room, it would happen that at times that the priest assigned was unable to attend, because of his health, or some other reason, St. Gaspar even though he was old and ill, would come and deliver the homily. If he were unable to do this he would call this little chosen group into his room, and would deliver a short sermon, much to their edification and satisfaction¹⁰⁶.

¹⁰⁴ o.c., SA p. 351.

¹⁰⁵ o.c., SA, pp. 351-353.

¹⁰⁶ *Miscellanea Lenotti*. SA, p. 149, f.

VOCATION TO MINISTRY IN THE CHURCH

207 I have chosen you

It was not you, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain [Jn 15:16]. Jesus tells us: You did not choose Him as teacher and Lord, but I was the first to choose you and to call you. By My call and My grace I have made you My friends, My disciples, My apostles. In the parable of the vine and the branches He insists: as the farmer chooses the best vines to plant in his vineyard, so I, O Apostles, have chosen you to plant you in My Church as the best branches, made so by My grace so that you might produce a good crop of grapes, that is, of a faithful, numerous and well-formed people. [cf. Jn 15:1].

Christ speaks in this way to show the greatness of His love for His Apostles, because among all the other men, even those more noble and learned and more eloquent, He had chosen them as His apostles, making them His special friends and princes of His Church. Thus stimulating them to exchange their love and honor to Him in a true special and loyal way.

He has also intended to have His Apostles consider the eminent dignity of their condition and of their apostolic duty, so that they would commit themselves to correspond properly to a radical following of Christ.

Further, with the choice made first by Christ, He wished to give His apostles a lesson in humility, as if to say, I have called you to be my friends, and share with you my most intimate secrets. Because of this you should not be proud, since this is not of your own merit, but it is a gift on my part.

Finally, the Lord wishes to affirm that He alone has given the apostles their dignity, so that they would believe in everything that they possessed came from him, and that no one could ever hinder their mission of reaping a great harvest of souls in this world. He would always remain with them and would always guarantee their capability of producing fruit for the Kingdom of God¹⁰⁷.

208: Great is the Lord's love for us.

From all eternity God has loved us and decreed to call us. It has been a long time that the Lord has loved us, and we are incapable of fully understanding this. God has called us to a holy vocation, one that is capable of making saints out of sinners and enemies. If, indeed, He is so powerful in calling, and He calls freely out of His goodness, there is little to fear. When we were still far from Him, He saved us by His grace, even though we were His enemies. How much closer is He now, seeing that we are now doing our part!

God has saved us not because of our works, but by His design of love, and impelled only by His love. We are called to collaborate with this design of salvation with the strength that He gives us. The proclamation of the Gospel is not easy. It is bound on all sides by the turnover of so many worldly interests that tend to shackle or to box it in. Because of the Gospel we should be disposed to suffer, to accept adversities of all kind, with patience and courage. We should not distance ourselves

¹⁰⁷ Retreat Instructions. **MssB 3238-3243.**

from afflictions, but we should seek them, trusting not in our own weak power, but in the power of God which triumphs especially when we are weak.

We are sure that God, Who has called us to this struggle so that we can do battle and win for the cause of faith, will remain near and sustain us with all His power. For the sake of the Gospel we will succeed in sustaining generously and joyfully all kinds of adversity, even those quite severe. Animated by faith, not in ourselves, or in our own power, but in God, we will immerse ourselves in prayer to Him. He will hear us and make us stronger than all our enemies, all our tribulations and all our persecutions¹⁰⁸.

209: God has chosen that which is weak in the world

St. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, says: ***Consider your own calling, brothers*** – that is the reason and the circumstances of your calling – ***not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many of noble birth.*** [1 Co 1:26]. We, too, are poor, without privileges, without nobility, without worldly culture. We know only a little theology and Canon Law. We can preach the doctrine of Christ and explain His Law with simplicity. We do not have the eloquence of great orators, or the prestige of the learned.

St. Paul affirms this [1 Co 1:17]: ***For Christ did not send me to preach the Gospel with the wisdom of human eloquence*** [that is, with the eloquence and refinement of oratory], ***so that the Cross of Christ might not be emptied of its meaning.*** Thus Christ willed that preaching should not be profaned and rendered useless. This would happen if men felt they had obtained the faith and consequently salvation through human eloquence, rather than from the Passion of Christ.

Nevertheless, the Apostle is right in admitting to the Christian community even those who were learned and important in the world. He did this, however, not because he needed them, but to avoid all forms of discrimination.

Where is the wise one? Where is the scholar? Where is the debater of this age? [1 Co 1:20]. What philosopher was ever able to save or teach the real truth? All this was the work of poor fishermen. That which the philosophers with all their syllogisms were unable to do came about through the 'foolishness of what was preached', thus convincing everyone of the most sublime truths, making ignorant men the real wise ones. The poor and the ignorant believed and were saved. The testimony of the great wisdom of the preacher is the fact that the ignorant are instructed in lofty truths that lead them to mold their lives on these principles¹⁰⁹.

210: Vocation is a chain of graces

God never refuses any one who wants to do battle under the banner of His Son, and who uses the means prescribed by Him, that is, prayer and mortification. Such a one will triumph in glory¹¹⁰. Recollection and the sense of the great gift of my vocation.

¹⁰⁸ Retreat Instructions. MssB 3297-3300

¹⁰⁹ Retreat Instructions. MssB 3266-3272

¹¹⁰ Spiritual Journal. July 29, 1809.

What is great blessing it is to forget and be stripped of all created things to seek God and Him alone¹¹¹.

The grace of a vocation is an immense series of graces. This series can be broken, and to break it, does it take much? It is sufficient not to correspond. This chain and this series of graces from the Lord are broken at once when the soul refuses to correspond. Then what happens? It happens that everything regarding a vocation becomes annoying and difficult. In time they are either abandoned or not cared for. This should cause us to fear. One could even lose his vocation.

Beware of saying: Oh, I don't want to be so scrupulous. I don't want to be tied down; I don't need so much perfection. This is a sign that one does not have a real understanding of his vocation. Worse yet, if he begins to enjoy the things of the world, such as riches, honors and pleasures. It would be a sign that spiritual values nauseate him¹¹².

211: Assuring the safety of a vocation

On His part, God has done everything that is necessary. He has granted, and continues to grant His grace in order for us to follow Him easily. But now it's necessary that one's soul, in cooperation with divine grace, will carry out all that is expected of it: so that one will respond, deny himself, take up the Cross on his shoulders willingly, and through obedience, truly follow our Lord until death.

It is true that one's spirit must also be supported in its weakness, and comforted us in its sufferings. But notwithstanding this, it must be attentive, to engage itself with all care, working with fear and trembling in order to make certain of its own election by means of good works and by proof of sound virtue, in conformity with that saying from Sacred Scripture; ***Be all the more eager to make your call and election firm*** [2 P 1:10]. Because of this, St. Ignatius prescribed many years of waiting before one's definitive admission into the Society of Jesus, in order to definitely ascertain a subject's vocation with trials and evident proofs, which, from our Lord's view, appears certain and without a shadow of a doubt.

It is incumbent on the subject, on his part, to ensure this same vocation and election. Analyzing this, everything easily comes down to this: that one knows that he cannot rely on himself, but must trust in God; pray; and have both fear and love¹¹³.

212: The Church prepares a calling to consecrated life

A vocation is the product of the Bridegroom's free election: ***It was not you who chose Me, but I Who chose you*** [Jn 15:6]. In arranging this election, His Providence uses force along with gentleness [cf. Ws 8:1] committing one to the maternal care of His Spouse, the Church, with the free and full cooperation of the same elect.

Before all else, God preordains a remote preparation for a vocation to a consecrated life. Divine Providence brought us into the world endowed with various natural gifts; He has called us to the faith; better still, He has provided for us to be born

¹¹¹ o.c., December 25, 1808.

¹¹² Retreat to Acolytes. MssB 4445-4446.

¹¹³ Correspondence, p. 42. Un-dated letter to L. Naudet.

in an environment which is permeated by faith; He allowed us to enter the Church by means of Baptism; then, He enriched us with virtues and gifts which were indeed suited by the ministry to which he destined us. We truly have ground to adore and thank the Lord, together with the obligation to pray for purification from our vices and to be reborn to a new life in Christ. God gives to everyone who is called to a particular state in life whatever is necessary for that state. He never is at a loss to do whatever is needed on His part.

Then, there is that commitment on the part of the Church, the Bride of Christ, which offers her prudent and carding help. The Church's commitment is revealed by her care for the chosen person's progress, both through activities and prayer no matter how long that journey continues. It unfolds like a mother's daily routine, who, early on, nurses her child, and then, weans him little by little as he grows.

In regard to activity, Mother Church, the Spouse of Christ, offers the candidate the milk of instruction and the most simple examples, so that he can begin to practice moral virtues. She weans him by helping him to progress in religious virtues, and brings to perfection by the practice of divine and theological virtues.

In regard to prayer, she nurses him by having him meditate on the mysteries of Christ's humility, and weans him by having him meditate on Christ's passion. She leads him to the temple, so that he will remain there, meditating on Christ's Resurrection and Divinity, in order that he will thereafter preach with fervor¹¹⁴.

It is our duty, therefore, to respond positively to so much solicitude.

213: The Church assists vocations to consecrated life to develop

While the remote preparation for a vocation to consecrated life consists in commitment to Christian perfection, the proximate preparation includes, over and above this, a more specific involvement in the perfection of ecclesiastical service. This entails learning the science of the saints in order to convert sinners, to watch over the just, and to promote union with God.

The Church operates in this way to inspire a candidate with a strong resolution to imitate the saints: proposing their example and putting each, so to speak, in familiar contact with them. By the example of the Saints, the Church inspires desire in the heart of the elect to help one's neighbor and to intimately unite himself to God, purifying his intentions so that he will feel moved, not by worldly vanity, but, by the pure desire to please God.

The Church's solicitude for a vocation to consecrated life is apparent early on in the case of adolescents. It endeavors to protect their innocence, to keep them away from the wicked, favoring their path to union with God in every way.

Divine Providence adds to the maternal care of the Church its grace, so that a candidate will generously offer his entire self to God, while doing so with great joy. The effect of such a gift of grace is the ability to give oneself entirely to God's pleasure, like a true apostle who does not seek his own interests, but those of Jesus Christ [cf. Ph 2:21], with a strong desire to grow in virtue and perfection¹¹⁵.

¹¹⁴ Meditations on *Primum Regum*, n. 6. MssB 4961-4991

¹¹⁵ o.c., MssB 5007-5032.

214: How to answer the call

It is necessary to conform to God's Providence and the Church's motherly care with the simplicity of children, without weakness: as in the example of Samuel, who let himself be guided gently like a child [cf. 1 S 1:24; 3:1, ff.].

We must respond to the Church's charge of watching over a candidate's progress in the realm of action as he advances from virtue to virtue, from moral virtues to religious virtues, and from these to divine virtues. And, insofar as the progress of prayer is concerned, he must try to apply himself to meditation on the mysteries of Christ's life, and progressively on to His Passion and resurrection. All this is to be done methodically, not by leaps and bounds. It must always be based on Sacred Scripture, from where rules for action must derive, as well as inspiration for prayer.

Therefore, it is necessary to apply oneself diligently to the study of sacred Scripture. Providence will open our minds to understand God's Word in the most vivid light of His Wisdom.

Lord, grant that while we respond to Your grace and to the Church's solicitude, we shall be able to develop resolutions of dynamic virtues in order to help others by our ministry, and ourselves also by prayer. Grant that we may endeavor to seek a more profound knowledge of God in order to preach and to pray more effectively. Grant that we may strive to cultivate the purest inclinations to charity, devoid of all worldly ambition. Incline us to be always ready with prompt and generous execution of your plans, and that we may give ourselves without reserve to you, in order to grow by Your grace in virtue and wisdom¹¹⁶.

215: If the world hates you, know that it first hated Me

I had a strong experience of that great gift which is to suffer anything for the love of God. ***Blessed are those persecuted for justice's sake; the reign of God is theirs. Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of slander against you because of Me. Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is great in heaven [Mt 5:10-12]***¹¹⁷.

After gently drawing the Apostles to Himself, Christ, knowing that it would be difficult for many of them, and that it would be unbearable indeed for these to be subjected to persecution, He proceeded, therefore, to encourage them: They have hated Me – the Lord seems to say – and because of this, I have gone before you and I have shown you the way. If you follow Me along the same path, you will be able to walk easily, moreover, you will do so with joy, knowing that if you are persecuted, you can count on Me as a friend, as well as a guide and model.

Christ strengthened the Apostles against the persecutions which threatened them, so that they would face them willingly, even to the point of boasting and glorying in them, understanding them to be what they are: true documents of Christian identification. Don't be surprised – Jesus wants to add - don't let your hearts be troubled when the world hates you, it hated Me before it hated you. Rather, be glad and rejoice because, in this way, you will be My imitators. On the other hand, just as

¹¹⁶ o.c., nn. 6, 7. **MssB 5021-5041.**

¹¹⁷ Spiritual Journal. **September 29, 1808.**

the world's hatred could not harm Me, likewise, it will not harm you. The world will persecute you because you do not belong to it. You are not in agreement with its works; moreover, you are in conflict with them, just as I have been. Saying this, He implied: It is for this very reason that you will condemn this world's pursuits. And, without difficulty, you will gain greater advantages from My love, rather than injury from the world's hatred¹¹⁸.

216: Constant renewal of God's gift

Just as fire needs kindling wood to burn constantly, so does grace need commitment on our part to cooperate. We are concerned here, as ministers, with that special grace which we have received to guide the Christian Community. It is incumbent on us to keep it alight, or otherwise, we will let it die out. ***Do not quench the Spirit*** [1 Th 5:19], St. Paul cries out. But, the spirit will be extinguished by sloth and negligence; while it will be nourished by watchfulness and attentive care.

It is up to us, as long as we become more fervent, and enrich ourselves with confidence, enthusiasm and joy.

It may happen that the zeal, charity and grace which we received in ordination, can, little by little, be weakened and become lethargic. A little because of human weakness and inconsistency, a little because of contrary motives, and a little because of laziness, and extinction may even result. It's necessary to revive and relight charity's flame, to encourage its growth and development again. In order to reactivate this fire, one needs prayer, the reading of, and meditation on God's Word, study, commitment to progress in virtue, and above all, zeal and application to obtain the salvation of those souls entrusted to our care, with greater diligence and generosity. With these resources the fire in our souls will be revived, our freedom of spirit which had been dozing and chained down will be awakened, and it will be possible to victoriously confront the world with its false loves, its errors and its fears. Having overcome egoism and eliminated fear, the fire of charity will flare up day by day, and will gradually spread¹¹⁹.

¹¹⁸ Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3246-3249.**

¹¹⁹ *Ib.*, **MssB 3281-3285.**

CORRESPONDING WITH GRACE

217: I fear that Jesus will pass me by

If the concern for our salvation depended on God alone, no one would be damned. But, since it also depends on our cooperation, and this sometimes is lacking, many damn themselves. It's a great danger to hear God's Word and not derive benefit from it¹²⁰. It is not enough to hear the Divine Word, perhaps even while doing so with pleasure, or even putting into practice some instructions. Even Herod listened to John the Baptist, with pleasure, and was willing to put part of his advice into practice, but not those who dealt with his predominant passion¹²¹.

During this undertaking, then, when we are dealing with the divine call, it is necessary to seize the occasion, the moment. **And they, straightway, leaving their nets followed Him.**¹²² I fear that Jesus will pass me by¹²³; on the other hand, when we cooperate with God's grace, we become worthy to receive an additional one¹²⁴.

Very few understand what God would do with them, if he were not hindered in His plans by them.¹²⁵

218: If one has good will, he has everything

Three things are necessary to attain salvation:

[1] Flee from small sins: **...he who wastes the little he has will be stripped bare.** [Si 19:1]. These are like little thieves who enter by a window to open the door for bigger thieves.

[2] Be realistically persuaded that one cannot enter heaven without the price of hard work and effort: **... the kingdom of heaven suffers violence [Mt 11:12]. Strive to come through the narrow gate [Lk 13:24]. Whoever wishes to come after Me, must deny himself, take up his Cross and follow Me [Mt 16:24].**

[3] God will is needed to really be able to enter Heaven¹²⁶. He, who has good will, has everything. But that will is not good if it refuses to do all that it can¹²⁷.

Let us not rely on good intentions. Deeds, deeds!¹²⁸

The sluggard's propensity slays him [Pr 21:25]. Why? Because by not putting these wishes into practice, his soul is assailed by remorse and sets up its own condemnation¹²⁹.

A fruitless intention is like a painting of those soldiers, or hunters, who, though they appear to be in the act of preparing to shoot, never wound or kill their prey.

¹²⁰ Spiritual Journal. February 22, 1809.

¹²¹ o.c. February 19, 1809.

¹²² o.c., December 7, 1808.

¹²³ o.c., September 15, 1808.

¹²⁴ ib.

¹²⁵ o.c., May 18, 1811.

¹²⁶ Spiritual Journal. February 22, 1809.

¹²⁷ o.c., March 22, 1809.

¹²⁸ Retreat for Acolytes. MssB 4456.

¹²⁹ Spiritual Journal. October 21, 1808.

Weakness is often blamed. But, what should we think about an elderly man who, laying aside his cane, attempts to skate on ice like a boy? The devil is sometimes blamed. But, what can we say about a hired hand, who, eating out at a tavern, pays with grapevine poles bought by his landlord for his vineyard, then puts reeds into the ground in place of the poles, with the result that when a wind comes up, it upsets everything?

It's necessary to redirect our passion, to aim our love toward God, our interests toward eternal gifts, our hatred toward sin¹³⁰.

219: Will and wishful thinking

Many would like to follow Christ, but are not disposed to renounce everything. On the other hand, if they want to relinquish all things and to moderate their disordered affections, they do not select effective means to achieve their goal. They are like a sick person who wants to be healthy, but refuses medicine because of the discomfort and nausea it may cause.

These men have a temperament that is entirely contrary to a holy vocation and to the commandment of renouncing all things they never acquire that soundness of spirit and of eternal life, because these are not obtained by wishing alone, but by working for them: **... A person is justified by works and not by faith alone** [Jas 2:24]. Even though it seems that they want to save themselves in reality, they do not want to. **The soul of the sluggard craves in vain** [Pr 13:4]. They want the goal but do not want to use the means needed to achieve that goal. They want virtue insofar as it is good, but do not want it if it proves difficult, so they abandon it. Therefore a lazy person doesn't deal with what is properly called the will, but with a mere wish. 'I would like to, but I don't want to.'

I will reflect within myself to determine, if by chance, I am also trapped by this deception: wishing for heaven apart from the perfection of my state; perfection without virtue, virtue without its practice, practice of virtues without mortification of their contrary passions, humility without humiliation; patience without suffering. O deceit, the gravest and fatal deceit! **Sometimes a way seems right to a man, but the end of it leads to death** [Pr 16:25]¹³¹.

Everything depends on a resolution to serve God under any condition whatsoever. One needs to guard against just daydreaming. Fanciful wishing is distinguished from willing by its effect: the former, when it encounters a difficulty, gives up, or weakens its resolve; the latter, stands firm and entrenches itself, and holds fast¹³².

220: Watch and pray

Meditating on the even of Gethsemane, I considered how the disciples were sleeping while Jesus was agonizing and sweating blood for them. Even John who,

¹³⁰ O.c. cf. also Note in the CS under this date.

¹³¹ Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2528-2533**.

¹³² Spiritual Journal. **July 30, 1808**.

shortly before, leaned on His breast, as well as the others, who had just partaken of communion! **Watch and pray** [Mt 26:4].¹³³

The Apostles slept while Christ prayed. This is how we also behave: sleeping while Christ is suffering in His members. It's lack of prayer which gives the devil the chance to tempt the Apostles. They run away when the soldiers approach to arrest Christ. Divine grace is required to overcome fear. Therefore, prayer is necessary¹³⁴.

Watch and pray. Every admonition in the Scriptures and in the Gospel is summarized in this statement: **Watch:** This means you must be wide awake and in control of your powers. But you are unarmed. You cannot resist if you are attacked; you will be overcome. **Pray:** this means you are well armed, but dozing. If you are assailed, you will be stripped of your weapons, killed by deception. **Watch and Pray:** Here you have a man in full strength, and who is well armed. He cannot be overcome¹³⁵.

221: Prayer and personal commitment

The current world is an immense hospital of sick people. Everyone complains, but no one is healed, even though the remedy is at hand. It is prayer, which is often omitted, or is practiced poorly because the person who prays is evil or asks for evil things. Insofar as one does not seek first the kingdom of God, one does not pray properly, he prays without perseverance.

Daily, a knight begged for St. Ignatius; help by his prayers, but he nevertheless continued to lead a scandalous life. One day the saint asked the knight if he would help him carry a small table out of a room. The soldier positioned himself on one side to pull it, while St. Ignatius stood opposite holding the table motionless. The former tried to pull it again, but, the latter continued to hold it back. At a certain point the knight blurted out: 'If you want to carry this out, you've got to give me a hand.' Promptly the saint answered: 'You, however, my dear sir, have to give me a hand while I am praying to take you away from your sinful life.'¹³⁶

The saints unite so much power and energy of soul that they are able to hold steadfastly against the obstacles placed in their way. This strength comes from an interior certainty that they possess following the divine will, and from this, living faith that nothing can impede God's carrying out whatever He has planned. They do not fear anything other than not corresponding with God's graces as they should¹³⁷.

¹³³ o.c., **July 5, 1808.**

¹³⁴ Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2615.**

¹³⁵ Spiritual Journal. **April 28, 1811.**

¹³⁶ ib., **March 6, 1809.**

¹³⁷ Spiritual Journal, p. 104. This note concerns a holy soul [in the singular], perhaps applicable to St. Teresa of Jesus [cf. Fr. Joseph Stofella's note here]. We have allowed ourselves a transposition to the plural in order to emphasize the general meaning of this invaluable reflection.

THE FEAR OF GOD

222: The fear of God in the spiritual life

The power of fear impels a man to turn to God, or impels him to unite himself more closely to God. Now, there are two ways that God may be feared: dread of just punishment, whether temporal or eternal, by which God punishes mankind's faults, or by being afraid of any fault which can separate us from Him. If we turn to God's mercy because of our fear of eternal punishment, while grieving for our sins, and abstain from further sin, this is servile fear, which is praiseworthy as the Council of Trent teaches¹³⁸, and is inspired by the Holy Spirit. If we turn to God because we fear our faults, and cling ever more firmly to Him, this is called filial fear, and is, properly, a Gift of the Holy Spirit.

Fear of the Lord is glory and splendor [Si 1:9], so says sacred Scripture. In the same way the other virtues will be honored and worthy of glory, becoming useful in peaceful times and powerful in times of strife. But, the Holy Spirit continues: ***He who fears God is greater than all others*** [cf. Si 10:20].

If we do not live in the fear of God, our house will fall, and it will do so quickly, even if it is built in heaven. In fact, St. Paul who could say ***our citizenship is in heaven*** [Ph 3:20], and who was really taken up to the third citizenship in heaven, feared that, after having preached to others, would himself be rejected [cf. 1 Co 9:27]. Now, those who did not know how to fear like him, even though they seemed to be like fixed stars in the heavens, ended up falling. Oh, how many there are who are exchanged the immortal splendor of their virtues for a crazed conflagration of impure affections, which makes them objects of scorn to fellow beings, but also a target of sneering and mockery by the very demons.

Let's not laugh at the fall of these mighty cedars, no! For we even wail like fragile cypress trees [cf. Zc 11:2], as we are struck by the horror or the harm others endure. Let us be enlivened with a mutual fear of falling as so many others have done. Moreover, God Himself has commanded us to do so. He tells the just: ***Fear the Lord, you, His holy ones*** [Ps 33:10]; and He orders sinners: ***Be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna*** [Mt 10:28]¹³⁹.

223: The fear of God leads to conversion

It is always difficult to free one's will from these disordered affections which hold it in bondage. It is indeed hard to change one's ways. But, by loving God, everything becomes much easier and convenient. On the basis of Sacred Scripture, we understand the fear of God makes conversion effortless, amiable, and prompt; inclining our wills, step by step, to this transformation.

Here's the first step: ***...He who fears the Lord, returns to his own heart*** [cf. Si 21:6]. By means of a deep anxiety of the worst evils that threaten a sinner in this life, even as it shall be more so in the next, the soul re-enters its inner self, gathers its distracted thoughts, and is inspired to come face to face with its unhappy state.

¹³⁸ Session VI, canon 8. Denz. 1558.

¹³⁹ Early Sermons. N. 2. 'Fear of God'. **MssB 391-402. PVC, pp. 154-159.**

The fear of the Lord is to hate evil [Pr 8:13]. While making us clearly see that sin is the cause of all these evils, the fear of God immediately leads us to detest and abhor sin.

By the fear of the Lord man avoids evil [Pr 16:6]. The soul consequently stands aside from itself and holds back its attraction to evil and then begins to leave the path of vice. It may seem difficult to keep away from evil entirely because of the powerful temptations which the passions, not accustomed to suffer refusal, unleash in the seal. But, there is no reason to doubt. **No evil can harm the man who fears the Lord; if he is subjected to temptations, he will be rescued from them** [cf. Si 2:9].

This is the way to overcome temptations: **the fear of God puts sin to flight** [cf. Si 1:27]. After this victory the sinner hears in his heart something like a voice from heaven which says: **You, who fear the Lord, hope for good things, for lasting joy and mercy** [Si 2:9]. Based on this mercy, these are those that **fear the Lord and prepare their hearts and humble themselves before Him** [cf. Si 2:17]. Then, truly, thousands of Angel's voices will be heard, celebrating their conversion, and repeating: **Salvation for those who fear the name of the Lord** [cf. Mi 6:5]. After all, they will have countless consolations in their hearts, proof of that mercy which from **age to age is given to those who fear Him**. [Lk 1:50]¹⁴⁰.

224: Love overcomes fear

It is proper for pious souls to fear a fault even when it is not really present. This is because they fear sin so much due to the great love they have for God, so that they do not even want to be subject to a shadow of sin, nor do they even want a trace of it about¹⁴¹. But, when we are assailed by vain fears, we will try not to give in to them, but to love Him to Whom we freely offer ourselves, ready to do whatever we know to be His will, not so much out of fear, but above all out of love. Love fears nothing, and because of this, once having put ourselves in this disposition of loving magnanimity, seeking the Lord's pleasure only, and having confidence in Him above all else, we can peacefully rest in him and in His goodness.

It may also be that we are not always clear on the question of certain fears. Well, in so far as we are assailed by these, let us take advantage of these occasions to grow in hope and love, while making stronger and more active attempts to seek divine aid and in order to act only for God, without any thought of self¹⁴².

Let us not fear. When our soul has confidence in God, we should fear only to be afraid¹⁴³.

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¹⁴⁰ Early Sermons, n. 2. **MssB 392-398**

¹⁴¹ Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2591**.

¹⁴² Correspondence, p. 73. Letter to Mother Naudet. Dated March 6, 1813.

¹⁴³ O.c., p. 102. Letter to L. Naudet, dated December 14, 1813.