

# 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 B [## 225 - 280]: RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

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**AUTHOR'S DEDICATION**

To my Stigmatine Confreres:

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

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

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

For the translation of this book:

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

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

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

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**PREPARATION for the ELECTRONIC LIBRARY & COMPUTER NOTES**

**Fr. Joseph Henchey.**

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

[www.st-bertoni.com](http://www.st-bertoni.com)

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

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

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

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

[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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<sup>1</sup> Doubleday Image Books. Garden City NY 1955, with Introduction by Etienne Gilson.

## PRESENTATION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>3</sup> Fr. Joseph Stofella, ***P. Giovanni M. Marani*. CS II, p. 124.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## FORWARD

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

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

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

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

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

- 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

### RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

#### PRAYER AND PRAYERS

**225:** Prayer is the life of our life, and the soul of our soul; it is like breathing. *I gasp with open mouth and I draw in the Spirit* [Ps 119:131]. Just as we receive gifts of divine bounty every moment, so, in like manner, it is proper that our hearts be raised to God constantly.<sup>5</sup>

We strive to keep our spirits high, calmly leaning and resting on Him at all times, thereby spiritualizing all our actions and all our works. A mother will at times show her child an apple in her hands. Immediately the child is pleased to see the beauty of the fruit, and to imagine how sweet it tastes, but when the mother playfully raises it out of reach, the child becomes sad and the joy now turns to tears, since she is unable to grasp it with her hands, all the while the mother is teasing the child. What does the child do to obtain it? She hugs her mother and never stops begging, and this is how she obtains it.

With great loving confidence, we plead with our Lord: 'Give us what You demand, and demand whatever You want of us'.<sup>6</sup> These words are entirely spiritual. How, what are we to do? 'I gasp with open mouth and I draw in the Spirit [op. cit.]. To open one's mouth in prayer is to draw in the Spirit's abundance.'<sup>7</sup>

How this is possible in the concrete is shown to us by the Holy Spirit. *Nothing impedes you to pray at all times* [Si 1:22]; *it is necessary to pray always, without tiring* [Lk 18:1]; *Pray without ceasing* [1 Th 5:17]. Thus prayer will assist prayer, and the effort to do so will draw down greater abundance from the Spirit. And, this Spirit *helps us in our weakness* [Rm 8:26], so that we here on earth even now can offer that perpetual and perennial sacrifice and holocaust which is the same that the blessed spirits and saints in heaven offer before God. This is what all the servants of God have done as exiles and pilgrims on this earth. We can also achieve what they did with these same powers and help. Because this pleases God and redounds to His glory, and because He commands us, it is enough that it can be accomplished in this way, and that it be done<sup>8</sup>.

#### **226: One's heart is always with God**

We must always act with a true spirit of faith; that is, whatever concerns the duties of our state should be performed with an intimate and lively conviction that these derive from God's Will. Therefore, when we faithfully perform these activities, we are surely obeying God and doing His Will. This outlook is necessary because it is the very soul of every action. Otherwise, we will end up by working all night without

<sup>5</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3412.**

<sup>6</sup> St. Augustine, Confessions. Book 10, c. 29. PL 32, 769.

<sup>7</sup> Correspondence. Letter to L. Naudet, December 1, 1812.

<sup>8</sup> op. cit., letter dated December 1812.

catching anything [cf. Lk 5:5]: I have worked, I have worked; but I have not accomplished anything!

Let us accompany every action in this spirit. We can be in school, but our heart is with God; in Church and our heart is with God; we can be singing at table, walking, studying, sleeping, but our heart is always with God. When we are animated by this interior spirit, even our external manners will be characterized by that decorum, that composure, and by a modesty which is not pretentious, but being holy, will edify one's neighbor.

The Council of Trent teaches: '... there is nothing that is worth more in molding one's neighbor towards piety and God's worship than the life and example of those dedicated to the sacred ministry. From the moment that they are seen as those who have been raised from the domain of worldly interests to a higher realm, they attract the attention of others, who then will tend to look at them as models, drawing from them examples to imitate.'<sup>9</sup>

It is not enough to do things as others do; one must do them well. Christ **has done everything well** [Mk 7:37].<sup>10</sup>

## **227: Everything is Grace**

If we want to prepare a place within us so that the Lord will accomplish all the good He desires, we have to begin by being grateful for everything He has already done for us. Why is God so displeased with our ingratitude? Because it is like that fierce wind described by Ezechiel [cf. Ezk 19:12], which made a desert of a very fertile land which is the symbol of the benefits of God. God is displeased with those who render evil for good, not because of His own interests, nor even because it denotes a grave insult to Him, but because it constrains Him in a certain sense, to unproductiveness.

It seems impossible! Of a man helps our just a little, we feel obligated to him at all times. If an important dignitary shows us courtesy and benevolence, we tend to give him whatever we can. Yet, we do not act this way with God, who through the mouth of the Prophet, grieves: **Though I trained and strengthened their arms, yet they devised evil against me** [Ho 7:15]<sup>11</sup>.

St. Gaspar habitually thanked God for everything, not only for favorable things, but even for adverse and painful events. He wanted his sons to acquire and practice this attitude of thankfulness toward God, so much so that he never avoided the opportunity of instilling it in their spirit. He would often say: 'May thanks be given at all times to God for everything that He has done for us through His infinite Mercy.' Praise be to Him Who has behaved toward us like a Father, which He truly is. Let us thank Him with all our hearts, chanting the *Te Deum* This is the way he trained his sons to be grateful to God for those benefits they received from Him<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> Council of Trent, Session 22: 'De Reformatione'. Canon 1, *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*. Herder 1962, p. 713.

<sup>10</sup> Retreat to Acolytes. **MssB 4447-4449**.

<sup>11</sup> Mission at St. Firmus Major. **MssB 4067-4085**.

<sup>12</sup> Cajetan Giacobbe, *Life*, SA, p. 515.

**228: The environment of prayer**

The Lord would like to speak to certain souls if they would only withdraw a little, because the world is making so much noise around them.<sup>13</sup> To receive the inspirations of God, we need solitude, calm, quiet and both interior and external silence; otherwise, the inspirations are not heard, or they will fade and disappear<sup>14</sup>.

***It is man's duty to prepare his own soul [Pr 16:1]***, Scripture says. Consequently we must not only try to be assiduous with Divine assistance to provide for our soul's encounters with His Divine Majesty, but also use the uppermost, purest and excellent care to keep it constantly prepared. Observance of silence, avoiding long discussions, evading frivolous conversations – all mean having one's ear ready for the sweetest inspiration of our Creator<sup>15</sup>.

St. Gaspar always walked in God's presence, which is the reason why you would often have seen him with his hat in hand. From time to time, he would demonstrate certain devout behavior and such strong but tender sentiments of compunction, that it became noticeable in the outward brilliance of his eyes, in the composure of his face and person, so that he inspired devotion and comfort, visibly demonstrating the spirit of the Lord with which he was imbued<sup>16</sup>.

**229: Living experience of prayer**

I experienced a very vivid awareness of the immense debt owed to God by reason of creation and the redemption, both during prayer and when not in prayer<sup>17</sup>.

Meditation on the Incarnation. Sentiments of gratitude to the Most Holy Trinity and conformity with Jesus Christ. I was obliged to love God even before He became man: how much more at this time!<sup>18</sup>

During Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, I felt sentiments of much tenderness, love and offering. I felt how Christ draws our hearts to Himself, just as He said: ***I will draw all men to Myself*** [Jn 12:32]; and how all good things, knowledge, and sweetness that there is in creatures, are all His. Because of these only He must be praised and loved<sup>19</sup>.

Reading about the interior presence of God, that is, how God is within us, I realized that there is no need to go outside ourselves to find Him. Having food at home, it would be foolish to go about seeking it elsewhere; there being no need to go hungry. I found so much sentiment and great recollection, which lasted sometime afterwards, and a great desire to please His Divine Majesty in all things<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Spiritual Journal. **March 23, 1809.**

<sup>14</sup> o.c. **July 23, 1809.**

<sup>15</sup> Correspondence. Letter to L. Naudet. **February 28, 1813.**

<sup>16</sup> *Miscellanea Lenotti*. SA, p. 188.

<sup>17</sup> Spiritual Journal. **September 28, 1809.**

<sup>18</sup> o.c. **September 27, 1806.**

<sup>19</sup> o.c. **March 16, 1809.**

<sup>20</sup> o.c. **October 13, 1808.**

### **230: The Liturgy of the Hours**

Praying the Psalms is a duty of great importance for the spiritual life. Unfortunately, we do not take this into account sufficiently. We are so attentive and exacting when occupied with our affairs, but, when it comes to practicing our liturgical prayer we run the risk of doing so in a routine manner; our mind distracted, perhaps letting it become preoccupied with other considerations.

St. Bernard warns us: 'When we participate at the Divine Office, we must seriously consider how we ought to comport ourselves in the presence of God and His angels. We must endeavor to chant the psalms in such a way that our hearts should be in harmony with our voices.'<sup>21</sup> St. Cyprian insists: 'How can you ask God to listen to you, if you take no care to listen to yourself? How can you want God to remember you at the very moment you call on Him, when you forget yourself at the same time.'<sup>22</sup>

So, let us listen to the voice of the same Psalmist who invites us to praise God in freedom: ***Freely will I offer you sacrifice; I will praise Your name, O Lord, for its goodness*** [Ps 54:8]. 'I praise God, and I delight in that same praise,' St. Augustine comments; that which is praised and that which is loved is freely given. What does freely given mean? That God is sought for Himself, not for some other reason. Leave everything else aside, be concerned for Him alone, love Him freely. Lord, I will praise Your name because it is good. Not for anything else, only because it is good. Perhaps one could say, 'I will praise Your name because You have given me fertile fields, gold, riches, dignity?' Praise God only because He is God. This is truly praising God.'<sup>23</sup>

### **231: St. Gaspar and the Divine Office**

I prayed the Divine Office with great devotion and for the Glory of God<sup>24</sup>. The Divine Office was recited by him with the greatest devotion, and towards this end he had devised a method. He would always faithfully observe everything prescribed by the rubrics, pronunciation, interior devotion, as well as external decorum. He always recited it even when sick, and only omitted it during his last days in obedience to his doctor<sup>25</sup>.

He considered the recitation of the Divine Office not only as his principal duty, but above all, as a sweet conversation with God, endeavoring as often as possible to observe the proper times of the daily canonical hours<sup>26</sup>. The community recitation of Matins and Lauds, as well as Vespers and Compline, was a practice that was observed in St. Gaspar's time<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> St. Bernard, *In Canticles*. Sermon 7. PL 183, 809.

<sup>22</sup> St. Cyprian, *De Oratione Domenica*. C. 31. PL 4, 539.

<sup>23</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3520-3529**. The latter citation is from St. Augustine. *Enarrationes in Psalmos*. Ps 53, 8. PL 36, 626.

<sup>24</sup> Spiritual Journal. **August 24, 1808**.

<sup>25</sup> *Positio*, p. 123.

<sup>26</sup> Cajetan Giacobbe, *Life*. SA, p. 332.

<sup>27</sup> Testimony given by St. John B. Lenotti, reference from the biographical notes of the same Fr. Lenotti, as quoted by Fr. Joseph Stofella. CS III, p. 195.

St. Gaspar's devotion while reciting the Office was never routine, nor did it last just a short time, rather, he cherished it constantly with growing intensity up to the end of his life. He was also well nourished through the deep and tireless study he derived from the sacred Scriptures, with which the divine prayers are interwoven<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> Cajetan Giacobbe, *Vita*. SA, p. 331.

## MEDITATION

### **232: The soul of meditation**

The essence of mental prayer appropriately consists in an intimate conversation with God, our Lord.

This is accomplished, above all, in order to praise and bless Him for what He is in Himself, to thank Him for the gifts and graces He has given us, by practicing that way of praying suggested by St. Paul: ***Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, sing and praying to the Lord in your hearts. Give thanks to God the Father always and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. [Ep 5:18-20]. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another, singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts [Co 3L16].***

Another purpose of mental prayer is to request graces that we need. The way to talk to God is, therefore, the way that a son talks to his father, the manner that a poor person entreats a rich and merciful man, the way one who is sick addresses a doctor, the student a teacher, the bride, her husband.

During meditation it is also worthwhile to converse with ourselves, according to the Psalmist's suggestion: ***Bless the Lord, o my soul; and all my being, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, o my soul, and forget not all His benefits [Ps 103:1-2]. Why are you so downcast, o my soul? Why do you sigh within me? Hope in God! For I shall again be thanking Him, in the presence of my superior and my God [Ps 43:5]***<sup>29</sup>.

### **233: Meditation according to St. Ignatius' method**

Mental prayer, or meditation, is an exercise of a soul's interior faculty concerning facts revealed by Faith. It is a simple practice. If, morning and evening, we habitually use the faculties of memory, intellect and will when we are concerned with sensible objects, then why can't we raise ourselves up a little to consider eternal things with the help of grace?

Memory, above all, calls to mind God, our Father, with whom we want to speak and deal with. We then will recall the mystery which we want to meditate upon, while considering it briefly and as clearly as possible in terms which faith uses in teaching us, articulating it in various steps.

The intellect, then, proceeds to reflect on the mystery, attempting to determine its depths and to derive important and practical convictions to present to one's will. This task which the intellect performs is particularly demanding because it is rather difficult to fix one's attention on only one thing, focusing on God, without being diverted to other thoughts.

It is up to the will to draw certain affections from these concepts, such as love towards God, and confidence in His mercy, sorrow for sin, and humble acknowledgment of one's sinfulness. One should also form positive good resolutions, keeping in mind that without these good resolutions, meditation would become merely

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<sup>29</sup> Retrat Meditations. MssB 3179-3188.

a scholarly exercise rather than a prayer. Finally, one turns to God in a conversational exchange, like a friend to a friend, to ask for His grace, to address one's real sentiments, and one's needs and to obtain help and guidance<sup>30</sup>.

### **234: Wind and oars**

When the Holy Spirit moves us with one of His special inspirations, everything becomes easy and gentle, because He keeps our memory engrossed, enlivens our reasoning, sends us a deluge of reflections, excites our affections and guides our conversation with God in an orderly manner. He controls the tasks of our mental prayer perfectly, so that we only have to cooperate with him with little effort on our part.

But, when we don't have this special assistance, we must exert ourselves to using our free will, with the help of Divine Grace, which, of course, is never lacking. We have to use our soul's faculties in order to exercise their specific capabilities. In this way, we may move the same Holy Spirit to come to our assistance with his exclusive power.

Spiritual men who have dedicated themselves to prayer cannot always expect to be like sailing ships with the wind at the stern, cruising along effortlessly. However, it is well that they adapt themselves rather like galleys, who are moved along both by the wind and with the power supplied by oarsmen. When the beneficial wind of Divine inspiration is lacking, they have to navigate with the oars of their own soul's faculties, aided by Divine Grace. This method of praying often is more fruitful even though it does not always please us<sup>31</sup>.

### **235: Practical suggestions**

Certain spiritual persons begin this task in reverse, that is, they begin by doing external works of charity fervently. These acts, however, are only naturally motivated, and have little of real charity in them. Their efforts may even seem to indicate certain signs of contemplative prayer, which, however, are only apparent, as can be detected by their inconstancy and brevity, and by the lack of positive effects, which, instead, accompany authentic contemplative prayer. These should, therefore, change their method of prayer and begin over again, trying to base their actions on a solid foundation; that is, not on external charitable good works, but in interior inspiration. This method will produce in its own good time, well-seasoned and mature fruit of real charity.

Moreover, interior inspiration, above all, must be supported by a stricter discipline of obedience to spiritual guidance, and by a form of more practical prayer, which will stir up the will<sup>32</sup>.

Insofar as one's preparation for meditation is concerned, interior sentiment and recollection are more important than the workings of his intellect and reasoning. Interior sentiment knows how to pick out a subject in an instant, without jumping from

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<sup>30</sup> o.c. **MssB 3117-3162.**

<sup>31</sup> o.c. **MssB 3151-3152.**

<sup>32</sup> Spiritual Journal. **November 16, 1808.**

one thing to another. It focuses on its principal object, without, however, going ahead by leaving the will behind; it uses the will as a companion, and sometimes the will becomes its guide. Our reasoning depends on our power, even with God's help. Our interior sentiment depends on God, even when we agree with it. The former is employed by human beings on earth; the latter resembles more that which will occur in Heaven in a perfect way<sup>33</sup>.

### **236: Enriching meditation assiduously**

It is important also to examine ourselves on our methods of making our meditation, reflecting on the manner of its preparation and how it is developed; on the inspirations received and on resolutions that we made. We must also evaluate those distractions that inevitably come our way, and that aridity of spirit that we may often suffer.

As for distractions and aridity, it is important to determine whether or not we have given them occasion to develop. Then, too, have we been guilty of neglect during our preparation, or in applying ourselves? Perhaps we were engaged in useless chattering just before beginning? Did some kind of a disordered affection interfere, or could it be that an excessive concern for worldly affairs intervened? Conduct such as this has the effect of distancing spiritual thoughts and affections from our hearts. It is like smoke forcing bees from their hives!

By determining what is wrong, it is possible to correct it by fighting against its cause. Moreover, let us come before God humbly, confessing how just it is that manna should not rain down on those who prefer to eat the coarse food of Egypt. Even in the case that we believe that this dryness of soul does not come from any fault of ours, but that it is a test the Lord sends to strengthen our souls in virtue, it is always a good thing to humbly abandon ourselves to the Divine Will. We, therefore, should guard against shortening the time dedicated to prayer. On the other hand, we must seek to prolong it, in order to prevail, and to do so with greater generosity.

An effective way to appreciate meditation, as well as to quickly avail ourselves of its fruitful effects, is to take notes of those more vivid inspirations, and those more important resolutions, so that when we read over what we have written down, it will be that much easier to put them into practice. It is like a gardener who, during a drought, will use water that has been stored during a period of more abundant rain<sup>34</sup>.

### **237: Faithfulness to daily meditation**

St. Gaspar was always united with God, thanks to meditation. That which he practiced so faithfully, he recommended to everyone, with the utmost fervor and especially to all who were consecrated to the Lord.

He advised its practice to the young men of the Oratories which he founded. Many of these, above all, his first students and companions, accomplished marvelous deeds by means of these sacred exercises.

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<sup>33</sup> Correspondence. Letter to L. Naudet, **March 6, 1813**.

<sup>34</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3189-3192**.

However, for his religious community at the Stimmate, it was not a matter of advice or exhortation, but, above all, a duty, and a strict one at that. He would have tolerated the omission of any other task, but he never excused them from meditation. At times, if a particularly important obligation impeded them from meditating at the established time in the morning, he expected them to discharge this duty for the prescribed length of time as soon as possible<sup>35</sup>.

He highly recommended meditation, and sought every way he could to inspire his confreres to do so before Mass, notwithstanding their duty to hear Confessions. If it wasn't possible he expected that part of it should be done then, and the rest be completed later.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Cajetan Giacobbe, *Life*. SA p. 507.

<sup>36</sup> *Miscellanea Lenotti*, SA, p. 189.

## EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

### 238: A spiritual 'balance sheet'

God prefers to speak as a Father rather than as a Judge. Let us take account of our service now, before the Lord exacts it from us<sup>37</sup>. We need to do the same thing for our sins as we do in our business transactions every day. Calling upon our conscience, we must take into account our actions, words and thoughts. We have to determine what resources were used up for worthwhile and useful things, and what was wasted instead to our loss. How many conversations were used in complaining, or in shameful language, and in offensive words? What thoughts evolved into improper glances? Which of our choices have turned out to be spiritually damaging, whether committed by our hands, by our tongue, or by our eyes?

Let us, therefore, be diligent in denying ourselves these inopportune expenses. Moreover, in place of these bad transactions, let us rather secure things that will bring us profit. In place of inconsiderate words, let us use prayer; in place of improper glances, let us put alms and fasting. For, if we continue to spend our efforts so poorly, without saving anything, and are careless about restocking our storerooms, we will find ourselves reduced to misery, and run the risk of falling into the ultimate punishment<sup>38</sup>.

In order to make an examination of conscience well, you need to select a saint with the same calling as yours as if he were a mirror. All that is lacking in contrast to his perfection are defects to be corrected<sup>39</sup>.

### 239: How to make an examination of conscience

A good examination of conscience requires these five components:

*First.* Thank God for all the benefits we have received, so that when we compare these gifts with our defects and our sins, we have the opportunity to experience our own confusion and therefore, will be able to repent our failings<sup>40</sup>. As for the first step in the examination, that is, the thanksgiving, while prostrate on the ground in the presence of Heaven, I felt a great awareness of divine presence, and of love and offering<sup>41</sup>.

*Second.* As for the grace to know well our sins and defects; to have the strength to rid ourselves of them. ***More torturous than all else is the human heart, beyond remedy; who can understand it? I, the Lord, alone probe the mind and test the heart, to reward everyone according to his ways, according to the merit of his deeds [Jr 17:9 - 10].***

*Third.* Ask your soul for an account of fault committed. Recall these failings exactly and have the courage to ask: Why have you done this or that? If your soul avoids answering, and begins to delve into the affairs of others, say to it clearly that

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<sup>37</sup> Spiritual Journal. **MssB September 15, 1808.**

<sup>38</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2760-2762.**

<sup>39</sup> Spiritual Journal. **July 30, 1808.**

<sup>40</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2741.**

<sup>41</sup> Spiritual Journal. **October 27, 1808.**

you have no intention to judge those, and that it must pay attention to one's own shortcomings, not those of others.

*Fourth.* Ask God's forgiveness for these faults that have been committed. ***The just will open his lips in prayer to ask pardon for his sins*** [Si 39:6].

*Fifth.* Resolve to rectify these failings with the help of God's grace. If God sees that we are directing ourselves to the road of virtue, fighting evil, He will approve and accept our conversion, and He will be most gracious with His gifts. We, ourselves, cannot yearn for the forgiveness of our faults, and for our salvation as much as He, Himself, desires it, as He hastens to help us so that we can achieve freedom<sup>42</sup>.

## **240: Particular Examination**

It is important to examine one's conscience every evening, particularly concerning one's predominant fault<sup>43</sup>.

Attention must be paid to distinguish among the most difficult passions one has to conquer, in order to determine which one has to be striven against with particular commitment, using all the weapons in one's spirit. In this way, having overcome these passions which are the most resistant, it will be much easier to conquer the remaining ones. First, because one's soul becomes every stronger as one victory succeeds another. Secondly, because when a person goes from one fierce battle to another which is much easier, victory becomes more possible. So having overcome one's strongest vices, and then confronting those weaker ones, it is easier to approach complete victory a little at a time.

Every vice is opposed by a virtue: as pride is by humility, avarice by almsgiving, lust by continence, and anger by meekness. Therefore, the objective of a particular examination may not only be a struggle against vices and defects, but also a commitment to acquire virtue<sup>44</sup>.

'St. Gaspar told me to begin a particular examination on these words of St. Gregory the Great: 'Whatever you do, look at Him and direct your life according to His example<sup>45</sup>.' During these prayers that were recommended to begin anew my examination, I experienced much consolation by finding the way to reflect on the redeemer more often, and, in consequence, to unite myself also with Him because it is difficult to apply oneself to think about Him, without feeling drawn to Him. I spent the entire day by considering all this, and by striving energetically to learn to imitate such a Model.'<sup>46</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2742-2758**. The five points on the examination of conscience are taken from the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius [n. 43].

<sup>43</sup> Retreat to Acolytes **MssB 4454**.

<sup>44</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2693-2707**.

<sup>45</sup> St. Gregory the Great. *In Primum Regum*. II, 41. PL 79, 107.

<sup>46</sup> From the Spiritual Diary of Leopoldina Naudet, cited in **BERTONI** 3, pp. 273, ff.

## SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

### **241: What the Spiritual Exercises are**

The *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius are not merely a simple collection of pious reflections intended to facilitate interior recollection and devout conversation with God. They are, instead, a complete organic method designed to purify, strengthen, and unify a soul, leading it from the phase of its detachment from the world, toward that of the most perfect union with God<sup>47</sup>.

Convinced of the intrinsic efficacy of the *Exercises*, St. Ignatius sought nothing more than a retreat for some days in order to obtain the conversion even of great sinners, as well as progress towards perfection on the part of those who plod along in mediocrity. He reminded preachers that they cannot persuade others if they were not well convinced themselves: actor-preachers bear no fruit.

The results of these *Exercises* depend essentially on two factors: divine grace and our cooperation. Prayer is essential to obtain grace, since only one who prays can merit divine aid. As far as our cooperation is concerned, an abundant 'fullness of heart' toward these *Exercises* is required, above all.

This fullness of heart will come from realizing the magnitude of this undertaking. It deals with laying the foundation of spiritual progress which will serve for one's entire life. It is worth the pain of straining all the powers of one's spirit in order to be disposed to receive the grace by removing all impediments, and be able to cooperate with it. Fullness of heart will increase even more when one realizes how much we can hope in God. Let us put a great hope in the goodness and generosity of the Lord, Who, if He also seeks those in error and pursues fugitives, all the more so will He gather those of a good heart who approach Him, and He will embrace them. So, let us have confidence in divine clemency, which, having inspired this good purpose in us, will also give us the grace and the strength to accomplish this purpose effectively and well, since His will is our sanctification [cf. 1 Th 4:3].<sup>48</sup>

### **242: Dispositions required for the Exercises**

St. Ignatius wanted the *Exercises* to be undertaken with great openness and generosity. He felt that its participants should avidly seek, not so much spiritual comfort, but rather, to follow God's will in our regard, and to detach our personal attractions from terrestrial things, in order to direct these only to Him. It is absolutely necessary that we develop a total readiness to accept God's will, over and above any desire to profit spiritually, so that we will know how to absolutely determine what we must do to follow every inspiration He will send us. Therefore, we must not hold on to any conviction which we are not disposed to surrender. God is generous to anyone who is generous toward Him then the Devil will not dare to tempt him.

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<sup>47</sup> Danilo Bartoli, *Life of St. Ignatius*. Book 1, c. 16.

<sup>48</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2174-2184**. St. Gaspar freely uses the *Directorium in Exercitia* of the Society of Jesus. cf. CS I, p. 114.

We must not put any limit to God's gifts, by wishing to be enlightened and helped only this much and not more. It would be very inconvenient that the creature behave in such a manner with its Creator.

Besides, it would be very damaging, because it would deprive itself of those greater gifts which God could give. And furthermore such meanness and ingratitude toward God would make it unworthy to receive even that little which it wished. It is rather necessary to expand the spirit in such a manner as to desire with all one's might to unite ourselves with God and to be enriched by Him with heavenly treasures as much as possible.

Among the requirements indicated to derive positive benefits from the *Exercises*, there is also the duty to follow some practical norms. Don't spend time reading if it does not relate to meditation. It should be pursued only when it is oriented to the particular reflection encountered. One should not read hurriedly in order to learn, or find something new. Rather, one should stop and accurately ponder that which has been encountered, in order to stir up appropriate affections. It would be a great mistake to conduct a study during this time!

What has been said in regard to reading, applies also to writing. Notes should not be written unless they have particular reference to the prayer involved. Therefore, meditation must be safe-guarded above all else, and all other things have to be in its service<sup>49</sup>.

### **243: How to follow St. Ignatius**

I hold that the best method to perform the *Spiritual Exercises*, as far as we are concerned, is to faithfully follow the directions found in St. Ignatius' book.

I said, 'as far as we are concerned,' because as far as our Lord, our God is concerned, it is important that we leave Him complete freedom, restricting Him neither to the time, nor to the subject, nor method, nor day. In my view, all this implies that if one is not immediately attracted by the Lord, he must prepare himself according to the directions found in the book of the *Exercises* of St. Ignatius. Consequently, the time, method, subject and order outlined should be followed.

However, when the Lord draws us on to Himself, it is best not to look for anything else, but to follow Him as long as it pleases Him<sup>50</sup>. Let us abandon ourselves to God in these days, as St. Ignatius pointedly asks, by not putting limits in the way, and by not imposing obstacles or time limits on our Lord<sup>51</sup>. Let us follow Him with prudence and discretion. He alone knows how not to be restricted to set ways, and can achieve His goals apart from the usual roads, and the usual times<sup>52</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2155-2196.**

<sup>50</sup> Correspondence. Letter to L. Naudet, **June 4, 1813.**

<sup>51</sup> o.c., p. 73. **March 6, 1813.**

<sup>52</sup> id. p. 75.

## SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

### **244: A guarantee against entrapments**

When human nature's enemy whispers its wily persuasions to a good soul, he desires and prefers that they be kept concealed, and he is very displeased when a soul reveals them to his confessor, or to an excellent spiritual director, who is experienced with his deceptions and his wickedness. The enemy knows very well that he cannot carry out his work from the moment his machinations are discovered<sup>53</sup>.

Nothing is so abominated and detested by the devil as the disclosure of his malice, because this is like removing the ground of trickery from under his feet. If one keeps a watch over himself, and learns how to reveal even the most secret things to whoever is his guide, the devil cannot find a way to hurt him. Having his spiritual director tell him that this is good and that is bad; that this comes from virtue, but that derives from unregulated passion; that this is not the time to do a certain thing, but, later on, it is appropriate, to do some other, the soul becomes well regulated in all things, and knows it can act with assurance. Then it achieves the best way of proceeding as it is written in Proverbs: ***For lack of guidance a people falls; security lies in many counselors*** [Pr 11:14].

It can also happen that a spiritual director may tell us the same things that our thoughts have already suggested to us. This is all very well. But, when things are said to us by the one the Lord has chosen to be our guide, we ought to consider them as coming from the Holy Spirit. Then everything is much better<sup>54</sup>.

### **245: Always confide in God**

When we can clearly see what has to be done, we act freely, confiding in God.

If there are any difficulties that impact our conscience and there is reason to doubt whether a certain action may be displeasing to God in some way, then we should not hesitate to expose our doubts, and clear up things with that minister of God, who, in our opinion appears better endowed with knowledge, probity and prudence.

Meanwhile, we must place our full confidence in God, who, whenever it is necessary, will never deny the light of wisdom to His minister. He it is, Who makes even the 'mouths of babes' eloquent because they know how to speak well of Him. Doing this, we can be sure we are following the most wise inspirations of the Holy Spirit. ***Son, do nothing without counsel*** [Si 32:19]<sup>55</sup>.

Even when the need arises to find a steady spiritual director, it is necessary to raise one's eyes to the Lord. He knows His own, and assigns His servants in the manner, time, and place He wants. If, at a certain time, it becomes necessary to change and find another, God will let him become known, even if he has to create one for the purpose.

One should omit neither prayers, nor searching, nor evaluation. Resting firmly in the knowledge that whatever is difficult and even impossible for men is possible and

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<sup>53</sup> St. Ignatius Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, n. 326.

<sup>54</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3059-3068**.

<sup>55</sup> Correspondence. Letter to L. Naudet, dated **October 16, 1825**.

most effortless for our God and Omnipotent God; in fact, it is accomplished as soon as He wishes it<sup>56</sup>.

#### **246: The Spiritual Director's Responsibility**

A spiritual director must be an excellent teacher, endowed with knowledge and experience. At the same time, he must be humble so as not to attribute anything to himself.

In regard to his penitents, he should endeavor to discern their souls, and to understand what their real interests are. He must know how to revive their fervor constantly with words from sacred scripture, and with the example of the saints. He will instruct them not to rely on themselves, but only on Christ, while, at the same time, he will exact complete cooperation from them. He will also encourage penitents to open their hearts without any reservations, to live in humility, and to cultivate a sincere spirit of conversion and penance.

A prudent director is expected also to keep his eyes wide open to save his penitents from the risk of eventual errors and deceptions. Even when they have attained to a high degree of perfection, souls are not thereby safe, but can run the risk of serious danger if they are not very humble and mortified: ***Whoever thinks he is standing secure should take care not to fall*** [1 Co 10:12]. Moreover, he has to be vigilant about himself so that he will not risk the danger of finding himself lacking in his mission. Among other things, if perchance a soul guided by him has need of another director who is more suited to his needs, he will allow him to choose the other with complete liberty. He must not act like a jealous husband, but like those wise teachers who, after having developed their students to a certain point within their competence, turn them over to their more advanced colleagues.

A good general rule is always to subject one's own judgment to that of the Church and to make its declarations the rule of all evaluations and behavior<sup>57</sup>.

In directing N.N., I should not so much study, but, rather have recourse to the source of light. In this way, I, too, will gain great advantage. I must never lead, but, follow the Lord, who will enlighten her and suggest to me, after having prayed, what will be more useful for her progress and for her correspondence to grace<sup>58</sup>.

#### **247: St. Gaspar, 'The Angel of Counsel'**

The priest, Gaspar Bertoni, a man of great talent, well versed in literary studies and in sacred science, but, above all, outstanding for his sanctity of life and for the

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<sup>56</sup> Correspondence. Letter to L. Naudet, **August 28, 1828**. In 1811, St. Gaspar assumed the spiritual direction of Leopoldina Naudet and her Sisters of the Holly Family, whose direction he was inspired to terminate in May of 1819. The Servant of God repeatedly asked St. Gaspar to review his decision and to renew his precious service. But, the Saint was unmoved, as is evident also from this section of the letter here quoted. [cf. Correspondence, pp. 143, ff. cf. **BERTONI**, 4, pp. 147, ff.

<sup>57</sup> Meditation on ***Primum Regum***, n. 23. **MssB 5861-5884**.

<sup>58</sup> Spiritual Journal. Note of **January 12, 1811**. 'N.N.' is evidently the Servant of God, Leopoldina Naudet. Cf. **BERTONI 4**, pp. 147, ff.

virtue of prudence, may be justly called an angel of counsel. Many came to him seeking answers to their most difficult problems. Especially those who were to make a choice in their vocation. They were convinced that in following his advice, they would be making the right and best choice<sup>59</sup>.

The most conspicuous sign of sanctity of that extraordinary man appears to me to be precisely the light of his counsel, whether in respect to himself, or in regard to others. Over and above that natural good sense that God had so generously endowed him with, I sense that his every action was weighed and directed by the light of the Holy Spirit. The clemency, modesty, gravity, gentleness, and courtesy that accompanied all his actions, words and works, were the result of the tenderness and wisdom infused in Fr. Gaspar by the Divine Spirit, in order to make him an apt instrument to guide souls to eternal life.

This is how I always regarded Fr. Gaspar Bertoni. This is why I had recourse to him when I encountered difficulties in answering the call to enter the Society of Jesus. The advice of that man guided me in the face of so much opposition. He encouraged me in the midst of so much discouragement. His advice strengthened me when so much perplexity assailed me. Thus, I have always acknowledged that the greatest reward of having entered the haven of religious life was due to God and Fr. Bertoni<sup>60</sup>.

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<sup>59</sup> From the *Historia Domus Probationis Veronensis of the Society of Jesus*. SA, pp. 647, ff.

<sup>60</sup> From a letter of Fr. Anthony Bresciani, SJ, to Fr. John M. Mariani, dated January 17, 1855. cf. **BERTONI** 4, p. 409.

## CHRISTIAN PRUDENCE

### **248: Charity and prudence**

Let us recall our reflections, beginning from the simplicity, I would say, of charity. This is the first step toward the evangelical precept: ***Be as simple as doves***. Then, we proceed to the most subtle prudence of the serpent, which is proper to the same charity, and which is found in the passage: ***Be prudent as serpents*** [My 10:16].

But where does one learn this kind of prudence, which is not human, but celestial? And who can give us its rules and training? Here's the school; here's the Teacher. Holy Scripture directs us ***He brought me into the wine cellar, and his emblem over me is love*** [Sgs 2:4]. ***Hear, o daughter, and see, turn your ear, forget your people and your father's house. So shall the king desire your beauty*** [Ps 45:11-12]. Having arrived here, the soul is inebriated with the wine of charity. This precious wine gladdens, fortifies, and transports the soul outside of itself, uniting it with God; disposing it perfectly.

A light of admirable wisdom and divine prudence then glows in the intellect in order to judge its correspondence with God, whether as an effect, or as a means to follow Him in the future and to glorify Him at the present time.

With this help we must strive to enliven our love even more, in order to commit all our strength to prayer. Thus, we can obtain timely enlightenment during difficult circumstances, and when it is necessary to determine which path we must follow<sup>61</sup>.

### **249: Seeking advice and prayer**

In order to help others on the road to sanctity, it is not enough to be guileless; prudence is also required<sup>62</sup>. Discretion is the queen of all virtues. In order to impart our directives and counsels to others we must be very able to discern one from the other<sup>63</sup>.

Whoever holds the office of Superior is expected to seek counsel and mature reflection of his collaborators each time he has to arrive at any important decision. This obligation derives precisely from that precept which says; ***Do nothing without counsel*** [Si 32:19]. Listening, and also seeking the advice of wise, prudent men, who are zealous in the interests of divine glory, is in conformity with the Lord's pleasure<sup>64</sup>.

After listening to the counsels of honest and solid reason, nothing prevents that this weak torch of human reasoning be subjected to the clearest light of Divine Wisdom. In this way, we will discern the source of every light, from which everything derives either immediately or secondarily, and will take place just as if we had no part in its happening<sup>65</sup>. Let us develop all these things together with God, praying and encouraging others to pray in order neither to delay nor to impede His Providence<sup>66</sup>.

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<sup>61</sup> Correspondence. Letter to L. Naudet, **January 26, 1813**.

<sup>62</sup> Spiritual Journal. **September 23, 1809**.

<sup>63</sup> *Original Constitutions, CF # 299*.

<sup>64</sup> Correspondence, p. 100. Undated Letter to L. Naudet

<sup>65</sup> *ib.*

<sup>66</sup> *o.c.*, p.140. An un-dated letter to L. Naudet.

When one can see clearly, one can proceed. But, when things are not very clear, then we must await enlightenment with full confidence. Before asking men's opinion, let us put our problems and even the order and manner of solving them, before the Lord. Moreover, let us not fear, for the Lord says: ***I will instruct you and show you the way you should walk*** [Ps 32:8]<sup>67</sup>.

### **250: Everything is yours: you are Christ's, Christ is God's**

It would be a loss to maintain conditional ties and bond with another person; but, on the other hand, it would be useful to maintain the freedom of availing oneself of the advice, favor, and the help of certain people, at least for some time and for certain circumstances. It is a good thing not to have the kind of attachments that obligate us to the services these people provide, but it is also a good thing to have the freedom of taking advantage of the opportunity when their services are available. In this way, we avoid whatever may be harmful, while we are not deprived of whatever may be useful.

Therefore, in the very act of seeking to avoid an importune attachment, we find that we are leaving another link intact: that of charity, strengthening it to the utmost. This one must never be broken; moreover, it is always perfectly free. ***Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another*** [Rm 13:8]. With these words St. Paul teaches us the most proper way to interact with one another in respect to the manner, criterion, and discretion required.

From this love and charity derive that which the same Apostle writes about: ***Everything belongs to you, Paul, or Apollos, or Kephas, or the world, or life, or death, or the present or the future: all belong to you, and you to Christ and Christ to God*** [1 Co 3:21-23]<sup>68</sup>.

### **251: The secret of the Saints**

May the Lord grant us to acquire again in its entirety that secret of the Saints which enabled St. Gaspar and his companions to cooperate in so many endeavors with each other, which would have been impossible if they had relied only on human criteria. In fact, our first Fathers knew how to combine:

- 1.] an on-going desire to keep a lowly, humble profile as possible, which was characteristic of their life together with an outstanding reputation for sanctity;
- 2.] a most austere life of penance with the most sincere cheerfulness.
- 3.] an heroic detachment and a true spirit of poverty with expenditures for their residence and church, which were completed without incurring debt, while assuring their propriety, and decorum, notwithstanding the expenses required;
- 4.] a most disciplined religious life, together with various and multiple activities.
- 5.] complete submission with the full development of each confrere's activities;
- 6.] constant study and work with the most sound piety.

<sup>67</sup> o.c., p. 105. A Letter to L. Naudet, **January 3, 1814**.

<sup>68</sup> Correspondence, pp. 112, f. Letter to L. Naudet, **June 5, 1814**.

These compatibilities truly represent the secret of the Saints. They are a mystery for the world. For the very reason, they reveal the Divine character of the Lord's work. This secret is the precious legacy which our first Fathers have left us<sup>69</sup>.

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<sup>69</sup> Circular Letter of the Superior General, Fr. John B. Tomasi, to the Confreres, dated October 24, 1916, on the occasion of the Stigmatine Congregation's first centenary.

## HUMILITY

### **252: Why humility is necessary**

Humility is that virtue which is found between its two opposite vices: pride and disordered subservience. Thanks to true knowledge of oneself, it moderates man's mind to avoid raising itself above its true worth, whereby it would fall into pride; rather, it tends to dispose it to lower itself, but always in the context of right reason in order not to fall into the opposite extreme, that of abjection.

Humility is so necessary that Christ said: ***Unless you become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven*** [My 18:3]. St. Bernard observed that Christ, speaking of humility and affirming that without it one cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven, used a different way of speaking here, from the one He used when referring to virginity. He said: ***Let him understand it, who can*** [Mt 19:12]. Virginity is counsel, but humility is a precept.<sup>70</sup> And now, where does this leave you, you who think that humility is only a counsel that is useful only for perfection, and not a command that is necessary for everyone to attain salvation? How can it not be ordained for all of us, when we cannot be saved if we not become like little children?

***Learn from Me,*** the Lord says, ***for I am meek and humble of heart*** [Mt 11:29]. Learn from Me, because even though I am equal to the Father in nature, I lowered Myself and assumed a servant's condition [cf. Ph 2:6, 7]. Not only did I become humble like a child, but I subjected Myself for thirty years to those whom I had created, obedient and submissive to the Father even to death, a death on the Cross. I have given you an example of humility, because as I have done, you must do likewise. [cf. Jn 13:15].

Christ, humble and we Christians proud? No! A proud subject cannot serve a humble leader! The name of Christian is not suited to us if we are not resolved to embrace humility<sup>71</sup>.

### **253: Intellectual humility**

Sacred Scripture leads us to true humility by its principle: acknowledge the majesty and greatness of God, and submit our will to His in all things with the utmost care. ***Oh, the depths and the riches and wisdom and the knowledge of God! How inscrutable are His judgments and how unsearchable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been His counselor? Or, who has given Him anything that he may be repaid? For from Him and through Him and for Him are all things. To Him be glory forever. Amen*** [Rm 11:33-36].

A soul that recognizes its limits and its dependence, instructed and formed by God, knows that the truth in our intellect is none other than conformity with the order of divine wisdom, which is externalized in His works and in His words. It is important also to achieve a modest attitude of gratitude for accumulating and retaining those truths

<sup>70</sup> St. Bernard, *Homiliae super Missus*, I, 5. PL 183, 59.

<sup>71</sup> Early Sermons, n. 1. Humility. **MssB374-376**. Sermon preached June 8, 1800, when St. Gaspar was still a Deacon.

which are possible to understand, and to guard against the presumption of wanting to comprehend those truths which are above the natural capacity of our minds.

For the rest, let us apply ourselves to contemplate the marvels of creation, so that created things will become a reason for our praise, and a motive for our prayer. Wisdom says: ***For from the greatness and beauty of created things their original author, by analogy, is seen*** [Ws 13:5]. We will be able to see, ascending from created things, how great is the wisdom, power, and love of the Lord. If an attentive and astute mind can apply itself to the consideration of each particular subject, or rather not just things one by one – it is enough to consider oneself – that person would be able to comprehend from those small realities the immense and ineffable power of God<sup>72</sup>.

### **254: Humility and magnanimity**

There are those who think that humility is opposed to that generosity and greatness of soul which tends to grand things and which makes it seem that humility has to shun great works. But, the truth is the very opposite.

In fact, humility represses ambition, not because it should not tend towards those things which are truly great from the standpoint of right reason, but only when it should avoid those things when they appear to be great against the judgment of right reason. In this way, magnanimity drives man to do great things, not against reason, but only in conformity with it. Man, thereby, is effectively called to do great things. ***Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness*** [Gn 1:26], God said in the very act of creation. And St Paul noted: ***...and we boast in hope of the glory of God*** [Rm 5:2].

Human nature is more timid than we think. So, there are two virtues what regulate the same striving towards performing difficult acts and these two help each other like sisters and inseparable companions. One is magnanimity, which strengthens the heart against excessive timidity and the risk of despair, urging it to pursue true greatness in conformity with correct reason. The other is humility, which moderates and restrains the human mind so that it will know how to strive towards greater things, not beyond the just measure of its endeavors, nor with a false presumption, which may cause it to lose true greatness just as Lucifer and Adam lost it.

Humility and magnanimity are not opposed to each other. Attempting to undertake major ventures while relying only on one's own efforts is contrary to greatness, is also contrary to this virtue. About this, Scripture says that ***This is also vanity and a chase after wind*** [Si 6:9]. This is that pride which does not make a man great, but pompous, like a body that swells from infirmity. On the other hand, tending towards ever greater things while confidently putting one's endeavors in God's hands is never contrary to humility.

Finally, humility is truth. Just as it holds one back from going beyond his potential, so it also prevents him from falling below that of which he is capable: and

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<sup>72</sup> Meditations on Genesis, n. 3. MssB 4563-4568,

that would be a degrading subservience. Thus, humility places man, and maintains him, in his proper state<sup>73</sup>.

### **255: The foundation of a spiritual edifice**

I see many people who are very intent to lay down solid stone building blocks of unmovable faith, to raise columns and walls of invincible hope, and to extend magnificent walls of charity. To all this, they add embellishments of the most beautiful virtues. They plant gardens where the most pure virginity and the most tender loves invites the celestial Spouse to take delight in the quiet of their pathways.

What a beautiful building, how rich, how pleasant! But has any thought been given to digging a foundation capable of holding up so high an edifice, so that it can handle the strongest winds which may assail it? Were you so busy about eliminating the loose soil of pride from your heart, so that it will remain open to that grace which would hold up a solid edifice on the stones of humility that were placed in the bottom?<sup>74</sup>

Before the Lord raises a soul so high, it is necessary that He lower it as much, because He is an architect Who cannot be less knowledgeable than most ordinary masters of masonry, who know that they must dig deeper when a building is going to be built higher.

Let us beseech the Lord to increase His light in us, so that being aware of our wretchedness, we will not find ourselves at the bottom, perhaps even in the abyss. Then one abyss will call to another [Ps 42:8], the depth corresponding to the height of the edifice that the Lord has shown us in His plan.

Let us adore so great and sublime Lord, and let us love Him, Who so demeaned Himself, and still demeans Himself in order to love us. To what point, then, should we not lower ourselves, in order to correspond with, and imitate, the abasement to which he descended to unite Himself with us? To Him be eternal glory, Who lives and reigns forever and ever<sup>75</sup>.

### **256: Humility guarantees the authenticity of all virtues**

If a solid foundation of humility is not in place, the other virtues will themselves be the occasion of one's downfall, because it could lead to a haughty despising of others. And so, while one believes he is conversing in heaven, he really needs an extraordinary grace of conversion. It is easier for an obvious sinner to be converted toward goodness, since he humbly realizes his condition because of his very failings,

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<sup>73</sup> Humility. **MssB 4365-4370**. We are dealing here with a text from the same manuscript which we have consulted treating Patience [It is probable that it, too, was used by St. Gaspar for his Domestic Exhortations which began in September 1840. We are led to believe this was so because both Humility and Patience had a prominent role in the collective spirituality practiced at the Stimmate. [cf. **BERTONI**, 6, p. 69].

<sup>74</sup> Early Sermons, n. 1. Humility. **MssB 377**.

<sup>75</sup> Correspondence, p. 115. Letter to L. Naudet, undated.

then for a self-deceived person who is clothed with a mantle of virtue which is only apparent<sup>76</sup>.

Virtues can often be an occasion of pride. Pride, such as this, while very hidden and lightly perceived, is revealed by its foundation. It has its primary roots in its incitement to sin, which is concupiscence. It is like an unhappy mother of every vice, which we carry on our backs, but, which can favor the development of every virtue, like a pestilential germ. In the beginning phase of pride, the subject's actions seem to be good on the surface. Moreover, not only are his external actions good, but the example and advice he gives to others can be excellent. So, it may happen that while he is teaching others humility among other virtues, his own are beginning to be tainted by his pride.

Therefore, the higher the perfection one achieves, the more he must fear, because other vices feed on ugly and sinful actions while pride feeds upon the most alluring pastures provided by the very virtues, and the highest ones at that.

Lord, grant us mistrust of ourselves and confidence in You. Holy and Immaculate Virgin, you were preserved by grace during your conception and were free of concupiscence, free us by your intercession from the root of all vices, especially pride<sup>77</sup>.

### **257: Humility and apostolic productivity**

Christ ***took the form of a slave*** [Ph 2:7]. Through this dumbfounding humiliation, and from this nothingness, God has gained His greatest glory and our ennoblement. Not only did He free us from sin, but He has made us His children, heirs of His Kingdom.

Whatever be God's designs concerning me, He will never do anything greater with me which does not have as its principle and foundation that nothingness which is my humility. From the moment that I wish to be something, I will be nothing. But, from the moment that I consent to be nothing, I will become capable of anything before God.

All beginnings of great things start with humility. When we fortify ourselves with this virtue, God will make use of us and make us publicly known; He will perform great things through us for His glory.

Humility is the safest way. No one should become a preacher who has not first been mellowed by silence, and has not developed deep roots in humility before appearing in public. Humility is necessary in order to be sure one exercises authority well, as St. Gregory says<sup>78</sup>.

Humility carries out justice, because it frees and overcomes every obligation by which man is a debtor to God, to his neighbor, and to himself. It subjects itself to God by means of religion; to his neighbor, by means of charity; and puts one's body in the hands of one's soul, and the soul in the hands of God. A humble man is at peace with everyone. He loves those who hate him, blesses the one who curses him, honors the

<sup>76</sup> Early Sermons, n. 1. Humility **MssB 378**.

<sup>77</sup> Meditations on ***Primum Regum*** n. 48. **MssB 6710-6739**.

<sup>78</sup> St. Gregory the Great, ***Moralium Libri in Job***, Book 81, c. 1. PL 76, 571.

one who scorns him. He wins over his enemies with the zeal of charity, and he makes friends of them. He avenges injustices with good works<sup>79</sup>.

**258: *Be humble, be humble! Seek out the nooks and crannies***

The truly just understand the distortions caused by pride and vainglory very well, and they feel all its horror. Even a small encounter with this vice makes their generosity of spirit react with as lively a fear as the impression made on them is the stronger, because of the virtues they have acquired and the gratuitous gifts given them. Like the wealthy of this world, they greatly fear the rapacity of thieves: in this case, specifically, pride and vainglory, which would despoil and suddenly leave their home empty.<sup>80</sup>

I am comforted by your refusing the miter, even though we ought to respect the office, and the one who offered you this honor. You have listened to the voice of Don Galvani: 'Be humble, be humble, seek out the nooks and crannies...' <sup>81</sup> ***The Lord will save the lowly of spirit [Ps 34:19].***<sup>82</sup>

Because the Lord has given you a grace which is greater than any treasure to live in humility and simplicity, see that you maintain yourself in this blessed state. Finally, even the people of this world like to see their priests humble and meek. With this virtue, you will gain more good than you could ever believe or imagine<sup>83</sup>.

**259: *Humility practiced: experiences and resolutions***

God is found in the depths of one's personal nothingness. Hearing about the greatest things of God, I realized a profound understanding of myself.<sup>84</sup> Humble yourself in all things.<sup>85</sup>

I experienced sentiments of great love toward the Most Holy Trinity in giving us the Son, and great tenderness towards Him, together with a lively faith and a great desire to be united and associated with His sufferings and ignominy. I asked for the grace to suffer and to be despised for Him<sup>86</sup>. Heartfelt affection for Christ, with the desire... and painful humiliation which happened to me<sup>87</sup>.

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<sup>79</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2478-2554.**

<sup>80</sup> Spiritual Journal. **November 17, 1808.**

<sup>81</sup> This phrase in the Veronese dialect refers to a child's game which evoked the story of a cricket in a little hole where it would hide. The phrase was habitually used by St. Gaspar as an invitation to humility.

Don Nicola Galvani [1752-1823], Professor of Moral Theology in the Seminary of Verona, was St. Gaspar's spiritual director. He was intimately linked to Fr. Bertoni and his works, leaving him heir of his estate, among which were the church and house of the Stimate, where the Stigmatine Congregation began.

<sup>82</sup> Correspondence, p. 327. Letter to Fr. Bragato, **April 11, 1848.**

<sup>83</sup> o.c., pp.309, ff. Letter to Fr. Bragato, dated **October 21, 1848.**

<sup>84</sup> Spiritual Journal. **August 24, 1808.**

<sup>85</sup> o.c., **September 5, 1808.**

<sup>86</sup> o.c. **September 27, 1808.**

<sup>87</sup> o.c., **June 24, 1813.** The dots are found in the original.

***Whoever thinks he is standing secure should take care not to fall*** [1 Co 10:12]. Humility, together with great confidence<sup>88</sup>. When we feel called to some degree of perfection, we should guard against having less regard for those who prefer not to follow us. It could be that they have the same, or even more merit before God. Even though we all have the same goal, not all attain it in the same way.<sup>89</sup>

If our failings were to be revealed publicly, like those of others, it would become apparent how our own would be most detestable above all, because of the many graces and inspirations given to us. If these gifts had been given to others, they would be saints<sup>90</sup>.

## **260: The example of St. Veronica Giuliani**

To talk about Veronica Giuliani is to speak about a new St. Francis of Assisi: so much has a daughter retraced the virtues of her father. Now, what was most characteristic of Francis was his humility.

Not an ordinary kind, but, the highest, the most perfect, the humility of Christ which was faithfully copied in himself. This, in fact, was precisely what Veronica's humility was like; a living redrawing of the Crucified One, her Spouse.

Her dying mother commended her five remaining children to the Five Wounds of the Crucified. She assigned Veronica to the wound in the side. From her most tender years, she listened to Jesus' voice: 'My Bride, the cross awaits you. She did not glory in this; rather, she used to say that she was very naughty at that age. She used to say the same thing when extraordinary gifts became apparent in her, by signs that confirmed the divine premonitions.

Veronica was profoundly convinced of her nothingness. It was for no other reason that she so frequently prayed to God so that she would come to realize this so well. She considered herself the greatest sinner. Anyone who did not know her, and didn't really know what she was like, would have taken her words at face value and would have considered her one of the world's greatest sinner. This she claimed to be with her Sisters and her novices. She sought every means to ask everyone to pray for her conversion, and did so with so much fervor and conviction that it seemed her heart would break.

As an abbess, she performed all sorts of holy tasks. She served everyone, even lay sisters. She did everything that she could to avoid election to this office. She fell on her knees to beseech the Bishop and Chapter to avoid, as she said, the ruin of the Convent by confiding its care to a superior who was so unworthy, useless to everyone, whether it be in spiritual or temporal matters. The Bishop responded that she was qualified to govern a world, for so many came to her for counsel in the most difficult situations. Nevertheless, because of her humility, she never undertook a task without the advice of others. She never commanded, but used words of prayer, even when dealing with tradesmen and peasants. She hid her supernatural gifts and graces and all else that would do her honor. Since she could not hide her stigmata she claimed that certain gifts were given by God even to sinners in order to convert them.

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<sup>88</sup> o.c. **September 19, 1809.**

<sup>89</sup> o.c. **December 20, 1808.**

<sup>90</sup> o.c., **August 9, 1808.**

At the moment of her death, she Asked pardon of all present for the scandal she had given, and begged them that they should pray to the most holy Virgin so that she would obtain for her the salvation of her soul<sup>91</sup>.

### **261: St. Gaspar's humility**

Humility was second nature to him. It was, before all. A humility of the intellect because he held himself to be a great sinner and ignorant. Therefore, he used to say that he was not the type to found religious institutes. If some one consulted him, and there were many, the first thing he would do was to excuse himself and ask: why do you come to me? For twelve years, he never let slip from his lips a single reference to his studies, writings, or works. He gave credit only to others. Because of this, he was ever prompt to thank his confreres for any and all services. In the same way, he always honored others. But, also because of his convictions, he was reluctant to give his blessing to other priests, except those of his own community. Consequently, clothed in the humility of Christ, he emanated the sweet odor and unction of Christ one felt by being near to Him, and by His words<sup>92</sup>.

It was his usual habit to keep in the background after taking part in various undertakings and in the establishment of institutes for both men and women. He would do so only after the work was safely underway, then he would withdraw and leave the honor and credit to others<sup>93</sup>.

St. Gaspar would often repeat to his sons: 'Be humble, be humble, seek the nooks and crannies... - which he said he had frequently heard from the learned and humble Fr. Nicholas Galvani<sup>94</sup>. The very first thing our Founder wanted was to ground us well in humility, and to maintain its spirit in us constantly<sup>95</sup>.

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<sup>91</sup> Sermon on St. Veronica Giuliani, December 29, 1839. **MssB 2163-2172**. Fr. Bertoni composed this sermon on the occasion of the festivities for the Canonization of this Saint, but he was not able to deliver it because of ill health. He entrusted Fr. John M. Marani who with his [Fr. Bertoni's] permission, elaborated the text, which was somewhat sketchy. The first section referred to here is Fr. Marani's [cf. **BERTONI 6**, PP. 14, ff.].

<sup>92</sup> *Miscellanea Lenotti*. SA, pp. 124, ff.

<sup>93</sup> o.c., SA, p. 134.

<sup>94</sup> Cajetan Giaccobbe, *Life*, SA, pp.548.

<sup>95</sup> Domestic Exhortations, of Fr. John Bl. Lenotti. CS III, p. 414.

## POVERTY

### 262 The necessary capital

To follow Christ is the goal: the means is renouncing everything.

**Every one of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be My disciple [Lk 14:33]. Which of you wishing to construct a tower does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if there is enough for its completion [Lk 14:28].** The tower which has now to be built is the following of Christ. The cost and the needed materials are renunciation<sup>96</sup>.

To begin an undertaking, one needs to have acquired great and heroic virtue. The capital needed is poverty, then all the other virtues. The smallest thing should not be neglected, nor should one hesitate to gather inspirations<sup>97</sup>. It is necessary to prepare for a great war against hell.

1. Humility is needed to draw help from Heaven.
2. Detachment from all things is also required, so that the devil will not have a means to entrap us<sup>98</sup>.

A fortune acquired by hard work is also needed to construct the tower of a consecrated vocation, in order to live in chastity and to be able to bear the weight of the ministry. This fortune must also include difficult renunciations: particularly from relatives and worldly goods, from whatever may constitute great dangers, as well as a renunciation of one's freedom and his very life<sup>99</sup>.

Men seek a certain excellence and abundance in external goods, riches and honors. Now, all these are to be properly sought in the Kingdom of Heaven; gifts which man obtains from the excellence and abundance of God's treasures. This is why the Kingdom of Heaven has been promised to the poor in spirit: **Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven [Mt 5:3]**<sup>100</sup>.

### 263: Poverty of a priest

A minister of the Gospel has an inexhaustible fortune of riches and goods of every sort through his service to God and piety. According to Christ's promise, he will never lack those temporal needs, which are desired by one possessing a spirit of moderation and content with a few things that are necessary to sustain life. **Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides [Mt 6:33].**

The condition of man in respect to all the goods of this world is the same at birth as it is at death: he is born without anything, and he dies the same way. He is, therefore, not destined by God to accumulate and to enrich himself with goods which he must leave behind and which will serve no purpose in the future life. An immoderate desire to enrich oneself exposes a person to many temptations. He will

<sup>96</sup> Retreat Meditations, **MssB 2529**.

<sup>97</sup> Spiritual Journal. **July 23, 1809**.

<sup>98</sup> o.c., **July 24, 1809**.

<sup>99</sup> Meditations on *Primum Regum* n.15. **MssB 5398**.

<sup>100</sup> Early Sermons, n. 57. 'The Beatitudes'. **MssB 1285**. cf. **PVC**, pp. 221, f.

find himself entangled in many nets, and to so much disordered greed that will submerge him in an abyss of death and eternal damnation. 'I will make you sink, so that you cannot make me sink': thus said a famous philosopher as he threw his riches into the sea. He should have lavished them on the poor instead!

An excessive love of riches can lead to every kind of evil, even to the loss of faith as the Apostle says: ***The love of money is the root of all evils, and some people in their desire for it have strayed from the faith, and have pierced themselves with many pains*** [1 Tm 6:10]. It is very significant that the Apostle exhorts a man like Timothy so strongly to flee from greed and avarice. But, there has never been a man alive on this earth, even if he were a saint, who was not exposed to the infestation of disease. It often easily affects even those who by a special profession are expected to have complete detachment from earthly things, because the pursuit of private advantage is covered by a pretence of common good, even by what may be imagined as the interests of the Church and the glory of God.

***But, you, Man of God, avoid all this*** [1 Tm 6:11]: this is the best panegyric and the most appropriate stimulus for a sacred minister<sup>101</sup>.

#### **264: St. Gaspar and poverty**

The love that St. Gaspar had for poverty was considerable, and there was nothing more that he feared, and sought to keep his sons from, than the spirit of magnificence, comfort and opulence. He reminded them by his example and by his words to live the spirit of poverty. He reminded them by his example and by his words to live the spirit of poverty and to practice it effectively. Their food, dress, the furniture in their rooms – in fact, everything, was to reflect poverty. He seemed to be absolutely jealous of poverty, for he was always fearful that at times the love of comfort and luxury would be introduced into his Congregation. These were things that he abhorred and which he immediately and severely discouraged, even if it was only something which could appear as suggesting it<sup>102</sup>. It was commonly said that the life of Bertoni and his companions was too austere<sup>103</sup>.

On the other hand, he never failed to provide and to do whatever was absolutely necessary for the health and welfare of the community. Whenever circumstances required, or justice, prudence, or charity demanded, he was always showed himself to be liberal and magnanimous.

When helping the poor, however, he was so generous that he seemed to be almost sinning by prodigality. Over and above the daily alms that he directed to be distributed to fifty or so poor people at the door of the Stimate, he frequently opened his hands to needy people who presented themselves to him for help. Many of these received considerable sums.

All the earnings derived from the holdings that were acquired for the Congregation, were used for repairs, plantations, restorations of tenant's dwellings, various other accounts either in the country-side or in the city. This brought about

<sup>101</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3740-3745.**

<sup>102</sup> *Miscellanea Lenotti.* SA pp. 175, f.

<sup>103</sup> *Positio,* p. 200.

great advantages for workers, who, in every seas, could find work with Fr. Gaspar, and, in effect gave them increased earnings and relief<sup>104</sup>.

**265: Poverty practiced: concrete experiences and choices.**

I felt the desire to imitate Christ in poverty, and in the straightened circumstances of poverty<sup>105</sup>, cheerfulness in adversity, and the consequences of real poverty, with thanksgiving to the Lord, offering to suffer greater burdens and pain, if I am worthy. This attitude is the best gift, of which I know I am unworthy. May God be ever praised<sup>106</sup>.

My unchanging rule prevents me from accepting the gift that your Ladyship has offered me for the second time, and it obliges me to decline your generous offer even after my death. In due time, you will dispose of it according to the prudent advice of the one who will draw up your will. This, however, must not be in my favor, nor in that of the Stimate, because I cannot accept it, and I will see to it that my companions will not accept it either. Above all, it is important to me that they take this maxim to heart, because I know very well that this spirit is to be carried on for God's honor in these circumstances<sup>107</sup>.

The priests of the Stimate, even while they were moved by gratitude toward this pious donor, nevertheless, would not know how to escape from their own ways because they have, for so many years to date, served the church and the country gratuitously, according to their talents. They have always done this without benefices, pensions, or pious legacies. The satisfaction expressed by their bishops and fellow citizens was enough for them<sup>108</sup>.

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<sup>104</sup> *Miscellanea Lenotti*, o.c.

<sup>105</sup> *Spiritual Journal*. **October 22, 1808**.

<sup>106</sup> *ib.*

<sup>107</sup> *Correspondence*, p. 365. Letter to Madame Teresa Gamba, undated.

<sup>108</sup> o.c., p. 366: Letter to the Reverend Ecclesiastic Administrator. An eloquent episode is recalled which caused much surprise in the public opinion of the time: the renouncing of the rich inheritance of Fr. Francis Cartolari, by St. Gaspar and his companions, in favor of the Count Anthony, brother of the deceased. After completing the formal act of renunciation. St. Gaspar gathered everyone in the community chapel, where a *Te Deum* was sung to thank God, 'who had given them the grace to send out of the house the sweepings of Fr. Cartolari, in order to keep the inheritance of his virtues.' [SA, Doc. 27, p. 583. **BERTONI 6**, pp. 339, ff.]

## PURITY

### **266: The most beautiful virtue**

All the virtues are beautiful, but propriety and beauty are attributed to purity in the most excellent degree, as St. Thomas writes<sup>109</sup>.

Let's consider: Man comprises two principles: one is corporeal; the other is spiritual. He is mid-way, as it were, between the angels with whom he shares intelligence, and the beasts with which he shares animal life. If man elevates himself to act in accordance with the mind, he becomes almost like an angel. But, if he lowers himself in obedience to concupiscence: ***Is it not from your passions that make war within your members?*** [Jas 4:1, he becomes almost like a beast. Therefore, scripture speaks of a man who abandons the sublime place to where he had already been raised, living according to reason and the spirit, in order to lower himself to carnal ways, and says: ***Man did not recognize the honorable status in which he was. He came to resemble the senseless beasts and became like them*** [Ps 49:21].

A dissolute man dislodges his reason from that elevated place where God had placed it to rule and dominate, and tramples it underfoot in order to make it a slave of the passions. Meanwhile, he puts the passions, which were destined by nature to receive laws and restraints, in a position of domination and prevalence. What a monstrosity! If they only knew how to look at themselves in a just and truthful mirror, certain men and women who are so ostentatious in this regard, which is reason for their confusions and brag about their very ignominies, would certainly be astonished if they behold their very own monstrous image. They would end up detesting those things which they rave about, and in which they take pleasure.

On the other hand, how beautiful is the virtue of purity, which preserves the order and dignity of human nature! Thanks to it, it is possible to appreciate man's excellence, who in so exalted terms, the Psalmist speaks, when, turning to God, he says: ***You have made him a little less than the angels*** [Ps 8:6]. It is purity that keeps him in that sublime supremacy which God placed him above all visible creatures. That august splendor, like a glorious diadem is proper to him, and adorns his royal dignity, about which the same Psalmist continues: ***... and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him rule over the works of your hands, putting all things under his feet*** [Ps 8:6-7]<sup>110</sup>.

### **267: An angelic but possible virtue**

Thanks to purity, we can recognize the sublime image of divinity impressed on man, so that it may be said: ***O Lord, let the light of Your countenance shine upon us!*** [Ps 4:7]. The practice of purity builds up in man's heart a living temple of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the very body of man becomes an instrument of God's glory, and what is more, His dwelling place and His footstool, as St. Paul pointed out when he

<sup>109</sup> *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q. 152, a. 1.

<sup>110</sup> Early Sermons, n. 19. 'St. Aloysius Gonzaga's Purity'. **MssB 803-817. PVC**, pp. 162 & 167, f.

said ... ***your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you. Glorify God in your body*** [1 Co 6:19, 20]. It is this virtue which makes a man pleasing in God's sight, a friend of the incorporeal and celestial spirits, dear to mankind and even feared by his adversaries.

But, someone may say: even if it is true that the Saints were able to live pure lives at the level of the most difficult counsels, as for me, it is impossible to observe even the simple precept.

Taken as it is, such an affirmation is unacceptable. It was also disapproved by the Church, which firmly censured it as heresy. But, let us clarify things. If one phrases this better, with Wisdom: ***One cannot be chaste if God does not grant this to us*** [Ws 8:21] – then, very well. But we must keep in mind the authoritative words of the Council of Trent: 'Man must do what he can, and must ask for what he cannot do' <sup>111</sup>

Not even the Saints would have been successful if they relied on their own abilities, without the comfort of grace, which God will never deny to one who properly asks for it in prayer. Moreover, He is most prompt in granting it, in order to lighten that pleasant weight, that yoke of the divine law, which appears to be above the powers of our infirm nature <sup>112</sup>.

## **268: Blessed are the pure of heart**

Let us go more deeply in order to discover the excellence of this most noble virtue. We will find peace, tranquility and joy which a pure soul intimately enjoys. To actually realize what a taintless joy is really like, even though it may remain hidden, one needs to compare it with what is, regrettably its opposite.

Take the case of a person who is in the throes of a lustful passion, and we see how much trouble, anguish, and agitation to which his heart is subjected. Inwardly, his spirit is like a city in which everything is in disorder, revolution and tumult. The passions, like a seditious and turbulent faction, make an assault on reason, with a blind and furious charge, and press on it from all sides to impose a violent dominion on it. God's temple becomes a throne for sin, which strips the spirit of its weapons, taking away any hope of being able to free itself. Then the will, buffeted by cruel remorse, abandons itself to a desperate desolation.

On the other hand, a chaste and temperate mind confirms that saying of the Psalmist: ***He has granted peace in your borders*** [Ps 147:14]. The will, like a queen, is seated here, commanding and sweet at the same time, The passions, in deference to its reign, well-ordered and directed under the strong guidance of the virtues, increase the glory of the one who, with so much wisdom, controls and guides them. A welcome, pleasant harmony, fills all the faculties of the mind with calm, happiness and joy. No enemy can present itself to disturb this calm, because it will be weakened and repelled at a distance. The assurance and faithful witness of a good conscience fills one with overwhelming joy and prepares him a continuous banquet of true happiness of heart.

Hope, comforted also by the experience of abundant consolations poured out for man by God opens up the blessed portals of heaven for him, because he can

<sup>111</sup> Council of Trent, Session, 6, c. 11. Denz. 1536.

<sup>112</sup> Early Sermons, n. 19. St. Aloysius Gonzaga's Purity. **MssB 803-817. PVC**, pp. 162 & 167.

already contemplate the crown that has been prepared for him there, drawing out a large lode of unchanging happiness during his journey on this earth: ***Happy are they whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord*** [Ps 119:1].<sup>113</sup>

### **269: A treasure to defend**

Before all else, it is necessary to rein in the body, where the initial root of disorder against purity is found. Wanting to acquire chastity, but not its rigor, is to want fruit-bearing vines without its thorny hedges. The more you remove animalistic tendencies from the body, so much the more will the spirit gain. If you forgo mortification and fasting - there are Christians who do not even observe that which is prescribed - how will it be possible for you to remain pure?

In regard to the soul, one has to develop contemplation of divine things, especially on the good and evil that are reserved according to our merits in the future eternity. The study of the bible and of spiritual books are also necessary. St. Jerome suggests: 'Love the study of Scripture and you will not love carnal vices'<sup>114</sup>. Humble prayer, not only during temptation, but habitually developed. 'Since I realized that it is impossible to be continent except through a gift of God. I approached God, and prayed to Him from the bottom of my heart, *thus* St. Augustine attests [cf. Ws 8:21]<sup>115</sup>.

The study of humane letters is also helpful. Men, having once found grain, left the acorns to the swine. Then, too, not only is the mind freed from impure thoughts by study, but the body is mortified by it, too. If nothing else, sloth is overcome, which is so closely entwined with impurity. Without it the water does not get polluted in a marsh, nor can souls in sinful pleasures<sup>116</sup>.

### **270: Purity and personal reflection**

Attention must be paid to personal relations. Man is sociable by nature. But, human nature carries the sign of corruption. And so, it is exposed to harm even from an action, which by itself, is directed to bring needed solace to someone.

Isn't it true that the very first act of deceit came into the world through the eyes? ***The woman saw that the tree was good for good, pleasing to the eyes, and desirable for gaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it.*** [Gn 3:6]. Through the eyes, therefore, many deceits continue to enter, like thieves through windows. And if simply indulging in an incautious glance has made so many people sorry, what can we say about an imprudent and prolonged conversation, which is like falling asleep on the edge of a precipice?

This danger is greatest when one thinks that there is less to fear when communicating familiarly with devout persons. How many times have two souls been lost when, under the guise of saving a single soul, both become misguided. The honey of devotion is sticky!

<sup>113</sup> Early Sermons, n. 19. **MssB 804-811. PVC**, pp. 163-166.

<sup>114</sup> St. Jerome, *Epistola*, n. 125 ad Rusticum, 11. PL 22, 1078.

<sup>115</sup> St. Augustine, *Epistola*, 157. c. 2, 9. PL 33, 677.

<sup>116</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3596-3605**.

In any case, however, even if caution is not demanded by the obligation of avoiding danger, it may be necessary in order to defend one's good name. St. Paul says: ***We are concerned for what is honorable not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of others*** [2 Co 8:21]. A clear conscience is proof sufficient for us, but it is not enough for others. Conscience and a good name are two distinct things. Conscience is necessary for us; our good name is necessary for our neighbor<sup>117</sup>.

### **271: Various types of Christian purity**

The first kind is conjugal chastity, which is proper to most adult members of the Church, and to which Scripture gives the highest praises: ***Let marriage be honored among all*** - it is holy and worthy of the highest respect [cf. Heb 13:4]. Christian spouses are those who possess goods as if they did not possess them, and use this world as if they did not use it; that is, they do not place their ultimate destiny here [cf. 1 co 7:29, ff.]. Remaining within the limits of what is licit and honest, they abstain even from any desire that is dishonest and illicit, according to the directives of St. Paul: ***your thoughts should be wholly directed to all that is honest, pure, admirable, decent, virtuous, or worthy of praise*** [Ph 4:8].

The widower's continence is another form of purity. Widows deserve particular honor and praise according to St. Paul, provided that they are truly widows, that they are detached in spirit from the pleasures of the sense, not only those of the body, but also from those of the soul [cf. 1 Tm 5:3]. These are those who rule over the peace of families, who night and day persist in prayer; teachers of chastity, full of good and virtuous works [ib.]

The highest and most excellent kind is that of virginity, where the light of purity shines most clearly. Some persons, nevertheless, while meriting praise among men for their virginity, are not so worthy in God's sight. This is because while they have renounced earthly nuptials, they care little or nothing for the heavenly nuptials which unites them to God with incessant prayer and loving contemplation. This, according to St. Paul is the goal of virginity [cf. 1 Co 7:32-35]. Others, even though they have offered the most pleasing fruit and the most beautiful flowers to God, have, nevertheless, retained the plant for themselves, because they have not consecrated their wills to God by means of the vow.

At the summit of purity are found those, who have been bound by the vow of chastity, ***following the Lamb wherever He goes*** [Rv 14:4]. It appears that, thereby, they have touched the ultimate boundary of this virtue. In fact, to what higher goal can men in earthly flesh aspire than to live no longer according to the flesh, but entirely according to the spirit? This surpasses every power of nature, and is only the work of grace: ***not all can accept this word*** [Mt 19:11-12]<sup>118</sup>.

<sup>117</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3606-3615**.

<sup>118</sup> Early Sermons, n. 30. 'Mary's Purity'. **MssB 1104-1108. PVC**, pp. 323-325.

**272: Modesty: veneration of decorum**

It is necessary to develop attentive care of external behavior regulating it not only on the basis of personal convenience, but also according to the circumstances of place, business and of other people with whom one must deal. This accords with that saying of Scripture which singles out saints, praising them because **they have venerated decorum** [Si 44:6]. Possession of this attitude implies treating each other according to what is proper to him. In all our actions there should be nothing that will offend another, but everything we do should be proper to Christian holiness.

In regard to those things which belong to outward necessities such as clothing, objects of common use, and other such things, simplicity, above all, must be the rule. In this way, extravagance and the inclination to vainglory will be excluded. But at the same time, one should guard against carelessness which avoids diligence and effort, because caring for oneself requires this. That kind of inverted ostentation which can be carried out in the name of God's service. Everything must be simple and decorous, inspired by poverty, but at the same time, suitable to the work performed, and respectfully of the people with whom we have to deal<sup>119</sup>.

Whoever wants to be interiorly recollected must acquire external modesty. He must not let his eyes wander about, nor move one's body unbecomingly<sup>120</sup>. One must carry oneself in a mature way, gravely and not hasten about anxiously<sup>121</sup>.

**273: Consecrated chastity and charity**

Apostolic Missionaries must strive with all their strength to acquire that perfection of chastity which is befitting those who have embraced an angelic state of life. They are, after all, procurators of Christ's nuptials, and their soul, St. St. Paul says, espoused to Him alone, must be presented to Him as a chaste virgin, that is, holy in mind and body. [cf. 2 Co 11:2]<sup>122</sup>.

What good is it to restrain the body by continence if the soul does not know how to launch itself into charity toward one's neighbor? The body's chastity is worthless if it is not accompanied by gentleness of mind.<sup>123</sup>

Lust flees from a soul when charity enters<sup>124</sup>. In order to preserve chastity, all should exercise great care to approach the sacraments of the Eucharist and Penance often with proper dispositions. All shall apply themselves constantly to prayer and meditation<sup>125</sup>.

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<sup>119</sup> *Original Constitutions*, CF ## 128-137.

<sup>120</sup> *Spiritual Journal*. January 4, 1809.

<sup>121</sup> *ib.*

<sup>122</sup> *Original Constitutions*. CF # 109

<sup>123</sup> *Retreat Meditations*. MssB 3106.

<sup>124</sup> *Spiritual Journal*. August 17, 1808

<sup>125</sup> *Original Constitutions*. CF ## 118; 110.

## AUTHORITY AND OBEDIENCE

### **274: Authority is service**

*You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you should be your servant [Mt 20:25].* In the Church there are those constituted in authority to serve the faithful and to be their ministers, according to the will of Christ. Therefore, they must care for the good of the others even at the cost of renouncing their own interests, even to the point that they are ready to lay down their life for them. St. Paul could say of himself: **So I will most gladly spend and be utterly spent for your sakes [2 Co 12:15].**

St. Peter exhorts the older members to feed the flock of God: **Not lording it over those entrusted to you, but be examples to the flock [1 P 5:3].** Tyrants are those who lord over others and seek to rule them. The minister of Christ must never be commanding and he should be careful not to become a burden to the faithful, who are the people of God. Opposed to the will of commanding is the obligation of example. It will be above all by the example of a holy life that the minister will exercise his office. He should seek to be a teacher and a model of virtue for all, offering in his life a rich image of excellent works, to which anyone wishing to do good can easily conform<sup>126</sup>.

Since all manifestations of domineering and commanding are reprehensible, let everyone abhor every tendency to command, or to assume an air of domineering. If one has to assume the role of leader, let him not be overbearing, but indicate what has to be done and let all serve one another<sup>127</sup>.

### **275: Primary duty of the Superior**

The superior of the community must be a model for one and all. He must realize that he himself must follow the norms of living as perfectly as possible. To be preeminent because of his title and position is not enough. Most of all he must excel all by his virtue and piety<sup>128</sup>.

His first duty is to carry the community on his shoulders, so to speak, by his prayer life, and by his holy desires<sup>129</sup>. He, therefore, should examine himself to see if he truly maintains the house of God that is entrusted to him. Is he negligent, indifferent, or is he yielding? Let him examine his prayer life, and see if he has true fervor and is able to entreat God's goodness to direct him. He must be convinced that one word said to the Lord in prayer has more value than all the shouting with it.

He should examine himself to see if he has nourished holy desires, so pure and so inflamed for the divine glory, that they are able to please God to invoke His omnipotence. Finally, wishing to progress as he should, he must see to it that his prayers and his holy desires imitate the prayers and the holiest desires of the Heart of

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<sup>126</sup> Retreat Meditations, **MssB 3564-3568.**

<sup>127</sup> *Original Constitutions.* **CF # 195.**

<sup>128</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3570.**

<sup>129</sup> This is taken from the Rules of the Society of Jesus.

Christ, Who suffered and died in this world and is glorious and immortal in Heaven and in the most Holy Eucharist, for the benefit and support of His Church.<sup>130</sup>

### **276: Charity and firmness in difficult cases**

Let us not become upset if there is someone in the community who creates difficulties. If the problem can be cured, then the proper medicine should be administered with due charity and patience. If he does not accept the cure, then, with diligence and prudence the superior should see that he leaves the community. A few genuine people will do much more than many who are sluggish and imperfect<sup>131</sup>.

If this member does not wish to leave the House peacefully, which would be the better solution, then let him leave even with ill feelings. When a bone is out of place, it always hurts. He will always be a nuisance to himself and to others. Then, by doing this, resentment will cease and peace will return. Since he is a problem, he will be known by all to be one.

When the member is leaving, he should be treated with all kindness. Even if at this moment he seems to be unappreciative, later on when he recalls this, he will speak kindly of the community. Nevertheless, when it is necessary to proceed, the departure should not be held up. The sorrow and the harm caused by leaving is not comparable to what will be caused by his remaining. It is similar to one who has a broken tooth. Out with the tooth, out goes the pain. In the best possible manner, let him go in God's name.

And then let us ask the Lord to console those who remain, whose affliction is understandable. A little up, a little down, one straight, one crooked, we proceed in the footsteps of Him Who leads with the Cross on his shoulders and continues to shut: ***If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me [Lk 9:23]***<sup>132</sup>.

### **277: He who listens to you listens to me**

Christ made Himself subject for us and humiliated Himself on the Cross. Obedience is the surest way, and it is like a short-cut to perfection. Let us obtain the merit of obeying perfectly<sup>133</sup>. When someone is so docile to his superiors, even contrary to his own judgment, he surely is being led by the Spirit of God. ***Whoever listens to you listens to me [Lk 10:16]***<sup>134</sup>. For the person who has no superior, because he himself is a superior, the vow of obedience binds his spirit to a total dependence on God in all things<sup>135</sup>.

If an order of the superior is manifestly contrary to the divine or ecclesiastical law, or the rules of the religious institute, everyone should feel obliged to obey God

<sup>130</sup> Correspondence, p. 65. Un-dated letter to L. Naudet.

<sup>131</sup> Correspondence, p. 234. Letter to L. Naudet, not dated

<sup>132</sup> o.c., p. 242. Un-dated.

<sup>133</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2188**.

<sup>134</sup> Meditations on *Primum Regum*, n. 35. **MssB 6309**.

<sup>135</sup> Spiritual Journal. **December 23, 1808**.

rather than man [cf. Ac 4:9].<sup>136</sup> When fulfilling a legitimate order, and a real impediment occurred, or, at least, if he believed so, or had reliable doubts, he should with all humility make them known to the superior leaving the decision up to him.<sup>137</sup> In all other cases obedience must be total, prompt, strong and humble, with perfect renunciation of his own will and his own judgment<sup>138</sup>.

One should accustom himself to be guided habitually by the counsel and the judgment of his superior<sup>139</sup>.

### **278: The quality of obedience**

There are those who obey, not out of love of this virtue, but mainly to calm their fears. In such cases when things are contrary to their liking, they strongly oppose their superiors<sup>140</sup>.

All should obey their superiors as obeying Christ<sup>141</sup>. One must obey not only externally in deeds, but also by conforming his will and judgment to the order of the superior<sup>142</sup>.

Regarding the will, the intention of obedience must be pure, that is, solely to fulfill a precept and comply with the superior's will, or better, with God's will, which is executed in and through the superior. Obedience should also be voluntary, that is, one obeys most willingly and diligently. Finally, obedience should be cheerful and spiritually joyful. It should be done with a constant persevering spirit, and with all humility of soul<sup>143</sup>.

Regarding the intellect, everyone should diligently strive to see that obedience be altogether simple, so as not to see the man in the superior, but God, and to regard his precept not as human but as divine<sup>144</sup>.

No one should contrive to be sent to this, or that place, but everyone should allow himself to be moved by obedience, though it is not wrong to show one's preference and inclination. IN fact, Isaiah offered himself, and Jeremiah excused himself. But neither Jeremiah refused God when He sent him, nor did Isaiah presume to go without first being purified with the coals of the altar [cf. Is 6:6-8]<sup>145</sup>.

### **279: The sign of signs**

All of God's works are perfect. God guarantees the authenticity, mainly by three signs. The sign that confirms the others is the fullness of the Holy Spirit by which one receives the grace of the word. The inclination to charity is the same as its effects,

<sup>136</sup> *Original Constitutions*, CF # 141.

<sup>137</sup> CF # 144.

<sup>138</sup> CF # 141.

<sup>139</sup> CF # 151.

<sup>140</sup> *Spiritual Journal*. July 1, 1809, which is the beginning of St. Gaspar's diary.

<sup>141</sup> CF # 139.

<sup>142</sup> CF # 140.

<sup>143</sup> CF ## 146-148.

<sup>144</sup> CF # 149.

<sup>145</sup> CF # 186.

that, love of the word. The sign of the fullness of the Spirit is a true humility. The sign of true humility is perfect obedience. This is the sign of signs, the seal of all witnesses.

One attains perfect obedience when he performs all his external activities, while keeping his eyes on God Who is omnipresent. Thus, through the exercise of obedience one is guaranteed the right way of working and an increase of faith and devotion. One works rightly because the difficulty of obedience is orientated towards God, Who is always present before us. Devotion is increased because we are forced to please Him Who sees our work and prepares to give us our reward in Heaven.

All Scripture teaches us to obey. ***For whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction, so that by endurance and by the encouragement of the Scriptures, we might have hope*** [Rm 15:4].

Perseverance and consolation are the companions of obedience. Hope, so to speak, is like a flower. The fruit is eternal<sup>146</sup>.

### **280: The example of St. Bertoni on authority and obedience**

The superior of the Stimmate, a man of sound judgment and piety, knows how to rule his community, with sweetness and firmness, so that one spirit animated all, one way of living, so to speak, was imbued in all<sup>147</sup>.

In his concerns whether they were relevant or miniscule, Fr. Gaspar never failed con consult his older companions. Even though he was their father and founder, he respected their advice as if he were subordinate and the least among them<sup>148</sup>.

Insofar as his obedience towards his superiors, in particular the Bishops, it is no exaggeration to say that he was always ready and prompt. One word from them was like a command and no matter what contrary reasons he might entertain, he never questioned. There were many burdensome duties assigned to him. He submitted bowing his head and having faith, that in its fulfillment, he would receive help from the grace of God. Even when in ill health, and quite sick, he fulfilled the many demands of his superiors.

Because of his great love for obedience, and the strong motivation of faith that he saw in the voice of God and in the person of his superior, we can understand the zeal that he wanted to instill in those whom he directed and counseled, to the practice of virtue<sup>149</sup>.

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<sup>146</sup> Meditation on *Primum Regum*, nn. 39 & 51. MssB 6431-6441; 6818.

<sup>147</sup> Louis Schlor, *Philanthropy of the Faith*. SA, p. 66.

<sup>148</sup> Cajetan Giacobbe, *Life*, SA, p. 495.

<sup>149</sup> o.c., SA, pp. 556, ff.