

# 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 C [## 281 - 343]: RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT

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**AUTHOR'S DEDICATION**

To my Stigmatine Confreres:

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

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

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

For the translation of this book:

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

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

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

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

**Fr. Joseph Henchey.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## PRESENTATION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## FORWARD

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

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

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

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

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

- 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 COMMITMENT

#### MAKING THE BEST USE OF TIME

##### **281: Time never returns**

***Make the most of opportunity*** [Ep 5:16]. Time never returns. Therefore, it should be used with great care<sup>5</sup>. You must give a proper order to your feelings and to your time. It should be used first of all to serve God and praise Him, and then for other things. First the soul, then the body. First the duty of spiritual perfection, then other occupations. ***And over all these virtues, put on love*** [Col 3:14].

Time should be well arranged. One should not act at random. Spiritual writers consider this not a good practice. For example, some do certain things not because it is the time to do so, but more often because they have the desire to do so. If at another time they do not have what they desire, then they neither do it, or, if they do, they ruin it. There are those who begin their day without knowing what they have to do, and end it without knowing what they did. One day they do this, and the next something else. One day they do it this way, and the next another way. One day they do this, and the next day they don't. One day they do less, and another day they do more. One day everything; and the next nothing. They vacillate operating without method or order.

A fundamental rule should be followed. Every Christian and especially every consecrated person must divide the hours of the day in such a way that there is no time which is not well used. Time is a precious gift. God has given it to us to make good use of it for eternal life. One does not make good use of time if he does not have a good method, and if he has not a fixed time for each action. One should not waste the smallest part of this great gift.

To listen is not enough. Good works are useless if they are but desires. Even a written method is not enough. Deeds need substance. Let us not put our trust in good desires. Deeds! Deeds! By means of good works, ***Be all the more eager to make your calling and election firm*** [2 P 1:10].<sup>6</sup>

##### **282: Beware of idleness**

***Let us not be weary of doing good, for in due time we shall reap our harvest if we do not give up. So then while we have the opportunity, let us do good to all*** [Ga 6:9]. If we are able to say that we are already engaged, let us not stop the good we have begun. If we are not seriously engaged, let us not wait until the last moment to begin. When we stop or defer it, it is generally because of laziness. We must always be alert against this. Laziness is a form of sadness, boredom, mental lethargy that renders the spirit heavy, so that the desire to do, or to begin to do good

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<sup>5</sup> Spiritual Journal. July 24, 1808.

<sup>6</sup> Retreat to Acolytes. MssB 4450-4456.

work is lacking. This happens especially in spiritual things that concern the glory of God and the salvation of souls. These things become problems for those who are lazy.

Laziness is opposed to spiritual joy that is born of charity that enjoys God and spiritual things very much. It makes a man bad, and the least useful of all creatures, even inanimate. The reason is that creatures must follow the duties given to them by God, making the best use of time. Above all, laziness puts a man at risk in losing eternal goods, because it takes away the necessary strength to resist the enemy and exposes him to the danger of being deprived of grace and glory.

Let us look at the example of St. Paul. He was very aware of God's will for him to work hard. He not only wore himself out in preaching, writing, consoling the afflicted, comforting the weak, bearing with persecutions and every kind of tribulation, but he applied himself to manual labor to fend for himself. ***You know very well that these very hands have served my needs and my companions*** [Ac 20:34]. Therefore, he could exhort others to labor similarly. ***Bear your share of hardship along with me like a good soldier of Jesus Christ*** [2 Tm 2:3]. ***Fulfill your works as a preacher of the Gospel; carry out your ministry*** [id. 4:5].

Now is the time to wear ourselves, to bear fruits [cf. Ga 6:10]. We shall rest in eternal life.<sup>7</sup>

### **283: Avoid laziness**

Laziness is the first-born child of idleness. Everyone must avoid it, because it is the cause of many evils. It makes a man foolish and dull. What is sillier than one not being daring for his life, not providing it with what is necessary by defending it against enemies? The lazy person not only does not defend himself against his enemies, but he leaves himself wide open and thus directly aids his enemies by giving them power. Through laziness vices are nourished. The devil makes greater headway against those who are lazy.

In every state of life and in every epoch of history the loafers were judged worthy of noting but censure and blame. In our blessed era of the Good News, these are more blameworthy than ever. Mainly because of the example given by Christ, who has shown in the most marvelous manner how to work well. He spent His time consoling the afflicted, healing the sick, freeing the possessed giving sight to the blind, teaching the ignorant, and fulfilling the possessed, giving sight to the blind, teaching the ignorant, and fulfilling every kind of merciful work, and then He would pass the night in prayer. [cf. Lk 6:12].

The Apostles handed down the same example as did their followers. In particular St. Paul, who could say of himself, ***You know well that these hands have served my needs and my companions*** [Ac 20:34].

In Christians, it is even more blameworthy, since we have been purchased with the high price of Christ's blood, so that we might do good.

***You have been purchased at a price. Therefore, glorify God in your body.*** [1 Co 6:20]. God is glorified and is present in our bodies when we work well. St Paul again insists. ***Therefore, my beloved brothers, be firm, steadfast, always fully***

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<sup>7</sup> Retreat to Acolytes. **MsB 4457-4478.**

***devoted to the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor in the Lord is not in vain*** [1 Co 15:58].<sup>8</sup>

#### **284: Manual labor**

All men should work even perform manual labor for at least two reasons. It is a punishment decreed by God for all mankind when our first parents sinned. [cf. Gn 3:19]. It is a fundamental way to avoid laziness and to make good use of time and not freely eat the bread of others, but do something to help the poor so that they can enjoy true peace of heart. St. Benedict advised his disciples that they could claim that they were true monks only when they work with their hands as the Apostles did. He prescribes the specific times in which the monks were to occupy themselves in manual labor, as well as the time for ***lectio divina***. With the same spirit he wanted the monks to help one another, so that no one was exempted from duty in the kitchen or working on the farm. They were never to complain about doing this.

It is true that the duties and the exercises of each one are done according to one's assignment, and generally they substitute manual labor. If the rule does not prescribe a particular kind of manual labor, one observes the common law of work by fulfilling exactly what those rules prescribe. But this does not change the fact that it is a very good things, [considering that such exercises belong more or less to the spirit] to add some physical labor according to each one's condition. God is the creator of the soul and body, and from both He demands, and justly so, the tribute of our service.

Furthermore, in order for work to be meritorious, it is to be joined with prayer and the application of the mind of God. ***For while physical training is of limited value, devotion is valuable in every respect*** [1 Tm 4:8]. In this way, while hands produce those things that feed the body, the soul is not separated from God<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Retreat to Acolytes. **MssB 4569-4593.**

<sup>9</sup> DeMabillion, J., *Traite' des etudes monastiques*. **MssB 8892-8900.**

## STUDY & LEARNING

### **285: Culture and Spiritual life.**

***God is the Lord of all knowledge*** [cf. 1 S 2:3]. One is unable to reach the summit of spiritual realities without the knowledge of the natural sciences. And I dare to add that this plan of yours is so delicate that it can never be realized as it should be, without the support of a great deal of learning by the various members [of your community]. The first seed of corruption of the great works of God is ignorance. The same is true of knowing much, but knowing it in the wrong way. This only leads to losing the good taste of things<sup>10</sup>.

Everyone has to be convinced of the importance of study, as a means to God's glory, and to prepare oneself against the temptations of the devil. This evil one, under the pretext of piety, tries in all ways to have one abandon the study of the humanities. The devil foresees the immense harm that will come to his kingdom through knowledge obtained from these basic studies. On the other hand, one must be on his guard against the other temptation coming from this same enemy, i.e., the use of poorly organized studies that can lead a person into even a greater harm<sup>11</sup>.

Theological studies furnish the weapons for our apostolate. However, as an aid to understand scripture, the humanities are of great value. The study of Scripture is helped immensely by the knowledge of various languages, modern and ancient, by geography, history and literature, and other sciences. The person most interested in having one ignorant of all secular topics is the devil. Basic literary studies are of great advantage to help us when praying and meditating<sup>12</sup>.

### **286: Studying with one's talents**

There are those who possess simple mind, and are capable of learning only a few things. Then there are those who are so smart that they can learn practically everything. When those in the first category forget their condition and try to elevate themselves to the level of those in the second category, they become confused. Because of this vain desire, they put themselves at the risk of failing to understand what they were able to know with dignity, provided they limited themselves to their level with discretion. On the other hand, when great minds are not able to comprehend all that is theoretically possible for them to know, as a result they are tempted to lose courage and to give up, and thus refrain from reaching their proper level. They end up doing minor things and so fail to attain the great results that the Creator has prepared for them.

We are not saying that the intelligent ones should not, from time to time, come down from their high level and study lesser matters. The same can be said of those minds of modest dimension, that they should not fear to raise their minds to a higher level. It is a fact that, while it is true that on one hand one should not neglect anything, on the other hand it is useful to reach for higher things. Everything should be done to

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<sup>10</sup> Correspondence. Letter to Naudet, **March 6, 1813**.

<sup>11</sup> Correspondence. Letter to Naudet. **July 31, 1813**.

<sup>12</sup> Meditations, *Primum Regum*, n. 52. **Mss B 6848**. who possess simple minds

avoid contempt for lesser things, and to avoid boredom and discouragement, which may have to be feared<sup>13</sup>.

### **287: Study for the glory of God**

One should not be too occupied or fearful of certain difficulties in studying. Studying is done to find the Lord and to seek His glory, since He is the Lord of all knowledge [1 S 2:3]. No one can advance even one step without His light in comprehending natural things. God does not deny this light to many, even if they are pagans, because they too serve to help His creatures, even though they have used their talents badly. How can it be denied to those who wish to serve, to know, and to love Him more, and who propose to communicate this to others?<sup>14</sup>

Since these studies are a means primarily to serve the glory of God in our apostolic work with others, it is obvious that we must first obtain divine mercy for ourselves. This means that we have to win complete victory over ourselves and then join in the battle to win the hearts of others with the weapons of studies. One should keep in mind the suggestions of St. Ignatius given to his students that they maintain the presence of God in themselves. Other points were given to this saint to evaluate better their studies, as a means of glorifying God, and as a defense against the Evil One<sup>15</sup>.

One must always remember that it is better to know a little but well, rather than to know a lot in a confused manner, for then one does not even know what he resumes to know<sup>16</sup>.

### **288: Vain curiosity**

All should moderate their desire of learning of practicing studiousness, a virtue opposed to the vice of vain curiosity. Everyone should refrain from the excessive desire to know all things. This conforms to the view of the Apostle Paul: ***Do not pretend to be wiser than is proper [for you], but see to it that you know in the proper measure*** [cf. Rm 12:3]<sup>17</sup>.

A curious person is always uneasy, because he desires to know and to investigate things that are of no concern of his, and much less is he capable of understanding all things. Furthermore, learning something that he dislikes, he tends to become uneasy. There are those who are interested in knowing the private affairs of others. They wait to learn all sorts of things; they seek every small detail of personal secrets. They tend to talk everywhere, trying to show how well informed they are. They waste time as busy-bodies and force others to do the same. They change the story according to their wild and confused imagination. ***What is committed to you, attend to. DO not be inquisitive about too many things*** [Si 3:21]. As a matter of fact, there

<sup>13</sup> DeMabillion, J. o.c., MssB 8959-8960.

<sup>14</sup> Correspondence. Letter to Naudet. August 24, 1813.

<sup>15</sup> o.c., Letter to Naudet. July 25, 1813.

<sup>16</sup> o.c., Letter to Naudet. July 25, 1813.

<sup>17</sup> CF # 122.

are no people who are nosy that are not also disturbed. That is why Holy Scripture condemns vain curiosity.

The Apostle calls to Bishop Timothy's attention those young widows, ***Furthermore they learn to be idlers and going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busy-bodies, as well as talking about things that ought not to be mentioned*** [1 Tm 5:13].

Then there are others who are curious roamers, nervous, sowers of bad relations, who take the liberty to visit the rich seeking alms. If [as St. Paul says] this should not be done by widows, neither should anyone else, and much less should I be done by one consecrated to the Lord<sup>18</sup>.

### **289: Human wisdom**

Since God is the Author of both natural and supernatural truths, His truth must always be sought. He must be adored everywhere. We might not always arrive at the truth, but it will always redound to our praise and glory, at the least, in searching for it, and coming close to it. Even if we form a reasonable doubt, and do not rush to a questionable solution, this would be considered as success.

One must investigate the truths in the natural order since they lead to supernatural truths. This is impossible to do if we begin with ignorance, error, or untruth. Once we investigate the hidden truths of nature, our minds will be trained in the contemplation of spiritual reality, and later find a particular joy in searching for the more mysterious and sublime realities.

It is, therefore, necessary to form a group of real learned people, who can reason well, who are able to keep alert against error, but know how to follow the dictates of right reason and virtue<sup>19</sup>.

### **290: Study of the Word of God**

All the knowledge and theology of the first Fathers of the Church came from studying Scripture. This generated ideas and the foundation of solid piety, and made them very pleasing to God, and led them to be guides and teachers of others.

St. Jerome exhorts his friend, Nepotianus: 'Read the Scriptures assiduously, in fact, never lay down this book of the Word of God from your hands.'<sup>20</sup> This saintly Doctor later wrote about Nepotianus that by carefully reading and meditating on Scripture he had made of his heart a library of Christ.

St. Jerome writing about Paulinus asked him to delve into the depth and the marrow of Scripture also, to form his rule for monastic life and to become a good teacher to others. He encourages him to learn from the Scriptures what he must teach, acquiring the proper speech which would conform to the true teaching so that he would be able to exhort others with holy doctrine and to confound those who would contradict it. The common thought of the Fathers and the Doctors of the Church was

<sup>18</sup> Retreat to Acolytes. **MssB 4560-4568.**

<sup>19</sup> Mabillion, J., o.c., **MssB 9071-9072.**

<sup>20</sup> St. Jerome, Letter 52, 7. PL 22, 533.

that the study of Scripture ought to be had by those who especially lived a consecrated life<sup>21</sup>.

### **291: How to study history**

By knowing history and meditating on past events, one acquires a certain attitude of prudence. Here we see, as if in a mirror, not only human events, but also the great deeds of Divine Providence: on one side, how the world is governed and on the other side, how God governs His Church. It is, therefore, necessary to study history, and in a special way, the history of the Church, but not out of mere curiosity. When it is done in a serious manner, with the intention of benefiting from it, there is no doubt that one can gain an advantage greater than one can imagine. It is not merely a matter of collecting in our mind a series of dates, acts, persons and deeds. This is not yet an historical science, since science is the knowledge of things acquired through reason and cause. To know history means to understand the persons who are the protagonists, and to evaluate, as much as possible, the reasons of their choices, their qualities and defects, their opinions and their passions.

Finally one acquires from this knowledge of others a message we can apply to ourselves, to be edified by virtuous and holy people, to notice what should be avoided in those who do evil and foolish things. Thus, a norm of how to act not only in good circumstances, but also in adverse ones is found. If we do not have this attitude, we will be unable to benefit from history, that is, to acquire an exact rule of conduct which is learned over and above the mere knowledge of dates, by prudent reflection and concentration<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> Mabillon, J., o.c., **MssB 8497-8912**.

<sup>22</sup> Mabillon, o.c., **MssB 9026-9057**.

## THE WISDOM OF THE CROSS

### **292: Fill me with what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ**

***Be imitators of God, as beloved children*** [Ep 5:1]. God has prepared a ladder for us that we might be capable of reaching such a height. He asks us to imitate His Son, made man, humiliated and afflicted, before He was exalted and glorified.

It is by the Cross that we are conformed to the Son of God, Christ crucified. This is a great dignity and a help. As we are conformed to Christ in His sufferings, so shall we be in His glory. God has ordained that he who does justice is an heir of God. This great happiness and glory will not be ours if we are not joined to Christ through His labors, sorrows and crosses with great patience. ***If only we suffer with Him, so that we may also be glorified with Him*** [Rm 8:17].

If we really listen to the words of the Apostle, we will find strong reasons to be patient. If Christ Who is our leader goes before us carrying His cross, should not we, His followers, follow Him generously, carrying the same cross? We will, then, participate in His glory, not just any glory, but the same glory of Christ, the Son of God. Really, ***I consider the suffering of the present time as nothing compared with the glory revealed in us*** [Rm 8:18]. That is to say: with a little suffering, we will gain an immense glory; with a temporary suffering we will obtain eternal glory.

We have the certain hope that in a short while we will be freed from all our trials. This hope would stimulate our soul to accept patiently all difficult and bitter trials. Then ***the Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness*** [Rm 8:26]. With such inspirations and with such a helper should we not accept valiantly the cross on our shoulders?<sup>23</sup>

### **293: Patience – a virtue of the strong**

***You need endurance to do the will of God and receive what He has promised*** [Heb 10:36]. Patience is a virtue by which the spiritual good of a person is protected against sadness. It helps him not to be discouraged or defeated.

Patience is necessary for one and all, when we consider the many evils that beset us everywhere and at all times, the result of original sin which brought sickness and death into this world, and all that goes with it. One also needs it when he is tempted by disordered passions which are strong and furiously contrast with our true good. Our enemies, both visible and invisible, try to harm us by sending us temptations, trying to trap and also persecute us. It is difficult to foresee a truce. We must also be aware that this is a way in which the loving designs of our Father are made manifest, and He wishes to use these means so that we can better purify our souls, and urge it on to greater heights.

Therefore, we can see that no one is exempted from the law of suffering, not even those who are saintly and close friends of God. In fact, God seems to send greater trials to His friends and He gives them a bitter chalice to drink from his own hands. Mary, His own Mother, was known as the Queen of martyrs, and the Mother of Sorrows. Was not this the road that the Son of God has to travel? ***Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer and enter His glory?*** [Lk 24:26].

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<sup>23</sup> On Patience. Consideration 1. Mss B 4384-4392.

On the other hand, by practicing patience one finds the joy of the most profound peace. Peace is a work of patience both in heaven and on earth. It is enumerated by St. Paul as one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit [Ga 5:22] which ripen and are enjoyed in this life<sup>24</sup>.

### **294: Carrying the Cross with Jesus**

Walking ahead of His apostles, Jesus hastened to His Cross [cf. Mt 10:32] to let us know how willing and ready He was to suffer. He did not fear the sufferings awaiting Him in Jerusalem.

The Gospel clearly points out His attitude as He hastens to accept the humiliating obedience that would lead Him to His passion and death to demonstrate the power of His divine love. This divine love is like a fire and a stimulus that incite us to run with a great spirit toward that obedience which, though quite painful for the body, is very acceptable to God. This is contrary to egotism that walks with leaded feet when a difficult duty has to be done, or when virtue must be practiced, but when it journeys towards honors and worldly pleasures, it runs.

Good Jesus, what a difference between our spirit and the spirit of the world! The world aspires above all things to seek honors and worldly pleasures. You, however, seek to be first in humiliation and suffering. The world seeks greater worldly glory, you, however, seek greater humiliations<sup>25</sup>.

I realize that to suffer some little thing for the love of God is the greatest good. ***Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you [falsely] because of me. Rejoice and be glad because your reward will be great in heaven [Mt 5:1-12]***<sup>26</sup>.

### **295: Accepting the Cross lovingly**

The Lord shows us His Cross so that we may accept it willingly out of love for Him. In the end, it is He Who carries it out of love for us<sup>27</sup>.

Adversities are signs of love, wounds that are medicinal by which God betters us sinners, and spares us for eternity. ***I will punish their crime with a rod and their guilt with stripes. Yet, My kindness I will not take from him, nor will I belie my faithfulness [Ps 89:34]. You chastised me and I am chastened, I was an untamed calf. If you will allow me, I will return, for You are the Lord, my God [Jr 31: 18].*** God is aware of our pains. ***Those whom I love, I rebuke and chastise [Rv 3:19]. My son, do not disdain the discipline of the Lord, nor lose heart when reprovved by him, for whom the Lord loves He disciplines; He scourges every son He acknowledges. Endue your trial as 'discipline'; God treats you as son. For what son is there whom the father does not discipline? If you are without discipline,***

<sup>24</sup> Patience. Consideration 2. MssB 4399-4401.

<sup>25</sup> Patience. Consideration 2. MssB 4399-4401.

<sup>26</sup> Spiritual Journal. September 29, 1808.

<sup>27</sup> Spiritual Journal. December 3, 1808.

***in which all have shared, you are not sons but bastards. Besides this, we have had our earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them. Should we not [then] submit all the more to the Father of spirits and live?*** [Heb 12:5-9].<sup>28</sup>

It is a great gift to receive punishments from God.<sup>29</sup> Lord, may we carry our cross and not drag it. May we carry it willingly and glory in it. May we also carry it with so much love that we glory in nothing else but that. ***May I never boast except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*** [Ga 6:14].<sup>30</sup>

### **296: Patience and Prudence**

Christ teaches us in what true fortitude and patience consist. These are between rashness which is when one exposes himself to evil when he should not, and cowardice, which is when one holds back when he should face and bear it. There are, therefore, two laws which govern fortitude and patience. One against rashness: ***When they persecute you in one place, flee to another.*** [Mt 10:23], and the other against cowardice: ***Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul*** [Mt 10:28].

On His part, when Jesus was aware that the Jews had decreed to kill Him, ***He no longer walked in public among the Jews. Instead, He withdrew to a region near the desert*** [Jn 11:54]. Thus, removing the danger, since His time had not come to face that for the glory of God and the salvation of the world.

But, when His time came, knowing that His passion was nearing and that the Jews in Jerusalem wanted to put Him to death, He wanted to go, because the time had arrived to do the will of God [cf. Jn 13:1]. He hastened on this journey, walking ahead of His Apostles, so much so that they were amazed and they followed Him with great fear [cf. Mk 10:32].

By the way, to be afraid is not against the virtue, but to hold back from doing one's duty, is. Fear is natural. But man really shows virtue when he is able to stand firm in the face of his own fears. Even he saints feared death, but they did not try to avoid it. If they had not feared it, what good would their patience be?<sup>31</sup>

### **297: Carrying the Cross with joy**

St. John Chrysostom says: 'Give me an innocent man, one who has a clear conscience, one who fervently aspires for the future realities, who awaits that blessed glory, what can sadden him? Death is certainly one of the most unbearable events in his life. The anticipation of death cannot sadden him, but in some way will console him. He knows that this is the end of his labors and it is the only way to attain his crown and the reward for those who strive for virtue. Will the untimely death of his sons cause him sorrow? He will be able to bear even this courageously, and he will be able to repeat with Job: ***The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord*** [Jb 1:21].

<sup>28</sup> Catechesis on the *Our Father*. MssB 318, ff.

<sup>29</sup> Correspondence. Letter to Naudet. June 29, 1831.

<sup>30</sup> Meditation n. 5, *Primum Regum* MssB 4693.

<sup>31</sup> Patience. MssB 4396-4399.

***If neither death, nor the loss of his children can take away his peace of soul, much less would the loss of riches upset him. If he falls ill and infirm, he would hear the word of God saying to him: in sickness and in poverty, confide in God. For in fire gold is tested, and worthy men in the crucible of humiliation [cf. Si 2:5]***<sup>32</sup>.

If we want true happiness, let us strive to be holy. Let us arrange our life well, and we shall never lack lasting peace, a peace that the difficulties of this world can never take away or diminish. Let us keep a clear conscience and with this as our testimony, not only will we live peacefully, serenely and happily, but when death comes, terrible as it may be, and the vain joys of the world will give way to frightening mourning, our security will be guaranteed, our joy will be doubled, and we will have nothing to fear. To the few happy years that we have spent here on earth in the fear of the Lord, eternal ages of perfect joy will be added in the joy of God Himself<sup>33</sup>.

### **298: True joy**

***Happy are the people whose God is the Lord [Ps 144:15].*** We will find true happiness and joy in recognizing that God is our Lord, in serving Him faithfully and in living for Him alone.

This thought is repeated quite often in the scriptures. ***Happy the man who follows not the counsel of the wicked, nor walks in the way of sinners [Ps 1:1]. Happy the man whom You instruct, O Lord, whom by Your laws y You teach [Ps 94:12]. Happy are they whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord [Ps 119:1]. Happy the man who fears the Lord [Ps 112:1].*** In the Gospels we also read that the humble and meek will be happy, as well as those who mourn and suffer persecution for justice's sake. ***Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are they that mourn. Blessed are those that are persecuted for the sake of righteousness [Mt 5:3; Lk 6:21].***

Therefore, only those who live a life according to divine law live a happy life. Virtue, no matter how agonizing and deprived of earthly pleasures and honors, and no matter how trying, will find joy, contentment and cheerfulness.

When we notice the fruit of certain trees that possess a specific beautiful color and shape, and are pleasant to taste, we also have to realize that all of this comes from the roots that are buried in the ground, and are repulsive to the eye and repellent to the taste. Likewise, the suffering of one who lives according to God brings forth the fruits of joy and peace.

If we live a well ordered life, we will also enjoy peaceful and continual joy that not even exterior troubles can take from us, but will always last, even without earthly joys. What is outside us, whether good or bad, cannot cause us harm or sorrow, if our soul is interiorly well disposed.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> St. John Chrysostom. Homily 18, 2. PG 49, 183.

<sup>33</sup> Early Sermons, 22. True Joy. MssB 888-895. PVC, pp. 20-23.

<sup>34</sup> Early Sermons, n. 22. True Happiness. MssB 880-886; PVC pp., 17-20.

### **299: The Secret of Joy**

The source of sadness and weariness here on earth even before eternal damnation is vice. Virtue, however, is not slow in rewarding her faithful followers. In this present life virtue is nourished with hope and crowned with pure delights.

He who thinks that a virtuous and mortified life is melancholic and sad is not very much convinced of these things. No wonder. Even a sick man thinks that the wine is bitter and the music dull, while the healthy man enjoys the taste and savors the sweetness.

While Augustine was immersed in the filth of impure pleasures, he felt that he could not live without them. Once he decided to rid himself of these desires, he could say: 'How lovely I found it to be free from the loveliness of these vanities so that now it was a joy to renounce what I had been so afraid to lose. Because it was You, my God, true and utmost kindness, Who chased them from me. You chased them away, and You came to take their place, You Yourself, sweeter than any pleasure.' We must believe this Saint, because after experiencing the bother of his malady, he relished the sweetness of health with much more intensity<sup>35</sup>.

Therefore, if losing such a vile pleasure is compensated not only with an immeasurable gift of happiness in Heaven, but with an overwhelming joy here on earth, it would be quite foolish not to be able to control oneself, with the risk of forever losing perfect and eternal happiness.<sup>36</sup>

### **300: St. Gaspar's patience and joy**

If I tell you that during his illness, Fr. Gaspar had to undergo over two hundred operations on his leg that were quite painful, it would be the plain truth. It is difficult to express adequately the great courage he possessed in suffering these awful pains that continued even after surgery. He was unable to move and had to lie in bed for several months as if he were nailed to it. Despite it all, he suffered patiently, and serenely, and left the impression that he was not only resigned, but happy and content<sup>37</sup>.

During moments of terrible suffering, he used to say: 'Strike me, O Lord, for you have reason to do so, and I deserve even more.'<sup>38</sup>

Some twelve, or fifteen days before his death, and feeling somewhat better, when they had to change his position in bed to give him more comfort, he would act the clown by mimicking with his mouth and face those who were assisting him, bringing a little joy and laughter, despite his great pain. One day, near the end of his life, two professors from the seminary had come to visit him. Jokingly, he said, after

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<sup>35</sup> St. Augustine *Confessions*. Book 9, c. 1. PL 32, 763.

<sup>36</sup> Early Sermons n. 5. Ascension. **MssB 513-515. PVC, pp. 13, ff.**

<sup>37</sup> Cajetan Giacobbe, *Life*. SA, p. 14.

<sup>38</sup> Form the original dialect: *Dei, Signor, dei che gavi rason, dei che mel merito, e merito du peso!*

being asked how he felt: 'We are here at school.' This caused them to smile and to be edified<sup>39</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup> *Miscellanea Lenotti*. SA, p. 144. Another testimony of how the Founder accepted suffering, typical of Fr. Bertoni. This was handed down to his sons:

... It is a known fact that the priests of the Stimate saw in their superior, Gaspar Bertoni, and in his leadership a great compensation for all their disadvantages, and they truly lived happily in all these circumstances.' [Bartholomew Sorio].

[*At the School of God with Fr. Gaspar Bertoni – Spiritual Notes*, by Fr. Ignazio Bonetti, CSS. Verona 1989, p. 231: Fr. Charles Zara writes: 'In all their discomforts and poverty, they were still very happy and content, that it was an exceedingly great joy just to see and hear them.' Fr. Francis Benciolini, a faithful disciple of Fr. Gaspar's, said: 'We imitated our Founder in the art of always being happy, in such a way that his presence always put us in a wonderful state of mind.'

## THE APOSTOLIC MISSION

### 301: The Mission of Christ

***The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord [Lk 4:18]. I must proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God because for this reason I was sent [Lk 4:43].***

When God decided to send a Savior to mankind, He made the best possible choice by sending one who was truly human and of the same nature as man. Thus He would be able to set the example and by understanding us would be able to treat us with compassion. He would be truly divine. He would be the only-begotten Son and thus would be able to redeem as by His omnipotent power. If Christ were not truly God, He could not bring the essential remedy. If He were not truly man, He would be unable to give us the example of how to live.

Christ is all wise. He knows what our needs are. He is all merciful and thus able to forgive. He is all powerful, full of goodness and charity to meet us halfway. His providence is limitless in that He is full of care for our own welfare. He is able to treat us as brothers because of His meekness and affability. He bestows on us His riches by His benevolence and greatness.

Christ makes us realize that the reign of God is not realized in riches or worldly glory, but in poverty and humiliation. ***For you know the gracious act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that for your sake He became poor although He was rich, so that by His poverty, you might become rich [2 Co 8:9].***

It is through humiliation that we conquer. ***He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even death on the Cross. Because of this God greatly exalted Him [Ph 2:8].***

We are now marked with the seal and the character of Christ. Whoever wishes to be His follower must willingly labor and give his all for Him. ***Whoever serves Me, must follow Me and where I am, there also will My servant be. [Jn 12:26].*** We will be rewarded according to the effort we make<sup>40</sup>.

### 302: As the Father has sent Me, so I send you.

As Christ went about His mission, he traveled with His disciples throughout the cities and towns of Palestine. Later, He sent His disciples throughout the world to proclaim the Good News to one and all.

He wanted His disciples to watch and perform exactly as He did. They had to be prepared to have the food or clothing or any other thing as He was having. Each one had to be ready to persevere with Him in vigils and privation. Then they would be able to receive the same victory and happiness. He did not limit Himself only to command, but He labored and suffered first. He willingly exposed Himself to persecution and even death. He did not choose victory or take advantages or glory for Himself. He desired to share with His disciples all the honor and glory in proportion to

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<sup>40</sup> Mission at St. Firmus; Major. MssB 4194-4200.

their labors and sufferings. Christ once confided to a saint: If I could find souls truly disposed to give themselves to Me without hesitation, all that you read in the lives of Saints and what I have done for them, I would do the same for them, and would even be prepared to work miracles for them. **'Lo, the hand of the lord is not too short'** [Ls 59:1]/ I am always the same.

Those who wish to dedicate themselves totally to the gospel must understand that they are called not only to endure labors, but also to fulfill even greater and harder tasks, once they have overcome the rebellions of the flesh and their own self glory. People should be able to see [in us] some sort of sketch of what Christ and His apostles did together. Today this is more necessary than ever to do the same<sup>41</sup>.

### **303: You are the light of the world**

***You are the light of the world*** [Mt 5:14]. St. John Chrysostom says: ' There would never be any more pagans if we Christians were truly what we ought to be, if we obeyed the Commandments of god, if we had no revenge for those who injured us, if we return kindness and blessing to those who insult us, if we would return a blessing when we are maligned. There would be hardly anyone against us, seeing us act in this way, who would not willingly accept the true religion. Look at the many people St. Paul attracted to Christ. If everyone were like Him, we would be able to convert the world.'

The Lord has chosen us to be dots of light, like angels living here among men, like adults living among children, like holy men living among worldly men. The sun remains in the heavens, but is from there that its rays are sent to earth. So it should be for Christians, with our bodies here on earth and our spirit in heaven, we should be a light and ignite a fire around us by the example of our virtue<sup>42</sup>.

### **304: The value of example**

***I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do*** [Jn 13:15]. Jesus says this to His disciples [after washing their feet]. From Him we learn that we must first act and then teach [cf. Ac 1:1].

It is by works that Christ brings followers to believe in His teachings. He exhorts us to meekness, and He does so by His example. ***Learn from Me, for I am meek and humble of heart*** [Mt 11:29]. He teaches poverty, and He Himself lives it by His deeds. ***But the Son of Man has no place to lay His head*** [Mt 8:20]. He prescribes that we must love our enemies and He does so from the Cross, praying for those who crucified Him. ***Father, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing*** [Lk 23:34]. ***If anyone wants to go to the law with you over your tunic, hand him your cloak as well*** [Mt 5:40]. He was not only willing to let them take His clothing, but also His blood. This is what He wanted His disciples to do.

St. Paul did the same as Christ. That is why he was able to say: ***Be imitators of me, brothers, and observe those who thus conduct themselves according to the model you have in me*** [cf. Ph 3:17]. There is no one so cold and inefficient as a

<sup>41</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 2448-2466**.

<sup>42</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3556-3557**. this passage is taken from St. John Chrysostom. 1 Tm. Sermon 10, 3. PG 62, 551.

teacher who reasons only by words. He is a hypocrite rather than a teacher. That is why the apostles first taught by example and then by preaching. In fact, they did not have to say much, since their deeds were shouting so loudly<sup>43</sup>.

It is also true that one does not need only to aim principally at giving example. This would be a mistake. One must also strive to do good, and do it in a perfect way. The example will follow by itself<sup>44</sup>.

### **305: Watch your life and doctrine**

***Attend to yourself!*** [1 Tm 4:16] – that is, take care to consider often, examine correct, and put in order your actions and behavior. ***Attend to your teaching*** [1 Tm 4:16]<sup>45</sup> so that you are able to teach others as well.

This two-fold duty is necessary for every true apostle, that is, to teach himself first of all, and then others. Live well, take care of yourself, if you wish to help your brothers. Those who neglect to care for themselves while dedicating themselves totally to the care of their neighbor will see their spirit evaporate and will end up by neither helping their neighbors nor themselves.

St. Bernard adds: ‘The first consideration should be yourself, so that you will not have to spend time in vain on other things while forgetting yourself. Of what use is it if you gained the whole world and lose yourself? Be as wise as you will; but in every case much will be lacking in your wisdom, if you are not wise for yourself. What will be missing? I don’t know. In my opinion, you will be missing everything. Even if you understand the mysteries and the dimensions of the universe, the height of the sky, the depth of the ocean, if you ignore yourself, it would be the same as erecting a building without a foundation. You would not be putting up a building, but a wreck.’<sup>46</sup>

Think often of the way you live, so that you will live better. ***By doing so, you will save both yourself and those who listen to you*** [1 Tm 4:16].<sup>47</sup>

### **306: Spreading the good news**

The grace of the Holy Spirit is intended to enlighten even those people who are estranged from the faith. The darkness of error is clarified by the reaching of the true faith and the works of the devil are destroyed by the proclamation of the Gospel. Sad

<sup>43</sup> Retreat Meditations. MssB 3741-3743.

<sup>44</sup> Spiritual Journal. July 17, 1809.

<sup>45</sup> **NB: Web-site edition note:** this text is developed by St. Gaspar in Part Four [CF ## 47-68] of his Original Constitutions: *De Progressu: Perfectio suipsius – De Profectu in ecclesiasticis doctrina*. Fr. Jerome Nadal, phrased St. Ignatius’ ideal in these words:

*... God our Lord, through his infinite goodness, impelled Fr. Ignatius of Loyola arousing in his own special grace [cf. our CF # 185] ... his Divine Majesty providing for His Church and the whole world, helping on two major issues: [1] joining learning to spirituality and [2] directing both to the good of our neighbor. Some people have brains but no heart and others are all heart with no brains; some have both, but very few serve the Lord by directing both to the help of our neighbor [CommInstr. 38, n. 8] – cited in: Joseph F. Conwell SJ, *Walking in the Spirit*. St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources 2003, p. 35.*

<sup>46</sup> St. Bernard, Considerations. Book 2, c. 3.PL 182, 745.

<sup>47</sup> Retreat Meditations. MssB 3805-3807.

to say, the spread of the Gospel is made more difficult because of the lack of preachers. Therefore, it is necessary to promote with all one's power and ardor missionary vocations. In non-Christian countries the spread of the Gospel meets with such obstacles as of being forbidden to preach. To overcome this, one must possess a renewed spirit and have an inexhaustible amount of apostolic patience.

One cannot ignore the danger of a certain inconsistency by which this same missionary can lessen at any given time his zeal to work for the salvation of souls. This ought to become more eager as they become more obstinate. The challenge to promote the glory of God should increase as the difficulties become greater: ***For stern as death is love, relentless as the nether world is devotion*** [Sqs 8:6].

Difficulties do not hinder the missionary journey of the Church until the people have been renewed by the preaching of the Gospel, thanks to the good work of the preachers. The Church knows how to preserve this blessed 'Good News' by fighting against the risk of corruption. At a certain point she also finds a way to have special care for those who are more perfect, by fostering in these new Christian communities vocations to all forms of consecrated life, including the contemplative life. She will not hesitate to engage for this purpose the most tactful services of her ministers who love to serve the best interests of God's glory<sup>48</sup>.

### **307: To struggle as Christ did and to be untied with Him**

***If the world hates you, realize that it hated Me first*** [Jn 15:18]. Realizing that many of His disciples would undergo hostility and persecution by the world and that this would be difficult and almost unbearable to a point that even certain high spirits would also be shaken, Christ forewarns the apostles of such an eventuality. Thus, He disposes them to encounter them courageously and generously, scorning hatred and persecution, so as to be able to glory and enjoy them as a distinctive mark of a disciple of Christ.

***If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you*** [Jn 15:20]. Do not be surprised and troubled when the world hates you, says the Lord, be happy that you can imitate Me. besides, be sure that just as their hatred did not harm Me, it will not harm you. If the world persecutes you, it is a sign that you do not belong to the world, that you do not agree with its works, and that you are contrary to them, as I am. By saying this He wants us to understand that He loves us in a special manner, because we are His, chosen by Him to condemn the works of the world, and thus help in saving mankind. We can be sure that His love will give us a greater advantage than the harm that can come to us from the world's hatred.

Oh, my Jesus, you are my model in suffering and the reward of my sufferings, my help in struggles, and my glory in triumph. With the example of your virtue ***train my hands for war*** [Ps 18:35], and after victory, crown my head with the presence of Your Majesty. May the imitation of Your example of struggling, and the hope of your crown, which are You Yourself, attract and bind me indissolubly to You<sup>49</sup>.

<sup>48</sup> Meditations nn. 20-23, *Primum Regum*. MssB 5703-5832.

<sup>49</sup> Retreat Meditations. MssB 3246-3249. The whole last paragraph is from St. Bernard. Sermon 47, in Cantica 6. PL 183, 1010.

### **308: Communion and Mission**

It is necessary to gather, reunite many workers of the Gospel under the inspiration of the same Spirit. As long as we are alone and each one seeks his own interests [cf. Ph 2:21], we will accomplish nothing, and we will be defeated one by one. When we are united, seeking the interests of Jesus Christ, then we will accomplish everything, and we will overcome all things. That is why our savior prayed: ***I pray, Father, that they may be one as we are one*** [Jn 17:11].

It is not enough to find zealous companions, but to make them, and in a certain sense, to force them to follow us, even if they are timid. Yet one must examine their goal and their vocation. One does not accept anyone, but only the best, those who are noted for their love of God and neighbor. These are chosen as **companions of a mission**. It is opportune to form from this group of good ones a class of perfect workers in confessing the true faith, and in the exercise of all the virtues, imitators of the apostolic life. Thus, this group, well unified, can help their neighbors and assist them in the struggle against the devil.

Both the group and its leader will speak with one voice, have one heart and one spirit, and will be sent to spread the light of the Gospel everywhere. In such a way they are brought together as **companions of the Missions** for two ends: to meet together and assemble the light of many examples; then, to spread everywhere the light of preaching<sup>50</sup>.

### **309: Collaboration leads the individual to multiply**

There is a great advantage in spiritual undertakings when two people share the same mind.<sup>51</sup> Each one seeks to animate the other to practice virtue and acquire perfection<sup>52</sup>.

St. John Chrysostom says very well in commenting on the words of the Fourth Gospel: ***'That all may be one, Father, just as you are in Me and I am in You'*** [Jn 17:21], 'that nothing can compare to the harmony of the reciprocal union of the will. It is through this that the individual multiplies. If indeed two or ten persons find unity, there is no longer one individual, but each will be increased ten-fold. In ten you will find unity, and in each one there will be ten.'

Later on, this same holy Doctor says: 'behold the greatness of charity: one becomes many and united, so that one can be in many places at the same time; he can be both in Persia and in Rome. What nature cannot do, charity can.'<sup>53</sup>

### **310: Becoming all things to everybody**

Our charity should be the same for one who is educated, or illiterate, one who is noble or lowly, a man or a woman, one from the country-side or from the city. One

<sup>50</sup> Meditation n. 44. *Primum Regum* MssB 6576-6590.

<sup>51</sup> Spiritual Journal. **December 20, 1808**

<sup>52</sup> **CF # 265.**

<sup>53</sup> o.c.. From St. John Chrysostom. Homily on St. John 78, 4. PG 59, 425. [**NB: web-site Note:** cf. also **CF # 266.**]

should work in the same way for all, with the criteria to opt for those who have a greater need. Imitating the example of Christ, Who undertook a long, arduous and hot journey into Samaria to convert a poor woman, who came with a bucket on her head to a well for some water. Even though He was tired and hungry from His journey, forgetting about food. He spent several hours with her. This was the way that Christ so valued the soul of this poor, miserable woman<sup>54</sup>.

St. Gaspar journeyed from the jails to the seminary, as well as from the cloister of pious virgins, to the pious 'hospice' of poor worldly women. Thus it was, he went everywhere to bring the gospel of peace. He was everything to everybody, a pastor of souls, in a word, an apostolic and holy missionary<sup>55</sup>. It is well said what everyone used to say about him as a true and constant characteristic. He was for all an imitation of St. Paul [cf. 1 Co 9:22]<sup>56</sup>.

Speaking of St. Gaspar, Bishop Joseph Grasser said: 'We attest that this priest is exceptionally endowed with sanctity of life, of doctrine and of charity. He is all things to all, so much so, that his zeal shines far above the other members of the clergy.'<sup>57</sup>

### **311: Familiar conversation with our neighbor**

Let each one have before his eyes the example of Christ the Lord, Who, though habitually living with men, even eating and drinking with them, nevertheless, not only observed perfection, but also adhered to a state of life which was most perfect.

We also know that the Apostles, who in their familiar dealing with men, became all things to all so that they might gain all for Christ, and they lived a state of perfection.

Whenever the ancient monks thought it profitable to their neighbors, they abandoned their solitude to mingle with them. So we read in the life of St. Anthony that he left his solitude, traveled over the whole city of Alexandria, hoping to instruct everyone.

Therefore, to visit and be friendly with people is quite pleasing to God. However, the one who does so should have a great deal of good sense and prudence in his conversation, observing what is enjoined by St. Paul: ***Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each one*** Col 4:6<sup>58</sup>.

### **312: Familiarity**

We have to enter the house of others as they would want, but we must be able to leave the way we want<sup>59</sup>.

Since persons of the world are in most cases rather material than spiritual, it is necessary to descend somewhat to their level and, with polite and familiar conversation, win them over so that they may be disposed, little by little, to listen to

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<sup>54</sup> Retreat Meditations. **MssB 3774.**

<sup>55</sup> C. Giacobbe, *Life*. SA, p. 377.

<sup>56</sup> o.c., p. 413.

<sup>57</sup> Testimony given to the Holy See regarding Fr. Bertoni. SA, p.265/

<sup>58</sup> **CF ## 271-276.**

<sup>59</sup> Spiritual Journal. **August 20, 1808.**

spiritual discourses. Although at times we talk of indifferent matters, this is done, or rather tolerated, with the intention of winning them over, such talk cannot be considered a waste of time, but useful and godly<sup>60</sup>.

The ways of God are admirable and deserve to be contemplated upon. Sometimes He uses means that are most imperceptible, like tiny little threads by which he holds back a soul, or calls it back to His service as from the edge of a precipice where it has strayed<sup>61</sup>.

We must never abandon our friends, even when they are far away or gone astray, especially if they have been abandoned by other good people. This will bring them great comfort and help them to change<sup>62</sup>.

### **313: The strategy of a great pastor**

St. Zeno was a protagonist of a renowned battle and of total victory. What was his method and order in battle?

By his manner and cheerfulness he converted the idolaters to Christ. How? In place of courage and by his meekness; in place of war-like terror by his cheerfulness. Let us not be amazed. This is the plan of battle according to the King Himself, and the commander whom He sent. ***As the Father has sent Me, so I send you [Jn 20:21]. Like sheep among wolves [Mt 10:16].*** He sends His servants like little sheep not only to the wolves, but in the midst of wolves. Even if they are bitten, they are not devoured, but they charge their enemies. God desires to glorify Himself in His servants, thus the power of His grace is more clearly manifested, and is strong in overcoming and in winning over, and is gentle by condescending and adapting to man's disposition, this man, who must be won over to be saved and then cooperate with God to win over for his Glory.

The leader, who does not allow himself to be drawn in by anger or impatience, or seek glory of his own interests, but is guided by his options calmly and serenely, is deeply appreciated. Neither is he drawn into battle if the end is risky and uncertain. He retreats, even accepting difficulties and hardships. He accepts insults calmly without panicking, while he regroups his forces, and asks for help. When it is the right time and place, he attacks and strikes the final blow. When he is victorious, his manner is good and controlled. He does not brag nor is he insolent or cruel, but gentle and kind. He understands that victory over his conquered enemy is really not complete, until he is able to win over his heart.

It matters little that the meekness of St. Zeno earned a purely human glory. What really matters is what he will receive from the Lord, when he will share in god's own glory<sup>63</sup>.

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<sup>60</sup> **CF # 279.**

<sup>61</sup> Spiritual Journal. **July 13, 1808.**

<sup>62</sup> *ib.*

<sup>63</sup> Oration in Honor of San Zeno. **Mss 2071-2077.**

### **314: The Missionary Spirit of St. Gaspar**

Fr. Bertoni's Mission is found in his Constitutions. To serve God and His Church wholly gratuitously.<sup>64</sup> When someone is sent to any place he should not expect any compensation nor provisions for his journey, or for lodgings, but he shall offer his service absolutely gratuitously<sup>65</sup>.

We shall remain free of dignities, residences, benefices and the perpetual care of souls. We must be willing to go anywhere throughout the Diocese and the world.<sup>66</sup>

The fundamental means to develop the Apostolic Mission are one's own spiritual perfection, a perfect knowledge of the ecclesiastical sciences. Common life, the perpetual and perfect practice of chastity, poverty and obedience.

The rule of life regarding diet, apparel and lodging shall conform to the standards set by the more exemplary clergy among whom they live, and they shall be of edification to the faithful by their Christian simplicity and religious poverty<sup>67</sup>.

### **315: The prayer of the Apostle**

God is our end. It is necessary that our soul and intention remain in Him. Thus we will merit the greatest delight in possessing this absolute good. He, by the infusion of charity and by giving us grace, will fulfill all the desires of our heart. That is what God does on His part.

This is why we must act with Him. ***But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace to me has not been effective*** [1 Co 15:10]. It is necessary that the Apostle be discreet in elevating himself over his bodily sensations [whenever he finds himself experimenting in mystical prayer]. And let the heart take over for a few moments. The day will come when heart and senses will be intoxicated from this source of blessedness. Meanwhile, to earn this, since this is a gift and a reward, one must strive to serve this God who is so good, and help him in this great work, the very reason why he sent His Son into this world. This is His will, even if He does not need anyone to help Him.

The end, therefore, which is the rule of all means, must be the rule to regulate these affections of holy devotion. St. Ignatius of Loyola gives us a wonderful example. He left the consoling solitude of Manresa where he was intimate with the Lord, and his very delightful contemplation for a more active and productive ministry in the world. God, Who will not be outdone by His Servants in generosity, repaid him abundantly with the same thing that he willingly abandoned for His sake.

Time is short, and later on we will be with God always. Meanwhile we say with St. Paul: ***As far as I am concerned, I would long to depart this life and be with Christ, for that is far better*** [without being diverted by creatures, and to leave this life]; ***yet, that I remain in the flesh is more necessary for your benefit*** [Ph 1:23, f.]. ***For the rest, whether I live, or die, I belong to the Lord*** [cf. Rm 14:8]<sup>68</sup>.

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<sup>64</sup> CF # 3.

<sup>65</sup> CF # 184.

<sup>66</sup> CF ## 4-5.

<sup>67</sup> CF # 6.

<sup>68</sup> Correspondence. Letter to Naudet. **January 10, 1828. MssB 9500-9503.**

## PREACHING

### **316: The Word of God is living and effective**

God could speak by Himself internally [to the human heart], but He also wants to speak externally through men. St. Paul was sent to Ananias [Ac 9:8]. St. Augustine warns us: 'Do not tempt God by refusing to listen to the preacher'<sup>69</sup>. Through preaching the old man is destroyed, an image of Adam - and a new one is formed in the image of Christ. ***My dear children, for whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you*** [Ga 4:19].

***The word of God is living and effective*** [Heb 4:12]; living because it has the power to work; effective, because it puts that capacity into action, and makes sure that it really works. The vitality and the efficacy of the Divine Word are founded on grace. ***I will put My law within them and write it upon their hearts*** [Jr 31:33]. God can make a soul tender by writing in it sweetly and yet forcefully. ***He sent forth his word and healed them*** [Ps 107:20].

Naturally the faithful must cooperate. Notice what happened to the Samaritan woman. Little was needed to obtain salvation. Little was also needed to lose it. She was saved and became holy because she casually came to the well where a tired Jesus rested. While there, she was questioned by Him. She was willing to postpone for a moment the need to draw water from the well and to listen to Him speak. But upon seeing Him, if she failed to listen, thinking she had other chores to do, or that she was thirsty, or that it was already late, or that she had to hurry home to care for the needs of her household, she probably would have lost this opportunity forever.

Our situation might depend on a small circumstance. The occasion must be seized as if by the hair. The matter of salvation is not to be treated lightly, as a pastime. It is something so grave and fundamental that it should be on the top of our list.<sup>70</sup>

### **317: Preach the Word of God with courage**

The band of preachers of the Gospel must march with readiness and courage as did St. Paul and the other apostles. From the very beginning, they knew what they had to say to the Jews in order to convert them.

A good preacher uses kindness but without weakness. He does not worry about the effect of his message, whether it is accepted or not. He keeps focused on the mission that God gives him, and on the obligations entrusted to him, leaving the results to God. On occasion he is able to speak forcefully and without any human fear to sinners and also to confreres who are imbued with a worldly spirit. He does so that they might be moved. Recalling to mind the words of scripture: ***For stern as death is love, relentless as the nether world is passion*** [cf. Sgs 8:6]. He forces himself even in this to imitate the way of the Divine Providence that threatens Hell fire so that each can avoid it, and scourges harshly those whom He loves.

<sup>69</sup> St. Augustine. *Christian Doctrine* Prologue 5. L 34, 17.

<sup>70</sup> Mission at St. Firmus Major. **MssB 4030-4045.**

***Therefore, put on the armor of God that you may be able to resist on the evil day, and, having done everything to hold your ground. So, stand fast with your loins girded in truth, clothed in righteousness as a breastplate, and your feet shod in readiness for the gospel of peace. In all circumstances, hold faith as a shield, to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. With all prayer and supplication, pray at every opportunity in the Spirit. To that end, be watchful with all perseverance and supplication for the holy ones and also for me, that speech may be given me to open my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the Gospel for which I am an ambassador in chains, so that I may have the courage to speak as I must [Ep 6:13-20]***<sup>71</sup>.

### **318: Conditions for fruitful preaching**

If one does not pray well first, he cannot speak well about God<sup>72</sup>. It is in prayer that the preacher finds the manner of preaching. From divine contemplation he obtains the light by which, attracting the veneration of the faithful, he is prepared to enlighten the minds of his listeners.

Above all, he follows the example of St. Paul, by raising himself as it were, up to Heaven, and to hear the secrets of Paradise those inexpressible words that no one else is allowed to pronounce. From this he will draw the teachings that are to be given to the world and for the good of mankind [cf. 2 Co 12:1-3].

Thus he will be able to deliver a brilliant sermon that will shed light on the most sublime teachings of scripture, to reveal the secrets of the highest virtues, and to unmask the most hidden vices. All this is done with such conviction and lively spirit that whether one is wise or simple, just or sinner, all will be drawn to follow the instruction and direction for their own life.

One must be careful that his preaching corresponds to his way of life. Thus it will be that what the preacher says about truth and goodness will be more credible because of his way of living. ***Whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do so will be called least in the Kingdom of heaven, but whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven*** [Mt 5:19].

[The preacher] still has a serious obligation to persevere and to increase constantly the gift of **holiness** and **sound doctrine**<sup>73</sup>. This is the only possible way to follow to obtain the fruit of renewal in the spirit and the reformation of the lives of his listeners<sup>74</sup>.

<sup>71</sup> Meditations nn. 16 b – 17, *Primum Regum*. MssB 5531-5567.

<sup>72</sup> Spiritual Journal. February 4, 1809.

<sup>73</sup> **NB:** web-site footnote. This is St. Gaspar's usual insistence on Progress in Holiness and Learning [cf. Part IV, *Original Constitutions*, CF ## 47 ff.].

<sup>74</sup> Meditations 16 b – 17, *Primum Regum*. MssB 4960; 5538-5549.

**319: Testimony of truth**

Truth is in the world like light in the darkness. It appears as light, not like lightening. Lightening passes through obstacles. Light remains outside the window, and does not enter unless the window is open. Let us not be negligent. Let us remove the blindness of ignorance and really wed truth with the ring of faith. He who remains in darkness can make many mistakes. Meanwhile, truth makes one mature, stable and steady.

It is necessary that truth be always proclaimed. It never should be silent because of fear. Thus it is that Providence raises up in the Church renewed and reformed ministers through the action of the Holy Spirit. These are presented with the character of steadfastness and faithfulness. It is necessary to speak clearly and openly, not in a way that pleases the good, and at the same times does not displease the bad. As St. Paul says: ***If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a slave of Christ*** [Ga 1:20].

Through these ministries, the Holy Spirit continues to reform the Church. Full of gratitude to God, those who have been enlightened are most ready to serve Him in any and all undertakings. They preach not for money, but for souls, not to the ears, but to the soul, not to be praised but to be followed, not to attract listeners to themselves, but to lead them to Christ. These truly have wed the truth with the ring of faith and nothing can separate them from it, not even death<sup>75</sup>.

**320: Do not trade the Word of God**

***For we are not like the many who trade on the word of God; but as out of sincerity, indeed as from God, and in the presence of God we speak in Christ*** [2 Co 2:17]. There is a real temptation in preaching, to do so for one's own glory. Christ was also tempted to do this. Christ has taught us, however, how to overcome this temptation: ***Take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father*** [Mt 6:1].

Those who have the duty to care for their neighbor must diligently be on their guard against this temptation. The more sublime and holy these ministries are, all the more serious is the danger of falling. Woe to those who have the duty to speak well of God if they turn to their own glory what they have received to promote the glory of God. If they seek things too lofty, they fail to reach the humble [cf. Rm 12:16]. Let them recall what God says through the words of the Prophet Hoseah: ***It was I who gave her the grain, the wine, the oil, and her abundance of silver and of gold, which they used for Baal*** [Ho 2:10].

The remedy for this temptation is found in that secret that Christ points out in performing all good deeds. ***But, when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father, Who sees in secret, will repay you*** [Mt 6:6]. ***When you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to be fasting*** [Mt 6:17]. Let us attempt to have the right intention.

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<sup>75</sup> Meditations n. 19, *Primum Regum*. MssB 5649-5672.

Then we shall show ourselves as true sons of God if we keep our sights and intentions constantly fixed on Him.<sup>76</sup>

### **321: A good preacher forms others to be teachers of faith**

The best preacher is humble by following the ways of the saints. He is well learned in the Scriptures. He is well disposed to be inspirations of God in prayer. He seeks nothing, hopes for nothing, and fears nothing. This is the effect of the actions of a good preacher. Bolstered by his preaching and instructed by his doctrine, real heroes are born and grow in the Church, because he has nourished them with the word of God and by example like cedar trees in a garden. Furthermore, his best disciples soon emerge as true teachers.

The preacher is like an architect. He makes a design, and later, with many helpers, builds the house. In such a way, the architect, without using his hands, does more than any other worker. On the other hand, even listeners can become real teachers in the perfection of the active and contemplative life.

It can also happen through an inadvertent mistake that preaching proves unsuccessful to the point that the bad ones take this as an occasion to distort doctrine and blaspheme God. The good preacher, however, does not become depressed over this. He is not worried about his personal insult, but the harm done to God. He calmly thinks about what has occurred, and with humility, and without presumption, he turns to God for inspiration.

The Lord will always show His wonderful ways; the way of Divine Providence, even though hidden, of making use of evil for His own ends.<sup>77</sup>

### **322: The preaching of the Apostolic Missionary**

The Ministry of the Word should be carried out in all its forms: preaching publicly, or instructing the people by public and private Catechism lessons; by pious talks and holy conversations; at times, fraternally correcting vices; at times, exhorting to the practice of virtue and frequent reception of the sacraments; at times guiding and encouraging people to acquire perfection' preaching the Spiritual exercises; promoting pious societies or associations; attending devotedly to the spiritual care of the sick, especially the dying<sup>78</sup>.

In giving missions, they shall depend strictly on the Bishop of the place, always observing their wishes regarding the place and time of exercising ministry<sup>79</sup>.

It is the duty of the confreres not only to teach the truths necessary or useful to reach eternal life. This should be done by preaching, teaching, but also by explaining the primary elements of faith and morals, especially to children and those who are uneducated. This should be done in the Oratories or in Catechism classes, whether

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<sup>76</sup> Rodriguez, o.c., **MssB 8840-8844.**

<sup>77</sup> Meditation nn. 25-27. *Primum Regum.* **MssB 5900-6034.**

<sup>78</sup> **CF # 163**

<sup>79</sup> **CF # 2.**

public or private. This also is quite useful to the church, and because of this, it should be very dear to them<sup>80</sup>.

The Christian education of children and youth, and also the uneducated, should be promoted with great fervor: with Oratories, catechesis and also with private instructions<sup>81</sup>.

Whenever possible, it is also fitting to instruct young people in their scholastic courses. Although these young people are accepted in our schools for instruction in scholastic matters, nevertheless the chief aim of this education is the quest and formation of their moral life<sup>82</sup>.

Concern above all must be had so that they will be well instructed in Christian Doctrine. They shall be taught it once a week. Each week they shall be given a conference to encourage them in the progress of virtue. When the occasion arises in the course of the lectures, the teachers shall strive to instill in their pupils religious respect and love toward God and love of virtue<sup>83</sup>.

### **323: St. Gaspar and the Catechism for adults**

One of the activities to which St. Gaspar dedicated himself in a special way for the good of souls was Catechesis, or Christian Doctrine, especially in the form of the so called Fourth Class. This instruction was held in each parish of the city on the Sunday afternoons during the summer time. Due to the fact that it was an inconvenient hour, and also because of the heat of the day, the catechist had to be particularly adept and capable, and had to have a wonderful spirit of self-sacrifice.

This ministry was always very close to the heart of St. Gaspar. If he was unable, because of sickness or some other duty, to conduct this class personally a few times, he made quite sure that it was handled by one of his own group. At certain times there were at least seven priests from the Stimmate Community assigned to different parishes to teach this Fourth Class. St. Gaspar wanted all his sons to be well prepared with great diligence to teach these classes, and he wanted them to be down to earth, pleasant and practical.

It appeared that the Lord wished to show him how pleased He was with this ministry, arranging that his short agony and death would occur on a Sunday afternoon, at the time that all of his priests had to leave to attend to the classes of the Fourth Class. As his disciples left to preach the reign of God, St. Gaspar departed for Paradise<sup>84</sup>.

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<sup>80</sup> **CF # 182.**

<sup>81</sup> **CF # 165.**

<sup>82</sup> **CF ## 166-167.**

<sup>83</sup> **CF ## 170-172.**

<sup>84</sup> *Miscellanea Lenotti. SA, p. 156*

## APOSTOLIC UNDERTAKINGS

### **324: Preparing for the work of God**

The time of God's calling ordinarily happens with a great outpouring of charity and love. ***Stay in the city until you are clothed with the power from on high*** [Lk 24:49]. This charity that comes from heaven is well distinguished from the false and imprudent zeal that comes from this earth<sup>85</sup>. The abundance and increase of charity: this is the definite and decisive sign and the moment in which one must begin to act. For a long time they were but hidden inspirations of the Holy Spirit and grew by prayer and meditation. The language of the Lord is peace. This is how He answers us and assures us that what we are doing is pleasing to Him. ***I will hear what God proclaims: The Lord – for He proclaims peace to His people and to His faithful ones*** [Ps 85:9].

Everything seems to invite and encourage us to hasten to do what the Lord has inspired us to do for His glory. Certainly, for us, it is convenient to wait, not to be waited for. I believe that we should not wait one moment, once we are ready, because the Lord is closer than we think; rather, He is so close that He stands at the door and waits until we are ready. He is really at the door [cf. Mt 24:33]<sup>86</sup>.

The inspirations of God must be received with great feelings of charity and purity of intentions, and should be guarded with great care. Therefore, we should also care for little things as well as great things, because in the eyes of God everything is great, as the Lord makes clear the extent of His designs<sup>87</sup>.

### **325: Courage and trust in God**

The Lord Who has given the outline of the whole building, will also give the design for each section, for the grandeur and beauty of the whole construction. If at the present time, we do not see clearly the total picture, we can rest assured that when He desires it, we will see it then, which will be the best time. The Lord will enlighten us to complete is us, with us and through us, what he has already begun. ***The One Who began this good work in you will bring it to fulfillment.*** [Ph 1:6]<sup>88</sup>.

We should have high spirits because the Lord does not desire plans of paper, or canvas, but of spirit. If the spirit is not wide and high, it cannot contain the design of a building that is high and wide and developed to its least detail, and therefore, risks receiving only what it can hold, and that is a lesser plan. As we widen our soul for the charity of Christ, so will He widen and develop the magnificent design of His glory.

Praise to God for what He desires to fulfill. Blessed are those who give themselves to this most loving and powerful god. Nothing more is needed. As He has given us the desire, so, too, God ***will give the power and the strength*** [Ps 67:6]. This is beautiful because the desire is not far from the deed. ***Whatever He willed*** - and because of this, He has us longing for it, ***He did*** [cf. Ps 115:3]. He has already

<sup>85</sup> Meditation n. 16 b, *Primum Regum* MssB 5526.

<sup>86</sup> Correspondence. Letter to Naudet. **January 16, 1814.**

<sup>87</sup> o.c., to Naudet. **March 6, 1813.**

<sup>88</sup> **NB: Website note: Fr. Bertoni quotes this passage in his key Constitution: CF # 185.**

accomplished it, because there is nothing that can resist His will, even before we are able to carry it out, poor creatures that we are.

Nothing is lacking as long as trust is not lacking. Talents, knowledge, and energy – we will find all this superabundantly in Him. ***Happy is the man who trust in Him [Ps 34:9]***<sup>89</sup>.

### **326: Decision making**

Every good undertaking calls for much prayer and great care. It must have the greatest confidence in god, and the utmost care, true humility, and heroic virtue on the part of man.

If we do all we can on our part, God on His part will do everything and do it well<sup>90</sup>. The meek and humble of heart will be embraced by God as a mother, and He will lift them up out of the mire<sup>91</sup>.

Let us see to it that there be also community prayer. He who is fervent will inspire those who are not, and he who tramples all things under his feet and keep his eyes on God alone, will keep the chariot of God's glory moving and will bring with himself those souls still encumbered with petty things of this present life, and who are perhaps not the most agile on the way<sup>92</sup>.

Whenever we have to make a choice, we should freely determine [trusting completely that God will be there at the opportune time] the most prudent option and the most convenient one in the Lord. Let us not waste time. With the help of God, let us do whatever we can, and the Lord will do His part as He knows best<sup>93</sup>.

### **327: Don't worry about tomorrow**

There is no reason why we should be full of fear or lack confidence. Listen to what Scripture says so strongly: ***Seek first the reign of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides. Do not worry about tomorrow [Mt 6:33-34]. Whoever for love of Christ's cause gives up brother or sister, or father, or mother, or sons or property will receive a hundred-fold in this life and inherit life everlasting.*** [cf. Mt 19:29].

As for our defects, we must remember God knew of them even before we were called. If they appear now more evident to us we need to be more conscious of His goodness and omnipotence. It is, therefore, both necessary and our duty to let confidence grow with humility. No one who has trusted in Him has ever been left confused. He, whose function is based on the word of God, even if he be frail and very weak, will become steadfast and very strong. If the Lord has made clear the object of His glory, He will gradually show the way, and how to realize it.

We should be happy if there are other groups of souls who are united to the glorious banner of Christ, coming from other places and under the guide of other

<sup>89</sup> Correspondence. Letter to Naudet.- **no date., p. 177.**

<sup>90</sup> Correspondence, p. 177. to Naudet – no date.

<sup>91</sup> *ib.*, p. 179.

<sup>92</sup> *ib.*, p. 247 – no date.

<sup>93</sup> *Ib.*, p. 243. Letter to Mother Naudet. **August 28, 1828.**

persons. For, indeed, the more we are, the better it will be for the glory of God, and for each and every one of us, for the fact that our charity increases and expands in the mutual communication and sharing<sup>94</sup>.

### **328: One step at a time.**

We often wonder what we should do [*quid faciendum*], but this is not enough. We should also know how to do it [*quomodo faciendum*].<sup>95</sup> Yet even this is not enough. We should know exactly when we should do it [*quando faciendum*]. The Lord, Who has taken the first step, will also take the second and the third, communicating that light, which enlightens everyone, who comes into this world [cf. Jn 1:9]<sup>96</sup>.

Once everything is clear, we should move ahead. If there is a doubt on some issue, let us wait with faith for God to enlighten us. Let us resolve not only the issue at hand, but also the way it is to be accomplished, first of all in front of God, before we discuss it with people. Let us not fear, since the Lord tells us: ***I will instruct you and show you the way you should walk. I will counsel you, keeping my eye on you*** [Ps 32:8]<sup>97</sup>.

Many rush into action, in order to get successful before time. Many deceive themselves in such a way that, in order not to ruin their own plans and projects, they disregard some obligation. Yet, in doing this they damage them, all the more. Never neglect one point, even if it should seem a perfectionism, with the pretext of not ruining some undertakings.<sup>98</sup>

### **329: If God is with us, who can be against us?**

The Lord is the God of Peace, harmony, charity and nothing can resist His will. It is necessary that all fulfill it, and more than anyone else, those who seem more

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<sup>94</sup> To fully understand the spirituality of this letter written to L. Naudet on **June 28, 1813**, which Fr. Stofella calls ‘an admirable document’, one must understand the reason for it. St. Gaspar and L. Naudet wanted the former monastery, so called Teresa, as the place for her to establish her new Institute of the Sisters of the Holy Family. The owner, who had recently purchased it, deeded it to another charitable school administered by some ex-nuns.

‘This disappointment’, notes Fr. Stofella, ‘produced an increase of joy and zeal for the greater glory of God and a more responsible abandonment to the Divine Providence.’ Three years later, after the death of Joseph Bellotti, who deeded this property to Fr. N. Galvani, L. Naudet with her Sisters, entered this Convent of Teresa shortly after Fr. Gaspar had entered the Stimmat with his companions. [cf. **BERTONI** 3, pp. 594, ff.]. Correspondence, p. 86. Letter to Naudet. **June 28, 1813**.

<sup>95</sup> **NB: web-site Note. For some, these formulations would be the way to interpret St. Gaspar’s CF # 1, the ‘end’ – and CF # 2, the manner of proceeding under missionary obedience**

<sup>96</sup> Correspondence, p. 106. Letter to Naudet, **January 16, 1814**.

<sup>97</sup> Correspondence, p. 104. Letter to Naudet. **January 3, 1814**.

<sup>98</sup> Meditation 16 B. *Primum Regum* MssB 5521-5533.

inclined to their own will instead of God's will. **All things serve You** [Ps 119:91]. **Our God is in heaven; whatever He wills, He does** [Ps 115:3]<sup>99</sup>.

Since the Lord is above all our contradictions, it follows that we must put our faith firmly in Him, and never lose sight of this. This is the surest way. **So surpassing is His mercy toward those who fear Him** [Ps 103:11].

What can we do to show our thanks for so much mercy? What a baby must give to its mother, who holds the baby in her arms, and does not want even to put it down<sup>100</sup>. At times the mother will show her child an apple. Immediately the child is pleased to see the beauty of the fruit, and to imagine its sweetness, 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. This is how she obtains it<sup>101</sup>.

Therefore, we should always keep our eyes on God. In doing His will, everything will turn out for the best. **My eyes are ever toward the Lord, for He will free my feet from the snare** [Ps 25:15]. **Happy the man who follows not the counsel of the wicked, but delights in the law of the Lord, whatever He does prospers** [Ps 1:1-3].

To conclude, all true apostolic undertakings are mostly the result of prayer<sup>102</sup>.

### **330: God can bring good out of evil**

When an undertaking is pleasing to God, it must be seen to be really contradicted from the beginning to the end. If perchance God desires something other than what we think should be pleasing to Him, we must submit to the Divine will, which is the wisest, the most just, the most perfect, instead of following our own will, which is ignorant, mixed up, and evil. If it is the work of God, nothing can destroy it. **This is the hope I firmly hold in my heart** [Jb 19:27 – Vg].<sup>103</sup> In the beginning there are always difficulties, but no one can stop the work that the Lord clearly designs with His hand. God can change even badly made things into good ones<sup>104</sup>.

On our part, we must purify our mind, comfort our heart, and recall what the Lord told us when He said to the two brothers, the sons of Zebedee: **Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?** [Mt 20:22]/ We know their quick response: **We can**, they said. And Jesus replied: **My cup you will indeed drink** [in fact, they drank of it, supported by divine grace], **but at my right to sit and at my left, is not mine to give, but for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father.** [ib., v. 23].

Blessed for all ages be our Heavenly Father. May He give us the grace to fulfill His will, not only in part, but all of it. This is what our sanctification consists in: to help our brothers and to glorify Him<sup>105</sup>.

<sup>99</sup> Correspondence, p. 111. Letter to Naudet. **June 4, 1814.**

<sup>100</sup> Correspondence, p. 108. Letter to Naudet. **June 1, 1814.**

<sup>101</sup> Correspondence, p. 31. Letter to Naudet. **December 1, 1812.**

<sup>102</sup> Correspondence, p. 11. Letter to Naudet. **June 4, 1814**

<sup>103</sup> Correspondence, p. 122. Letter to Naudet. **December 21, 1814.**

<sup>104</sup> Correspondence, p. 122. Letter to Naudet. **No date.**

<sup>105</sup> Correspondence, p. 122. Letter to Naudet. **December 21, 1814.**

**331: Birth of the Marian Oratories: similar to Bethlehem**

When St. Gaspar decided to begin this work, the first group of children was taken to the first floor of the rectory. This was the pastor's library. There was no other place available. Later on, due to the renovations of the rectory, they had to move out. It seemed as though there was no room for them in the inn. [cf. Lk 2:7]. So, they went into a shed. Fixing it up as best he could, he brought his youth there. Here was the beginning of the Marian Oratory. This soon became the standard ad model of other Oratories founded in all parishes to the great advantage of the ministry to the youth in the parishes which welcomed them and cherished them.

Needless to say, this humble beginning and its development from this humble shelter was heartening to St. Gaspar and gave him great hope. He, who have lived solely on faith and followed the example of his Divine Master in all his doings, was very happy. The birth of this little ministry resembled the birth in the stable of Him who was to bring light and salvation into the world. In all this he could recognize Divine Providence.

Therefore, he began to comfort and encourage these young people to practice humility, self-abnegation, love poetry and mortification; in a word, the same virtues that Jesus so eloquently taught from the lowly stable of Bethlehem. He was too strong and too faithful to let these difficulties overwhelm Him, and even bigger ones. He felt that this ministry was pleasing to God, since it came from Him<sup>106</sup>.

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<sup>106</sup> C. Giacobbe, *Life*, SA p. 340.

## PERSEVERANCE

### **332: Walking toward sanctity – from difficulty to joy**

The deception of a diabolical temptation consists in magnifying the difficulty and weariness, which is experienced at the beginning of our spiritual journey, as if these are going to last a life time, and perhaps increase daily, making it more difficult to give up worldly pleasures.

However, this is completely false. Weariness will last for a time, but habit will make relatively easy that which at first was difficult, and will even become pleasing and joyful. In Scripture we read: ***A patient man needs to withstand for a time, and then contentment comes back to him*** [Si 1:20]. We also read: ***On the way of wisdom I direct you, I lead you on straightforward paths*** [Pr 4:11]. Behold, from the beginning the narrow paths of virtue have a difficult entrance. But then: ***When you walk, your step will not be impeded, and should you run, you will not stumble*** [Pr 4:12].

Notice how the Holy Spirit says that the journey is slow and easy, not when these paths are ended, but from the very beginning. The Lord, from the very beginning, gives much pleasure to those souls that are dear to Him and remain faithful in His service fighting evil. If they do not stop and become discouraged, He continues to favor them, until He gathers them ***to sit with His people, in the beauty of peace*** [cf. Is 32:18] in which they gently labor, their spirit resting in God. Sirach also states: ***For in cultivating her*** [that is, in acquiring wisdom] ***you will labor but little, and soon you will eat of her fruits*** [Si 6:20].

If we continue undaunted, and do not worry over these first small difficulties, we will soon notice how quickly our hearts will turn with consolation and joy to bless the Lord Who has shown us how to attain so much peace<sup>107</sup>.

### **333: Remain steadfast on the way to perfection**

The devil would like us to think that it is difficult to persevere in works of penance, just as it was when one decided on conversion. Difficulties occur only at the beginning, and when we first overcome the devil, who opposes us with all his strength, then he himself weakens. First, because he was defeated, and second, he was defeated when he thought that he was more powerful. Let us be courageous and bold and hasten on the glorious way with all our strength.

Onward, therefore, let us not fear our enemies, and let us not worry over our weaknesses. God will fight for us. He will defend us because of the love He has for us. He comes, moved by honest and valuable causes of virtue, of our salvation, and of His glory. He comes, driven by the aversion he has instinctively to sin, to destroy it.

God is obliged by His word, for He promised to protect man who has faith in Him with the power of His grace. ***But kindness surrounds him who trust in the Lord*** [Ps 32:10]. If God is fighting with us and for us, what have we to fear? He easily conquers His enemies, whether they are few, or many, learned or unskilled, strong or

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<sup>107</sup> Earl Sermons, n. 18. Perseverance. MssB 780-784. PVC, pp. 114-116.

weak. Let us go forward with courage, fight with all our strength and become victorious<sup>108</sup>.

**334: Our spiritual journey starts at the beginning of each day.**

*My son, when you come to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for trials* [Si 2:1]. We find these words of the Holy Spirit in Scripture. No sooner does he see a person on the right way and beginning to seek what is right with a strong resolution, the devil begins with all kinds of wiles to have him turn back to hindering his journey. He makes him consider the difficulties and the boredom of a long strenuous journey, in order to weaken and discourage him. He seems to say: 'How can you resist your passions for so many years, never give in to any whims, always mortifying your senses?' In this way he suggests strong temptations that are very difficult to overcome, and at times, even difficult to detect.

Let us examine with care this subtle trick of his. He lengthens out of proportion the time that lies ahead of us, making it uncertain even to a point that we are not even sure of another day. In the Gospel we are warned; **Do not worry about tomorrow** [Mt 6:34]. This is what we have to do to avoid the snares of the devil: to live each day as if it were the last. Who cannot bear the burden of a single day? How much more should we remember the reward that God has prepared for those who valiantly fight His enemies, and the promise of salvation given to those who persevere to the end [cf. Mt 10:22].

Even if we were granted another day, tomorrow we would begin to make our resolutions, and to work as if this were to be the last day to gain heaven. What will happen to us, if after having done our best to start our journey, we stop running because we judge that the finish line is too far away, when perhaps it is really close? **Woe to you who have lost hope**, says the Holy Spirit, **who have left the good road, seeking evil ways** [Si 2:14-16]<sup>109</sup>.

**335: If God is with us, what do we have to fear?**

God is not only happy to show us the way, but He Himself offers to lead us. **On the way of wisdom I direct you** [Pr 4:11]. Let us deeply reflect on this point. Thus we will be able to calm the fears that still trouble our hearts, and those that the enemy does not cease to provoke in us in order to thwart our resolutions.

No matter how long the road is to travel, no matter how difficult it is to walk steadily, no matter how many dangers we encounter, or strong enemies who block our journey, or the endless snares put in our way, if the Lord walks with us, **Why should we fear?** [Ps 26:1].

**I set the Lord ever before me; with Him at my right hand, I shall not be disturbed** [Ps 16:8]. Why should we fear to fall. **If He is with us and takes up arms to fight our adversaries** [Dt 7:21] **why should we be frightened? If He is always ready to watch over our steps and to free our feet from snares**, [Ps 91:3, 12], **how**

<sup>108</sup> Early Sermons, n. 27: 'Discouragement of Conversion' MssB 1013-1015. PVC, pp. 45, ff.

<sup>109</sup> Early Sermons. N. 18. 'Perseverance' MssB 775-779. PVC, pp. 112-114.

***can we be bound? May Your good spirit guide me on level ground*** [Ps 143:10]. Is there any grater safety?

We noticed very well when one is guided by the Spirit of God, his way is secure. He has promised this Spirit to anyone who asks: ***If you, who are wicked, know how to give your children good gifts, how much more will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him*** [Lk 11:13].

What else remains to be done? Nothing else, except that we place that condition to which He has bound His infallible word, namely that we pray. Because He who has begun the good work of our sanctification [cf. Ph 1:6], giving us the grace to be converted, He Himself will bring it to fulfillment, strongly assisting us until the end<sup>110</sup>.

### **336: Only the brave conquer**

Courage. If the time is short, the labor is shorter, and if God Himself comes to our aid, let us make up our minds, reconfirm our good resolutions, and run without stopping until we capture Him to whom all our thoughts and desires should be directed.

If we are resolved from the start, every suffering and difficulty will cease, because nothing frightens our enemies more than bold courage. Even if we are losers in the first phase to our adversaries, we should not fear. Even if in the battle we are wounded, let us not lose heart. Knowing that medicine is available and effective, we will renew ourselves immediately with greater courage, and with more faith in God, we will carry on our race.

When we least expect it, we will see every difficulty overcome, every enemy defeated, and we will be assured of that crown promised to those who persevere to the end [cf. 2 Tm 2:5]<sup>111</sup>.

### **337: Never stop**

We should imagine heaven at the end of an avenue strewn and obstructed with thorns, stumps and thickets. We should focus our attention on the end and not on the thorns, walking and brushing off now and then the thorny spines. We should never rest until we reach the end<sup>112</sup>.

We must rivet our attention on our end, God. We should never lose sight of Him. We must always work without ceasing, praying without interruption, struggling valiantly without being disheartened, and never stopping until we possess it. If we have put our hand to the plow, we must never turn back, because: ***No one sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the reign of God*** [Lk 9:62]. We push on, forgetting completely all past hardships, but desiring greater things<sup>113</sup>.

<sup>110</sup> Early Sermons, n. 18. 'Perseverance'. MssB 785-788. PVC, pp. 116-118.

<sup>111</sup> Early Sermons, n. 18. MssB 790-793. PVC, pp. 118-120.

<sup>112</sup> Spiritual Journal. July 30, 1808.

<sup>113</sup> Early Sermons, n. 18. MssB 791. PVC, p. 119.

When the road becomes much longer than we thought, this can cool us off, unless we resume immediately and walk along the road.<sup>114</sup> Let us make use of the present time [cf. Ep 5:16]. Time will never return. Therefore we must use it with great diligence<sup>115</sup>.

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<sup>114</sup> Spiritual Journal. **July 13, 1808.**

<sup>115</sup> o.c. **July 24, 1808.**

## THE LAST THINGS

### **338: Reflection on death and eternity**

Precious is the death of the just. Stephen, the first martyr, filled with the Holy Spirit, dying, sees the heavens open up, and Jesus sitting at the right hand of the father. He dies cheerfully and serenely, with peace in his soul and the taste of honey on his lips. He dies, rather, he sleeps in the arms of the Lord. **He slept in the Lord** [Ac 7:60]. **Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of His faithful ones** [Ps 116:15].

Who is it that does not desire to die the death of the just? **May I die the death of the just** [Nb 23:10]. This was said even by Balaam who later died the death of the impious. Those who still live in sin also may say this and they desire intensely to die like the just, yet they still want to live in sin. This is nothing but a vain desire. One dies as a just man, if he lives like one. One does not die as a saint, if he does not live a saintly life.<sup>116</sup>

We are invited by the Gospel to think of the end of the world [cf. Lk 21:5-36]. This is a thought that should impress all our feelings, and make us reconsider seriously looking into ourselves. Let us reflect now a bit deeper. Is it not the death of every man in particular that which for every man will become the universal end? The day I die is for me the end of the world. Can we perhaps escape this day and avoid death? Or should this day be less feared?<sup>117</sup>

Let us earnestly apply ourselves to prayer, keep watch on ourselves, and perform the practice of Christian virtue. Let us do penance generously and also mortification. We are called to reform ourselves radically, and begin a new life, putting on the wedding garment which makes one a number of the elect. It is a matter of our soul! It is a matter of eternity!<sup>118</sup>

### **339: A good death**

To die well, one must avoid idleness, sin and the occasions of sin. Those who did well will rise to eternal life. Those who lived badly will rise to condemnation [cf. Jn 5:29]. It is not enough to be converted only in the intellect; one must be converted with his will, and this is not easy.<sup>119</sup>

We must take steps to make a real, serious conversion of our life. If we are still under the yoke of sin, we must learn to detest it, and confess it to a priest, and promise to avoid sin, and the occasions of sin; then, we must take all the means needed to keep our resolutions.<sup>120</sup>

Remember: the past is no more, the future has not yet arrived; only the present exists and it is in my power. Let us live day by day, or rather from morning to mid-day,

<sup>116</sup> Early Sermons, n. 26. 'Death.' **MssB 970-971. PVC, pp. 47, f.**

<sup>117</sup> Early Sermons, n. 32. 'The terrible death for each man'. **MssB 115401156. PVC, pp. 74, f.**

<sup>118</sup> Early Sermons. N. 24. 'Imminent Death'. **MssB 944. PVC, p. 73.**

<sup>119</sup> Spiritual Journal. **February 15, 1809.**

<sup>120</sup> Early Sermons. N. 24. 'Imminent Death'. **MssB 944; PVC, p. 73.**

from mid-day to evening, and perform every act with the greatest perfection possible. Perhaps I will have no more time to glorify God.<sup>121</sup>

Also, reflect well on this: when a person in danger of death is well disposed, it is not discernible that the Lord prolongs his life. Death is a bridge between two eternities, between what is before and what comes afterwards. It is a step. When a man is sure that this is the right time, he should be encouraged to take that step<sup>122</sup>.

### **340: Judgment**

***Fear God and give Him glory, for His time has come to sit in judgment [Rv 14:7].*** The light from the east flashes to the west. The Cross already appears high in the heavens [cf. Mt 24:30]. Sinners behold the law-giver, behold the judge; he alone can condemn and save [cf. Jas 4:8]. ***Behold He is coming amid the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him*** [many times with their sins]. ***All the people of the earth will beat their breast in front of Him*** [cf. Rv 1:7].

The angels will come forth to separate the good from the bad, the goats from the sheep [cf. Mt 25:31]. What a bitter separation. The father from the son; a daughter from the mother; a friend from a friend – all will be separated for all eternity. Two will live together in the same family, or who work together in the same office: one will be taken up among the elect, and the other sent with the reprobates.

Those who were not able to overcome human respect, or to change their way of living, or those who were unable to endure a little blushing when confessing their sins before the minister of God, must now suffer shame, which is now useless, as they see even their most hidden sins bared before the whole world. Meanwhile the elect will be saying; 'We too were sinners, but by the grace of god we were able to overcome the occasions and the habits of sin, human respect and convert to God with our whole heart.'

How blessed are those just ones who will now remain with God for all eternity. How sorrowful those sinners, who now must suffer by not ever seeing God. O Lord! You, who are so merciful and loving, grant that we may not hear on that day those bitter words: ***Out of My sight*** [Mt 25:41], and may we not be deaf to that loving word: ***Come***<sup>123</sup>

### **341: In the light of judgment**

Let us not be content with the thought that judgment day is near, rather we should think of it as present. Let us always be alert, and never dull our senses to this event. Let us make a real and sincere resolution to better ourselves always and, if necessary, to change our way of living.

Why do we hesitate to throw ourselves into the arms of divine mercy, while we still have time, before mercy yields to justice? Now is the time to do penance, and thus assure ourselves of salvation. To neglect such an important matter is flirting with failure and playing with fire. Remember you are dealing with your soul. Once it is lost, it is lost

<sup>121</sup> Spiritual Journal. **September 17, 1808.**

<sup>122</sup> o.c. **December 23, 1808.**

<sup>123</sup> Early Sermons. N. 14. 'Universal Judgment'. **MssB 695-713. PVC, pp. 86-93.**

forever. You are dealing with a final and unchangeable state of life. You are dealing with an eternity of joy, or of suffering. Why should we hold off our decision?

This God-man, our judge, who loves us as tenderly as a father, and who has no desire to condemn us for all eternity, threatens and warns us. He shed His blood to wash away our sins. By His merits, we have been given once again a right to enter His Kingdom. He makes us participants in His work of redemption, by lessening the weight of our penance. **Come**, he shouts, **come to Me all you who labor and are burdened**, oppressed by the weight of your sins, **and I will give you rest** [Mt 11:28].<sup>124</sup>

### **342: Live, as hell does exist**

We cannot live as if Hell did not exist, and also as though I could deserve it. Hell does exist, and with it are cruel torments, pain of the senses, expressed in the biblical image of fire, and torments of the soul. The intellect will be darkened and will be focused only on its own evil, in contrast to the good that was lost. The will remains obdurate and obstinate in hating god. The heart of the damned is like a turbulent sea, in which all the rivers of torment enter through the faculties of the soul. The memory is tortured, because it recalls the joy of the past, the occasions it had to be saved, and the evil that was done. Above all the greatest pain is the loss of not seeing God, our infinite Good<sup>125</sup>.

There are many Christians who believe that Hell exists, and know that one mortal sin can condemn one; nevertheless, they live peacefully with mortal sin on their soul, and if they do not confess, shame shuts up their mouth, and neither do they have great fear of the fact that they are living in sin. They are however, expert in conducting their business, draw up contracts, caring for their families and knowing how to avoid dangers. But they do not know how to care for their soul. This is really crazy.

Where does all this ruin come from even among Christians? From ignorance. Where does this ignorance come from? From not listening to the Word of God. The Word of God sweeps away the darkness of ignorance, and also conquers human perversity. The Word of God and sin cannot exist side by side. The first Christians were converted by preaching. Naturally, it is not the voice of man that converts, but the Voice of God. **Indeed God's word is living and effective** [Heb 4:12]<sup>126</sup>.

### **343: Heavens – a perpetual day**

Let us think of the blessed happiness that the Lord has prepared for us, and like a beloved Lord He anxiously waits to give it to us for all eternity. There will be no longer any sorrow, wailing, sadness, poverty, or sickness. All will be peace, happiness and joy. Everything will be tranquil and serene. A perpetual day. A life without end. Loving conversation with the angels, a blessed concord with the choirs of saints, a joyful banquet with Christ. A blessed vision and enjoyment with our first beginning and our last end, who is God.

<sup>124</sup> Early Sermons, n. 14. **MssB 698-712. PVC, pp. 89-93.**

<sup>125</sup> Retreats 1806. **MssB 3946-3952.**

<sup>126</sup> Mission at St. Firmus Major. **MssB 4035-4041.**

If St. Paul considered all his burdens light in comparison to the enormous weight of glory [cf. 2 Co 4:17], why shouldn't our struggle against sin be lighter, so as to live the life of grace? Those merchants who seek their riches beyond the seas, at times, suffer ship-wreck, and yet they start out anew on another dangerous journey with lively hearts. And we, who are sure of a happy ending, why do we not have the courage and the faith of starting anew our journey towards our homeland? Some of the great saints, like Peter, Paul and Magdalene, had fallen into grave sin, but they knew how to turn to good use the enthusiasm that they had formerly when committing sin.

Let us lift our eyes and see how beautiful Heaven is. Let us set our eyes on Christ, Who shed all His Blood that we might merit victory, and now He shows us the crown that He wishes to place on our heads<sup>127</sup>.

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<sup>127</sup> Early Sermons, n. 27. 'Desperation of Conversion.' **MssB 1008-1018; PVC, pp. 43-47.**