

# St. GASPAR BERTONI



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

SOME RUDIMENTS  
of his

## SPIRITUAL WRITINGS

**SPECIAL THEMES – Fr. BERTONI's DEVOTIONS**

**Part 5 [## 344 - 373]**

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**AUTHOR'S DEDICATION**

To my Stigmatine Confreres:

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

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

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

For the translation of this book:

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

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

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

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

**Fr. Joseph Henchey.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## PRESENTATION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## FORWARD

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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**SPECIAL THEMES**  
**Fr. BERTONI's DEVOTIONS**

**THE SACRED HEART**

**344: The most appropriate symbol of love.**

The Church is the prudent and most wise Spouse of Christ. By her love relationship with Him, she has developed a great desire to see that her spouse Jesus is adored and loved. To reach this purpose she derives the most convincing means to reach everybody, and the easiest and most effective motives. Could she have found a more appropriate symbol of love than the Heart of Jesus?

The many connections between heart and love have already developed among all people a commonly accepted bond. The heart is recognized as the seat of love and the heart is almost a synonym of love. We even give the same meaning to both terms.

All the more so Jesus' love is symbolized by His divine Heart. His Heart is the source of that blood which was shed for our sake. It is enlivened by a most pure soul. It is identified by the hypostatic union with the Word. The very characteristic of this Heart is the fact that it has always been the most perfect means through which Jesus' invisible and inexpressible sentiments of love have been and are manifested for us to see and feel.

The side of Christ was torn open after His death just to show His heart, the very Heart wounded by the lance, the scar which He preserved in His glorious body. All these things make the Heart of Jesus such a tender, distinct and divine symbol that it is impossible to venerate the wounded Heart without remembering and venerating His love.

The Church is happy to see that her intentions are being met. She has seen that through this sensible object, people receive the Eucharist every first Friday of the month. Here is a renewed fervor of devotion towards the Blessed Sacrament. The feast of the Sacred Heart is celebrated with solemnity and with joy not so much because of the pomp and the noisy crowd associated with it, but rather because of the piety, affection and love of devoted people. All this generally causes people to recall more often the love of Jesus and encourages them to reciprocate His love with more fervor.<sup>5</sup>

**345: Why do you show us Your Heart?**

Lord, you created man in your own image and likeness [Gn 1:26] and established him as the aim for all creatures. As your image he is able to know you and to love you. In his ingratitude man quickly ruined himself and all his posterity. You promised that from his seed a Liberator would come, namely, your only Son, given up to death for man's sake! ***What a love!*** [1 Jn 3:1]. This man takes the life of His own

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<sup>5</sup> Sacred Heart Notes. **MssB 1768-1772**. These are notes of a sermon which Fr. Bertoni gave on June 5, 1812, Feast of the Sacred Heart, in the Church of St. Fermo Major. What is noteworthy here is the rich theological content together with the apologetic zeal in defense of the devotion to the sacred Heart against Janenism. [**BERTONI** 3, pp. 383, ff.].

Redeemer. On that very night in which he betrays Him, You instituted a Sacrament of love with the aim of communicating yourself to him and of remaining with him until the end of the world. Still man grows lukewarm, forgets this benefit, too, and tramples on it. Yet, you put before his very eyes Your Heart wounded for him. Why do you show him Your heart? [Jb 7:17]. SO much ingenuity of love is in view of inspiring man to love you. I understand, Lord, You are an abyss of goodness and love. Man is an abyss of ingratitude and malice. **Deep is calling on deep!** [Ps 42:8]<sup>6</sup>.

Our poor human heart is also able to wish our friends success ad ever good thing. If this is what we frail human beings can do when we love our friends in Christ, how much more should we trust the Heart of Christ, our Lord, Who loves us more than any mother. Oh, what a Good Shepherd! Let us surrender completely in all circumstances, as wise, docile, and humble sheep, to be supported, led and fed by him<sup>7</sup>.

Oh, lovable Heart of my Jesus, Who has ever found you to be slow in feeling pity for his miseries, or indifferent in paying heed to his requests, or difficult in granting him pardon for his faults<sup>8</sup>.

### **346: Lived experience of the devotion to the Sacred Heart.**

Feast of the sacred Heart. During Mass During Mass, at the Consecration, Communion and throughout the whole thanksgiving time, many tears of compunction and affection. In particular, during Communion I felt for a moment as if my spirit was snatched away from all creatures, at the service of its Creator<sup>9</sup>.

While praying before Mass, I felt a little sleepy. Then I heard a voice speak to me from the Crucifix: 'Look at My Heart.' These words brought a marvelous light to my mind, and a great rush of fervor to my heart. I felt as if my spirit rose to get a closer look at that beloved object. I felt a shiver run through my whole body. My eyes were closed and so was my mouth, but my soul was wide awake and full of joy.

It seemed that my soul wished to separate itself from my body. It seemed to be dying, and yet enjoying this. When it turned back again with desire towards the One Who was talking to it, I had another shivering and feeling of a sweet painful death. My soul was then confused about what to do. If the experience had continued it was going to die, or at least to be separated from the body. In such inability to act, it rested with delight in the hands of the Lord and finding great peace. It was ready to die at that very moment. Then, in an instant, it regained contact with the senses.

The effect of this was a very tender devotion to the Sacred Heart. During Mass, I was full of sentiment. My soul was moved to tears at Holy Communion. After Mass, I experienced great recollection and peace for the whole day with an increase of faith, hope and charity.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Sacred Heart [Notes]. **MssB 1775-1777.**

<sup>7</sup> **Correspondence**, p. 391. Letter to Fr. Louis Bragato. May 29, 1840.

<sup>8</sup> Early Sermons, n. 3. The Name of Jesus. **I. MssB 412. PVC p. 237.**

<sup>9</sup> **Spiritual Journey**, July 2, 1808.

<sup>10</sup> **Spiritual Journal**. May 30, 1812. It is noteworthy the coincidence of this mystical experience felt by Fr. Gaspar and the time in which he was preparing Notes for the sermon of the Sacred Heart.[cf. n. 344, just above].

## THE STIGMATA OF THE PASSION

### **347: To contemplate the Wounds of the Crucified and the scars of the Risen One.**

Christ rises on the third day from death to life, freed from all sorrow and pain, as splendid as the sun. He still bears the scars of the Five Wounds impressed in His Body. They are victorious emblems of His Mercy. They are glorious emblems of His Justice. With these He won a victory over death and hell. With these, He made satisfaction before the Divine Father on our behalf. These Wounds He ceaselessly shows to the Father, pleading with Him for mercy for us sinners. These Wounds are perennial springs of grace and heavenly assistance.

He shows them also to us, to invite us to love Him and to suffer for Him. What longing do they instill into us, to suffer for Christ! Do they not? They Wounds of the Redeemer are like many mouths which teach us how we have to suffer for His sake.

Let us then keep our eyes always fixed on those sacred Wounds. We shall be encouraged to bear patiently the trials and labors of the earthly pilgrimage. We too shall bear our Cross with the hope of obtaining victory. Otherwise we shall have to look at them, on the Judgment Day, with confusion and shame: ***They will look on Him Whom they have pierced.*** [Jn 19:37].

Take courage! Take courage! Let us gaze with eyes of faith at the Wounds of that God of Mercy who hangs from the Cross. From this contemplation will our heart not acquire much strength to combat bravely in temptations, to bear with tribulations, poverty and sickness! Let us dwell upon the Wounds of the Crucified first, and then we shall contemplate the scars of the Risen One.<sup>11</sup> In that way we shall see how true it is – as the Psalmist also says – many are the trials of the just man, but from them all the Lord will rescue him [cf. Ps 34:20], and He will give us an eternal crown in heaven.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> St. Augustine. *De S. Virginitate*. 54, 55. PL 40, 428

<sup>12</sup> From the Sermons of Fr. John Baptist Lenotti [**Bertoni 6**, pp. 394, ff.]. The piercing, produced by the nails and by the lance in the members of the Crucified and retained in the body of the Risen Lord, and the object of one of the great devotions of Christian piety, is expressed in theological-spiritual terms with various names: sores, wounds, scars, stigmata and have practically become synonymous throughout the centuries. The distinction between Wounds of the Crucified Christ and the scars of the Risen Lord had been over-stressed by St. Augustine for polemical reasons. He wanted to oppose the pagan philosopher Porphyrius who claimed that by the fact that the Wounds had remained in the body of Christ after His Resurrection, there was no true death and resurrection. Subsequently, however, the controversy lost both interest and relevance. By calling scars and marks of the Risen Lord, in fact, we do not intend to deny that we deal with true wounds. We want just to specify that they are not bloody nor sorrowful [cf. Ignazio BONETTI, *Le Stimmate della Passione*. 1952. pp. 70-75; and by the same author, *Le Fonti della Salvezza*. 1984, p. 8.

### **348: The Stigmata of Christ impressed on the heart**

If you do not have eagle's wings to fly toward the stars, take the wings of the humble dove which nests in the cliffs and, there, you will meditate on the Wounds of Jesus Christ. Holiness was found more by St. Francis in meditating on the Passion of Christ than by all the wise men in contemplating the heavens<sup>13</sup>.

Remind yourself constantly that the greater you are the more you have to humiliate yourself in everything [Si 3:20], and if you cannot live in our little house of the Stimate with your body, you should stay in spirit in ***the clefts of the rock*** [Sgs 2:14], in the wounds of our most beloved and most humble savior, where I leave you embracing you with all my heart.<sup>14</sup>

Picture to yourself the Risen Lord as He appeared to the disciples very much alive and shining, with the scars of His Wounds. At the same time he invites you to heaven, where He is preparing to return: ***I go to prepare a place for you.*** [Jn 14:2]. Consider the conditions and the way necessary to reach heaven. Christ entered it with the scars of His Wounds. This is the price with which I purchased this kingdom. It cannot be had at a lesser price.<sup>15</sup>

...For the rest, cheer up! And when you need more cheerfulness, fly on the wings of thought to the little room of Fr. Michael, if your wings are not always ready to fly over the clouds to the bosom of your God and in the Glorious Wounds of your Savior. Take your seat as one of His People, in the beauty of that peace...<sup>16</sup>

### **349: The Stigmata of Christ and our hope**

Is it not true that when we are grieved by faults, by temptations or by any adversities, as soon as we fell on our knees in front of the Crucifix, we felt consoled in looking at His Wounds? What a consolation to see Him clasping us all to His Heart. to see His Heart open as if to show that He wants to hide all of us inside there. To see His head bent as if to look for us to lead us to Paradise!<sup>17</sup>

Jesus is a true Friend Who never forgets us. He has painted His faithful ones on His hands with the scars of His Wounds which He will bear always. He painted

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<sup>13</sup> Meditations from **Spiritual Exercises**. **Mss B 3419**. The thought is taken from the *Imitation of Christ*. Book 2, c. 1.

<sup>14</sup> **Correspondence**, pp. 311, ff. Letter to Fr. Bragato, November 18, 1835.

<sup>15</sup> Meditations from the *Spiritual Exercises*. **MssB 2682; 2687**. cf. above, marginal number **97**.

<sup>16</sup> **Correspondence**, p. 318. Letter to Fr. Bragato of January 29, 1840. Fr. Michael is Fr. Michael-Angelo Gramego, who, because of his cheerfulness, was called 'the delight of the new-born Congregation' [cf. *Memoirs of the Fathers and Brothers*. Verona 1886, p. 51].

<sup>17</sup> Fr. Carlo Fedelini, Friday Sermons, manuscripts, quoted by Fr. Nello Dalle Vedove, 'Conformation to Christ Crucified'. Rome 1989, p. 52. Every Friday evening in the Church of the Stimate, there was a celebration in honor of the Passion and of the Five Wounds of the Lord. Fr. Gaspar himself was keen on giving a meditation for about half an hour, for as long as he could. Subsequently, he was sustained by his confreres. While we do not have any written notes of Fr. Gaspar's sermons, the manuscripts of Frs. C. Fedelini and J. B. Lenotti have been preserved [cf. **BERTONI** 4, pp. 272-274. Ignazio BONETTI, 'At the School of God with St. Gaspar Bertoni'. Verona 1989, p. 125, n. 156].

them there with His Blood so deeply that neither time nor eternity can ever wipe them away. As far as we are concerned, we should always try to keep our Friend Jesus in our hearts and to act always for His sake. He surely deserves this!<sup>18</sup>

Let us always keep our eyes fixed on Christ, the author and the perfecter of our faith [Heb 12:2]. Let His Wounds, His Blood be our hope. A God Who died for us, Who died torn apart by so many tortures and humiliations. Is this not a sweet hope for us? He ascended to heaven where He shows to the eternal Father the scars of His Wounds to move Him to pity our wretchedness and save us. Let us therefore cling to Jesus and His Cross. Either death nor life nor all the powers of the world or of hell will be able to separate us from Him.<sup>19</sup>

### **350: Christ on Judgment Day with His Stigmata**

Christ will sit on His throne and then all shall look on Him Whom they have pierced [Jn 19:37]. There will also be a throne for Mary and for the Apostles. Jesus will say: Do you see these Wounds? They have been opened for you. This Blood? I have shed it for you. In it I have washed you in Baptism.

On that day we shall be saved by our good works only. Let us therefore give ourselves over to the continuous exercise of good works. And then let us throw ourselves at the feet of Jesus and say: 'Ah, Lord, on that day, there will be no place to hide myself, but today I have found it. It is in the Wounds which I have opened by my sins. Hide me in Your Wounds!'

Then we rely on Mary. On that day we shall approach her and greet her as Mother, Advocate and Queen. Then she will turn to Jesus and say: 'Here is my son and yours. He came to be in Paradise with us. He has been devoted to me. He not only paid homage to me himself, but has promoted devotion to me among his friends and relatives and children. Here he is now, looking for his reward.'

Then Jesus will turn His face benevolently towards us. He will throw His arms around us: He will thank us. Yes, He will thank us for our devotion which we have shown towards His Mother, and as a reward He will present His Wounds for us to kiss. The very thought of this gives us an immeasurable amount of consolation now. What an experience will it be then?<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> **BERTONI** 5, p. 643.

<sup>19</sup> J. Baptist Lenotti, Friday Sermons. **BERTONI** 6, p. 584.

<sup>20</sup> C. Fedelini, Friday Sermons. **Bertoni** 5. [[. 588; 640, f.

## ESPOUSALS OF THE VIRGIN MARY AND St. JOSEPH

### **351: The Espousals of Mary and Joseph and intimacy with Christ**

Our soul must have with Christ its Spouse, to whom it is married in grace, the same relationship that Mary had with her Spouse, Joseph.

Mary never let him down in the least, but always heeded his wishes. Similarly our soul must never let God down by disobeying His commandments. Furthermore, Mary always honored her Spouse as the head of the family, perfectly fulfilling all the obligations of her state and depending entirely on him. We, too, have to honor our heavenly Spouse by fulfilling exactly whatever our condition, as workers, students, heads of families, employers and especially Christians! Mary enjoyed the company of her spouse. Let us imitate her by visiting our heavenly Spouse in the Eucharist and by keeping Him company with joy.

Finally, Mary gave him every possible assistance and comfort in all his sufferings and pains, especially in his last illness. It is true, we cannot assist directly Christ our Spouse with similar services; however, we can do it to those who represent Him, namely the poor. We can assist them when they are in need. We can instruct them when they are ignorant. We can visit them when they are sick. We can pray for them when they are dead.

Thus we shall profit greatly from the spiritual espousals of our soul with its Spouse Christ, and we shall imitate the most blessed Mary in what she did for St. Joseph.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Innocent Venturini, Second Little Sermon in honor of the espousals, in **Bertonian Historic Archive**, Series 2, **Sermons**. On the espousals, Verona 1992, pp. 231-234.

Fr. Gaspar had a particular devotion to the Mystery of the espousals of Mary and Joseph. He chose the Holy Spouses as Patrons and Models of the Stigmatine Congregation. He dedicated to the Holy Spouses the main altar of the Church of the Stimmate and introduced as the Patronal Feast the celebration of the Holy Espousals on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of January [which date was however traditionally established by the Liturgy]. This choice, which seems surprising, has to be seen against the background of a soul considered as the Spouse of Christ, an image very dear to Fr. Gaspar [see the Marginal Numbers above, nn. **38-43; 147, 273**]. It is in this context that the above quoted meditation of Fr. I. Venturini has to be seen. This Priest was famous for his deep adherence<sup>3</sup> to the thought of Fr. Gaspar [cf. *Summarium Additionale*. Doc. 29, pp. 600, f.]. In promoting this devotion, Fr. Gaspar had also the pastoral concern of meeting the spiritual needs of Christian couples and families.

His interest in the family apostolate is expressly testified by Fr. Camillo Bresciani, who wrote: 'He supported the holiness of marriage, prevented divorce, reunited separated couples. How many were the illegitimate and scandalous marital relationship which he did manage to solve!' For more on this subject, see J. Stofella. 'The Cult and the Devotion of the Holy Espousals, in: CS I, pp. 245-402. I. Bonetti, 'At the School of God with St. Gaspar Bertoni. Notes of Spirituality.' Verona 1989, pp. 106-111.

### **352: The Holy Spouses and religious life**

Whoever enters this Religious Congregation must always have his eyes on the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph. From them he will learn the love of poverty, dedication to prayer and meditation, promptness in obedience, even I things difficult and contrary to nature, love toward God at Whose glory he should always aim, love towards neighbor whose spiritual good he is ready to serve with zeal, even at the cost of his life.<sup>22</sup>

All possible effort must be exercised so that our young candidates may be enamored with spiritual things and devotion to Our Lady and St. Joseph, by encouraging them to imitate their examples as the opportunities arise. Above all they are to be exhorted to fulfill all tasks, even small ones, with great diligence, especially when they are not seen by anybody. As a consequence, this diligent way of acting in view of pleasing God and of imitating Our Lady and St. Joseph who reached great perfection in their most hidden life, will become almost as second nature to them.<sup>23</sup>

Oh most holy Virgin, through those virginal nuptials which you celebrated with your most chaste spouse, St. Joseph, may my soul enter into spiritual nuptials with your Son, and my Lord, Jesus.<sup>24</sup>

### **353: The Holy Spouses and the Christian family**

St. Gaspar promoted the veneration to the most holy of weddings, with the intention that his sons should find in the Holy Spouses their most powerful protectors. His second and holy aim was that good Christian couples should see in the example of the most chaste Spouses the rule and inspiration for all virtues at the same time obtaining through their powerful protection the graces which are so necessary for themselves and their children<sup>25</sup>. Marriage should be held in honor by all people, especially by those whom Divine Providence has called to live in it. To honor marriage properly, it is not sufficient for the couples to feel affection with the heart and to express it with words. Works are expected, especially those derived from their most basic duties. Among these, the pride of place is given to conjugal chastity, which is also the most beautiful mark and dignity of such a state. It is therefore purity, I mean the most special and outstanding, which characterizes and honors the marriage of the Holy Spouses, Mary and Joseph, in a manner utterly new and wondrous.

Oh most holy Virgin, in your nuptials with St. Joseph you are an excellent model of chastity to all Christian couples. We pray that you bestow on them an abundant gift of that chastity which is proper to their state and honors it so much<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> J. M. Marani, 'Compendium of the Constitutions, in: CS II, p. 165.

<sup>23</sup> J. M. Marani. 'Rules', CS II, p. 256.

<sup>24</sup> Traditional Prayer during the Stigmatine Novena to the Holy Spouses.

<sup>25</sup> G. Giacobbe, *Summarium Additionale*, p. 513.

<sup>26</sup> J. M. Marani, 'Panegyric of the Holy Spouses, in: **Bertonian Historic Archives**. Series II. Sermons. 'On the espousals'. Verona 1992, p. 151.

**354: The Holy Spouses, Models of conjugal love.**

Married people, would you like to have a norm for your state, which could teach you to live happily all the days of your life? Take the Holy Spouses. What was the knot which bound so tightly the heart of Mary with St. Joseph's, the heart of Joseph to Mary's, and the heart of Joseph and Mary to Jesus? It was Love!

Love caused Joseph to spare no effort to assist his wife and to keep her comfortable. Love made him tirelessly dedicated to his work in order to support the family with his earnings. Love made him to have reverence towards his Spouse, to be solicitous in serving her to watch over her and protect her with great responsibility.

Love made Mary honor Joseph as her head, even though she was infinitely superior to him in dignity. The one who was 'Queen of Heaven and Earth' made herself subject and obedient to her Spouse, so that she surpassed all other married women in reverence and respect, always attentive in fulfilling her obligation as Spouse and Mother. She was most diligent in her daily tasks, without neglecting anything which made her progress in the spiritual life. On the contrary, she grew in virtue while living at home with her husband, even more than when praying in the Temple.

This very love drew the thoughts, joys and the entire heart of Joseph and Mary towards their beloved son, Jesus.

Here is, dear married people, a very effective example to keep you completely happy: the love of charity. A love which does not give occasion to suspicion, is an enemy of jealousy, flees from quarrels, takes away resentments, is not deceived by appearances, nor tired by waiting. On the contrary, this love maintains inseparably united faithfulness, prudence, kindness, patience, generosity, dignity and honesty.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> I Venturini, Sermon in Honor of the Espousals of Mary and Joseph, in: **Bertonian Historic Archives**. Series II, Sermons, 'On the Espousals'. Verona 1992, p. 151.

## OUR LADY

### **355: Mary, the Mother of God**

We can easily refer to Mary, the Mother of God what the Holy Spirit has said in the Book of Proverbs 8:29: ***When He set for the sea its limit.*** Mary, in fact, had to conceive and enclose within her womb the Word of God, which is the sea, and the abyss of wisdom, of power, of virtue, and of all existence and goodness.

Should we not, therefore, call Mary the mistress of that sea which as measureless as it is, she was able to contain in her immaculate womb? The Virgin Mother of God had the right to have a maternal authority over Christ, as other mothers have, because one can say that she was more a Mother to Christ than other mothers are with respect to their children. As a mater of fact, Christ is born only of His Mother. That is why the Blessed Virgin had more authority over Christ than other mothers have over their children. Christ Himself did not disdain to recognize Himself as her subject: ***He was obedient to them*** [Lk 2:51].

‘The God to whom Angels are subjected was subjected to Mary. We have to admire both things, then, ’ this is an exhortation of St. Bernard, ‘and choose which one of the two should be admired more, either the most gracious condescension of the son, or the more excellent dignity of the Mother. Both are marvelous and miraculous things: obedience of God to a woman is unheard of humility; a woman commanding God is unparalleled loftiness’<sup>28</sup>.

If therefore Mary had such commanding authority over the Person of her Son, if she has such an easy and determining influence over the Heart of the King, Who is certainly her Sovereign and her son as well, how could she not have clear control over all His treasures, namely over that immense sea of grace and mercy?<sup>29</sup>

### **356: Mary Queen of Heaven and Earth**

Mary is Mother of the King whom God has established over all the works of His hands. Consequently, she is also established as Queen and as such she possesses by right, all the kingdoms of the Son. How could she in fact not possess her Son’s Kingdom, she who possesses entirely the Son Himself?<sup>30</sup>

Mary is first of all Queen of Angels, as the Church says in her hymns, because of her excellence and dignity. Secondly, she is such because of her eminent grace and virtue. But, at the same time she is such on account of her own true authority. One sees this from the respect angels have towards her. Such reverence is clearly demonstrated by the fact that the archangel Gabriel greeted her with such veneration and respect.

The Queenship of Mary is also extended to the world, namely, over all people. One cannot possibly separate the royal power of the son from that of His Mother. One is the flesh of Mary and Christ, one in spirit, one in love. From the moment it was said: ***The Lord is with you*** [Lk 1:28], the promise and the gift grew inseparably together.

<sup>28</sup> St. Bernard, Homilies. I, 9. PL 183, 60, ff.

<sup>29</sup> Early Sermons, 29. ‘The Name of Mary’. **MssB 1075-1080. PVC pp. 312-314.**

<sup>30</sup> Rupert of Deutz, Commentary on the Song of Songs. Book 3. PL 168, 877.

Therefore one has to believe that the glory of the Son is not only similar to that of the Mother, but that it is the same.

What a beautiful field is opening up for us to consider the love of Mary towards us and her desire to save our souls! We do not need to waste our time with much reasoning. It is a field which is open to everybody and which is easy to walk through. Let us enter into it through our personal considerations. We shall discover how vast it is, we shall enjoy its beauty, we shall enjoy its priceless and wholesome fruit<sup>31</sup>.

Is it difficult for Mary to intercede? Is it difficult for Jesus to grant a grace?<sup>32</sup>

### **357: The Immaculate One**

The holiness of Mary was like a most clear sky which was never clouded even by the shadow of sin. Her spirit, always enraptured in God, was never hindered nor held back by any earthly thing. Mary is surely the only one who can be called wholly beautiful and spotless before God: ***You are all beautiful, no blemish in you!*** [Sgs 4:7]. She did not experience the actual disorderly suggestions of a fallen nature, but this very disorder of nature was removed completely from her. Rather it is even truer to say that it was not removed. In fact, through her immaculate conception God's grace prevented the action of our flawed human nature, so that sin never reigned in her body. Who can therefore understand with human judgments, which are normally very limited, the excellent purity of the Mother of God?

O God! What superhuman purity did the divine motherhood of Mary demand of her! A purity superior to that of angels. In fact as much as she was exalted over all the choirs of angels because of her dignity as Mother of God, so much did she have to surpass in an unimaginable measure the purity of those most pure beings, as lofty as they are.

Let then all those of us who are devoted to Mary and imitators of her purity, approach her and sit, as it were, under the shade of this most pleasant tree of paradise. Its fruit will be sweet to our taste. She kindly stretches the branches of her protection over all her servants, even to the lowest ones. Those of us who, in the scorching desert of this world, feel they are walking tormented by the fierce burning of passions, look for shelter confidently under the shade of this healing tree. They will find refreshment, rest and health for their tired and confused hearts.<sup>33</sup>

### **358: Christ is waiting for us. Mary is calling us**

The Feast of the Holy House of Mary, which came to rest among us permanently at Loreto, is like a gentle invitation to our heart that it may fly quickly to visit in spirit those sacred walls. Blessed walls, more splendid than royal palaces, you have welcomed the Queen of Heaven, the Spouse of the Holy Spirit. You are the witnesses of the errand of the angel and, what matters more, you are witnesses of the great mystery of the Incarnation!

<sup>31</sup> Early Sermons, n. 29. **MssB 1081-1090; PVC pp. 315-319.**

<sup>32</sup> **Spiritual Journal.** May 18, 1810.

<sup>33</sup> Early Sermons, n. 30. 'The Purity of Mary'. **MssB 1115-1120; PVC pp. 327-329.**

It seems to me that on such an occasion God has a request to make of us. He asks for our heart. Like the House of Loreto, He wants to consecrate our heart and make of it a temple where He can dwell. ***Do you not know, my brothers***, exclaims St. Paul, ***that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?*** [1 Co 3:16].

How consoling to see our soul similar to a temple, to dialogue with God in the peace of a good conscience, to find within ourselves all consolation and a sweet joy for our present life, together with hope for the future! Shall we hesitate for a moment to grasp such happiness! Christ is waiting for us! Mary is calling us! Yes, it is she who wants to open our heart to her Son.

Holy Virgin, here we are at your feet. Our eyes are fixed on you, and so are all our trust and all our supplications. You have made our heart a temple for your Son. Therefore, we hope that, having welcomed our King as a guest into our heart, He will give us a place in His Kingdom.<sup>34</sup>

### **359: The Virgin of the Annunciation**

Let us contemplate the Blessed Virgin and the Angel who greets her. What an honor that God chose to be born of a woman and assume our flesh! How much should we congratulate Mary on this. She is the source of all goodness for us. She is the only one God is looking for with satisfaction. What a great reverence we should have for Mary!

The Virgin and the Angel, in the little House of Nazareth, talk about the Mystery of the Incarnation: ***Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord*** [Lk 1:38]. Humility. This is the condition which God demands of those, in whom He intends to perform great things, for their own good and the good of others.

Let us consider how the Virgin, after the Angel had completed his errand, gave thanks to God with a great spirit of faith and humility. In the same way the faithful, and all the more so the priest, must relate to God after the reception of the Holy Eucharist. It must be with that same spirit of faith and humility, with a very personal recollection. We are honored by God as the Virgin was.<sup>35</sup>

### **360: A Complete Program of Marian devotion**

After God, it is Mary who should have pride of place in your heart. You should not lose sight of her at any cost. You should, rather, see that your devotion to her be enlivened more and more, day in and day out.

You will recite every day the third part of the Rosary of Mary. In any trouble, small or great, you will invoke her most powerful name. You will prepare the celebration of her liturgical feasts with novenas, during which you will make your

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<sup>34</sup> Early Sermons, n. 8. 'The Holy House transported to our Heart.' **MssB 573-592.**

<sup>35</sup> **Spiritual Exercises.** Meditations. **MssB 2472-2479.**

meditation around the respective mysteries, employing loving conversation and simple vocal prayers.<sup>36</sup>

St. Ignatius of Loyola never began any task whatsoever without first entrusting it to Our Lady. Nor did he make any petition to God except through her. He used to carry a picture of her around his neck. In his bed he always kept the Rosary of Our Lady with the intention of falling asleep while thinking of her and of turning again to her when waking up.<sup>37</sup>

### **361: Spirit of total entrusting to Mary**

I greet you, my Mother. Give me your blessing. Bless me and all who are dear to me. Vouchsafe to offer to God today, all I have to do and suffer, in union with your merits and those of your Divine son. I offer you and consecrate to your service all my being and whatever belongs to me, placing everything under your protection. Obtain for me, dear Lady, purity of soul and body and grant that I may not do anything today displeasing to God. I ask this through your Immaculate Conception and your perfect Virginity.<sup>38</sup>

Most holy Virgin Mary, Mother of God, though unworthy to be your servant, moved however by your wonderful mercy and by the desire of serving you, I choose you this day as my personal Queen, Advocate and Mother. I resolve firmly to serve you always and do what I can to see that others may serve you, too. I entreat you, therefore, most compassionate Mother, to accept me in your service for ever. I pray, be always favorable to me, and obtain for me the grace to act in thought, word and deed in such a way that I may not give any offense to you and your divine Son. Remember me and do not abandon me at the hour of my death.<sup>39</sup>

### **362: A secret for efficiency in pastoral activity**

One day a young parish priest paid Fr. Gaspar a visit. He was discouraged by the fact that [as happened to his predecessor] his parishioners showed complete indifference and even hostility toward him, and were deserting the church in great numbers. So much so that he had lost hope and intended to resign. 'But, there is also hope in the mother of Holy Hope!' explained forcefully Fr. Gaspar. 'Start the Marian Oratory! Call and attract the youth. Welcome them and embrace them as a loving father does. At the beginning you will deal with only a few. Then Our Lady's solicitude

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<sup>36</sup> From a Rule for the day suggested to the young Gaspar by his Spiritual Director, Fr. Nicholas Galvani. It is preserved in the archives of the Stimmate [cf. **BERTONI 2**, pp. 19-24].

<sup>37</sup> Notes on St. Ignatius, taken from the Life written by G. Peter Maffei. **MssB 8722**.

**BERTONI 2**, p. 692.

<sup>38</sup> **Spiritual Journal**. May 24, 1808. This is a prayer which St. Gaspar copied and made his own. He used to recite it daily. He gave it to his sons as the greeting to our Lady at the beginning of the day. [cf. *SpEx* n. 234].

<sup>39</sup> This is the traditional formula for the reception into the Marian Congregation. Bertoni offered this prayer at the age of 12 in 1789 [cf. **BERTONI 1**, p. 208]. And renewed it together with his Community of the Stimmate in 1824 [**BERTONI 4**. 390].

and untiring zeal will increase the number day by day. Talk often to them about = the devotion to Mary. Put them under her patronage. Trust, yes, firmly trust, that by beginning to be a shepherd to the children, the parents themselves will come in time to listen to you, and to recognize you as their shepherd and father, too.' As a matter of fact, things went as Fr. Gaspar had foreseen. After having dedicated himself to the care of the youth in the Marian Oratory, according to the suggestion of Fr. Gaspar, that parish priest saw the parents get rid of their hostility and indifference towards him. They realized that he could not be shepherd only to their children, but had to be also, and in the first place, to their parents. Then it was that the relationship between parishioners and parish priest became a very happy one.

When that parish priest returned to Fr. Gaspar to report about the good result of his suggestion, the saint gave the merit all to God, expressing to Him all his gratitude. He said it was thanks to Mary's protection that such a benefit was conferred on that parish and its shepherd.<sup>40</sup>

### **363: Excellence of the Rosary**

I do not know any other exercise of piety that can claim to have more excellent characteristics [of helpfulness] since its very beginning. The Queen of Heaven herself suggests it and recommends it. It has been promoted and spread as one of the most valuable resources for the life of the Church. It is a weapon of defense against heresy and vice. It is a refuge in most pressing needs. It is a support in terrible times of trouble.

The high quality of this prayer itself appears both from the perfection of the arts which constitute it and from the consistent structure of its practical use.

The Rosary consists in fifteen decades of Hail Mary's, separated by the Our Father, which is said in between and of the Mysteries of our Redemption which are recalled through pious meditation. Now, what prayer is more excellent than the Our Father, and, after that, what is more noble than the Hail Mary? As regards the mysteries of the life, death and resurrection of Christ, they certainly constitute the highest subject for meditation. The essential purpose of the Rosary is to imitate what the mysteries promise. Is there a holier and more sublime purpose than that? And all this through the meditation of Mary, which, after that of Christ is certainly the most advantageous and effective.

When one considers the practical structure of this prayer, how far-reaching and how involving it is. Many things are involved: the tongue to praise, the mind to meditate, the heart to love, all of these with extreme ease.<sup>41</sup>

### **364: The power of the Rosary**

The Rosary devotion has helped the Church enormously. Thanks to it the Christian people have been given steadfast protection and kept in safety for many ages against the formidable attacks of their most powerful enemies.

<sup>40</sup> G. Giacobbe, Life. SA p. 403.

<sup>41</sup> Early Sermons, n. 39. 'The Rosary'. MssB 1367-1375. This sermon was delivered October 4, 1807.

In the 12<sup>th</sup> century the Albigenses had been spreading an anti-Catholic movement which was a summary of all heresies. It refused infant baptism, it denied the Eucharist, it derided penitence, it removed the hope of future resurrection, it destroyed faith in the one Creator of the universe. Churches were knocked down, altars were demolished, priests were tortured and put to death.

In such difficult situations to whom should one have recourse? To Mary. To the one who is the strongest support of the Christian people against their adversaries. To her about whom the liturgy sings with special praise: Mary, you alone have defeated the heresies of the whole world!<sup>42</sup> And help did not delay in coming. The Queen of Heaven herself brought it. She appeared to St. Dominic Guzman and gave him this errand: 'Go preach the Rosary. Know that this form of prayer is the most pleasing to me and my Son. It will be of very special advantage to the Church.' The result was miraculous, and it confirmed that such devotion remains most excellent and efficacious for salvation.

In the year 1571, the Turks called for an expedition with the aim of destroying the armies of the Christian countries and so to insure for themselves control over the sea. The warring fleets faced each other near the port of Lepanto on Sunday, October 7<sup>th</sup>. That was the day when all Christianity was praying the Rosary with great devotion and supplication to invoke the help of Mary.

And help came swift and plenty for all to see. In living memory, there has been no victory in which the hand of God was experienced with such evidence. S. Pius V decreed that each year on the first Sunday of October, there should be a celebration commemorating Our Lady of Victory. Gregory XIII testified that that victory was won by the prayer of the Rosary, and asked that, on that day of remembrance, Mary should be honored with the title Queen of the Rosary.<sup>43</sup>

### **365: Fruitfulness of the Rosary**

You can see in the Rosary an exercise of prayer which is the most noble in its origin, the most perfect in its structure, the most widely recognized by the authority of witnesses and confirmed by miracles. Here are the excellent mystical roses with which a splendid crown is intertwined for the Virgin. They are like roses transplanted from the heavenly gardens into the fertile garden of the Church.

Mary herself is called Mystical Rose. She is that Mystical Rose which makes the just happy, sinners healed, beginners attracted, those who are professing to shine brighter and the perfect ones crowned. She calls under her mantle those who are troubled. She becomes a protecting fence for those who are tempted. She enters both the well cultivated garden of great people as well as the simple little employs the unemployed. She does not hamper the worker. She renews the fervent. She does not discourage the lukewarm.

Let us all plant the flowers of the Rosary, water them, nourish them, and make them known. Let our sins and daughters adorn themselves with them as a protection for piety and as a defense of virtue. Let their fragrance perfume our homes. Let these flowers adorn the churches, the altars of the saints, the tombs of the faithful. Let us

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<sup>42</sup> Roman Missal of St. Pius V. Common of the BVM.

<sup>43</sup> Early Sermons, n. 39. **MssB 1368-1395.**

make a garland, woven with these flowers around the high throne of the Mother of God.<sup>44</sup>

### **366: The Rosary: a lesson of life**

The Rosary is a prayer adapted for all Christians. In it sinners get a sure means for their conversion, and the just a savory food for their life of prayer. In the meditation on the life and death of Christ, the former find a powerful remedy against the poison of the flesh and the senses. In the contemplation of the glory of Christ the latter find a gentle invitation to long for eternal life.<sup>45</sup>

Fr. Gaspar confided to Fr. Lenotti the thought he used to have while meditating on the second Joyful Mystery of the Rosary. He said: 'I am always impressed by what Mary did for Elizabeth. As soon as she was told of Elizabeth's pregnancy she left immediately. She intended to go and assist her in the difficulties of her condition. She left immediately and in haste, as the evangelist says [cf. Lk 1:39], though the road was long and difficult. So great was her solicitude in helping that sick person and her charity towards her. And once she arrived, she stayed with her not one or two days, for three full months, giving help in her need.'<sup>46</sup>

One day [Fr. Benciolini relates the incident], Fr. Gaspar went to pay a visit to a sick brother and suggested to him to say the Hail Mary in order to overcome weariness. 'But', he said, 'meditate on it, as I do myself when I have sleepless nights. I recite the Rosary, but I meditate on the words of the Hail Mary, spending even one hour and more on each one. I do the same with the Our Father. In this way I go through the night'.<sup>47</sup>

### **367: Fr. Gaspar's devotion to Mary**

After the suppression of the Order of the Servants of Mary in Verona, our beloved Virgin inspired [Fr. Bertoni as] another 'Philip Benizi', to keep alive devotion towards her as his Lady and Mother.<sup>48</sup>

From his youth, Fr. Bertoni cultivated a very special filial devotion to Mary. He used to invoke her often and entreat her to be always a merciful mother and a powerful advocate for him. Every single day he used to offer himself to her anew. During the month of May one can say he used to offer himself entirely to her, making, together with traditional sacrifices, a more intense effort to practice virtue. He did not let any Marian festivity pass by without special preparation in prayer and some particular spiritual resolution.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Early Sermons, n. 39. **MssB 1377-1397**

<sup>45</sup> Early Sermons, n. 39. See above, **MssB 1376**.

<sup>46</sup> Miscellanea Lenotti, **SA** p. 313.

<sup>47</sup> Miscellanea Lenotti, **SA**, p. 188.

<sup>48</sup> From the Funeral Commemoration of Fr. Camillo Bresciani. **SA**, p. 207.

<sup>49</sup> Fr. G. Giacobbe, Life, **SA**, p. 313.

To describe how much devotion he had towards Mary, and how much he did for her, and how much he tried to move the hearts of all to love and respect Our Lady, one would have to write a book.<sup>50</sup>

He used to preach very often about Our Lady. From those sermons we can understand that his soul was filled with love of Mary.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> *ib.*, p. 509.

<sup>51</sup> *Positio*, p. 134.

## St. JOSEPH

### **368: St. Joseph is great**

Jesus was conceived and born of the Blessed Virgin Mary through the Holy Spirit, without any human intercourse. However, by the fact that Mary belonged completely to Joseph, who had power and authority over her as his property, the fruit of this field is rightly attributed also to him who owns it. As a consequence, therefore, to be very explicit, we must say that the beloved Jesus, Who came to fill the world with all blessings, is the fruit of the Espousals of Mary and Joseph. He is the offspring of this holy marriage. Jesus wanted to be known and recognized as son of the holy couple, Mary and Joseph. As He called Mary by the sweet name of Mother, in the same way, He called Joseph Father while putting His arms around him.

Noble by birth, Joseph descended from Patriarchs and Kings. He excelled in all gifts of nature and was perfect in all virtues. He is called by scripture a 'just man' [Mt 1:9], which is to indicate that he possessed perfectly all virtues.

Now I understand why the Evangelists, who are so generous in praising some individuals, were so restrained in paying tribute to Joseph. They knew that he, who had been chosen by the Holy Spirit to become the husband of Mary, must have been filled with very many outstanding qualities. Therefore, they were just as concerned to make him known for what he was: the husband of Mary. Husband of Mary! This means to have the same heart, the same soul with that heart, and that soul which carried the Heart and Soul of the Son of God. Husband of Mary! It is the same as saying that he is completely similar to his Spouse in heart, talents, behavior, holiness and virtue <sup>52</sup>.

### **369: St. Joseph, teacher of the interior life**

In our devotion and love let us never separate what God has joined together with an indissoluble bond namely Mary and Joseph. If we are really willing to pursue our progress in the way of perfection, we should have a special devotion to St. Joseph. To him God seems to have entrusted all people who are consecrated to interior life.

It is not sufficient to have recourse to St. Joseph in prayer. We have to beg him to get involved with us by imitating him, taking him as a model, especially with regard to obedience and recollection. St. Joseph is the saint of silence. We shall then invoke him frequently. We shall endeavor to make our meditation with diligence. For his sake we shall take special care to obey faithfully and to control our tongue. If we do this we shall allow St. Joseph to take up the direction of our soul and he will obtain many graces for us.

Finally, let us dedicate our heart to St. Joseph. Let him see that it should be preserved, purified, and used as he wishes. He will adorn it with virtues and fill it with love for Jesus and Mary. He is the master of the interior life. Let us become his

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<sup>52</sup> I. Venturini, Semron in Honor of the espousals of Mary and Joseph', in: **Bertonian Historic Archives**. See above, p. 149.

disciples! We shall be sure to make progress in the way of perfection under his direction<sup>53</sup>.

**370: St. Joseph is not asking, he is commanding**

Jesus is the tree of life. Mary is the Paradise in which that tree was planted. Joseph is the angel who defends it [cf. Gn 3:24]. Jesus is the living bread which came from heaven. Mary is the ship which brings it from afar. Joseph is the helmsman who steers and directs them. After Mary, Joseph is the holiest, the most privileged, and most powerful in heaven. He is not asking, he is commanding. Let us then turn to him with great confidence.

Priests, who are called by God to the great task of leading souls to salvation, should ask of Joseph some of his charity and zeal. Fathers of families should ask for the grace of fulfilling their duties of mutual love and faithfulness, and seeing that their children are educated in the Fear of God. Youth should pray to him to be granted to keep the lily of purity unblemished. Those who are rich and noble should ask St. Joseph to make them richer and nobler by the practice of Christian virtues. Those who are poor and of low condition should ask St. Joseph for the strength to bear with serenity and cheerfulness the labors and trials of life and to love poverty in the spirit of the Gospel. Those who are crushed under the weight of the Cross should ask St. Joseph to be able to carry it with patience, knowing that it is the surest way to Heaven.

Also the sinner, who has offended the Lord and has nailed Him to the Cross, can put his trust in St. Joseph. The good father will pray for him. There he is, stretching his hand to help the repentant sinner to return to Jesus. Will Jesus reject him? No, He will welcome him with loving kindness, because of the prayer of such a good father<sup>54</sup>.

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<sup>53</sup> Fr. J. B. Lenotti, Community exhortations. **CS III, pp. 284-301.**

<sup>54</sup> From the Sermons of C. Fedelini. **CS I, pp. 316-319.**

## SOME LITURGICAL FEASTS

### **371: New Year's Day**

In your letter, you wish me a thousand blessings for this New Year, not excluding crosses. I thank you for such great kindness, which is exquisitely spiritual. As a matter of fact, what could we wish our own friends better than crosses? Certainly to me you could not have wished a more pleasant thing. Not that I have the strength to bear them, but it is the Lord who gives me the grace of appreciating them. Through your prayers and God's mercy I expect to obtain, together with suffering, patience, too. So, as I see the coming to me quickly and from the very first days of the year, I welcome them cheerfully, and say: 'Here are the crosses which my dear Fr. Louis foretold, praise the Lord!' <sup>55</sup>

I thank you for the New Year's wishes. I pray that the Lord will give you in return all the blessings which you need most. In the meantime, I rejoice in the greatest gift the Lord granted you, to give thanks amidst tribulations, because patience makes perfect things [Jas 1:4], and a person, who is grateful also in troubles, draws many blessings upon himself. There is nothing that can give greater honor to God than this. <sup>56</sup>

### **372: All Saints' Day**

All Saints' Day stirs up in our hearts the most intense desires of the blessedness of heaven. Today's Gospel indicates to us the shortest way to get there: ***Blessed are the pure in spirit, because theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, because they shall be comforted. Blessed are the gentle, because they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who are thirsty and hunger for justice, because they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, because they shall find mercy. Blessed are the pure of heart, because they will see God. Blessed are the peace-makers, because they shall be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of justice, because theirs is the Kingdom of heaven*** [Mk 5:3-10].

It is not sufficient to love blessedness in order to possess it. One has to comb that path which Christ has indicated, which the saints have trodden. Take courage. Keep looking up! We see those triumphant hosts of saints on the walls of blessed Jerusalem. They are our friends, our brothers. They are ready to help us on our journey towards that Kingdom by the encouragement of their example and the assistance of their prayer. They long to see us with them, they wait for us, they call us.

We see Jesus, our Leader, anxious to share with us the glory of His kingdom and the full possession of His heritage. It is He Himself who set the ladder in front of us and exhorts us to climb it. He promises His grace to comfort us all through our climbing. He stretches His right hand to us.

The first decisive step one takes at the beginning of any task determines all that follows. Let us rid our hearts of any attachment to the world. Let us make at least an

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<sup>55</sup> **Correspondence**, pp. 317, f. Letter to Fr. L. Bragato. January 29, 1840.

<sup>56</sup> **Correspondence**, p. 284. Letter to L. Naudet of December 30, 1831.

act of renunciation in spirit. Let us keep our anger in check. Let us learn from Him to be kind and meek of heart. Let us give up the empty joys of the world. As far as we are concerned we should be sorry for our faults, with the assurance that our mourning will be changed into joy, which in turn, nobody will be able to snatch away from us. In the meantime we do not thirst except for justice, nor are we intent except to be merciful. Thus our spirit will be purified in such a way that it will begin to see the first rays of its future happiness, and will bring peace in our hearts. Then while our eyes will say: Paradise is beautiful, our hearts will boldly say: Paradise is mine.<sup>57</sup>

### **373: All Souls' Day**

Scripture narrates that Judas the Maccabee sent 10,000 silver drachmas to Jerusalem with the intention of offering sacrifices for the soldiers fallen in battle. The same Scripture praises this initiative with the famous expression: ***It is a salutary and holy thought to pray for the dead, that they may be absolved from their sins*** [2 M 12:46].

In his book of ***Dialogues***, St. Gregory the Great tells us that he ordered that Mass should be celebrated for thirty consecutive days to pray for Justus, a monk of his monastery of St. Andrew's. He then heard that the monk's brother had a revelation that after the Last Mass was celebrated, the soul of that monk flew to heaven free from all pain of sin.<sup>58</sup>

St. Augustine affirms also that one of the holiest exercises and most pious activities in which people can get involved during this life is to offer sacrifices, alms and prayers for the dead who are in Purgatory, for we are their family.<sup>59</sup>

Above all, prayer is the key to open the blessed door of Paradise, not only for ourselves, but also for our neighbor. Let us then offer prayers and petitions for the souls in Purgatory. It does not require much effort to pay. We can do it everywhere, at any time, in any circumstance. How much spiritual advantage shall we have just for ourselves! This is in fact an act of charity and of mercy, the most exquisite! We shall also derive an outstanding temporal advantage.

What we can be sure of is that we shall never be abandoned in our needs, nor ignored in our supplications and desires, provided, that through the charity we exercised with regard to our deceased brothers and sisters, we have been fortunate to make God our debtor. Because He said: ***What you did to one of the least Brothers of Mine, you did it to Me*** [Mt 25:40]<sup>60</sup>.



<sup>57</sup> Early Sermons, n. 37. The Beatitudes. **MssB 1267-1296 PVC pp. 216-224.**

<sup>58</sup> St. Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*. Book 4, c. 55. PL 77, 420, ff.

<sup>59</sup> St. Augustine, Sermon 172, 2. PL 38,936.

<sup>60</sup> Early Sermons, n. 31. 'The Souls in Purgatory'. **MssB 1139-1149. PVC pp. 196-199.**