

Our Lady's Retreat.doc

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Our Lady's Library
Convent of the Maternal Heart of Mary

Our Lady's Retreat

or

Mary's Whispers

To her children during a nine days retreat.

APPROBATION

We have read with much pleasure *Our Ladys Retreat*, another in the series of devout and beautiful works written by the authoress of the *Path of Mary*, and called by her *Our Ladys Library*. And we heartily recommend it, together with the rest of the series, to all our flock and to those especially who are aiming at perfection in the interior life.

+ EDWARD, Bishop of Nottingham.
Christmas Eve, 1883.

NOTICE

This retreat is suitable for all, as a preparation for devoting themselves to God, either in religion or in the world. It may be profitably used by the Children of Mary, in preparation for consecration to her, or renewal of consecration.

It is also intended to be used by Religious, upon occasion of Renewal of Vows, and at other times.

PREFACE

This little work, *Our Ladys Retreat*, will be found exceedingly useful, not only for Religious, for whom it is principally intended, but also hardly less so for all persons who are striving to serve God in the ordinary paths of life. It is one of the series called *Our Ladys Library*, of which the first Rev. Mother of the Convent of the Maternal Heart of Mary, at Hyson Green, near Nottingham, is the authoress. She has been now more than a year in Rome, where she is establishing, with the sanction of superiors, a House of her Institute.

This is the seventh of the series, and is, like the rest, remarkable for its exceeding earnestness and religious fervour. Each and all of the series will be found to

Earnestness in God s
service

Sorrow for sin

Mary s sorrows for our
sins

The soul finds Jesus on
the cross

combine two things not always seen together in writings of this class, - spiritual and ascetic devotion of a very high order, along with the most practical advice, descending to the smallest details of everyday life.

But perhaps the best way to recommend it will be to give the words of our leading Catholic review on the works of the series already published. The *Dublin Review*, for October 1878, speaking of the *Spiritual Exercises of Mary* says:

These *Spiritual Exercises* are founded upon de Montfort s plan, in which the servant of Mary is to dedicate himself to her for life, after a spiritual preparation extending over many days. The object of the meditations, which are eminently beautiful and practical, is, first, to divest the mind of the spirit of the world, and then, by self-knowledge and a nearer study of Jesus and Mary, to clothe it anew with their double spirit. The book is part of that admirable propaganda of devotion to the Blessed Virgin which is one of the works carried on by the Convent of the Maternal Heart of Mary, at Nottingham. It has the advantage, not only of approval, but also of revision by the Bishop of the diocese, and since it might be used, not only for a few days, but as a *vade mecum* by those devoted to Mary, it ought to enjoy a large popularity.

The same review, for October 1883, says of the last published work of the series, *Loves that Reign in the Heart of Mary*

Another charming little work from the pen of one, who has striven so earnestly to propagate devotion to our Blessed Lady. The authoress at times reminds us of some of the traits in Father Faber s style. The great charm of her writings, to our mind, is the glow and fervour that light up the smallest phase, the unmistakable warmth of desire to win souls to God. Under the title of the work, the authoress has ingeniously developed the love of Mary for the different virtues that should grace the religious and secular life.

The *Month* also has spoken in terms of praise of these little books. It only remains to hope that *Our Ladys Retreat* may, by God s blessing, produce all the fruit, which its pious authoress intended and desired in writing it.

H.M.W.

Kenilworth.

PRAYER TO OUR BLESSED LADY IN RETREAT

My Mother, sweet Mother of Jesus, whose child I am, to whom I belong as thy very own, I come to thee now, asking thee to lead me into solitude, to give me thyself this Retreat, to teach me to know myself, to teach me to know Jesus.

Thou who knowest him more perfectly than any other of his creatures, make thy child to know him likewise.

Give me sweet thoughts of God; teach me truths about him.

Be near me, dear Mother, at all my exercises, and conduct them thyself.

And send thy holy angels to surround me night and day, guarding me from evil, shielding me from temptation, from suggestions of God's enemy, who, opposing all good, will seek to disturb and distract my mind, and so trouble it that I may be hindered from hearing the whispers of God's Holy Spirit.

Do thou, sweet Mother, be by my side, that God's grace may work in my soul so powerfully that, coming forth from this retreat renewed in soul, I may live a life of love on earth, and so work for, and suffer for, God's children here.

That I may be an instrument for their eternal salvation in heaven.

Oh God, give me grace.

May my Mother show me how I may best use it when given.

PRELIMINARY REMARKS

Whoever you may be that are now preparing to enter this retreat, you may think it a light matter it is upon which you are entering. From all eternity God destined this certain portion of time for you, during which he will give you special graces, if you are prepared to receive them. Again and again we must repeat that we receive grace from God in proportion to our own efforts and our correspondence with it. This retreat is intended by God to be a time of special communion with himself. You are to commune with God, to keep close company with him. Then be not weary of his company; be not tired of it. It is ourselves we may well be tired of, not of God. We shall never tire of him if we fit ourselves to keep in his presence, which can alone be done by humility. And it is for want of this that we grow weary, that we do not hear God's sweet voice that we do not come closer, nearer to him.

Let us, then, listen for God's voice during this retreat. Let us seek those means that will enable us to sustain his pure, holy presence, and these means, I say, are humility and contrition. Therefore, the manner in which this retreat is arranged is that we may lay a good foundation of humility and self-knowledge at the commencement. We arrange our time into three parts, whether it be three weeks, or nine days, or only six days. We have principally arranged for a nine days retreat. The first thought put before the mind is, as it were, the motto of the retreat, I will give a gift to my God. For the first three days the subject will be, who am I to give? For the second three days [it will be] what have I to give? And for the third three days [it will be], to whom do I give?

The first and second parts may be taken together, and will supply abundant matter for self-examination. Alternate meditations may be made on these two questions, who am I who give and what have I to give? If properly carried out, and the painful duty of self-examination well performed, God will show himself when we come to the third part, to whom do we give? In a manner he never did before, so great, so lovable, so beautiful, so desirable, that our souls will turn to him, and rest upon him with extreme delight, satisfaction and content.

But you must never forget that, great as is the grace of retreat, so likewise great is the evil that will accrue to your soul if you neglect this grace. This retreat will be as it were a rubicon, a turning point in your life. It may be the very salvation of your soul. Its perfection, its happiness in this world and in the next, may depend upon the resolutions made and kept in this retreat. Oh, then, enter it with a good mind, with a generous heart, with a self-sacrificing spirit. Spare no pains on your part to induce God to look upon you with favour, to stretch out his hand to you, to draw you lovingly to himself, to embrace you, and so strengthen you and invigorate you with his presence. That nevermore will you be allured by your passions, by false charms, by the world, the devil or the flesh. But firm in your allegiance to your true Lord, your Creator and God, you will fight the good fight, and carry off the crown that the angels have in keeping for you.

The angels count out the hours to their clients, hoping that each hour will give them fresh jewels to weave in the crowns of those entrusted to their care. Ask these bright, beautiful spirits how wistfully they watch the hours, those precious hours of time that should be used so scrupulously to secure and gladden our eternity. Let us not disappoint them. Let us not disappoint our patron saints. Let us not disappoint our own Mother Mary. Let us not disappoint our good God by our carelessness, by our selfishness, by our want of mortification.

This retreat, as we have said, may be the turning point in our lives. This retreat, if well made, may be intended by God to be the preparation for one of these precious graces, these touches from himself, that change sinners into saints, that change imperfect souls so powerfully that henceforth they run in the way of perfection. We know our own inability to help ourselves, we know that, anxious as we sometimes are to become better, we try and try, and do not seem to succeed. Why is this? We are like the apostles fishing the whole night and taking nothing. But struggle on, persevere, use greater efforts. It is the touch from God you need. He has shown you how incapable you are yourself of succeeding, that you may not glory in yourself, but truly acknowledge that every good gift, and every best and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights.

Be not over anxious, be content to lie low until God calls you to arise and come closer to him. It is because we are selfish, and seeking ourselves in our devotions, that God does not give us greater lights and graces. To those who seek nothing, but kneel contritely before him, confessing their sinfulness and unworthiness, not asking for any special sign of favour from him, almost dreading it, because they feel how utterly unworthy they are that God should look favourably upon them. It is to such souls God speaks; it is to such souls God draws to himself. Be of their number then, be humble, be little, be hidden, be unknown, and God will bless you and reveal himself to you, and drawing you near to himself make you taste what it is to have left all things for love of him.

THOUGHTS TO BE REMEMBERED

That Our Lady herself is giving you your retreat. You have asked her to do so, and we know no one ever asked her anything in vain; therefore, keep constantly in her presence. She will keep close to you if you ask her, if you on your part do not part from her gentle peaceful presence. Consider Mary as the favoured tabernacle where Jesus loves to dwell, Jesus in Mary. Visit him there; love him there. Think, mediate and pray to your love, ever present with his love, Mary. Mother help me. Spouse of the Holy Ghost, obtain for me the great gift of the Holy Spirit. Let me be filled with the Holy Ghost. Let me be inflamed with love. Let me be filled to overflowing with the sweet Spirit of God. My God! My God! For whom I am. My God! My God! To thee do I watch at break of day (Ps 5:2). My God! My God! By whom, and with whom, in whom, for whom I live. Let me, sweet Mother, so live by thee, with thee, in thee, for thee, that I may indeed be devoted, as Jesus, thy Son, to the glory of thy Father and his Father, nay, my Father also in heaven. Thus pray during this retreat with Mary.

PREFACE : for those preparing to renew their consecration to God.

This preface is intended for those who are making this retreat, not with the intention of offering their gift to God, of consecrating themselves to his service, but for those who intend renewing some previous solemn resolutions or vows. Very little alteration will be needed to make this plan of retreat adapted well to renew fervour and good resolutions in some, who may be in danger of growing lukewarm, or who may have made their vows and resolutions to God without fully understanding all that they had thereby pledged themselves to.

It happens sometimes with some religious that they wake up suddenly to the thought of the dignity of their state. They have never really realised it before. As is the case with converts who are brought into the Church by one means or another, and who do not realise the truths, the beauties of the Church, until long after they have entered it, and looking back they think with regret that before they were but half Catholics. But it is never too late. We shall learn a great lesson during this retreat if we so but learn a great trust and hope in God's mercy, and to know his power as God to regenerate, to recreate, to raise up to beautiful life, in a way that would be impossible, humanly speaking. Therefore, take courage, and though you may have lived years in lukewarmness, in a want of correspondence with the duties of your state, commence now to live up to them fully, at least strive to do so, rising quickly after each fall, for falls you most probably will have. Do not waste time on useless regrets, but only strive to obtain a strong foundation in your souls, by deep-rooted humility and contrition, which the salutary consideration of past sins will necessarily engender, and thus make your souls most pleasing to God.

You, who are now about to enter upon retreat, not with a view to making your vows, of giving your gift to God, but with a view to renewing those vows, to render the gift you have already made to God more perfect, and more pleasing to him, to brighten it, and to cleanse it, must strive to look upon God with as large a view, as broad a view, as you possibly can. To place before your minds first of all the great truth that God's ways are very different from those of man, his works very different. If a man sets about building an edifice, he never allows the work to be carried on wrongly if he can help it; God often acts differently. How often we see in the lives of the saints, that God has permitted them to go on for years building their spiritual edifice in a wrong way, or to remain quite at a standstill about it, or to be pulling down, as fast as they build. Thus many of the saints, perhaps the majority, went on, and then at last God stood before them as it were, and though in a hidden manner, yet wonderfully attracting them to himself. He stood before them, and a bright light shone about their darkness. A warmth of love sprang up in their hearts, such as they never before had felt.

Their soul was touched, touched by the God who created it. It would spring to him, but felt held down, weighed down by its own unworthiness, but resolved with an iron resolution to free itself from its iniquity, from its unworthiness, from the slightest stain that could hinder the embrace of its God; and hereafter it was changed. Yes, completely changed are some souls. With others there has indeed been the great change, but the force of habit and passion, combined with extraordinary temptation, have induced many lapses. Still, they rose after each lapse bravely, and persevered. Yes, persevered as those fighting, so to speak, in a stream in which they may be engulfed, who battle with each wave, and fight for life. Yes, thus they fought a gallant fight.

And we too must fight it. We too must persevere with our various temptations in the same way. We must persevere, battling with dryness, with disgust, with weariness, with weakness of soul and body. Our cry must still be, on, on, on.

The blessing we shall meet hereafter will reward us. Indeed, the blessing we receive here rewards us. The peace of a good conscience is a wondrous treasure. The calm of a soul in harmony with the will of God is worth, I will not say the richest earthly treasure, for that is infinitely below it in value, and can never make us happy. But [it] is worth far more than the pain of the struggle with ourselves in order to acquire it. One great matter to be remembered is that each struggle makes us stronger, or each defeat makes us weaker. We must fear to relax in small particulars, as a small defect, a want of prompt obedience, for instance, a want of punctuality, an omission of some exercise, may bring about a grievous fall. Be, then, most particular about the smallest matters.

Do not think that these conferences do not refer to you, as they seem to be a preparation for those who are about consecrating themselves to God. I wish you to think of yourselves as if you too were about to consecrate yourselves, letting the

past be buried with all its imperfections, and really looking upon yourselves as about presenting yourselves before the whole court of heaven. To entirely consecrate yourselves to God, looking narrowly into every part of your gift to God, the gift you make him of your soul and body, in order to see if perhaps it had never been entirely given before. And if so, then simply sorrowing over the past without disturbance or anxiety of mind, but humbling yourselves before God, and if there have been faults in the past, resolving to repair them by extra attention, extra exactitude in the future. God will cast from him the past if we will let him. He will obliterate it. He will erase it altogether. He will bury it in the vast ocean of his mercy, if we will but trust him.

Ah, then, do trust him, and cast yourselves lovingly into the bosom of his love and compassion. Never think it will be too late; never think it is too late. It is never too late whilst we are living in this sweet world of mercy. It is not too late, even if we had committed the sin of Judas, if we had committed every sin in the world. Thank our good God that it is not too late. Though thy sins were as scarlet, they shall be made white as snow (Isa 1:18).

I have thought it well to preface our retreat with these few words, for it sometimes happens that souls enter religion young. They pass their noviciate fairly well, and are professed. The years go on. Temptations or lukewarmness work in them unfavourably, and they grow careless. A retreat, or some other grace from God, recalls them to a sense of what God expects from them, to a sense of the extraordinary greatness and dignity of their state, of what they have been, and what they should have been. And they are inclined to think it is too late. Oh, if we had thought what it is to be a spouse of Jesus! Is the cry of their hearts, if we had but known; how sorry we are! And a certain despair, dangerous despair, comes over them. A certain feeling of jealousy of those who knew better what they were doing, who had been better prepared, who perhaps had had greater advantages than they themselves. And they feel a sort of envy. They wish they could begin again, and do not think that it may be that God, in his wisdom and justice, has given them this special light to make up for any disadvantages they may have had, either on account of youth, or from circumstances, which hinder their being as well prepared as they now wish they had been.

But give not way to any despairing thoughts. Look into the lives of the saints who had very much to regret in the past, and rouse your hearts; what they did you can do. There is a total change in the life of St. Theresa after years of a less fervent religious life. Read of her laxities for so many, many years, and how wonderfully she made atonement for the disedification given by them, and you will be encouraged to think that it is never too late. Look at the life of St. Giacinta Mariscotti, who did not at once wholly reform her life, but kept commencing and then relapsing, commencing and relapsing. God so mercifully [raised] her again after her repeated falls, and at last there came a time when she fell no more into any serious relapse. Take

example from these saints, - so many, many more could be quoted.

Turn to God now with a child-like confidence. Tell him that by his grace all the old things are passed away, and that if indeed through human frailty they do spring up again, yet one thing you will never do, you will never doubt him more. You will rise again. You will trust him to help you do so. But that now you have resolved by his grace to look into yourself, to know yourself better, and to ward off better the snares of Satan, to learn to fight with your corrupt nature, how to come off conqueror, instead of being conquered, as has too often happened.

Do not, then cavil at the expressions used in the conferences, as though they did not refer to you, and were but fit for novices. Imagine, as I have told that you are but now preparing to consecrate yourself wholly to God s service. That you are about to offer your gift, which will be as acceptable to God now, nay, perhaps more acceptable, than if at first it had been offered in its freshness and never tarnished. It will have now the brightness of Our Lord s passion upon it, and reflect more powerfully the divine attribute of mercy.

PREFACE FOR RETREAT FOR PROFESSION

Profession! What is it? What does it mean? Profession of what? There are various professions, - profession of faith, &c. What profession do we mean? Profession of being what? Profession of being a spouse of Jesus, bound to God, wholly his. Oh, God, to be thine only, to be God s! God s what? God s child? Yes, thank him; thank his great mercy alone, we are that. But to be God s consecrated spouse! What an awful, what a consoling thought! It humbles one in the very dust to consider it. Spouse of Christ, sponsa Christi, God s Church will call us. And what are we, and what have we done, to obtain this great title, this wondrous privilege?

Oh, God, uphold us with thy strong right hand ere we faint with fear. Oh, God, trusting to thy great mercy, compassion, and love, we come to thee, praying thee thyself to prepare us, to strengthen and enlighten us, that we may seek thy holy will alone in this tremendous act; this step we are about to take. Oh, let us beg of God the grace to make it worthily. Let us beg of God that we so make use of these days set apart, these days far too few, to prepare for this step which we desire to make for his sole honour and glory. Let us not doubt his willingness to give. Let us not, because of our true sense of our unworthiness, despair or grow desponding. The cry may indeed come from our hearts, Lord, depart from me, for I am a sinful creature (Lk 5:8). But at the same time we are hoping that he may himself draw us closer and closer, make us nearer and dearer to himself. We might indeed fear if we were taking this step of our own will without being called to it by God. We might indeed fear, and we should fear, lest we make it with a light mind, even though called to it by God. He still requires of us a fitting preparation. He requires that we should solemnly and seriously consider the step we are taking. God help us, God

assist us, we need it.

But one look at our Mother, she is more anxious to prepare us than we are to be prepared. To the true child, who has let herself during her noviciate be guided by that sweet Mother, what comfort now. To the soul that thus has faithfully kept to the resolutions of the retreat before clothing, what a joy! And if there have been failures, if there have been negligences, if there has not been a steady purpose throughout, still must we take good heart, still will our mother do her best if her child will do her best. If the failures of the time of noviciate have been simply those natural to human infirmity, take heart, and great steps may be made during the time of retreat. And even if there has been habitual negligence, do not despair, nor abandon a vocation of which you have no reason to doubt. By Mary's help, you can yet gain that strong efficacious grace which will make you truly faithful.

Happily shall we put our hand in the hand of Jesus, our heart in his strong loving Heart, and vow our vows to God, if we have well prepared ourselves. Let us not be downcast. God can work in one moment if he will. He can change a sinner into a saint. If the days of this retreat are well spent, we may come forth pure, beautiful in the sight of that loving Lord whose own we are to be hereafter, by whose life we are to live, to whom we are to speak, saying, My God for whom I am. Yes, we were made by God, for God, to be His. And by this solemn act of giving ourselves to him wholly, entirely, we begin on earth indeed to do as the blessed do in heaven.

Come, sweet Mother, bless thy children. Breathe a spirit of peace into their souls. Still them, that hushed and quiet, God's voice may be heard.

WHO AM I TO GIVE?

1. The first thing that we must impress upon ourselves is that we are creatures. There is a great deal more in this thought than may at first appear. We are creatures made by a good God, and for a purpose. We, therefore, belong wholly to him, and it is our duty to fulfill that purpose. Ask yourself candidly, have you always looked upon yourself in that light? Is it the case that when you have performed some act of self-sacrifice, some real act of virtue, you have regarded it as a small thing, and nothing more than your duty? If this is the light in which you regard all you do for God, well and good. It is the right light in which to view what you do, because it is a truthful light. Now, many people endeavour to hide what they do. They trouble themselves a great deal for fear of giving way to vanity. They think they are bound not to recognise the good they have done. To such people I would say: pray for the grace to know yourselves, and you will not then fear vanity. God, who is truth itself, does not wish us to be untruthful. He wishes us to know ourselves as far as it is possible. This self-knowledge will not come at once. It will go on increasing till the day of our death.

Nevertheless, if we strive earnestly to spend this week in the endeavour to know ourselves, we shall have made a great step towards laying the foundation stone of all sanctity, which is self-knowledge, the lowly sentiment of ourselves as creatures, or, in other words, the virtue of humility. Perhaps you have not been aware hitherto, how much you needed this virtue. Let the fruit of this meditation be a desire, to know yourself with some of the knowledge with which God knows you. I say with some of the knowledge, because you never will know your own nothingness and unworthiness as God does. Direct to this end your works, penances and prayers, always in union with Mary, to obtain from God this great grace.

2. We were made by God; therefore, we belong to him, with all we do, all our thoughts, words and works. You are bound to devote yourself to his service, and seek his will in all things. You belong by right to God. You are, I will not say a servant, for a servant has rights, but I will say plainly, you are the slave of God. And if there were any other words by which I could express more strongly the idea I wish to impress upon you of the absolute dominion God has over you, any more forcible word, I would use it. Consider well the truth of this, and you will acknowledge that God has greater rights over you than a master in former times had, in those countries where slavery was permitted, over his slaves. But you may object that Our Lord himself says, I have not called you servants, - more correctly translated slaves but friends (Jn 15:15). That is true indeed, but we are not to forget that our true position is evident from his words, When you have done all that is commanded, say that you are unprofitable servants (Lk 17:10).

If the Lord, in his goodness and great love, raises us up and calls us his friends, his beloved children, he does not mean us on that account to forget our true position, and say, We are slaves to no one. Yet how often this is said, even by those whose knowledge of theology should hinder their speaking what is really against the truth.

Mancipia Christi - slaves of Christ are the words used in the Council of Trent concerning Christians. Let this truth, though perhaps unpalatable to you at first sink into your mind. Put yourself in the presence of God, in your true position as his creature and his slave. The God of truth will love you with a special love when you place yourself before him in your true position.

3. The truth we reflected upon in the preceding meditation is so important that it will be well to consider it more fully in the present. It is true indeed we are children, heirs also. But we must remember we are children of God by adoption. If a master had released and raised one of his slaves to the rank of his child and heir, would he be pleased if that slave altogether forgot his former position? Even so far as never to thank the good master to whom he was indebted for his freedom and present elevation? No, certainly not. The slave would be considered to have been rendered proud by his elevation, and would probably be disgraced. He would likewise be considered, and would in fact really be, ungrateful. I think it is St. Thomas who says, True gratitude consists in esteeming a benefit as it deserves, and endeavouring to

make our benefactor an adequate return. Therefore, a person, who will not acknowledge what he owes another, who endeavours to keep it from his mind, cannot be grateful any more than he is truthful. And this would be another reason why we should earnestly try to understand our own nothingness, because it makes us more grateful to God. If we search thoroughly into what we are, creatures of God made to glorify him freely, and bound by the fact of our creation to do so, just as the sun or any other work of God is bound of necessity to fulfill the end of its creation. It will make us think very little of what we do for God. But when we consider still further what he has done for us, raising us from the rank of slaves to that of his children, it will humble us still more in the thought that we never can make him anything like an adequate return for such a favour. Imprint this thought on your mind, or rather, ask Mary to instill into you a portion of her wonderful humility, that precious gift for which the King of kings regarded this chosen one with a look of love far beyond that bestowed on any other creature. And [he] raised her above the highest of the angels, and made her their Queen.

We have considered that, being creatures and subjects, we are bound to give service, and when we give that service, we do no more than our duty. This is what Our Lord would have us understand when he tells us that when we have done all that is commended us, we are still unprofitable servants (Lk 17:10). They are the words of Truth Incarnate, and we could not dare to entertain the thought of exaggeration in connection with them. And to those, who possess a truthful knowledge of themselves, there is no difficulty in understanding them. We give God what is due to him. Happy those who give him all that is due to him.

But we give him no profit, that is to say, nothing over and above what is due, therefore, we are unprofitable. This is a plain simple truth, but, unfortunately, not enough considered, and for that reason do people spend their time labouring, fasting, watching, praying, working, and take nothing or very little. They think too much of what they are doing. They believe they have made great sacrifices, and deserve much from god in consequence. They spoil many of their works. Their hearts are not the pleasant resting place for Our Lord that he would have them be. I seek a pure resting place and there is the place of my abode, (Ps 132:14) a pure, simple, truthful heart. Mother form it within us. Or rather lend us thy Heart, that Jesus may take his delight within it, within us.

Having considered that if we do all that is commanded us we shall still be unprofitable servants, what must we now call ourselves? What are we who have not done all that is commanded us; who have broken the commands of a good and just God. Who have dared, wretched creatures, to stand in the presence of our Creator, and say, I will not serve? (Jer 2:20). What are we? Sinners, we call ourselves; but that word, so familiar, does not sufficiently impress upon our minds the utter degradation of our state, the vile things we have made ourselves, even if we have committed but one mortal sin. What figure can we use that will force more strongly

on our minds what we have done, we who have committed sin?

Soul, what have you done? You have broken the law of God. He, the Creator of your soul, loved it and drew it to himself in an ineffable union which we understand not, which it is impossible for us to realise; and your soul turned from its true Spouse, its God, its Maker, its Lover, and became an adulteress. That word will bring more home to you what you have become by sin. Turn not, then, from the unfortunate outcast in the streets with a shudder of disdain, but shudder for yourself when you consider what you have done, and what you have become, by your sin. United still closer in confirmation, you were unfaithful again, and forsook him. United in the wonderful sacrament of love with Jesus, your God Incarnate, that he might draw still nearer to you, you approached and united yourself to him only to cast him forth with contempt, and even loathing. And if after that you committed sin, the soul that was in truth espoused to God, forsook its Lord and Master, and became an adulteress. Think what a wife becomes, even in the eyes of a corrupt world, when she leaves her lawful husband, and seeks other love besides her lawful love, and finally rejected by all, becomes the wretched creature that the very passers-by turn from as they encounter her in the streets. You too turn with disgust from such a miserable object. But this woman, so despicable to the eyes of man, is but a shadow of what you are, and infinitely less horrible in the sight of men than your soul is in the sight of God and his holy angels when in a state of sin.

Think of this with tears at the feet of Mary. She will stretch out her arms to you, and tell you not to be disheartened when you find what you have really done in committing sin. She will console you with the thought of the new birth for which you are preparing, when all the old things are to be put away. She will tell you that her special office is towards sinners. The greater the sinner, the more glory will there be to mercy, beloved attribute of God, when that sinner becomes a saint. For this reason may Mary have chosen you in preference to some soul that had never lost its baptismal innocence.

6. I have said that a soul in a state of mortal sin is, in the eyes of God and His holy angels, infinitely worse than a woman is in the eyes of the world who has lost her character. Now, let us reflect that with many of these sinners, with whom perhaps we have never thought of comparing ourselves, often as we say that we are great sinners; let us reflect that we cannot compare ourselves favourably with them because we really are so much worse. That woman whom you will not even notice because she has disgraced herself, had, perhaps, never been baptized: but you, who were consecrated, and made the temple of the all pure, all holy God, have profaned His temple; you have committed sacrilege. I doubt if there is one Catholic in twenty who sufficiently considers this truth, the greatness of his sins in comparison with the sins of others who have never received the sacraments and the graces which he has received. We often read of fearful crimes which strike us with terror. We never for an instant compare our own sins with these crimes, and yet

perhaps ours are worse, far worse, in the sight of God. Again, we may consider that God, who is the truth, sees not only what is, but likewise what would be in all possible circumstances. Therefore, He may know, in His divine wisdom, that in certain circumstances we should have committed the same, or may be, far worse crimes than those we read and hear of.

Think of this truth, and while you consider it forget not, forget not to return thanks to the good providence of God that has so guarded you from evils and temptations which would have proved too strong for you. Whilst you are considering what you are in the sight of God be sure you rejoice with Him in the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady, the only one of His creatures of this world who always appeared fair, and beautiful, and spotless, in his sight; the only one of this earth whom He could, so to speak, trust never to fail him in any circumstance.

7. In our last meditation upon the knowledge of ourselves it will be well to consider the greatness of our dignity before the fall. We are so given to run to extremes, that the preceding meditations may have induced us to take too low a view of human nature. That is not my object at all. We were made a "little less than the angels;" we are their younger brethren. We were created in Adam immaculate; and to his pure nature, from the instant of its creation, there was superadded a participation of the divine nature by grace. Besides, do we not possess a soul made to the likeness of the Blessed Trinity? And the body in which dwells this immortal soul, though formed of clay, is it not fashioned to the likeness of the Son of Man? We must think upon this, we must think upon the greatness of our nature, in order to understand the depth of our fall. Let us, then, consider well these facts.

We were created in Adam immaculate, and in him we incurred the guilt of sin, and by that one sin, which we cannot say we should not have committed in this world.

That the nature made only a little lower than the angels, so that in truth we may be called their younger brethren, has been reduced to such a state, stripped of sanctifying grace and "prone to evil from out very childhood," that in some respects it resembles the nature of the devils.

That the sanctifying grace with which we were enriched by baptism we have perhaps cast away, to feed on the husks of swine.

That the likeness of the ever Blessed Trinity has been blotted, blurred, disfigured in our soul.

That the body, made to the likeness of the Son of Man, has been abused: in how many ways let each one's conscience tell.

You may draw back from the comparison I feel inclined to make, and it is a thought we hardly like to think, much less write, but that we may hate sin more I will write it.

Look upon that immaculate Virgin, bearing Jesus in her womb; then think what would be our grief if you were told that, even after the union of her body and soul

with God, she would fall away, she would rebel against her God, even as the rest of creatures had done. You would, if I may so express it, feel pity for God; you would exclaim, how grievous, how terrible! I would not hurt your feelings, for I know that your love and reverence for your Mother Mary like not this comparison. I only make it to bring to your minds more forcibly the fearfulness of sin, and to make you grieve in heart as you think with sorrow of God's beautiful creation of human nature, fresh and immaculate from the hand of its Creator, even united with Him by the wonderful union of sanctifying grace, and then sin coming with its blasting power, and human nature so fearfully fallen and disgraced. Think again of that other union with God vouchsafed to Christians, by which the Holy Spirit takes up His abode in the soul, as in a temple dedicated to Him.

Think of your first communion; think how you prepared to receive Jesus and promised to keep Him ever with you, and dwell upon the union then for the first time vouchsafed to you, a union by which Jesus comes and dwells in you as really as he did in Mary, since at the time of communion you possess the Body and Soul, the Heart and the Blood of Jesus. Think of the love that brought Him to your unworthy self, and then think how, perhaps, you cast Him forth and sent Him from you, and ask yourself whether you have reason to do penance or not. Can pride ever again come to reign in you, or can anyone ever say anything too bad of you? Oh, no? That could not be possible, you now feel it in your inmost heart. You have come to the last day of seven; you have devoted it to self-knowledge, and now you will commence with joy to strive, with God's grace, to know Mary better, Mary His chosen one, Mary your own Mother. The knowledge you have acquired of the sinfulness of your nature in its present state, will make you more grateful to God that that nature has been raised to so high a dignity in the person of Mary; and in the succeeding week, when we shall endeavour to know our dear Lord better, we shall be still more filled with wondering admiration at the marvelous condescension of God in assuming our nature to Himself.

SE LF-EXAMINATION

We are still examining ourselves upon ourselves. It is not pleasant work. We find ourselves, if we are looking into ourselves truly and without disguise, we find ourselves - do not be hurt at the word, I cannot think of any better, - very nasty, unspeakably nasty. We can scarcely bear the sight of ourselves, and yet we feel comforted with this humiliating sight of ourselves; we feel we are nearer and dearer to God than before, when we were not so humiliated, when we did not see ourselves in our true colours. We say from our hearts, it is good for me, O God, that Thou hast humbled me, for before I was humbled I offended. But as we have found so much more than we thought to find of our naturally sinful inclinations, there may be still more we have not found; and how terrible to have something within us that is displeasing to our good God. If we have used the light God has given us well, we are not, though certainly somewhat subdued, yet inwardly rejoicing. If we are

chagrined, irritable, peevish, it shows that we are very full of self-love, and so not like to own to ourselves what we are; we would wish to make excuses, we would almost be inclined to be envious of others' spiritual good; we are moody, morose; we have not God's spirit in us, Do not give way to this. Humble yourself still more, if this has been, as it shows you still more what you are; it is a great sign how deeply rooted self-love is in you. This especially is likely to happen with people considered good, who bear a reputation for goodness, who have no great passions to make them know themselves. These people, almost insensibly, or quite insensibly to themselves, have themselves acquiesced in the opinions of others regarding themselves. They have a good opinion of themselves, and have a secret pleasure in the good opinion of others. When this is somewhat shaken by one means or another, a retreat for instance, the word of a friend or it may be of an enemy, they become disquieted, saddened, dulled, instead of flinging themselves in contrite love at our dear Lord's feet, and acknowledging truthfully and humbly that before they were humbled they offended, but that now, trusting in His mercy and goodness, they hope they have found favour with Him.

Do not fall into this too common error, do not hide yourself from yourself, if you begin to think, and really see, that you are not so good as you imagined you were. Thank God, His grace is really working in you; do not lose the good seed by trouble and discontent, by giving way to sadness, irritability, &c.; but casting away all self-love, thank God with a full heart for His goodness in thus showing you your defects instead of allowing you to go on blinded by self-love. Others besides you have had self-deceit, but they got out of this thick darkness, or mist, whichever it may have been, and basked in the sunshine of the light of God. If you would do that be assured you have much in yourself that you cannot see, Be ready always to believe what others may tell you of yourself. Be not ready to think they are mistaken, or that they do not understand you. It is a common thing to hear it said, "so and so does not understand me." Ten to one the chances are that so and so had been telling the said person his or her faults. Now we have most of us come across certain apparently very pious people, with great eccentricities, with a considerable amount of quiet self-conceit about them, which conceit and self-love may be found out at any moment, if an attempt be made to take them to task, or to hint to them that their ways are not God's ways, but their own whims and fancies; Then their self-love, their want of humility, and therefore want of solid virtue is plainly discernable to all but to themselves. Well, we do not want to be like them; they do harm instead of good to religion, making people think that if going to church and saying long prayers has that effect upon souls, they would rather avoid than follow such example. These people are none instance of how we can deceive ourselves; others could be cited. We have many of us come across certain persons who render themselves despicable to others by their pride of family, their boasting ways, their vanity, &c. Sometimes such people are encouraged in their weakness by others, in order that they may be made fun of, and they fall insensibly into the snare. They are so blinded that they do not perceive that they are objects of ridicule. Well, in the

spiritual life the same thing happens. We may be simply despicable when we are thinking ourselves far advanced in virtue, and despicable on account of our sins and offences that we know, but despicable for our offences that we do not know and ought to know. The angels respect the contrite sinner, but they hold in contempt the conceited Pharisee. It is very easy to take a wrong view of ourselves, or to glide into the slippery ways of self-deceit. We do not become Pharisees all at once, any more than we become great sinners all at once. We may, however, have some particle of Pharisee about us, we may be on the verge of becoming one; and this Retreat may save us if we are open and true to ourselves.

O God, enlighten us. Holy Spirit, come. Mother, spouse of the Holy Ghost, pray for us, that we may live in light in this world, and come hereafter to the eternal light of heaven.

WHAT HAVE I TO GIVE?

A body made like to the Son of God, capable of working and suffering like Him; a heart that can love Him, that can become like the Sacred Heart of Jesus by its love for God and man. Still more: I have a soul possessed of three powers, memory, understanding and will. All can be given to God, all should be given to God. Yes, I will give a gift to my God, and my Mother will make an offering well pleasing to the Most High.

"Yes, my child," she seems to say; "but thou must do thy part to assist me."

"Yes, Mother, I will, I will. What can I do?"

"See, my child, and examine how thou hast hitherto used that body which is the temple of God. Look and examine."

And Mary's face beams purely, sweetly, lovingly upon the little child of earth, who cowers down, who hangs her head, in the presence of the pure holy Mother, with her immaculate body, with the loving heart of love that seemed to warm and encourage the little soul at her feet, even while the purity of her presence humbles that soul in the dust.

One thought of her own sinful body, and of the pure body of Mary, has forced tears front the little one, wishing, as she does, to be Mary's own child, wishing to be Jesus' spouse: but in the presence of the Immaculate Mother she is led to examine herself, and to ask, "How have I hitherto used my body?" What remembrances crowd up, what sinful indulgences! How has every member its separate sin, above all; the tongue, - the tongue upon which has so often rested the Body and Blood of Jesus! How has that tongue been used? Think, my child, and consider. From early morning till late at night, has it been used to praise God, has it been used purely for His service; or has it, on the contrary, been used in opposition to His will! Has it been used to break some law of God? Has it been used as a note of some beautiful

instrument, which is indeed sweet in its proper place; but which, when wrongly and improperly used, causes discord, and destroys instead of producing the harmony it is intended to produce?

Mary speaks to each of us, and says, "My little one, look into thyself, examine and see what goods thou hast, for now thou canst be steward no longer. In future I shall be the guardian of thy goods. Thou wilt give all to me, to be guarded for my Son, and then thou wilt no longer have aught of thy own. But examine and see what thou hast. Look upon all. See the hands that should work for God alone; see the feet that should never be wearied in His service; see the lips that should unceasingly praise the great, good God; see the beating heart, capable of such great love, so influenced by the emotions of the soul, and so far oftener influenced by selfish emotions than aught else; and yet that heart should unceasingly beat with love of Jesus. Ah, my child, my little one, - and Mary bends over her little one, - look this day upon the body you are going to offer entirely to the service of your God, and tomorrow we will examine the soul with its wondrous powers and privileges, the soul made to the likeness of the Ever- Blessed Trinity. God made thee, both body and soul; God loves thy very flesh, for it is His own creation; God desires that thou shouldst offer thyself to Him, body and soul. But wouldst thou offer Him a stained, a worthless gift? Ah, no; thou hast said, 'I will give a gift to my God.' Then let that gift be pure."

"Ah, would that it were," is the murmur of the little soul at Mary's feet; "would that it were. What would I not give, what would I not do, to purify my body and soul from the slightest stain, and make them more pleasing in the sight of God."

"My little one," speaks Mary, "deliver thyself to me, and I will make thee a most pleasing and acceptable offering to my Son. Do you think I could permit a docile child of mine to become the bride of Jesus without having on the ornaments and dress wherewith to please Him? No, my child. Be obedient to me, and the body you offer to Jesus when you are bound for ever to Him shall be an offering He will prize. The soul shall be bright, glittering, purified in His own Precious Blood; the soul that is to be henceforth the precious fruit of that Blood, the dearly-prized, hard-earned fruit of the Passion of the Lord and Lover of that soul."

"My child, I would do this for thee, but I cannot without thy own consent, without thy freewill. Thou must deliver thyself to me and those I place over thee, to mould thee at their will; and the more thou shalt grow into the form I would have thee, the more and more must thou be tried, as gold is tried in the fire."

As the flower when crushed throws out such sweet perfume, so the tried soul of the generous giver to God exhales an inexpressibly sweet odour to God, and angelic choirs look upon that soul with love and reverence, and Jesus draws it to Himself with His own sweet untold love, love which yet hardly seems untold or unknown to the soul encompassed with it, Still, the soul can only know that though it feels in part

that love, the kind of love it is, it can never know it in its degree, it cannot know its excess, its intensity; it feels the sweet love of Jesus, the kind of love, but it cannot know its extent, the soul knows it cannot know that.

Oh, love of Jesus! Oh, sweet atmosphere of Jesus, sweet presence of Jesus everywhere all around the soul that truly loves Him, sweet "unconscious consciousness" of Him at all times! Ah, my Jesus, my Jesus, that soul alone knows Thy sweetness which has given a gift to Thee, the gift Thou prizest so highly, the gift of itself, its worthless self, which thou canst change, which Thou wilt change, and make less unworthy. Indeed, indeed we are worthless; indeed, indeed we are selfish. If we think of our body, and the use we make of it, we are ashamed; if we think of our soul, what subject of humiliation we have! Let us not excuse ourselves, but, prostrate before our God, now humbly confess our guilt, and beg pardon of Him, promising Him penance for our offences against him.

THE POWERS OF THE BODY

We cannot say regarding the body what we must as regards the soul, - that people do not value it. They do value the body, almost every one does but the saints, and they, though they despised their bodies, still valued them; but they valued them rightly, they valued them because made to the likeness of the body of the Son of Man. But they treated them hardly, they kept them down by penance and mortification, lest they, being the inferior, should raise themselves above the superior, - the soul, - according to the general rule in this perverse world, where the inferior ever strives to raise itself above its superior.

Now, the body strives to master and even to destroy the beautiful soul, and it is our business to treat our body as, what in truth it is, an unruly animal, and to keep it in check. What a figure does a man make who is riding a headstrong horse that he cannot tame, that he is not master of, who, not being a skilful horseman, knows not how to keep his horse in check; such a one is an object of ridicule. On the other hand, a skilful rider on a high-spirited horse, who knows how to manage it and tame it, is admired for his bravery and skill. How despicable are we, then, when we keep not a tight rein over our passions, when we give way to them, and let them run away with us, when we allow the body to master the immortal soul. How we render ourselves despicable in the sight of God's angels and saints by permitting this. The beautiful image of God, the soul, that immortal soul which has imprinted on it the likeness of the Ever-Blessed Trinity, is made the slave of the body, is completely under its sway, bound down by it, not its master, as it should be, but its slave. This is manifestly contrary to the will of God. This cannot be right, this cannot be reasonable. Such an evil must be fought against with an iron hand, must be overcome. As long as there is one little inclination or passion that we are not master of, that masters us, trifling as it may seem to be, we are not safe, we cannot be at peace, we are in danger of being drawn into some pitfall, of permitting the

inclinations of the body to run away with the soul, of losing altogether our command of ourselves, and becoming as the brute beasts.

Let not this be so; let not the members of the body, made like to the Body of the Son of God made Man, our own Brother Jesus; let not the members of that body, I say, defile themselves. And yet it has been so; ah, yes, how deeply, how deeply. Let us not hide it from ourselves. It was bad enough indeed; we may well be ashamed, we may well sink down in confusion before our God, confessing contritely and sorrowfully our iniquity, looking upon our body with indignation because of the evil it has done us in drawing us away from God. Imagine how despicable is a woman, a wife, who seeks to adorn herself for the sake of pleasing other men rather than her own husband. How we despise such a vain, frivolous woman, even though we may be sure she would not commit herself criminally. Even so, must many souls appear despicable in the sight of the holy angels and saints, for they are intent on adorning themselves for the sake of creatures, rather than striving to render themselves beautiful in the sight of their Creator, and thus becoming fit to be enfolded in His loving embrace. Shall this ever be said of one who is a spouse of Jesus? Could it be said, unless she had renounced her high vocation? Look into the past, and examine and see how you have used your body. For the future you are no doubt firmly and truly resolved that your whole being shall be devoted to the service of God. But the greatest security you can have that it will be entirely given to God, wholly consecrated to Him. The greatest security you can have that you will not make "rapine in the holocaust," that you will not take back and use for another service what you have devoted to God's service alone; in a word, the greatest help to perseverance you can have will be true repentance for the past; and for this it is necessary you should fully review the past, and thus learn to know yourselves, and see your own vileness in a true, straightforward light, considering each member of the body that has sinned, and sorrowing over each sin, and doing penance for it.

Good God! Good God! What a view comes before us! What ingratitude, what black ingratitude for God's goodness, for His many gifts. What He gave, in His love, to make us happy, we have used in our sinfulness and selfishness against Him, in disobedience to Him, in direct rebellion. Consider the eyes, which were given by God to view His works, and love Him in them. "The heavens show forth the glory of God, and the firmament declareth the work of His hands" (Ps 19:1). If we walked in God's presence His works would make us love him: but we walk before creatures, vanities engross us, and we see not God, we miss Him. Yes: we know not our God, though He is so close to us; we know Him no more than the Jews knew Jesus, close as they were in His sweet company. There are the ears too, and the mouth, and the hands; have not these too, the precious gifts of God, been used as weapons wherewith to war against Him? Above all, there is the heart. Oh God, when we think that beating human heart so loved by God, the heart He so longs should beat with love of Himself, that He so desires to be sole possessor of; and we will not give Him our hearts, we refuse Him, we deny Him. What am I saying? God

stoops to ask, "my child, give Me thy heart;" and we refuse, or we give it and take it back again, Alas! Alas! We set apart our heart as a tabernacle for our dear Lord, a living tabernacle well pleasing to Him. And then that tabernacle thus made sacred, thus consecrated, we use for some most unworthy object, for some sinful, wicked purpose. We defile that human heart that Jesus had made His home, we desecrate it.

Ah! Well will it be for us if we continue to ponder and consider how we have sinned in our hearts, how we have offended our good God with these selfish hearts of ours. Every other part of our body that we have used sinfully has been moved and set in motion by our corrupt hearts; every sin committed has had its source in our sinful, selfish hearts. Well may we then mourn over these stained, these defiled hearts of ours, these hearts that are so pleasing to God when pure, and so displeasing, so loathsome when they are, as they are too often, black, defiled, sin-stricken, sin-soiled. But, O God, we will purify them. They shall be cleansed, they shall be, by thy grace, what Thou wouldst have them to be. They shall be hearts that Mary's hands have moulded, and have made somewhat like her own, humble, loving, generous, self-sacrificing, and for those who have sinned, as we have, contrite. Yes, a contrite, humble heart, oh God, Thou wilt not despise (Ps 51:17). Accept the gift I am preparing to give Thee, that I offer through Thy sweet Mother Mary. Let the prayer of my heart ascend as incense in Thy sight, and may angels bring from heaven to earth graces and blessings to Mary's child, to fit her to become what they so love, the Spouse of Jesus, full of humility, full of faith which worketh by charity.

Such do I wish to be; such, please God, I shall be, not in word, but in deed and in truth. Now, holding my heart before Thee, O my God, show me I beseech Thee, what there is in it displeasing to Thee, that it may be rooted out ere this heart is laid at Thy feet, an entire oblation and sacrifice to Thee, the strong, living God.

THE BEAUTY OF THE SOUL

"Words cannot tell the beauty of a soul that has died in a state of grace." No, we cannot speak adequately of the beauty of the soul. Ordinary people never even realize the fact that they cannot understand that they have the faintest possible knowledge of the beauty of a human soul. When we begin to know that we do not know, then is the sign that we are learning. When we come to see, even in ordinary matters of science or other knowledge, how little we really know, it is a sign we are really learning. It is only ignorant people who think they know a great deal, who do not see how much there is to be known, and do not know how very little they really know. But the thoughtful mind, the mind that has considered and deeply meditated upon truth, whether human or divine, sees an unfathomable abyss, an impenetrable vista of knowledge that it does not possess, that it does not even see the power of possessing, that it feels only is unsearchable and known to the divine mind of God alone. Those who possess such a mind feel sweetness in learning all they can. They are eager to discover, especially with regard to their God, all that is to be

known. And they are glad to search into His works, and discover all they can about them, for the works of God show their God to them. They are learning about Him as they learn about His works. They discover more of Him from His works.

Good God! And yet as we look upon Thee, with hearts burning with love, our minds do indeed seem dull, our knowledge but that of a beast of the field. And we would that our intellects should be cleared, our minds brightened, our thoughts, so dull and dim, raised a little to the intelligence of the angels. And we repeat the prayer of that great mind, St. Thomas Aquinas, that we may understand that we may use the powers of our soul for that purpose for which our good God intended them, to know Him and His, to see Him in His works. And by the knowledge we gain to love Him, and by our love to serve Him with the bodies He has fitted for us, that with them we may work labours of love. And that serving Him with them in this world, we may enter hereafter, with glorified body, with radiant, unspeakably happy soul, into eternity.

Let us now repeat the prayer so often used by the grand St. Thomas, to obtain from God that light without which we are not able to think right thoughts, or know the beautiful truths faith teaches us we should know.

From St. Thomas Aquinas:

"O ineffable Creator, my Lord and my God, who in unsearchable wisdom hast formed the nine choirs of angels, and set them on high above the heavens in a wonderful order, and hast exquisitely fashioned and knit together all parts of the universe. So Thou, who art the true Fountain and one essential Principle of light and wisdom, deign to shed the brightness of Thy light upon the darkness of my understanding, and thus to disperse the twofold darkness to sin and of ignorance wherein I was born. O, thou who makest eloquent the tongues of babes, instruct my tongue, and pour forth on my lips the grace of Thy blessing. Grant me acuteness in understanding what I read and power to retain it, subtilty to discern its true meaning, readiness in learning and clearness and ease in expressing it. Do Thou order my beginnings, direct and further my progress, complete and bless my ending, through Christ our Lord."

My God, my God, teach me what the soul is like, made to Thine own image and likeness. Let me learn; let me see all my clouded intellect can see of that priceless soul; let me use its power well now upon itself, and add a special light Thyself, a ray of Thy Holy Spirit, to enlighten me. My God, this beautiful soul Thou hast given man, what is it? It is carrying into effect the decree, the result, if I may so speak, of the council of the Three Persons of the Most Blessed Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, "Let us make man to Our own image and likeness" (Gen 1:26).

This likeness, then, was stamped upon the soul. To what, then, is the soul like? The everlasting, eternal, immortal God. My God, my God, what then am I? What a subject for my own thought and consideration! I did not always exist. No; but now I

shall forever. There was a time when I was not, but that will never be again; I am immortal. My soul, which is myself, my own identity, my soul will never die. My soul is made by God for Himself, to be in heaven; is made capable of enjoying God's own happiness. What an overwhelming thought: the soul is made capable of enjoying in its degree God's joy.

Most merciful God, how good, how very good Thou art. Wherefore didst Thou do this? Is it not Thy own essential goodness has constrained Thee? Thou art God, and Thou are ever giving. It is our won fault if Thou doest not give as plentifully as we would wish. It is our own fault that we shut our souls from receiving, for thou wilt give, O God, if we would expand and open our souls to receive. Dear God, sweet Jesus, our Saviour, our Incarnate God, with Thy grand sacred Soul, help us, that we may make our souls conformable to Thine, that we may let our souls be raised as thou wouldst wish them raised. We lift our souls to Thee, O most High, most mighty God. We examine them, and think what we can learn about them, that we may guard them as precious treasures entrusted to us; that we may in the first place preserve them pure, and then that we may beautify them according to the wish of our God. Day by day, hour by hour, nay, even moment by moment, we can, we should be, purifying these souls, adorning them, beautifying them by every means that we possibly can. And we have so many, many means; there is so much we could do, there is so much we could avoid, if we would.

Let us think first of what we should avoid. We are supposing the soul has received its first purification in the cleansing waters of baptism. It is beautiful, stainless, but not very long. Oh, no sad it is, most sad indeed, the soul of the child becomes stained, and that more through the faults of parents than through its own. We look back at our early years, and sorrow over our childish sins. It is well to do so; it is well to weep as we think that almost our first use of reason was to disobey, to sin against our God, to tarnish the white robe given us in baptism. As you think of it you say, "I did not know better." It is true, you did not know the beauty of your soul. Your parents were bound to supply for your want of knowledge and reason. They knew, or they should have known, the value of your soul in God's sight, how precious it was to Him. They were bound to watch over you as having to give account.

But how have you acted since you *have* learnt the beauty of your soul, and how dear it was to God? How have you kept your soul? What are you doing for it day by day now? Look and examine well. You have entered upon this Retreat with the intention of preparing to give a gift to God. You wish to make the gift as pleasing, the intention as pure as you can. Ask yourself, then, have you kept the treasure within you? How does your soul present itself in the sight of God, the all pure, all holy eyes of God? I will not suppose you are blinded by self-love. Oh, no! But looking into yourself in the presence of your Immaculate Mother, ask yourself: have I, since the light of God showed me the value of my soul, or some little of its value, some little of its beauty, have I tried with every power I possess to preserve that priceless treasure for the love of God, whose love created it? Ah, me, sorry indeed

is the sight, so sad, so sad, O my God! And burning hot the tears flow at the remembrance of the wreck you have made your soul, at its utter ruin perhaps at one time of your life. So ruined that perhaps if God's iron hand of death had struck you at that moment, you would have left this earth at enmity with your God. You, once His child, would be no longer so; you would have been the subject, the slave, of the devil forever, an object of the hatred of God, of unspeakable disgust and loathing to Him. To be loathed by God! Oh! Horrible, most horrible! O God, let it not be so. My God, terrible is the thought that it should ever have come to pass that I could change my own sin, Thy intense burning love into loathing and detestation, miserable that I am! My God, preserve me for the future, purify my soul, cleanse it from its stains. Oh God, my God, let the slightest stains, as they seem to me, be taken from me, for what I term slight is not so in Thy eyes.

These slightest stains, these nastinesses, these selfishnesses, what have they done? They have been like unpleasant disgusting odours to God, like foul spots, disfiguring marks, on what is so beautiful, so exceedingly beautiful. Yes, the soul has been compared to a beautiful globe of purest crystal, that the slightest breath will tarnish; to a most exquisite robe of purest white, upon which the smallest sin or imperfection leaves a mark as though someone had thrown mud upon it. And this does not refer to mortal sin. Oh, no, the soul in mortal sin is utterly disfigured, dead indeed to God, broken up and destroyed. The difference between the soul in mortal sin, and the soul with venial sin upon it, may be compared to this. In mortal sin it would be as though we took a beautiful statue and destroyed it, shattered it to fragments. God alone, by His wondrous power, can raise these ruins again into a beautiful statue. The soul in venial sin is like a beautiful statue, which is not entirely destroyed, but it has an arm broken, some disgusting blemish on the face, an eye wanting, or some other disfigurement.

How strange the care taken of some old china, some choice paintings, while so little care is taken of the immortal soul, the everlasting spirit, placed within the human frame, which the wonderful Creator has so skillfully fashioned for its abode. Why are we so supine about our souls? Is it not because we do not think enough of them? God help us. How foolish as well as sinful we are! How very foolish! We are like children playing with precious stones which they no more value than pieces of coloured glass. But though we think so little now of truths which are none the less truths for our not thinking them, some day we shall wake up to what we were so dull about in this world; but it will be too late then, too late. But it is not too late now, thanks to our good God. Thank Him a thousand times now that we begin to see the preciousness of our souls, and what we can do to make them more and more beautiful. How glad we are that we have yet time, how grateful we should be that we have time. Dear Mother, help me now to thank God for the light He has given me, and to profit by this grace.

"What shall I do now, sweet Mother? What shall I do first?"

"My child," she seems to say, "as when you have to fit a house or room for a guest you much esteem, our first care is to thoroughly clean it. And then to ornament it, so now purify your soul by penance, by sorrow for sin, and then commence to use the powers of your soul as God would have you do, in union with His sweet will, in harmony with Him. Then will God have what He so desires; He will have that human soul living in His light, and grace, and love, so that He may look upon it at any moment, and see His own beauty reflected in it. Clear as crystal must the soul be for the pure eyes of God. Placidly beautiful, as some fair lake upon which the sun casts its golden rays, received these rays and reflects them, and shines in their borrowed beauty. So should the soul, receiving rays of light from the Divinity, receive, reflect those rays, and shine with the beauty of its God upon it. This may be, my child, this should be.

"Souls know not their own beauty, and the complacency with which the Almighty looks upon them. They know not how they themselves hinder the looks of love they might receive from their God. They might lie bathed in the light of God's countenance, beautiful, content even on this earth, knowing and feeling the warm, bright rays of love, which God would pour upon them. But they receive not these rays, for their souls are surrounded by dark clouds, which the rays of God's grace cannot penetrate, and they remain cold and dark when they might be brightened and warmed by the light and love of God."

"But I do indeed wish to receive God's light and love. How can I best dispose my soul to receive it?" is the cry of the soul at Mary's feet.

"My child." She says. "By true contrition of soul, by humility of heart, thou wilt receive every grace and help, all light and love from God."

"Then I will now commence."

"Yes, my child, begin and continue to practise a daily lesson of constant self-denial; self-knowledge will lead you to this, and this to self-accusation and contrition before God, and this again will draw down upon you His intense and ardent love."

THE POWERS OF THE SOUL

To look upon matters in a general light is to little purpose. We have considered the soul in general, and learned to prize it better, to desire to purify it, to desire to beautify it for love of God; but let us descend to particulars. The soul has three powers: memory, understanding, and will. How, if we wish to please God, are we to use these three powers? The memory, to recollect the things of God, the understanding, to understand what he requires us, specially remembering that He requires us to do well the duties of our state of life, to use our memory and understanding upon them. And not to imagine, as some foolish, deluded souls seem to do, that God wants us to be so bent upon prayer and pious practices, as to become stupid, and to have no mind or thought for our various duties, and so not to

be relied upon. Such persons are stupid, inert, dull. They do but disgrace religion, and require a firm hand to rout them out of their disedifying ways. The Spirit of God is not in them as it should be, brightening their intellects, clearing their minds. No, they do not glorify God by their ill-advised piety. God is glorified by our performing our actions in the most perfect manner possible, by our using all the powers He has given us with which to work His works. He is glorified by our showing to the world that our religion makes us wise, by manifesting that we are children of the all-wise God, that we watch His ways and walk in *His* footsteps, who is orderly and beautiful in all He does.

Let us, then, use our intellect to perfect our works, to perform them in the most perfect manner possible. Not forgetting to employ them at every spare moment upon the one great end for which they were given us, viz., to know the Creator who created us for Himself, first to know Him, then by our knowledge to love Him, and by our love to serve Him with our whole hearts and souls. And the will, the will of our good God is so jealous of, the will that having once given us He will not touch, unless we ourselves beg Him to do so. That beautiful human will, that free- will which enables us to serve God so gloriously if we will only use it as God so desires we should. Ah, my God, trembling yet devotedly I take this will in my hands to lay it at Thy feet. By Thy grace it shall ever harmonize with Thy will. And yet I fear its weakness, therefore I tremble. My God, my good, good God, this is the gift I will give Thee. My mother, make me firm, let me not draw back and make rapine in my holocaust. Let me wholly, entirely belong to my God, and give my gift gratefully, gladly, generously. God help me, God come to my assistance, God make haste to help me to be Thine, only Thine, for time and eternity.

Let us now think of the soul God has given us, with its powers of memory, understanding, and will. Look at that marvellous work of God, the mind of man. What are minds of men in general employed on? The worldly-minded man has his mind filled with his worldly cares, his financial affairs, his various business negotiations, his enterprises, his earthly schemes. Then there is the mind of the carnal-minded man, the sensual man. See the abominations with which such minds are filled, too horrible to think of; the memory employed with recollections of sin, the understanding employed upon the past and future enjoyment of sin, the will employed to resolve upon sinful enjoyment of its own desires. Ah, turn and look upon others; what do we see? Even those who profess to have given all to God, their memory employed to recollect what will please themselves, or to bring up with a feeling of resentment what may have vexed or humiliated them. Their understanding employed to make whatever fault has been committed as little vexatious to self-love as possible, by some elaborate explanation or excuse; their will determining upon some interview, some conversation, which will satisfy their self-love in some way or other. And these are they who should be entirely filled with God's Spirit. Their memory filled with thoughts of God and holy things. Their understanding employed to understand God's designs and wishes. Their will

resolved to bend and to follow God's will. Their every desire and wish tuned in unison with His, and thus emptied of those petty thoughts which fill the minds of selfish souls, disturb and worry them, mar their characters, and altogether prevent them from being the noble creatures of God that He wishes them to be.

Let us commence now to use the faculties of our soul as God intends we should. Let us not allow our minds to be crowded with petty thoughts. Let us employ our memory, understanding, and will for God. Let us present to our memory pure images. Let us employ our understanding to think of holy things. Let us use our will so that we may never will aught but what God wills until we arrive at that happy day of entire union of will with God. That time so ardently to be longed for, when nothing, however naturally contradictory to our will, can withdraw it from embracing the holy will of God. Believing firmly what the understanding declares, viz., that nothing happens without the permission of God, while the memory dwells on that happy saying, "All things work together for good to those who love God" (Rom 8:28)

If we really used the faculties of our soul, if we have bent our minds upon God, and really live in His presence, we shall not easily forget what nevertheless is so constantly forgotten, that God permits everything. And then, in the place of that expression so often used, "What is pity?" "How unfortunate!" We shall use rather the simple expression heard in the land of faith, "Blessed be the will of God!" "Sweet will of Jesus!" And when adversities, or contradictions, or losses, come upon us, these holy words of Job will be ever on our lips, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21).

We come back to the same point, the perfection of perfections, the living in harmony with the will of God. Thus let us regulate our soul, thus let us keep our faculties in order, in union with the Divine Will, so that this soul of ours, made to the likeness of the Ever-Blessed Trinity, the beautiful jewel hidden in its casket of clay, be kept bright. The immortal soul made conformable to the immortal God who formed it. The lovely spirit, the human soul, thus imitating the unspeakably beautiful Spirit, the Mighty One, the great Creator, by whom, it was formed. Yes, we come back again to the thought we commenced with, "I will give a gift to my God." Happy, happy are we to have a gift to offer Him. Wrong, miserably wrong, should we be if we undervalued this gift. The human soul is beautiful; it is dear to God, so dear; that lovely creation of God that little being which God has fashioned. What is it upon which the angels gaze with wondering delight? It is but a poor little waif of earth, some human being, little perhaps in the eyes of men, despised, perhaps unknown, uncared for upon earth, but valued, known, prized by its Creator with unimaginable love. Do not, then, let us undervalue what God so values, but let us thank our good God with our whole hearts for giving us these hearts. Let us thank Him with our whole soul for giving us our precious soul. Let us thank Him with our whole mind for giving us this mind, with which we can know Him. The mind which, when filled with the knowledge of God, will make our hearts love Him, who will so inundate our souls

with His grace, and purify them, that they can be, and will be, united for ever to the loving God for whom they were created.

Yes, union with God, that is the end for which we were created, to be united with our God. Is this to be in the next world only? Nay, verily, but we shall only be united with Him in the next world in so far as we are united with Him in this. What a great object to strive for, to be united to God, the good God, the great God, the everlasting the Immortal One, the Mighty One, the immense Creator, our unseen Beauty, our most to be desired and Beloved, our King and Lord, our Light and Love, our nearest and dearest of all, our Life, our God, who alone is, who is alone to be adored for endless ages, forever and ever. Amen.

Union with Thee, O my God. What is it? What does it mean? It means, my child, that after struggling, after striving, after crucifying self, thy God will indeed make thee taste and see how sweet He is to those who love Him. Even on this earth thou shalt taste His peace; even on this earth thou shalt "touch" that God who made thee for Himself, and longs for thee with such unspeakable longing. But will He not be with me in my struggling, in my trials? He is, my child, with all who struggle. His grace in them enables them to support the conflict. But not with them as with those who have bravely fought and conquered, and have so subdued self, have so pushed forward, looking not back at the things they have left behind, that they have come to the "coasts of peace." Yes, they have arrived at the **coasts**. The vast ocean lies stretched out before them, fair breezes come from it, fanning and refreshing the tired souls. They seem to rest, though it is but a seeming rest, but great is the sweetness of even that seeming rest to the soul, the warrior, wearied, worn, but conqueror for God. To it a taste is given, though it be but the slightest taste, of the peace and rest of heaven. Disorders of the soul, doubts, and darkness, have passed away. Light has come, just a glimmer of that far-off light. Oh, it is good indeed to know God's power, to know that even in this world of sin and sorrow such peace and joy, and rest to the tired spirit can come. Push on, then weary ones still struggle forward; it will not be long. One earnest purpose, one fixed resolve, one constant endeavour to seek God alone, to see Him alone, and all things in Him. One steady step nearer to Him day by day, not weakly and with wavering, but earnestly, intently. And the day will come, even on this earth, when we will find ourselves so wrapt in the arms of God, so clasped in His embrace, so locked in His love, that henceforth we may say indeed, "I live no longer, but God lives in me" (Gal 2:20). I am as though I never were. His strong life has attracted and crushed my own, My God, My God, sweet, tender Lover of my soul.

The world passeth away, the creation fades, creatures die, all will soon have passed, God, and those who are Godlike, alone really living. Oh, my God, how foolish we are, how foolish indeed we are; for this short breath of time we may lose, our eternity of joy, and yet we are not happy even in time, though if we were, could that compensate for the loss of eternal happiness? We know it could not.

Let us now turn our thoughts for a short time to God alone; let us strive simply, quietly, to realize the existence of that grand life which is God. Let us desire to profit by our thought of Him, by our meditation on Him. If our souls are dry, if our poor body seems to oppress and weigh down the soul. If the things which should interest us are not interesting to us, let us nevertheless remain humbly in God's presence, saying, "I know God is, I know He lives who made me, I would like to know Him better, to love Him better. My God, I believe in Thee, I hope in Thee, I love Thee. God not only lives, but He is near, closer to me than any of His creatures. My God, my All, - God and I." Strive for a short time to forget all creatures in the thought of the great Creator. All creatures except Mary the Mother, whose eyes are bent lovingly upon her child, wishing that child could see what she sees, that it might be inebriated with a little of her joy and love. And though indeed the veil through which we must see God in this life cannot be removed, the warmth of His happy presence can yet in some slight measure be felt. **My** God, yes, my God. God, who is all for me, who has given Himself all for me, who so loves me.

Make your act of contrition, hide yourself in your dear Mother's arms, ask her to feed you spiritually with the Fruit of her womb. Pray earnestly that you may derive profit from this meditation. If we are in earnest about our works, we use all efforts we can to succeed. We take pains about the smallest details; we spare no trouble. Now, therefore, if you would make your meditation in a proper spirit, one from which you may derive profit, do not neglect the little minor matters, which will enable you to succeed. St. Ignatius, gifted in prayer as he was, was as careful as any novice in his preparation for his morning's meditation. It was prepared overnight; the subject he would think upon, then the virtue or special fruit he desired to derive from it. Now, how earnest we should be to make this meditation upon God in a proper spirit, in the reverential, humble attitude with which the little creatures should think of the great Creator. We do not like to be misrepresented either as regards our features or our dispositions; neither does our good God desire His creatures to misrepresent, to misunderstand Him. And yet how they do mistake Him; what a false likeness of Him they draw in their own minds. Oh, let us beg God to show us Himself. Let us strive to think to whom it is we give our "gift."

God's Holy Spirit! The Spirit of God! O, my God, not until we see Thee can we ever understand the Third Person of the Most Holy Trinity, the beautiful Spirit of Love, the Spirit of our God. How much do these words convey; God's Spirit is the spirit of Love! We speak of the spirit of a saint, the spirit of an order, the spirit of a nation. When we speak of God's Spirit we say, the Spirit of Love. We do not speak of God's Spirit as a Spirit of justice, of mercy, of compassion, of any other of His beautiful attributes, but we say, God's Spirit is a Spirit of Love. We know when we speaking of the Holy Spirit, we are speaking of the love of Father and Son. Let us adore as we think of these things, that we may raise our minds to understand some little of what the intelligence of angels and the mind of Mary cannot comprehend, and which

they adore with befitting love and reverence. Let us prayerfully bow down, for prayer alone can show us our God.

The love of God the Father for His Son, the love of the Son for His Father, Their mutual love is the Holy Spirit. We cannot understand this, although the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity has deigned to appear in this world under the form of a Dove, and of Fire, symbols of love, yet the infinite love of this beautiful Spirit is a mystery to us. But still we know that God's Spirit is a Spirit of Love, and we know likewise, to our great comfort and joy, that with the same love with which Jesus is loved by His Father, so are we loved by Jesus. Incarnate Truth has said it, or who could have believed it? "As the Father hath loved me, I also have loved you" (Jn 15:9).

Wonderful words of Jesus! Comforting words indeed! Who would be downcast, desponding, if they really thought of them? Who could doubt the love of Jesus with these words constantly pondered over in their hearts? How our minds travel as it were into eternity, and wonderful thoughts arise within our souls about God and His ways, as we think of them, thoughts that cannot be written. We see our dear Lord bringing us forth by His Passion of love, and loving us with the self-same spirit of love with which the Father love Him, and breathing this very same Spirit into our hearts to unite us with Himself and His Father. We see all this, and the thought rises: what, then are we? What are we now? What has Jesus made us? Ah, we know what we are, sinful creatures enough; we mourn as we think what we should be, as we think what Jesus wishes us to be. We should all be saints. Why are we not? What graces God gives! What have we done with them? What are we doing with them? Oh God, what we should be, and might be, and what we actually are! Is there no one, O my God, who corresponded with Thy graces? Is there not one creature truly grateful to Thee? Again our Mother rises in her beauty, her loveliness, her special grandeur, and we see God's wish accomplished. There is His fair creature, faithfully corresponding with His will, perfectly united to Him by grace, overshadowed and replenished with His Holy Spirit, satisfying His designs, His desire for union with us, enabling her God, if we may so speak, to fulfill his love for giving, by her faithful correspondence with the graces He gave.

Mary, thou art indeed our hope. We, thy children, look upon thee, our hopes rest upon thee. Thou hast conquered our enemy. Oh Mother, help us that we may conquer him too, that we may overcome that evil spirit, who has never had part in thee. Oh Mother, be our aid; come to our help, or we faint in the way. Mother, thou dost ever reflect thy God. We contemplate thee again now, receiving again from thy God; The Father pouring upon thee the Spirit of love as He proclaims thee the daughter of His love; the Son filling thee with love as He calls thee, Mother. We see thee, Mary, enfolded in the embrace of the Holy Spirit, as He calls thee His spouse. Truly, Mother, that thou art a wondrous being; and yet, as we think these high thoughts of thee, what is uppermost in our minds? It is sweet Mother, that thou art a Mother of love, imitating Thy Divine Spouse. When we think of our great God, His grandeurs, His wonderful attributes dazzle us; but over all, above all, before all, we

see His love shining everywhere radiant. So is it with thee, sweet Mirror of God. Before all, above all that we can know or think of thee, is the knowledge and the thought of thy love. Mother, may it be ever thus, and may it be our joy in eternity, to know that thou art the joy of the Heart of God, because He can look upon thee without spot, and see His own divine attributes reflected perfectly in thee.

And in our measure, sweet Mother, may it be so with us. May we so follow thy footsteps, and imitate thy example; may we so aim at what is most perfect here, that our lives on earth may delight our God, and our eternal life in heaven be an eternal joy to that dear God who deserves so much from us. We can do much, dear Mother, if thou wilt help us, Teach us, Mary, to walk all our lives in thy footsteps; teach us, our Mother, so to imitate thee that God may bless this earth where Mary's sweet life of love is again shown forth in her children.

Mother, make us love the sweet Spirit of our God. Increase our devotion to the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity. What graces will not this devotion bring with it. Untold will be the graces that devotion to the Holy Spirit will bring us. Graces incredible to those, who have not this love for God's Love, the beautiful Spirit of God, by whom if we live we shall be indeed not of this earth, earthy, but though on earth we shall have our souls in heaven. Yes, heaven is already begun in the souls of those who live by God's Spirit. Who have opened their hearts to receive Him, who have received, by means of God's fair fountain, our dear Mother Mary, the Holy Ghost into their souls with such love and devotion, with such renunciation of their own selves, their own spirit, that they are indeed living temples of God. And the Holy Spirit dwells in them with love untold, penetrating their human nature, filling it with the priceless gifts of God, charity, joy, peace, patience. These are God's gifts, even whilst we are on earth: joy, peace, content, happiness. Those who have joy on this earth, those who have peace, are wrapt in the embraces of the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity, the beautiful Spirit of God. Let us now humbly pray that we may never, by any sin or imperfection, ruffle the repose the Holy Spirit should find within us.

THE JUSTICE OF GOD

Oh God, when thou dost exercise Thy justice, Scripture speaks of it as Thy strange work. Strange; yes, for it is not the work thou delightest in, as Thou dost in the exercise of Thy mercy; and yet it is equally adorable: can we say equally beautiful? Yes, God's justice is beautiful. Father Faber tells us we are not required to rejoice in this attribute of God, as in others, which naturally excite our love. We are creatures of hope and mercy; we are living in a world of mercy, God's mercy is our very life, or we should not live. Our daily, hourly, momentary prayer should be: thank God for His mercy, love Him for His love and mercy. His justice makes us shudder as much as His mercy makes our hearts bound with thankful love and glad hope. But still God's justice is beautiful. All God is adorable. It is Father Faber again who tells us

that the purity of God shines resplendent from the fires of hell, lit up by His sacred justice.

We have spoken elsewhere of Our Lady, how that she did not hide from herself the sight of God's justice. As we look upon a beautiful picture, with its lights and shadows, clouds and sunshine, so God's beauty would not have been to her complete without the dark shadows of His justice. The brightness of His beauty would be indistinct. It would not be so beautiful without the black clouds of His justice, His glistening purity, His shining mercy, His sweet compassion, all, all need His dark justice to counterbalance, to enhance, the beauty of that sweet vision we hope one day to gaze on.

Holy Angels, clear away the mists that darken our intellects, that we may think rightly now of that attribute of God, adorable and beautiful as all God is, that attribute we poor creatures of earth trembling contemplate, but which you, bright spirits of love, nevertheless exalt and rejoice in.

But there is the justice that rewards as well as punishes, and yet the justice that rewards seems rather mercy than justice. The justice that remembers the cup of cold water, and rewards it, is wondrous. The justice that regards every little deed, word or thought that treasures it up, and proportions the reward to its purity and fervour; this justice seems to us so marvellous, so godlike, disclosing to us the wisdom and power of God. Yes, God's justice is inconceivable, unlike anything we have ever seen, or read about, or thought of. Whoever thought that he was bound in justice, strict justice, to requite every little act of kindness done to himself? But God thinks so: it is honourable to Him, it is to His glory, it is like himself, it is necessary to Him, it belongs to His very nature, to show this justice, to reward the cup of cold water given in His name. How otherwise would He be the absolutely independent God? How otherwise would He not be under obligation to His creatures? It is good for us, then, to think of God's justice. It is for us to incline our hearts to keep His word, because of His *justifications*. His word is love. We must love Himself, we must love His creatures, we must do good to him in doing good to others, for He is just, and will reward us, dear God that He is! He will forget nothing.

Seldom do we ever find any person however holy, who treasures up every little act of kindness, valuing it, endeavouring to make a return for it, gratefully solicitous that not a single act of the kind should go unrequited. No, the saints were very grateful. But how different is their gratitude for the gratitude of God, that gratitude from the gratitude of God, that gratitude which He calls justice. Thus, as we have said elsewhere, do His attributes run one into the other, thus the difficulty of speaking of one of God's beautiful attributes without speaking of another.

We have wandered from the justice that punishes to the justice that rewards. It is so far easier to write about than that dread justice, and yet we could not think of God

without that punishing attribute. We do realize our close connection with Him. We cannot put into words why it is we feel and know, as we meditated upon God and our union with him, the absolute necessity of His punishing sin. Quick as the pain which follows any disruption of God's order and law in our bodies, such as a broken limb, a dislocated member, so quick too, is the punishment allotted to each sin, each violation of God's law laid down for the good of soul and body. For one deadly sin, deadly punishment, yes, one mortal sin committed, and straightway the fires of hell are lit up for that one sin. Death for one mortal sin, yes, death, temporal and eternal, is the punishment accorded to that human body and soul for the transgression of a law of God. The Most High will not alter His decision. His sacred justice demands the infliction of this punishment upon the human race.

But, Father, I will die for our people, speaks the Eternal Word, the Son of His love.

Thou hast fitted a body for Me; then I said, behold I come (Ps 40:6-7). Yes, dear Lord, He came, He came to take upon Himself our punishment. He came as a Victim to the *justice* of the Most High. Look and see you, who think little, who think lightly of the justice of God, who put it on one side. Look upon the Lamb of God see the Victim of the unalterable justice of God. See Him in His passion. See the mangled body of the most beautiful among the sons of men. See Him scourged. See Him lashed. See Him stripped and buffeted. See Him thrown down, trampled on, spat upon. See the Victim for the sins of the human race. See, and think that the Eternal Father would sooner suffer this than alter the decrees of His justice, and you will gain a clearer insight into this adorable attribute than ever before. See the Son of God hung by His hands and feet, suspended between earth and heaven. See his life, His Precious Blood, pouring from Him, as an expiation, as a satisfaction to the justice of God, that our sins required. See Him finally in the presence of the sweetest of human beings, His immaculate, spotless, broken-hearted Mother, dying the death of a criminal, crushing the soul of the one He loved most, the one He loved more than all His creatures. See this, and bow down in the lowliest adoration of the awful justice of God, to satisfy which Jesus shed His Blood, suffered, broke His Mother's Heart, and died. Yes, everything must give way to this: He must satisfy the outraged majesty of God. Human nature had transgressed, had insulted God: human nature must suffer. Human nature of itself could not satisfy, not even in the eternal flames of hell, therefore, Jesus suffered, therefore, He offered His Body to torment and death, in reparation for the sins of men, in satisfaction to the justice of His Father.

Can we think, then, God's justice little? Can we think, because His mercy is so great, that His justice is slight? If He spared not His Only-begotten, how can we think He will overlook our transgressions? Because He forgives, are we to think He will require no satisfaction? No, indeed no, we know our dear Lord's satisfactions are our own; but we have, as Christians, to join ours to His, our little, comparatively so little, sufferings to His great sufferings. His immediate followers set us this example;

we cannot exempt ourselves. Be ye imitators of me, as I am of Christ (1Cor 11:1), speaks the Apostle, who chastised his body, who filled up in his flesh those things that were wanting of the sufferings of Christ (cf. Col 1:24).

We cannot understand sometimes the life of penance led by many great saints. But it was a view they had of God's justice, the clear light vouchsafed them of this adorable, this awful attribute, which prompted them to it. It was a feeling in their pure, holy souls akin to the feeling our dear Lord had, a holy indignation, a hatred of every part of that human nature which had sinned against its Creator. It was this feeling in the Heart of Jesus which induced all these, strictly speaking, unneeded sufferings, so that from head to foot there was no sound part in Him, there was no comeliness in Him (Isa 52:14). His pure, sinless, immaculate Body suffered and rejoiced at suffering for sinful human nature. We must ever remember this cause of the suffering of our dear Lord. We must ever remember that to satisfy the justice of His Father was the chief reason of Christ's Passion and Death. But at the same time let us not forget that the shedding of one drop of His Precious Blood would have sufficed. God's love was the reason, and God's mercy, His compassion: all this we must thankfully remember, but we must not overlook His justice. Then let us not think lightly about ourselves and our failings. Let us not overlook our negligences. Let us not forget the past sins of our lives. But let us strive, when forgiven, to remember and atone for the past; to remember our sins, though we have the happy hope that we are pardoned. And thus remembering them, to perform our actions in a spirit of penance, and especially you, who are religious, you who have received greater graces from God, you priests, monks, nuns. Remember and meditate upon the justice of God, the justice that will require from the five of the ten talents, interest proportionate, the justice that expects where much is given to receive much. Ah, we little know, we little think, how much.

We may perhaps see we are doing some good where Providence has placed us, priest or sister. But do we think of the graces we have received, and for which we have to account? Look at your lives many of you, who are supposed to be aiming at perfection. How far advanced are you? Oh God, how fearful is our self-deception. I am doing my duties, one will say. I am God's minister. I look to my people, preach, hear confessions, give instructions and so on. Yes, but you receive an injury from someone, some injustice is done you, how then? Many and many a secular person, one not solemnly consecrated to God, one not fed daily upon the Heart's Blood of Jesus, which should, it may well be thought, give likeness to Jesus. Yes, many and many a one in the world would take an injustice more humbly than some do who are bound to God by the closest ties. Forgive me, forgive me, one very little, one who has wept and prayed in silence, now must speak.

Why is it that God's own, his very domestic ministers, His thoroughly good priests, fail in so much, so often seem as though they were not even aiming at perfection?

An injury, an injustice is borne, I do not say merely not in a saintly manner, but not even in a Christlike manner. What does it mean to be a follower of Christ? What is a Christian? One who is to imitate Christ. And when the opportunity arises, when that meritorious, happy moment comes in which to be like Him by patient suffering, what is done? Ah, it need not be said. We have all seen it, and scarce owned it to ourselves. We have rightly passed it over, and have not allowed our minds to dwell upon it. But it is sad, and we feel we must write it here. No wonder the saints speak of the years, the ages of purgatory, and no wonder we hear of the speedy admission of some, who appeared to us very ordinary Christians, into heaven. They had made better use of their fewer graces. They had profited by them, and had advanced farther than some who have heard Mass daily, received Holy Communion daily; who had lived under the same roof with our Lord, and visited Him as often as they pleased at least, who could have visited Him and did not. God help us! A sadder sight, a sadder thought are the imperfections of those who should be aiming at perfection, than even the serious faults of sinners who are not professing it.

We will not pursue this sad subject further. But we pray from our heart of hearts, or rather from the Heart of our Mother, that if any who read this feel their conscience reproach them for not having done what they should have done in the way of perfection. That which is nothing less than the union of heart and soul with God, that as they value their salvation, they will be as earnest in striving for the perfection of their soul as if their very salvation were at stake. It needs but an earnest resolution, a firm will, to do ever what is most perfect. It is not so difficult if really tried. Do but try, I pray you, I entreat you. By the love you bear to Jesus your Lord, your Brother, He whom you do love. By the love you bear Him, turn not a deaf ear to my cry. You know not how you are observed, you know not the simple wonder the laity feel when they see your imperfections. You think not of this, and no one has the courage to remind you of it. They see you jealous lest some new mission may interfere with yours, instead of rejoicing in the extension of God's kingdom. They see this and wonder. They see the subtleties and untruthfulnesses they would not themselves be guilty of. This they see and wonder. They see you rebelling, by fretfulness and impatience against the cross, which is the very mark of a Christian. They see, and if they are good they are silent, but they marvel what it can mean.

And you, spouses of Christ, vowed, bound to imitate the Incarnate One, why is the number so small of those who really, heart and soul, body and mind, have crucified themselves, are really united with Jesus on the cross? Why feed upon Him day by day that you may receive the abundance of His grace, and not use that grace? Look upon the graces you receive day by day, nay, hour by hour. Look at the grand grace of living under the same roof with our Blessed Lord: and with what result? Are you so much better, so far higher in sanctity, than many a holy saintly wife and mother? See the self-sacrificing spirit of many a holy mother in the world. See her generous devotedness, and in humility kneel before your Lord, and acknowledge you are but an unfaithful servant. You have littlenesses. You have nastinesses, if you will let me

use the word, selfishnesses, which should not be in one of God's chosen spouses.

We have written this, and seemed constrained to do so, but we almost regret it. We so love the holy company of priests and nuns devoted to the service of God. And yet for some, who may read, for some to whom it may apply, we will not erase what we have written.

And now let us turn to our Mother, and see how we may apply this divine attribute of God's justice to her. Is it not St. Alphonsus who says that this attribute of God seems in no way reflected in her? Yes and how true what he says. Except so far as regards God's justice in rewarding her fidelity to his grace, Mary our Mother seems to have nothing to do with His justice. We cannot see it. It seems as though it were entirely shut out from her. Blessed be God, and it is well it is so. Mother, sweet Mother, thou art Mother of mercy. Thou hast not to do with His justice, except in so far as it belongs to thee perfectly to fulfill His word. It is said, Blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it (Lk 11:28). Thou hast kept it, dear Mother, and behold thou art blessed above all women. As thou hast most perfectly fulfilled His will, His justice has raised thee above all women. Pray for thy children, dear Mother, that they too may fulfill the will of God. If we utter this prayer with sincerity, our Mother's gently whisper will come to us, sweet and low, This is His will for thee, thy sanctification. Then dear Mother, we will be saints, why should we not be saints, since we have bodies to suffer and hearts of love?

Be patient yet a little longer. What you so desire will surely come. God will reveal Himself to you as you have never yet known him. Oh, He is indeed good. He promises in His justice that He will reward us according to our exertions, though His justice here is only another name for His unspeakable beneficence and goodness, for we really owe him our entire lives; every part of our being is already His. Still when we see God working in His saints, granting them such wonderful graces, and raising them so far above this world and the things of the world, and then rewarding them so magnificently in heaven for works which were rather His than theirs. When we see this, we understand better the correspondence with grace of our dear Mother. In proportion as she is raised above all the saints, so in proportion was her correspondence with God's grace, her union of will with her Creator, and her glorious reward in the kingdom of God.

When we think that that dear Mother's Heart cannot, on account of their own perversity, obtain from God the salvation of the souls of the children she loves so dearly. When we think that God suffered it to break in its anguish at the view of her children who would be lost. When we remember the sufferings of Jesus, and think that He suffered for each of these lost souls, yes, suffered and broke His own and His Mother's Heart for their salvation, and yet they are lost. What a view opens before us of the awful justice of God.

It is enough. We need not descend into that region of horror, and there view those most miserable of beings in order to understand it. No, we see enough. If the Most High spared not his Only-begotten, if He pierced with unutterable anguish the pure soul of His fair Immaculate Daughter, how terrible must that justice be. What a vista opens before us! What great need is there of examination of conscience. What need to see how we are using the talents entrusted to us. God has given us our graces for a purpose. Are we doing so? Be not disheartened with the thought that if Mary prayed and suffered in vain for so many, what can we expect? Our Mother indeed suffered and prayed for many in vain. For Christ died for all, so Mary prayed and suffered for all. And let us rather think of the numbers, the countless numbers, who owe their eternal happiness to Mary.

Who can fathom the vast abyss of Gods mercy, opened up, sounded, as it were, to its furthest depths by the Mother of mercy? We will imitate her. Yes, sweet Mother, we will endeavour to bring all within the happy sphere of God s mercy. And the sharp sword of God s justice shall be ever in our own souls, purifying, refining them, keeping them detached, unspotted from the world. For how could a soul become worldly that meditates on God s justice?

O most worshipful God, adorable ever, we worship Thee, we adore Thee in Thy infinite and most wonderful perfections. The attribute of Thy avenging justice is not mirrored in Mary Thy Mother, and we range ourselves round our Mother of mercy, to imitate, honour, and love that sweet Mother. Imitating her too by bearing patiently Thy sword of justice, letting it pierce our souls, keeping them pure, and thus honouring Thee by patient suffering, loving Thee by sacrifice. Mother make us meek, patient, persevering in thy sweet path of pain.

But there is yet another view of God s justice, and that we get in the thought of purgatory. Alas! There are doubtless numbers there we should never have thought would be there. Yes, many, after having finished a long life on earth, leave it only to commence a longer life in purgatory. And why? For the plain reason that where much is given, much is expected. Graces had been given plentifully, and what correspondence has there been with them? You who were united to God by the closest ties, you who were His domestic ministers, His consecrated spouses, what gain have you brought to God with your talents? He entrusted, may we not say, the salvation of many souls to you. You took no trouble to bring to perfection your own soul, that so you might do good to others, You troubled not to make your every thought, word, and action breathe Jesus as they should have done. You saved not souls for him as He wished you to do, and what profit have you brought the good God with your talent? Behold the weary, weary ages of purgatory are now for you. His justice demands it. And with a little more trouble on earth your lot now might have been so different, so very different. You might have been, you should have been one of God s hidden saints. He intended it; it was His will. But you fulfilled not his will, and though His mercy has saved you from a worse fate, still His justice

demands this punishment of purgatory. His justice will perhaps inflict upon you a far severer and longer punishment than upon greater sinners who had received less graces from Him.

Before finishing the subject of God's justice, one thought more upon the last words of an all holy, all pure, all just God to the condemned, eternally lost soul. Sweet indeed is the voice of God, rejoicing, raising to ecstasy the hearts and souls of the just far, far before the loveliest strains of angelic music. But to hear it for the first and last time speaking to the trembling fearful criminal, the victim of His justice. How awful! Ah, they are bitter words indeed, and they cause bitter, bitter pangs to the soul to whom they are addressed: Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire (Mt 25:41). They are said; they are the last words that soul will ever hear from God, but they will live in the mind of the accursed forever more. And some higher, far higher in grace than ourselves, have heard these words. And we too may hear them; we too may lose our souls; we are not yet secure. All around us souls are departing this life in sin, are being lost. Are we not, too, in danger? Yes, but the surest way to secure our own souls is to try and save those of others, to snatch them from that terrible eternity where they will glorify God's justice. It is true, at the cost of their own misery, instead of glorifying His mercy, to their own eternal happiness, and as He, the Most High, most loving God, would have them do.

Let us ponder over the words of an angry God, yet most just in His anger, and we shall strive by every means we have, and they are so many, so various, to save souls from hearing those most terrible last words of God to the lost soul. We would wish from our home in God's bosom to hear Him speak to many, many happy souls whom we saved by our exertions, God's grace working with us, from eternal destruction, whom we brought to Jesus' feet. We would wish to hear them as we lie in our good God's arms, and each time we hear, receive fresh joy, as He in His own joy gives us joy, as casting an ineffable look upon the redeemed, He pronounces those words of bliss, Come, ye blessed (Mt 25:34).

TO WHOM DO WE GIVE?

We have considered the attribute of justice first, as it was more suitable to the first part of our Retreat, which is devoted to the consideration of ourselves, of our sinfulness, and therefore, God's attribute of justice was the most fitting subject for our consideration. We have been thinking that we have a gift to give our God. We have been asking ourselves, who we are who give, and what we have to give, and now we are considering, to whom do we give?

To whom? Oh, to a God all beautiful, all holy, all pure, all goodness, who loves us so intensely who gives us all our heart's desire. Yes, this our God does. The pure soul has every desire satisfied. It can desire no more than its God has given it. Do think of this. You love God now, and you may love Him far more than you now do.

You have heard about the most lovable God, infinitely deserving of your love, and thought how you wish to possess Him. You perhaps have longed and desired to do so. But you *may* possess Him. He has promised to give Himself to you if you deserve His sweet love. You have thought how good God is, how great, how lovable, and then the longing has risen up in your heart: how I wish God were near me. And how happy the next thought, as we glance at the tabernacle, Dear Jesus, My God, is here; He is near me. And even to many a holy soul what joy is the thought, God is within me, close as my very breath, nay closer. Yes, it is a holy and a wholesome thought to think of all we could desire, and then see how God has already granted our desires, how He gives us every wish of our hearts. Does not this increase our love of Him, and make us know Him better?

Dwell much upon this thought. Think how the saints have thirsted for union with their God and see how wonderfully their desires have been granted. Think, as we meditate on god, His beauty and His perfections, how much we desire to see Him. What would our lives be like if we thought we could never see God, never be with Him, if we thought He did not love us, that He did not care for our love? What would our lives be like? Blessed Jesus, what misery! Is there not a bright sunny happiness over our lives from all that we know of the loveliness and love of our God? And is not the shadow, the sorrow of this life, caused by the thought that some will lose that lovely God forever, through their own fault, through their own sad fault? Oh, my God, the better we know Thee, the greater our joy that we have so good a God, the greater also our sorrow for those who do not know Thee.

What have we learnt of God, by thus thinking of Him, that we did not know before? We can scarcely say little or nothing, perhaps, and yet we seem to know Him better, and to be comforted with this knowledge, from the mere fact of thinking about Him. And so we trust Him more. We feel He is our Father; we feel He is all for us. Heretofore we sometimes seemed to look upon Him almost as though He were not our Father, our own Father, who desires more to do us good than we ourselves desire it. Did we not indeed sometimes act thus, even if we did not really think it? Have we never thought and acted as though He were against us, as though He were a stranger or an enemy, instead of what He is, a Father, and the best of friends to us? Now we are glad that we know Him better, and that we may trust ourselves entirely to His care, for He hath care of us. That now we not only believe this with a cold, almost dead faith, but with a warm living faith, with a lively hope, and, therefore, with an earnest love. For we cannot but love what our faith shows us to be so lovable, what our faith teaches us we should so revere and trust with such childlike confidence, the great, good God who make us, who cares for us, who loves us with such an unbounded love.

If we had more time to meditate separately upon the various beautiful attributes of God, by taking each singly, as far as we know them, how much more we should love Him! We overlook so many beautiful attributes. We think indeed of His love, we

think of his mercy. Perhaps we meditate more on these than others, and even so, we do not think enough of them. But though the love and mercy of God are more familiar to us than aught else, as it is right they should be, still we must not forget to meditate on His power, wisdom, justice, and other attributes. We need not give as subjects of meditation here the love and mercy of God; enough has been said in our former meditations and conferences. If you will only think of what you have heard, or take up any book of Our Lady's Library, you will find some thought, if you need it, upon which to feed your love of God, by meditation on His love and mercy.

But look upon other attributes of your Creator also. See His power. He can do all things; with God all things are possible (cf. Gen 18:14; Lk 1:37); by Him all things were made that are made (cf. Jn 1:3); and all possible creatures, creatures of which we have, and can have, no conception, are in the wonderful mind of God. He can create whatever He will. He has the wisdom in His magnificent mind to conceive all that is great, beautiful, holy, lovely, lovable, and He has the power to create whatever He conceives.

We rejoice, dear God, in Thy power. In our feebleness, in our littleness, we look upon Thee with delight, and rejoice in Thy strength, Thy might, and Thy power. God can do whatever He will. This rejoices us, this makes us glad, God is all wise; He can make no mistakes; he is wisdom itself. What a wonderful mind of God! What can we think of it, with its divine wisdom, its unspeakably beautiful conceptions? Even through the mind of God, to speak according to our human notions, float lovely thoughts, beautiful images, far beyond the power of created intelligence to conceive. We were in that mind before we were in existence, in that magnificent mind of God, loved by Him, though He foresaw we should sin, and abuse the graces and gifts His love would bestow on us. His wisdom is able to draw good out of evil, and to defeat the snares of Satan. We need never feel downhearted at the plots of the evil one. If we hope in God, and still give praise to Him in the midst of our trials, however we are persecuted, however oppressed, He is our salvation, our all powerful, all wise God. His providence is over all, and arranges that all things work together for good if we love our God. We must never doubt for an instant, though at times evil seems uppermost, to doubt would be disloyalty, to falter would be sin. We must remember there *is* a providence, and we must trust to it. There is no chance to the true Christian; there is a loving providence directed by the kindest of human hearts, the Sacred Heart of the God-Man, Jesus. And this beautiful providence of God enters into everything, disposes everything, harmonizing all lovingly, happily, for the greater glory of God, the greater good of God's children.

In these trying times we do indeed need to exercise our faith in the beautiful providence of God. He will protect us. He will direct all the events of our life for our greater good. He will provide for our minutest wants, if we trust Him. All things even those that happen by chance, as it seems to us, are from His providence. We have said it elsewhere, but we must repeat it here, how greatly would our love for God

increase if we did but see the loving providence that is directing and arranging the smallest details of our lives. And this again shows us the wonders of God's wisdom, the magnificence of His mind, that contains all things within itself. Think of the countless millions of human beings, who have lived upon this earth. Each one is known singly, individually by the mighty mind of God, planned for and arranged for by His sweet wisdom and providence, loved individually, as though there were no other human being to be loved. See the good God's condescension to each little being He places upon this earth. He has emptied Himself. He has not abhorred the Virgin's womb. He has lowered Himself taking the form of a slave for each one.

Oh, the humility and condescension of our God. What is there like to it? The saints were condescending, the saints were humble, but then the saints were but creatures. What was their humility compared with God's humility? Learn of me, for I am meek and humble of heart (Mt 11:29). So spoke the great Example of all mankind. And we sink down in confusion before the profound humility of our God. What is the deepest humility, the most profound condescension of any saint, the greatest love of hiddenness, when compared with God's humility, God's condescension, God's hidden way of working? Have there been many holy souls who would be pleased that others should have the credit of the works they themselves did, as God permits others to have the honour and the reward for doing the works of which He is the chief Author? See the seed sown by man's hand, who has the credit of the crops and the fruits of the garden. But are they not the work of God, hidden though He be, infinitely more than of man? By what power does the little seed become a fruitful and flowering plant? It is by God's power. But man has the greater credit of it with his fellowmen; God's part is so hidden, so forgotten.

Our space does not permit us to dwell upon each dear attribute of God at length. We can do no more than point to some, to be meditated on at fuller length. We cast a glance at the deep sea of the peace of God, the calm haven in which by His grace we shall rest hereafter. We are lost in wonder as we think what Thy beauty is like, O God. We love it though we cannot conceive it; we long to see it. We meditate on Thee, the all pure, all holy God, and

*More than we seek in Thee we
find,
And languish with delight.*

Patient, gentle, beautiful is our God, our own God, compassionate, kind, goodness itself. Oh, God, to whom do we give our gift? To whom but to Thee, our Creator, Father, Lover, Lord, our All, for whom we are, for whom we live, whom we love with all the power our hearts possess? O God, we give our poor gift to Thee. Do Thou accept and bless it. Keep Thine own, O God. Thine we are, if Thou wilt but accept us, Thine alone, Thine now in time, Thine we trust, forever, in eternity.

MEDITATION ON THE BLESSED TRINITY

You who know not the God who made you, put away from you for a little while the thoughts of this world: make a short prayer, an invocation to your patron saint. Cast a look of love to your angel guardian. Then lay yourself as a little child upon the breast of Mary, whose dear Mother Heart is beating with a love for you that you have no conception of, and with her assistance bring all you know of God before your mind. Holy angels, what do you see as you gaze upon the Divine Essence? Infinity, infinite beauty, infinite love, infinite mercy, infinite power, infinite majesty, goodness, happiness, peace, perfections unspeakable, do they pertain to one person? Look from your Mother's breast, and see the divine companionship of Father, Son and Holy Ghost. All the divine perfections of the Father equally possessed by the Son, who is eternally generated by the Father. All the perfections of the Father and Son are possessed by the Holy Ghost, the Holy Spirit of Father and Son eternally proceeding from Them.

O divine union! Three adorable Persons yet so united that they are but one God, the Ever Blessed Trinity. Infinitely happy is God the Father in the possession of His only Son, the Son of His love, born of Him from all eternity. Infinitely happy is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of the Father, the Spirit of the Son, eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son, the very jubilee of the ever bright and peaceful Trinity. Glory be to Thee, o most sweet, most noble, resplendent, peaceful, ineffable Trinity, you whisper from your Mother's breast. Would that I might rest with Thee, my God, my God, in everlasting peace. Would that I might see Thee, God of my heart, and my portion forever. Taste and see how sweet the Lord is (cf. Ps 34:8). Ah, we taste but very faintly now His unspeakable sweetness. We know but little of His loveliness, but He is love itself. Oh, Love not known, Love not loved, Love infinite in itself! Love pouring itself upon us infinite creatures, ever within itself a vast ocean of peace, joy, bliss unspeakable, ever pouring itself upon its creation, flooding those who will receive of its abundance, giving in this world a foretaste of the peace of heaven.

Why do we not, then, live in hope and love on earth? Why not so live as to fit us for that home? Why trouble ourselves about the little vexations, the crosses of earth, the death of our dear ones? God never dies. The strong living, loving God is ever the same, ever infinitely lovable, beautiful, desirable. Ever loving us, not as we poor mortals love one another, even in our strongest love, but with His own divine love, the infinite love of the great God who made us because of His love to be loved, and because He so desires we should love Him. Let us humbly prostrate in deepest adoration before the Ever Blessed Trinity. Let us, forgetting ourselves, make one grand act of love and worship of God before all things. Let us, as we find how unable we are to worship him as He should be worshipped, beg from Our Lady her pure Heart of love, with which to adore God and to praise Him.

Let us think, as Mary thought, how that even she could not worship God as He should be worshipped. And, with her let us unite our hearts with the Sacred Heart of Jesus in its adoration, in its praise, in its intense, indescribable worship of the Blessed Trinity which the God-Man, Jesus, our dear Lord and Brother, can alone perfectly worship.

But, O God, we Thy little creatures do love Thee. We rejoice that Thou art so great, so good, so beautiful, so happy. We rejoice in Thee all we can. We will seek Thee all we can. We will, we do, love Thee with our whole hearts. But we love Thee not as we would love Thee, we know Thee not as we would wish. But in heaven we shall know even as we are known. We shall love Thee indeed, not as we are loved, but we shall then truly be all love. We shall be replenished from that vast ocean of love, with love so great, so wonderful, that our earthly love will seem but a figure, a faint shadow of the heavenly love we then enjoy, and which will indeed be our very life. Yes, our life in heaven will be a life of love. We shall live in love, for love, by love. For we shall love and look upon love, upon the God of love, the God whom on earth we looked upon darkly, and loved so strangely, as it will then seem to us. We shall there know what a life of labour and of love has brought to us, and shall live one unchanging, unending life of love, blissful, peaceful, unutterably happy love.

May God grant that the Mother of fair love, of fear, of knowledge, and of holy hope, may infuse into her children her spirit, that they may on earth so live in the presence of God as to be allowed to see and enjoy the beatific vision of His beauty forever and ever with her, their sweet loving Mother, in heaven.

VARIOUS CONFERENCES AND MEDITATIONS ON THE PASSION OF OUR LORD AND THE SORROWS OF OUR LADY

For Retreat

The time is now drawing near for our perpetual espousals with our dear Lord. It is a work that has to be done once and forever by the soul that has prepared itself with befitting reverence, humility, and love. It is no thought of a moment. It is no temporary offering. It is not a promise of our time and ourselves for a given number of years. Oh, no, we could not regard it in that light any more than persons in the world could think of being married for a certain number of years. No, we make a solemn act, and as far as it is permitted by holy Church, an irrevocable one. We wish to be no longer ourselves. We wish to lose, as it were, our identity, our entire selves, our whole natural being. To be lost in Jesus, to be supernaturally His, poor little beings, certainly, with ever a separate personal identity, which, poor and little as it is, is, however, specially loved by its Creator. Who would have it live more by its spouse, Jesus than by itself, the little life lost in the great life.

It might be thought that, mixing with the world as we do, engaged in so many

various distracting duties, the sisters should not be required to aim at so great a perfection as other more secluded orders, but this would be a mistake and a very sad one. The sisters require a higher degree of perfection, a more solid spirituality, than the more retired orders, Their obedience is tried more by their being sent here and there to so many places, to so many different duties. Their spirit of poverty is constantly exposed to temptation, and even their chastity. Their spirituality, unless very rooted, would be liable to suffer loss by their intercourse with the world. This is so evident that it hardly needs to be noticed, except to remind us that our good God in His wisdom gives according to the need. And if there is great need when persons are working for God, great grace will be given them in proportion to their need. God will only make use of those to do a great work for Him, who co-operate with His grace. If they fail Him on that respect, He will select some other order to do the work. Only be sure He will grant great graces to those called to do such a work for Him as the one we undertake, and He wishes to bestow these graces upon us. Yes, I repeat, He wishes it, dear sister; for surely He wishes our great perfection, which means our close union with Himself. Shall we not give Him His wish? If it is in our power, as we know it is, to give joy to Jesus Heart, shall we not do it? We will, God helping us, we will, let each one say. And we fear, and rightly fear, our weak selves as we say it; a sense of our weakness and misery creeps over us. How poor and weak we are, shall we not fail God? Can we really hope to live thus ever close to Him? Shall we not perhaps grow lukewarm? May we not even lose our present good desires? May we not grow cold? Oh, Jesus, it is pain to think it. May we not perhaps treat Thee ill? Might we not perhaps hereafter break our resolves? Ah, dear Lord, what might we not do, what might we not do if it depended on our poor sad selves? The thought frets us; we are grieved, troubled. But there comes a whisper from our guardian angel, we might almost fancy it is audible, My child, have you forgotten your Mother?

Mother, Mary, Mother of Jesus, my Mother help me, reassure me that I may take this step with a safe conscience. How can I be sure that I shall keep my promises, my vows, my plighted troth, my resolution of doing ever what Jesus wishes? Mother, others have fallen: shall not I? And resting at Mary s feet in supplication in tears, a ray of joy, of comfort steals over the soul. Mary s word comes to her little one, No, my child, be not disturbed, fear not, I am with thee; thou art under my special care, keep close to me. All will be well, for one that trusted me, and listened docilely to me, have ever been lost, have ever failed Jesus, have ever fallen from Him. Lean upon me. Thou shalt be the spouse of Jesus, and thy Mother will rejoice in thy joy and happiness. And thou shalt certainly persevere if thou art faithful to my great rule; the rule enforced upon all my children who wish to please my Son and myself.

And what is that rule? Tell me, O my Mother, that I may faithfully keep it.

My rule, my child, is that you value grace. It is Mary s rule for her children, never to

lose grace, small or great. This is the one great matter I exact from my children, for by this alone I know that they can persevere and conquer in their fight against my Son's enemies, the devil and the world. All who value every particle of God's grace, little though it may appear, shall grow rich in grace on earth, and be hereafter great in glory in heaven.

Yes, this is the secret of perseverance in God's way, of perseverance in the path of perfection, to keep in the company of Mary, to keep Mary's rule, to value grace, never to lose any grace, however seemingly small. If we do this we shall be certain to persevere. If we do this we shall not grow lax in love of Jesus. And certainly if our love increases, our endeavours to please our Love will increase also. We shall live holy, happy lives of love to God and man. O God, may it be so! Good God, call us and keep us in Thy holy service of love. No other service does our God want but the service of love. Not a grudging, calculating service, but a free, tender, generous service, the child-like happy service of the child of God to its God, the service that the brethren of the Son of God's love should offer. Jesus made us His brethren. Let us approach our Father, then, with the filial love of children. Let the spouses of Jesus look upon their God, saying, Father, behold the Son of Thy love. Take pity upon Thy handmaid as, prostrate in lowliest humility, she calls upon Thee with confidence, not withstanding her unworthiness, saying, Father, unworthy that I am, Thy Son has made me His spouse. He is my Lord and my Master; from Him I have my life. Father of my Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me, upon mine, the souls for Whom Jesus Shed His Blood.

THE USE WE MAKE OF GOD'S GIFTS

My God, I am approaching to consecrate myself wholly to Thee, with an entire oblation of my whole being to Thee. I would fully know what I am doing, lest, approaching Thee carelessly, I may afterwards, through ignorance, cause rapine in my holocaust. What is it I intend to do? By Thy grace alone, yes, by Thy grace and my own exertions, corresponding with each grace, accepting it, treasuring, and using it carefully and zealously, I desire to be as a perpetual lamp before Thee on this earth. Ever burning brightly would I keep the light of Thy love within me. An entire offering would I be. And how can it be done? Self, miserable self reigns still within me. How can I root it out?

What does the offering mean that I am about to make to my God? What are the vows I shall vow to my Jesus? Oh God, it means that henceforth not a word, look, or deed is my own, belongs to myself; not a breath can I draw for self-interest or pleasure. All my being is God's. Yes, that I may be united to God, that I may be wholly His own, that I may be set apart whilst in this world for his service only.

Do not the angels look upon those who are thus given to God, and almost envy their lot, in that they can show their love of God so greatly by working, suffering, hoping

and trusting Him in circumstances so trying and so meritorious? Now the religious, the one given entirely to God, what is her duty to God? What has she to do for Him? What have you or what are you doing to promise, to vow, to God? Place yourself now as a little being, a little creature, in God's vast creation. Picture the great Creator; picture yourself as you appear before Him. What a little being you are! What a great, great God He is! How worthy to be served and loved, how desirable, how lovely beyond all comprehension, how powerful, how mighty. He made all things; He made me you say to yourself. He made me and loves me. All this universe, all the worlds, suns, stars, all that I know of in God's beautiful inanimate creation is nothing to Him in comparison with my own little self, little being that I am. I have life. I have a will. I have powers. I am made like to God. I am made to His own image, and He loves me. He loves the little creature, the little life He Himself evoked from nothingness. He loves me with intensity. I am more to Him than all He has created in His vast material creation. He would sooner lose, He would sooner destroy the whole universe than lose myself, than that I should be destroyed or lost. He prizes me.

Oh, then, my God, I prize Thee too. Thou art all to me. And it is not foolish to say what is evident to reason: Thou art my all, and I will be all to Thee. I will give Thee what? My will! Yes, that is everything. That is what God requires, the free-will of His creatures. He has given that great gift. It is for His glory we should possess it, for His glory we should use it. The greater number of His creatures misuse it, even the holy do so at times. If the greater part of men do so, still it is more to His glory to have the free-will of the few rather than the forced will and worship of many or all. I, then, have this will. I have the power to serve God or not. I can live for myself, and use the things of this world for my own use if I will, or use them for the greater glory of God. But I take this will in my hands. I offer my beating heart that so influences my will, and present them irrevocably to God, to live for His service only, to love Him only. Whatever part of this world's goods were mine, or might have been mine, or henceforth may be offered or given to me, all is to be employed for my God. All is given to God; all is disposed of. I have henceforth nothing. I have used the free-will, the liberty God gave me to choose which I would serve, to choose the service of my God, to be his for both time and eternity. I have chosen to serve him in poverty, chastity and obedience. And why? Why do I think that the most perfect thing to do? Why is poverty pleasing to the omnipotent great God? Why is chastity so pleasing to Him? Why is obedience? Because by living thus we imitate the Incarnate One. Because by living poor, chaste, and subject, we become like to the Son of God. And this is all perfection: to be like Jesus, to become like to the Beloved Son of the Eternal Father, the pearl of great price, the Son of His love, our own dear Jesus, our hidden Lord and Love in the tabernacle. The God who is our best Friend, the God who is our All, who lies quiet, hidden, still, in the Sacred Host, and yet so sweet so lovable. It is to our Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament we are bound. It will be held before our eyes. *Ecce Agnus Dei*, will sound in our entranced ears. *Ecce*

behold! We look up and our All greets our glad, happy eyes. Jesus, our heart speaks, my Jesus. We wish, but hardly dare, and yet we thirst to vow our gift to Him. My God, my loving Lord and God.

The time has come, and we are about to make our gift to Him, but is it worthy? Oh, what would we not wish to have done then? What would we not wish to have suffered? What would we not now do to purify and make more pleasing the gift we have come to give our God? But O Jesus, a contrite and humble heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise (Ps 51:17).

Mother, sweet mother, we are thine. Offer my gift, and then, calm, subdued, peaceful, our soul remains stilled. Our Mother will offer her child. She will see that it is offered properly. She will place her child's hand within the Hand of Jesus. She will join the little heart to the great Heart of love, the little soul to the grand, beautiful Soul of the God-Man, and henceforth those two are to live as one. Yes, it is so.

Child of Mary, now reading this, pause and consider. You are perhaps living in the world, or you may be postulant or novice in religion. But whoever you are making this retreat, now consider, now think earnestly, think with all the energy and powers of your soul, why were you created? To be with God! Your soul was created to be united with its Creator. The little creature united by the closest ties with the great Creator.

What a wonderful exaltation of the creature, what an honour, what a happiness! Is it simply our good Creator's condescension, His compassion, His benevolence that has induced Him to offer us this union? No, indeed no! God's condescension, His compassion, His benevolence are all glorified by His little creature's union with Himself. But it is His love has induced Him to make this union. It is His love desires it, is satisfied by it. And we, what do we do? How do we esteem this honour? How do we treat it? We constantly esteem creatures before our Creator. We treat the proffer of God to unite us with Himself sometimes coldly, sometimes as though our union with Him were a troublesome affair, as though it were rather an annoyance, a shall I say the word? bore to us to keep our souls in such a state as that they may be united to God.

Sometimes, when we have resolved to keep our souls for God alone, we do it with an air of doing God a service. We do it as though He were the honoured party, the one obliged rather than ourselves. We think we have done something very great by giving ourselves to God.

Now, what is the true spirit with which to approach Him? How are we to unite ourselves to Him? How are we to offer our gift? With the deepest sense of the great condescension, the wonderful love of God, in allowing us, in wishing us to be in such transcending union with Himself, with the most profound humility, the very

greatest possible annihilation of spirit. Prostrate, abject, humbled to the dust, let the creature, as its gift, offer its worthless self, and though in truth so worthless, still so desired by God, so coveted, so prized. Though we should never lose sight of our worthlessness, our vileness, still likewise we must never forget that we are very dear, that we are intensely prized by God. Our hearts, souls, our whole beings, our very flesh, all is loved intensely by the great good God who made them. We must never forget this truth. And yet we do forget it, or we should do more, much more for God. We watch a little kitten in its gambols and play. We watch a little child we love sporting in its innocence and beauty, and we think not that this feeling is but a faint, a very faint shadow of the love with which we are watched by our dear loving God.

We must never lose sight of these two things, our own utter vileness and worthlessness, and yet at the same time how valued we are, how dear to God. Beyond all our conception are we valued by our good God. He prizes us above all price. He has prized us at the price of the Precious Blood of His Son. The very hairs of our head are numbered (cf. Mt 10:30; Lk 12:7). We know all these things. We believe them firmly, and yet how little we put our faith in practice.

To some few, who have purified themselves by penance, who have subdued themselves by mortification; who have crushed self wherever they found its nasty self appearing, who have humbled themselves under the mighty hand of God in His loving visitation of sorrow to them, who have lain patient, gentle, sorrowful, yet sweetly subdued, when the iron hand of His justice, His gentle justice, pressed upon them. Into such happy favoured souls, - they are not many upon this earth, may they be more! into these souls, I say, God's Spirit has breathed its breath of light and love, of light and consequently love, for we can scarcely have the light, this special light, without love. These happy souls have looked, by means of this light, upon their God. They have not seen Him. Oh no, no one can see, - short of the Beatific Vision in heaven, - God and live. But they have been enlightened to know, to see spiritually, not with bodily eyes, to taste and feel some little of God's goodness. They have listened, looked, and loved, and their life henceforth is His.

So may it be with you, my child. May your life henceforth be God-like. May you, living upon earth, in the world, keep yourself unspotted from it, pure in a sinful world, peaceful in the midst of discord and disorder, loving in the midst of uncharitableness, unchanged in the various changes of your life, unchanged in your life of love for God. Ah, this life is good; this life is happy. Such a life as this is to be desired, coveted almost by the angels themselves. Why should we not lead it? What hindrance have we? Ourselves, our own self-wills, our own self-love, self-seeking, but, dear God, by Thy grace we can overcome ourselves, by God's grace we will.

How can we do this work? By obedience, by unswerving, prompt, exact obedience, obedience to mind and will, one great blow is struck at self-love. Again, by being devoid of the goods of this world, by giving up all things, by embracing poverty for

love of poor Jesus, we are set free from many temptations; we are made more humble. We are in this merely acting according to our professions, and corresponding to what we have declared to be the truth. We are, we know it. We have said it, felt it, unworthy of any place, any position, save a place in hell, a position amongst the satellites of Satan, for having, at one sad time of our life perhaps, done his will rather than the will of God. We truly in our hearts feel our utter vileness. And by embracing a state in which we possess nothing, and give up every position in the world, we are maturing fruit, substantial fruit, out of the flowers and blossoms of our good feelings and dispositions inspired by God's Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth. Even one little particle more of the root of true humility planted in the soul is worth giving up the grandest fortune for, is worth suffering hunger, want, and mortifications of all kinds to obtain.

Again, by the vow of chastity we give up all bodily pleasures, pleasures of taste and sense we live devoid of, that we may live a more spiritual life, that we may live as the angels, taking all our pleasures from God, from heaven, not from this earth. And this is a life most pleasing in the sight of God, so greatly loved by the whole court of heaven that they watch enraptured such a life led upon this corrupt earth. It is lovely in their sight. Those who live in the embrace of the strong, living God, who in heaven gaze on the Beatific Vision of the Ever Blessed Trinity, who look upon the lovely countenance of their companion saints and angels, who have ever beautiful sights upon which to gaze with delighted love, still find pleasure in looking upon those who live in this sinful world lives in some measure like their own. Such lives, I say, are beautiful in the sight of those in heaven. Such lives make sweet music even to God Himself, God who ever listens to the sweet, *Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus*, and loving strains of His angelic choirs.

THE LOVE OF JESUS FOR THOSE WHO GIVE UP ALL FOR HIM

The last days of our retreat have come, three short days remain. These are all that now intervene before that great day arrives that is to make us spouses of Jesus. That day in which we change our state in life, that day which will accomplish a real work in us, a day so long looked forward to by us, a day looked forward to so long by Jesus. Yes, so long, hundreds of years ago, a dying Saviour looked upon us, loved us, drew us to Himself, or rather, invited us to this close union with Himself.

Gentle, loving Jesus, who could refuse this invitation, even though we know it leads to pains, to desolation of soul, to suffering of mind and body? No, only let us be assured He wishes it, and we must wish it too, at any cost, at any sacrifice, at the sacrifice of our life, we will be true to Thee, dear Lord, we will be Thine till death. Yes, in time our Love loved us, and called to us to come to Him, but not alone in time. Through the vast ages of eternity our Love has loved us. Back, back in the mind and heart of the everlasting God there was His everlasting love of us. To each one of us He has said, I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore, have I

drawn thee to Myself, taking pity on thee. Yes, He loved us; He chose us from all eternity. As He chose his spotless Mother, as He chose His precursor, as He chose each individual soul, so He chose His spouses each one individually from the multitude. So let us say to ourselves, I have the happy hope that He chose me; the great God, the Holy one, the Blessed Trinity, looked upon me and loved me.

Oh, most dear God, how can I repay Thee for Thy eternal love of me? And yet I would indeed wish to repay Thee. Show me what I can do the better to fit myself for union with Thee. I look up to the glorious company of Thy angels and saints, my intercessors, and I appeal to Thy beautiful angels to help me. I call upon Thy saints, and ask them to intercede for me. I look into purgatory, and I ask those dear suffering ones likewise to assist me. I press closer to my Mother, the Queen of angels and saints, and ask her to plead for me, to offer the Heart of Jesus, with its treasure of Precious Blood. I look upon my God, or rather, humbled before Him, I offer Him His own great glory and beauty, His own attributes, His own perfections, rejoicing I offer them, begging of Him, for His great mercy and compassion, to pity me, and prepare me to be a spouse of Jesus.

But there is one certain preparation we can make, if we will, one preparation that will certainly please our good God. One thing that will endear us to Him, one remedy for all selfishness and sin, one purifier of the soul, one means, one sure means of becoming a saint, one secure way of becoming like Jesus. One thing we can only do on earth, and yet which will make this earth like heaven to us, one thing Mary loves so in her children, one thing that should be the mark of a true child of Mary, a true spouse of Jesus. And that one thing, what is it but suffering? Yes, well borne suffering, patient suffering, loving suffering, in union with Jesus, yes, let us suffer. Let us be humbled; let us mortify ourselves. Let us submit to be mortified, a harder matter to some than to penance themselves severely. Let us spend our remaining days, ere we meet our Spouse at the altar, in culling all the beautiful flowers we can to adorn our souls. To make ourselves pleasing to that dear Lord, to whom we are so anxiously awaiting the time to bind ourselves in the most solemn manner that we can. And let us recollect that however great our own anxiety may be to give ourselves to our dear Lord, yet His anxiety, His desire is far, far greater.

No bridegroom ever met his bride at the altar with the love and desire with which our dear Lord meets His own at that precious moment when she vows herself to Him for time and eternity. Yes, if she is properly prepared, if she is really purified in soul, if she is truly mortified, truly chaste, detached from the things of the world. Detached from creatures, detached from herself, firm in temptation, brave in the conflict, ready to fight with all evil suggestions. Mortified in spirit by being ready to give up her own opinion, her own views. To believe simply as a child those whom God places over her, simple, truthful, sincere, full of charity and love to others, fervent in prayer and fervent in work, avoiding sloth both at prayer and work. Ah, we have all these things to think of, to ponder over, to sorrow over, to promise and practice amendment. Let

us bathe our souls in the Precious Blood. Let us humbly confess our sins and our omissions again and again with still greater and greater contrition. Let us resolve during this retreat to strive to love the sacrament of penance, in which our souls are bathed in our dear Lord's Blood, and come out bright, glistening, beautiful, in His sight. Let us so love this sacrament, and prepare for it, and frequent it with such dispositions of love and contrition that it may be to us what our dear Lord intended it should be, a sacrament of consolation, and not of trouble, as we often make it. Such our dear Lord did not intend it to be. He intended that until the end of time He should renew for Himself the joy He had in pardoning the Magdalene. In forgiving the penitent thief, in exercising his power, the power which belongs to God alone, of fully forgiving, of pardoning, and purifying the souls of the children of earth, loved so dearly by the One who saved them at the price of His own Precious Blood.

EARNESTNESS IN GOD'S SERVICE

We have now far advanced in our retreat. We commenced with this thought in our minds, I will give a gift to my God. We have considered who we are to give, what we are to give, and to whom we give. We have tried to please our God by really seeking to discover in ourselves whatever there is that may displease Him. We have sorrowed over our sins. We have confessed them. We have seen in how many ways the precious jewel entrusted to us, the soul God gave us, had got tarnished, soiled rusty. We have striven to purify it. We have endeavoured to brighten it. We have carefully considered our gift. We have meditated upon the soul and body we possess, with their various powers. We have resolved to use our whole being in the service of the good God who alone deserves our service. We mean henceforth to be His, His alone, His only, His entirely. This we mean to do. We mean, after this retreat, to commence a new life, a life in which we intend to be more zealous, more earnest, more careful in God's service than ever. We are preparing for that glad day we may well look forward to, the day when holy Church will call us *Sponsae Christi*, spouses of Christ. Swiftly will the time fly by, the intermediate time before we make our vows to God. Our vows to God! A solemn oath [is made] between the creature and the Creator, which will be a fearful sacrilege to break.

Oh, well may we welcome the days of our noviciate, in which to practice first those vows we are looking forward to make to Jesus. And let it be remembered that though on the day you put on the religious habit you make no vow, you make a solemn profession before our dear Lord, and a public profession before the world, that you have resolved to live in poverty, chastity, and obedience.

Considering the sacredness of those ties, considering the fearfulness of violating our plighted troth to our Creator, we shall not consider our time of noviciate too long wherein to learn the practice, in their perfection, of those vows which we so long to make, and which will bind us to our good God, not for time alone, but for eternity. Yes, for eternity we should have a special joy in being of those who in time bound

themselves, not to creatures of time, but to the Creator, to the Eternal.

We will, then resolve to make our time of noviciate as profitable to our souls as possible. To practise so well beforehand the vows we are hereafter to make, and when the time really does come we may make them with a safe conscience, with glad heart.

It should be noted as a fault if ever such a thought as this should come into your mind: I have not made any vow yet. There will be no great harm in doing this. That is a wrong thought, and should be carefully avoided. You have made a vow truly, but you have made a solemn resolution. Likewise it would be presumption to make a vow to do that which you had not practised and kept to for considerable time.

Now look forward to entering upon religious life with a glad and hopeful heart, neither too timorous nor too bold. We should fear. The creature is entering upon a most solemn engagement with its Creator. We should fear lest we do not fulfill, on our part, the engagement we make with our Creator. Yet we should not be despondingly afraid of not being able to keep the contract we make, for with God's grace we can do all things. I can do all things in Him that strengthens me (Phil 4:13), said the apostle. If we are acting under obedience, they might then well dread to undertake such solemn obligation; they might then tremble.

Sometimes the thought of what they are going to pledge themselves to will make the young novice recoil as she looks forward to that life which seems so long, and is really so short. But the forward glance, but the look upward to the dear Lord to whom she is to be pledged on earth, these happy earthly espousals which will be consummated in heaven. Yes, that thought will be the spur onward, to be Jesus own, to be bound to Him, to be entirely set aside and marked out to the world as one who could not give her heart to an earthly man. As one who had given her heart to the Son of God, the Divine Man, Jesus, as one, who as spouse of Jesus, enjoys a title the angels might envy.

Ah, how the thought of our vileness and meanness grows upon us as we think of the state we aspire to, or rather, hope we are called to by God. It should be our daily thought, the dignity of our state and our own unworthiness. It should be our daily, hourly endeavour to perfect ourselves more and more: to daily, hourly allow ourselves to be perfected by those who are over us, who cannot do what they would unless we allow them. It is a good will, an earnest will we need, if we would become perfect, if we would strive to become all that Jesus wishes us. And we would surely not wish to be His spouses, without doing all we can to make ourselves pleasing to Him, and without doing all we can to endear ourselves to His Sacred Heart. Surely we would not like to do a single thing that would displease our Lord, our Love, our Life.

We would not like to know that the dear loving eyes of Jesus looked coldly upon us, that the sweet smiling face had changed its look of love to one of indifference. Shall He ever look at us with reproach? Shall He turn upon us with almost regret that He drew us so close to Himself? Shall we take his choicest graces from Him to scatter and lose them? Shall we go near to Him only to be something unpleasant and offensive to Him? Who would like to be unpleasant to dear Jesus? Surely not those whom He has drawn so lovingly, with such tenderness, close to Himself, surely not his favoured ones, whom He has separated from home and friends, from everything of the world, that they may be entirely united to Him.

The voice of Jesus has sounded in our ears, Come (Rev 22:17). The sweet tones still echo in our hearts. We have answered, Yes, dear Lord. **Adsumas**, - here we are, ready to work for Thee, to live for Thee only, to live for Thee alone. Our hearts shall not be attached to aught of this earth, and more, our heart shall be prepared to suffer for Thee. Suffering is the touchstone of love. Yes, if we really love, if the blossoms that have sprung forth in our retreat are to bear fruit, the blossoms of good resolutions, desires, &c., are to come to fruition, it must be by constant self-denial, the patient enduring of reproaches and reproofs merited or unmerited, the constant offering of our actions in union with those of Jesus and Mary.

Ah, these interior acts, how dear they are to our Lord. Let us fill our lives with them. When we do an act of obedience let us enhance its value, make it of infinite value in God's sight by its being joined to the infinitely holy actions of Jesus. If we suffer poverty, let us make a virtue of necessity, by joining what we suffer to the poverty of Jesus. When depriving ourselves of some pleasure, think of the pure, chaste soul of Jesus, living on earth divested of its enjoyments. Let us resolve to live heavenly lives on earth, and do what in heaven they cannot do, - suffer.

SORROW FOR SIN

Kneel on Calvary today with St. Mary Magdalene. Beg from that great penitent some little portion of her intense grief and sorrow, for the suffering, for the agony, which Jesus then endured for her sins. To obtain deeper sorrow, greater humility, linger by the side of that wonderful penitent, entreating her to ask for you the gift of tears as hers, tears from a wounded heart. A sorrowful yet peaceful soul, peaceful, for the grace of contrition draws God into the soul with special love, and His presence causes still greater sorrow for sin, and yet peace. For God is a God of peace, and where He dwells there is peace, though His presence upon the soul produces still greater and greater grief for having ever grieved so good, so good a God.

Contrition brings all good in its train. Sorrow for sin is intensely pleasing in the sight of God. It renders a soul most pure, most beautiful. It seems to refresh and invigorate the whole being, to lighten the spirits, to make us love everybody. It is a

wondrous grace, the gift of contrition.

St. Mary Magdalene, by your joy and peace at Jesus feet, by the tears you shed, obtain for us a like grace. Obtain for a glance from Jesus sweet face, moving us to sorrow that we ever gave to it the look of pain and grief, that we ever caused that gentle face to change its hue, filled those loving eyes with tears, pierced that tender, sacred, sensitive Heart.

Jesus, how could we ever have grieved You thus? We have felt grief ourselves, and thought it great, and yet how little it was when we think of the grief of our dear Lord. How we wrung His Heart, how we pierced His soul. How He felt each sin of ingratitude, of coldness, of malice. Not one single sin committed in this sinful world of ours but was felt by Jesus, and sorrowed over by Him. Yes, he mourned, that dear Lord of ours mourned as none have mourned. He had each individual soul distinctly before Him. There was the soul, there was the Saviour of that soul, and mournfully indeed did he look upon some to whom He would hereafter have to be a stern judge, who would not be saved, who would not love, who would not be beloved by Him. Ah, poor Jesus, poor Jesus! Let us be of the number of those souls who sent a thrill of joy and comfort through the dying Heart of Jesus, as He saw in futurity those who would come to His cross, and cling to it with love.

Clasp the cross. It is wet. Yes, it is wet with the Blood of Jesus. Bow your head beneath His feet, touch reverently those sacred feet, and tell Him that His death lies not with you, that you have no hand in it. Do this if you can; but you cannot. Good God! How awful the thought! The murderer of my God, my Lord, Him whom I so love, who is so very, very dear to me, my all. Yes, it is He whom I have slain by my sins. The thought is too terrible, too sad. God help me! And it is I who have done this deed? My guardian angel, reassure me, assist me, or too sorrowful will be this fearful thought, fearful, for it is true.

Ah, how useful are all true thoughts. We might think ourselves to be something and forget what it is we have done. We might think ourselves getting near to the angels, but we are brought down to the foot of the cross, and there we learn what we are. We learn what a lifetime of penance could not make up for crime such as this.

Holy angels, show us how we appear to you as you look upon us. Show us what our sin really is. Obtain for us holy indignation against ourselves. Obtain for us a true spirit of penance, so that we may give you joy.

We cannot exaggerate our guilt, and we cannot exaggerate God's goodness in His entire pardon and forgiveness, and love of us when we repent, but that does not lessen our guilt. It should not lessen our consciousness of our sin, our fearful sin against so good a God. It should never hinder our viewing our sin in its true light, and looking now upon our crucified Jesus, and saying, as we bend in grief of heart

before Him, My sin it was that did this deed. It was for my sin He died whom I now love more than my life. Oh, Jesus, why was it, why was it? Why did I leave you, my Love, and grieve You so sadly? Ah, Jesus, my Jesus, never more shall this be. And others, all to hinder sin, every sin, that fearful monster sin, which is so offensive, so hateful in Thy all pure, all holy eyes. This shall be my work for the future, to root it out from my own soul first, and then to strive to prevent every sin I can, wherever I maybe. By God s grace I can do this, by God s grace I will. My Jesus, here at the foot of the cross I promise Thee that henceforth my life shall be one constant fight with sin in myself and others. Every slightest root of that hateful thing that crucified Thee, O Jesus, I will root up and pluck out with a firm hand, and I will strive to stop sin in every shape and form wherever I meet with it. This, Jesus, will I do by Thy grace, for Thy Love, my Lord, my Saviour, my Lover, my most Beloved.

MARY S SORROW FOR OUR SINS

Mother, sweet Mother, we speak of thy sorrows, and we think of them as principally seven. And yet, how strange it seems, we almost appear to ignore that one which was perhaps the greatest of all. So it is with us short-sighted beings, How seldom do we see things in their truest light. How incomplete, unfinished, are our best works. We write the life of some great saint, and perhaps his greatest virtue, the trait of character most pleasing in the sight of God, has escaped us.

Sometimes we get a glimpse of something that had escaped our notice, some new truth perhaps about God, or about the works of God, and there we wonder how it was we did not see it before. We rejoice and profit by our new knowledge. We gain some slight idea of the constant novelty, the continual freshness we hope to enjoy in heaven. We believe and we meditate on many beautiful wondrous things about God. We meditate on His attributes, and yet in one sense we know Him only as a shadow of the great reality. The attributes or perfections of God are infinite, and, therefore, numberless are those of which we have never formed the least idea of, to which we never saw or imagined anything analogous. We meditate on His love, that attribute of God we love so to meditate upon, that so spurs us on to do our very best for so loving a God. We understand love; we feel it ourselves. We understand compassion, mercy. We see in others and experience in ourselves what in a finite way is similar to these and other attributes of our good Creator. And yet how wonderful, I repeat is it to think that there are attributes of God that we have never formed the slightest conception of.

What has made us write this? What was it that suggested it? It was the thought of our sorrowful Mother, and the grief that pierced her Heart, which we believe to have been even greater than the sorrows that are spoken of as her principle ones.

What sorrow, then, is it that in its own aspect would seem to have caused her deeper grief than even the death of Jesus? What could be worse to her? The

eternal death of her lost children! Yes, poor Mother, the death of Judas, the death of the impenitent, the death of the thief on Calvary. Ah, this was the pain; this was the pang, the bitter pang, that so grieved, that so wrung, that broke her loving Maternal Heart.

Can anything be imagined more awful, can there be anything conceived more terrible for a mother than to know that her child will be separated forever from her in the next world, and be buried in the eternal flames of hell? Think of it, ponder it, turn not away from this thought. It will be profitable to you. It will expand your heart, enlarge your mind, to ponder on it. It will keep littleness and self-seeking away. It will help divest you of self. Picture to your mind our loving, unselfish Mother, Mother of Jesus, therefore, Mother of those He termed His brethren, Mother of the apostles. Think of that most loving Mother, with the apostles who were so dear to her, to whom she was so good a Mother, her Heart expanding for love of them, proud of their graces, rejoicing in them. Picture to yourself the apostles, with their simple, fond love for their sweet Virgin Mother. See them drawing near with veneration to that sweet sanctuary of God. See there is Judas amongst them, with his bright graces and gifts, even the gift of miracles. See the Mother's love for Judas. See again her anxiety as she perceives that grace is growing dim in that unfortunate apostle's soul. See her entreating, agonizing prayer, as she watches his onward course in sin. Oh God! The pain of that Mother's Heart!

If we would be like Mary, we must suffer with her, and like her, we must sorrow over poor unhappy sinners.

See Mary again on Calvary. See the poor impenitent thief deaf to the loving invitations of grace, which her prayer had obtained for him. See her anguish, that with Jesus beside him, dying to save him, he to all appearance is dying impenitent, and will be lost. Consider these things, and mourn for and with your Mother. Resolve to be like her, by your love and prayers for sinners. Think how the good thief rewarded her prayer. Pray to him, and rejoice with him, and mourn over the eighty thousand who daily die, grieving for the fact that you have good reason to fear that very many die without the love of God in their souls, that love which alone can fit them for heaven.

THE SOUL FINDS JESUS ON THE CROSS

Jesus, my Love, my life, my All! Where art Thou, my Lord, my God? Hast Thou left me? I find Thee not, and I cannot be happy without Thee.

But my child, thou mayest ever find Me; there is one place where I wait for all.

Where, O Lord, for Thou seemest hidden from me? I would have Thee near to me. I would be heart to Heart with Thee.

Then on the cross, My child, you may ever find me; you may come close to me. There are no walls to separate us. I wait with arms extended for you, for whom I

suffered, whom I so love, for whom I died.

Jesus, then I come, I come now. Open Thy Heart to me.

My child, it is ever open, that all may come and enter therein.

Then Jesus, I come. I love Thee, Thee who are infinitely beautiful, infinitely lovely, my treasure, my delight, my joy in time, my hoped-for crown in eternity. Oh, Jesus, sinful as I am, known to Thee as I am, do not Thou despise me. Canst Thou indeed love me?

More than My own life, My little one, since I have laid down My life for thee.

Ah, my Lord, I am sad, weary. Wherefore art thou sorrowful, O my soul? Wherefore art thou disquieted? I would please Thee, O my Jesus, but I am so unworthy. I do nought for Thee that I should, though I love Thee more, far more, than myself. Yet what do I for Thee?

My little one, thou art tried and tempted. Bear with thyself as I bear with thee. And to please Me thou hast one thing to do, walk before Me in simplicity and truth, walk with Mary, walk humbly, lovingly, constantly. Do this, and thou shalt live ever with Me, and I with thee, and my delight shall be in thee.

Jesus, I come to watch with Thee, to speak to Thee on the cross.

Draw then, My child, close to My Mother. She will teach thee what I would have thee do, and when she places thee in My arms I will receive thee.

Mother, dear Mother, how shall I spend this time with Jesus?

The Mother of fair love has wrapped the little one she loves in her maternal embrace. And pressed close to her Heart, that little one looks into its Mother's face.

Oh, pure, sweet, loving eyes of Mary bent upon her earthly child. Faith will enable us to see the sweet Mother of pity and compassion looking upon us, with a love, which is simply incomprehensible so unworthy are we of it. And yet Mary does love us, vile as we are. There is truly nothing in us of our own which deserves to be loved, so full of nastiness are we, - do not be offended at the expression; it is the truth, - so self-loving, so selfish. But nevertheless, beloved Mary, make us better, we implore thee, we beseech thee, make us be it even so, like thyself.

Beautiful creation of God, heavenly yet earthly! Thy purity is of heaven. But thou hast another beauty, which is of earth, thy sorrow, most sorrowful Mother. Thy beauty shines all radiant because of thy sorrows, and Mary, sweet Mother, we, too if we suffer, may become beautiful. We may be made well pleasing to the Eternal Father if we bear suffering, and without suffering we cannot become Mary-like.

Mother of God, immaculate, glorious with the light of God's holiness imparted to thee, shining with unearthly beauty, more radiant than the seraphim as thou holdest Jesus, the Son of God and thy Son, in thy arms. We think of thee, O Mary, and then we look up from our place on Calvary into our Mother's eyes, and intense grief and anguish is in them, suffering, deep, deep suffering, unknown to us, for our selfish

nature could not suffer as did her most loving soul. Yes, the Mother of God stands silently by her dying Son. Grief enough would it be to watch His anguish were He dying a perfectly natural death, but in that fearfully unnatural death, - unnatural because He is hated and murdered by His own people, whom He loved more than His own life, - what did she feel? Words and thoughts fail us here. Shame she felt for her people, grief deeper than words for the grief of Jesus. Sorrow for this people who were many of them working their own damnation, sorrow that Jesus should lose ever those He was dying to save, sorrow that God the Father should be so outraged by His creatures. Her Heart [was] still yearning to save those poor unfortunate beings who, clamouring and shouting blasphemies on Calvary, were reckless of the future eternal woe, which the Mother of Sorrows saw in all human probability would be the sad fate of so many who were now so near to Jesus, so close to salvation, and yet to be eternally lost. The Mother's Heart beat on that height of Calvary. She was tossed in a tempest of sorrow, wave succeeding wave.

Mother, draw us near to thee, and make us understand thy suffering, We have chosen Calvary for our abode. We trust we were with thee there in thy pierced Heart. We would know what they didst feel, that we too may share thy grief, that we may become like thee, dear sorrowing, suffering Mother. And thus please Jesus, comfort Him, make some amends to Him for so much ingratitude, so much sin, on the part of those He so loved.

Mary standing at the foot of the cross on Calvary. That should be the constant subject of our meditations; that should be our great thought. But we cannot feel with Mary unless she draws us close to herself. We will, then, beg of her to lend us her Heart, that we may love with it, her mind that we may think with it; and when her thoughts and affections have full possession of us, then that mind will be in us that was in Christ Jesus (Phil 2:5). And this is what we would have, this is what will make us saints, this is what will make us all God desires we should be, real Christians, real followers of Christ. If the apostle tells us, Be imitators of me, as I also am of Christ (1Cor 11:1), how much more may we refer these words to Mary, the Mother of Christians, the first follower as well as the Mother of Christ.

If, then, we would imitate Mary, especially on Calvary, we must beg from the Holy Spirit light and wisdom. Mary on Calvary was flooded with light concerning God's ways. She saw what even she, with all the wisdom she possessed had never seen before. Maybe she saw with Jesus the eternal destiny of all, and that as they were presented to her sight, her Heart sent forth that cry and prayer for their salvation which was to save souls in every age until the day of doom. It maybe that God in His mercy showed them to the Mother whom He had but just consecrated as Mother of Christians, Mother of the Church. And that Mary was touched with compassion and a cry for mercy came forth from her Heart, such as the Almighty could not disregard at that moment of her intense suffering. We know God will not turn a deaf ear to the earnest prayer of a humble suffering heart. Then what could He refuse to

His Mother in that awful hour of her agony? What wish, what desire would she have at that moment, when the poor souls were brought in vision before her to enable her to suffer in her degree with Jesus, as He looked from His cross upon the condemned, and a wail of bitter agony burst from Him at the sight. He saw the souls, beautiful, God-like in their nature. He saw them led away to ruin by passion, by the devil, by the world. He loved them, mourned for them, showed them to His Mother, and grieved her soul with that sight of sorrow, and she prayed.

Oh, the power of unselfish prayer. It seems, if we may so speak, that what God will not accord Himself, He will accord to His creature's cry. Mercy for the miserable, cried the Mother's Heart, mercy for my children. Most merciful God, show mercy, cried the Mother of Incarnate Mercy, and the prayer was heard. Numbers of every age and clime are brought to God by the mother-prayer, and it is that prayer Mary's children must continue. Yes, take your place on Calvary. View heaven and hell from that sacred mount, and your soul will grow purer in that purifying atmosphere. It will grow unselfish. It will expand to something of the grandeur of Mary's soul. It will somewhat resemble Mary's, and pour itself out upon others in love, in earnest, anxious, agonizing prayer, and like Mary, gain souls to God.

Oh, Jesus, we will then stay and watch with Thee on Calvary. We will remain in loving union with Thee, loving Thee most where Thou hast most loved us. Close to our Mother on Calvary, close to Thee, dear Jesus, our Lord we will love; close to Thee, dear Jesus, we may die.