

MARY
OUR MOTHER,
OUR MODEL, AND
OUR QUEEN

SCRIPTURAL MEDITATIONS

by Emmanuel d'Alzon

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FOREWORD

Father Emmanuel d'Alzon was born in 1810 and lived until the age of 70. During his life that spanned most of the 19th century, he became the founder of two religious congregations: the Augustinians of the Assumption for men and the Oblates of the Assumption for women. He was also influential in the foundation of the Religious Sisters of the Assumption, the Little Sisters of the Assumption, the Orantes of the Assumption, and the Sisters of Saint John of Arc.

His numerous writings have all been reverently preserved in archives in Rome and Paris. Many of these have been published in France. However, the only writings that have been translated into English are those that develop the spirituality from which he meant his religious to live.

Father d'Alzon was a popular preacher who loved the Blessed Virgin. He usually preached from a well-defined plan and a few notes. Toward the end of his life he decided to organize some of his favorite reflections into thirty meditations on Mary. They are patterned according to the stages of her journey through life as the Mother of Jesus; her place in the beginnings of the Church; and her role as Queen of Heaven and earth.

Throughout these meditations, Fr. d'Alzon is persistent in transmitting the teaching of the Church. He draws from his solid background in the Fathers of the Church, particularly from the works of Saint Augustine.

It is our hope that this publication during the present Marian Year be both inspiring and beneficial to those who love Mary, and to those who wish to come to know her.

Edgar A. Bourque, A.A. *Rooftops*, Director

INTRODUCTION

Mary, the most perfect of all creatures, has been given to us as our Mother, our Model, and our Queen.

Because she is our Mother, we must place all our trust in her; because she is our Model, we are called to imitate her virtues; because she is our Queen, we must always honor and valiantly defend her cause.

1. Mary, Our Mother

“There is your mother!” (Jn 19:27). These were Jesus’ last words to Saint John. This Apostle and Evangelist, eminent for chastity and apostolic zeal, is one of our most perfect models of the Christian life. Let us profit from his example and take on his sentiments. He accepted his adoption with the deepest respect: *“From that hour onward, the disciple took her into his care”* (Jn 19:27).

I, too, must receive Mary into my life. Everything I have must belong to her, not as an owner but by virtue of her being my Mother. Besides, since Mary is my Mother I must entrust everything to her, especially my worries and illnesses. Since in the past century she has chosen to express her motherly love by healing a multitude of bodily ailments, can I doubt that she is ready to heal the illnesses of my soul?

What are these spiritual illnesses? It is up to me to study them during these meditations because if I so desire they will be completely healed. Who but Mary holds in her powerful hands the remedy for every spiritual languor? Does she not have at her disposal the blood of Jesus Christ through whom the entire human race was not only healed but also restored to life?

That is why I shall go to Mary and say to her: O Mary, heal me if I am ill; restore me to life if I am dead; but above all let your motherly love enfold me because I want to be your child.

2. *Mary, Our Model*

The most beautiful thing about God's law is that, mingling the commandments and the counsels, it joins all the virtues into perfect unity. Now, these virtues are in Our Lord Jesus Christ as in their repository. They have also been made more accessible to us in Mary's soul. That is why Mary is an excellent model for us, less likely to frighten us in our weakness than Jesus. Jesus is man, but he is also God. Mary, while she is the Mother of a God, remains a creature, the purest, the most admirable of all creatures, but still a creature.

Mary leads me to Jesus, and that is a splendid privilege. She leads me to him, and teaches me how to imitate him.

O Mary, you will be my model and my teacher. I shall study your perfections and thereby learn to imitate the perfections of Jesus less falteringly. In this effort my soul will be formed and I shall obtain the grace of being a true disciple of Christ who will some day earn the reward of sharing your triumphs because I shall have tried more generously to follow in your footsteps.

3. *Mary, Our Queen*

God the Father has given his Son as his legacy to the nations, and the Son has established his Immaculate Mother as their Sovereign Queen. That was indeed fitting and proper.

Since Jesus Christ was destined to govern the world by his authority, he chose as his associate a creature who would cooperate in his work with great kindness and gentleness. And for this work he chose Mary. He willed that the one through whom he the Savior had been given to the human race would help him to save sinners through great mercy.

The Father has entrusted all judgments to his Son; therefore the Son received the right to exercise justice. Mary was to exercise mercy by the will of Jesus. This is a wonderful arrangement, for it preserves order. When justice is ready to bear down, mercy intercedes, and a sin has to be very serious not to be easily forgiven.

There is still more to say. This kingdom of Jesus Christ whose Sovereign Queen is Mary has enemies to repel and conquests to make. Mary is the very powerful protectress of all the defenders of her Son's kingdom. This being so, does not a zealous apostle of Christ need to have great devotion to her and trust in her protection whenever there is question of defending the kingdom of Jesus Christ and extending its boundaries! Mary's interests are those of her Son. She, too, wants his enemies to be repulsed, and his conquests to range far and wide. That is why she will always protect those who dedicate themselves to this great cause.

O Mary, be our Queen. Watch over us. Arm us yourself for the battles of your Son, and grant us victory not for ourselves but for God's cause.

I

MARY, THE MODEL OF TRUE PIETY

*Piety is valuable in all things.*¹ This is something the world will never understand because it will always refuse to grasp what true piety is.

1. *What is True Piety?*

Let us ask St. Thomas Aquinas this question. He will answer that true piety is a virtue by which we are grateful toward those to whom we are indebted or with whom we have relations in our lives.

In this sense the source of all piety is God because, besides creating us, he wills our well-being. In any event, all piety is ultimately addressed to God because we owe everything that we are and have to him.

There is also piety to the saints who protect us, to our country, to our parents and relatives. Yet the more we ponder the question, the more we are obliged to acknowledge that since God is the One to whom we owe everything, our piety must be addressed above all to him in the most absolute way. And this piety must be manifested by our actions, by our dedicated service.

2. *Mary's Piety to God*

Granted what we have just said, what was Mary's piety to God like? Like all other creatures, she owed everything to God. Yet, having been granted by a special privilege the most admirable gifts, her gratitude must have been very profound indeed! This is what she expresses in her hymn of thanksgiving: "*My being proclaims the greatness of the Lord*" (Lk 1:46). She thinks of herself only to turn

¹ Cf. 1 Tm 4:8. Train yourself for the life of piety, for while physical training is ... valuable, the discipline of religion is ... more so, with its promise of life here and hereafter."

Webster's *New Collegiate Dictionary* defines "piety" as: The quality or state of being pious: (a) fidelity to natural obligations, as to parents; (b) dutifulness in religion: devoutness.

with greater ardor to God. God is the principle of her being, of her virtues, her gifts, and her future glory. Now, for all these gifts she offers God the greatest gratitude: "My being proclaims the greatness of the Lord." The contemplation of God's blessings is a source of ecstasy for her.

When shall I ever understand all God has done for me? Oh! If only I were willing to look deep within my being and fathom its nothingness! If only I were willing to focus my attention on the divine thought directed to me from all eternity! If only I were willing to consider God's fatherly attentions toward me! Why have I thought so little until now about this great virtue of gratitude which should be the very foundation of all my sentiments toward God?

I shall go to Mary and ask her to give me some share in the disposition of soul with which she cried out:

"My being proclaims the greatness of the Lord, ... God who is mighty has done great things for me, holy is his name" (Lk 1:46).

Granting that God has not done as great things in me as in Mary, does that mean he did not do great things in me, too?

My God, I have been ungrateful to this day. Following Mary's example, I want henceforth to prove to you by sentiments of true piety the full depth of my gratitude.

3. Mary's Piety Toward Others

God owes us nothing, and yet he looks on us with great benevolence. He pours out this benevolence around him in abundance.

Mary, the perfect imitator of God, has similar sentiments. It is for our sakes that she is the Mother of God. It is for our sakes that the Son of God became man, and it is for our sakes that he chose a daughter of Adam to be his Mother. One might say that Mary owes us a certain debt or gratitude. If God is said to have piety toward members of the human race (*"Pie Jesu, Domine"*), do we not have all

the more reason for giving this title to Mary: (“*O clemens, o pia, o dulcis Virgo Maria*—O clement, o loving, o sweet Virgin Mary”), as the Church sings in her praise?

Clemency and gentleness are united to her piety toward us. She is an admirable model of the clemency and gentleness we must exercise toward our brothers and sisters. Yes, we also owe much to them, we owe them our vocation to the apostolic life.

Therefore, in the footsteps of Mary I shall have piety toward God and toward my fellowmen, a piety of gratitude and kindness which, by making me resemble the Mother of God, will make me resemble God.

II

MARY, THE IMAGE OF GOD'S PERFECTIONS

In the beginning, God said: *"Let us make man in our image"* (Gn 1:26). This applied not only to the first Adam, but also to the human nature of the second Adam. But after Jesus Christ, is there anyone to whom these words can be applied in a more perfect way than to Mary? Yes, she is the most perfect image of God, after his adorable Son. I would now like to do the following: 1) examine in Mary, a pure and simple creature, the image of God's perfections; and 2) inquire how, in imitation of Mary, I can receive from God a perfect image and likeness of himself.

1. Mary, Image of the Divine Perfections

In God there is something incommunicable, and the eternal difference between the Creator and the creature is that the Creator is infinite Being, the plenitude of being, whereas the creature draws its being from outside itself and everything the creature possesses has been received. That is the abyss that separates God from us. Yet we can say that God in his love for us wants to fill the abyss insofar as possible. He who is infinite Being chose to make Mary the Mother and as it were the principle of his Son's humanity.

What a miracle!

Ah! Obviously everything comes from God. Yet what treasures of life what an abundance of being must have been communicated to Mary to empower her to become the Mother of God!

Let us not think only of the nothingness of creatures. Are we to speak of the perfection of Mary's natural being?

No, we must scale loftier heights and penetrate the order of grace. *"The Lord begot me, the firstborn of his ways"* (Gn 1:26). These are words the Church applies to Mary. Before all else, she was possessed fully and entirely by God. And God cultivated this admirable being, the chosen possession of the Almighty, in an incomprehensible way.

Mary, being God's image, possesses the power, the perfection, the radiance, the beauty of being. Within her, truth is poured out. She has an immeasurable capacity to receive this truth totally. Her will, directed to the good, tends to everything that is noblest, most perfect. Not only does she obey God's commands, but she seeks ways of anticipating his wishes.

God's perfections are virtues in Mary. And yet apart from the divine gifts, she made untold efforts to develop the precious seeds of virtue developing in her. This will be the subject of our meditation. With my eyes fixed on Mary's admirable face, I trust I can realize within me at least some degree of her lofty holiness.

2. How Can I Become an Image of God, After Mary's Example?

Evidently, it is impossible to become as perfect an image of God as Mary was and is. Yet I can attain to a certain perfection in my resemblance. I am a child of Adam. I was baptized in Jesus Christ. I am a child of God by adoption. Why would I not resemble my Father? I have only to energetically will it and I shall draw this energy from my participation in the Being of God communicated to me by grace.

The power for good has been given to me, I must make use of it. Now, we know that God is pure act as the theologians say, that is to say, he is eternally and always as perfect as it is possible to be. I for my part, in spite of my weakness, must also be as perfect as it is possible for me to be. God has implanted in me as it were a treasure of heavenly seeds. They will grow within me through the cooperation of my will, predisposed and sustained by divine mercy. Yet, regardless of what God does for me and within me, I have to do something on my own. I must surrender totally to God's transforming power and cooperate with it with all my might.

What am I to conclude from all this?

- 1) My obligation to strive to know God better, to study how I can imitate him. This offers me an immense field of

endeavor. I am called to study God's perfections so that, by striving to imitate them, I can become his image and likeness.

- 2) My need to study Mary's virtues, the creature in whom God's perfections are most fully reflected, so as to learn how to accomplish this very difficult but necessary work within me.
- 3) My need to place my trust in Mary, to ask her to guide me in this life of striving, so that I may become an imitator of God by becoming an imitator of Mary.²

² Father d'Alzon will point out later in Chapter XX and elsewhere that Mary learned to imitate God's perfections by the careful study and imitation of the perfections of her Son, true God and true man, who chose to share our humanity in order to show us the way to become "sharers of the divine nature," according to 2 P 1:4.

III

MARY'S IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Let us reflect on the order of creation. What God the Father sees in it first of all is his Son. We need not inquire here whether the Word would have become incarnate even if man had not sinned. It is certain that from all eternity God foresaw Adam's sin and the mystery that would repair it, the Incarnation.

Now, in order for God to become man, there had to be a woman who would be the Mother of God. Since everything in this birth was to be extraordinary, divine, it befitted God's infinite purity that the first sanctuary in which he would dwell should be endowed with the most admirable purity. This sanctuary had to be exempt from the slightest stain or blemish.

1. The Fittingness of the Immaculate Conception

What was Jesus coming to do in this world? He came to save it through his own blood: "*He will save his people from their sins*" (Mt 1:21). Think of it! Could he who was to bring men perfect purity wash them in a blood that was not pure? That would be impossible for God's wisdom. Undoubtedly he had to choose very pure blood. But since he wanted to become man, where would he seek this blood, the wellspring of purity offered to the human race? From his Mother. But in order for Mary to give this pure blood, she had to possess it herself. That is the reason for the Immaculate Conception. Jesus Christ needed to save the world with a blood free of all stain.

Jesus came to destroy Satan's dominion, and this Jesus was God and man at one and the same time. Now, the preparations for the war were made in the greatest secrecy within Mary's womb. But was it fitting that the prison in which he would be kept for nine months be unworthy of him, in the sense that he would have been dwelling in a place sullied by sin? Was it not much more fitting that Jesus' purity overflow within Mary in such a way that Satan could

never boast of having even for an instant made his den in what was later to be the sanctuary of the wondrous mystery of a God-made-man? The only contact Mary and Satan would ever have was the conquering heel with which the Mother of God would crush the serpent's head.

2. *Mary's Predestination*

It was fitting that he who was coming to save the world through his blood should receive it from a Mother whose blood had never been touched by any form of concupiscence. Let us go even further and say that just as Jesus is infinite purity inasmuch as he is God, likewise Mary, the Mother of Jesus, is in every fiber of her being the supreme exemplar of the purity created by God's grace. She had been predestined from all eternity for this ineffable work.

It goes without saying that Mary needed to be saved by her Son, but she was to be the instrument of salvation for all those whom her Son would snatch from sin and restore to true life.³ Mary was predestined. But aren't we all predestined? Let us listen to Saint Paul: "*God chose us in him [Christ Jesus] before the world began, to be holy and blameless in his sight, to be full of love*" (Ep 1:4).

Why was Mary predestined? And why are we all predestined? "*God chose us in him.*" In searching for an answer, I can find only this one: "*O Lord, ... your judgments [are] like the mighty deep*" (Ps 36:7). Depths of the divine abyss. I find in these depths infinite power, infinite wisdom, infinite love. I adore the infinite will that is in very truth this power, this wisdom and this love. I know that nothing can be chosen, predestined by this will except with infinite wisdom and infinite mercy. I know, because of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, the immense purity God can pour into a creature. I therefore know what God will do for me if I remain holy and immaculate in his presence and in his love that impelled him to

³ We find these thoughts expressed in our own time in several papal documents: Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, Par. 53, 1964; Paul VI's *Credo of the People of God*, June 30, 1968; and John Paul II's Encyclical Letter, *Mother of the*

do so much for me.

3. *Mary's Cooperation With Grace*

Why did Mary who was conceived without sin rise to such heights in all the virtues? Because she cooperated with grace. I have no reason to complain that I have not received privileges which, after all, were granted to her for the sake of my salvation. And yet I need to ask myself what I am doing with the graces God is granting me every day. Ah! That is the great fruit of the mystery of the Immaculate Conception. Certainly, Mary was granted a superabundance of gifts, but she made the best possible use of them. When shall I make the best use of all that God makes available to me for my salvation? Lord, I shall do so at this very moment, and always.

IV MARY'S FAITH

It is certain that Mary was inundated with the most abundant light on divine matters, but she was nonetheless filled with faith. That is to say, she adhered to God's word by an act of total acceptance.

Let us examine:

- 1) The prudence of Mary's faith;
- 2) her faith's prompt obedience;
- 3) the joy of her faith.

1. The Prudence of Mary's Faith

Let us try to picture the moment when in the fullness of time concerning the realization of God's promises the heavens opened and the Savior prepared to descend. *"Rejoice, O highly favored daughter! The Lord is with you"* (Lk 1:28). She was deeply troubled. She wondered what this greeting meant. She did not yet know the messenger or his message. *"She was deeply troubled by his words"* (Lk 1:29). The angel reassured her: *"Do not fear, Mary"* (Lk 1:30). Did this give her a reason to accept at once without any questions? Not at all. *"How can this be?"* (Lk 1:34). She was about to make the greatest act of faith any human has ever made, but she surrounded herself with precautions. She was ready and willing to adhere to God's word, but she wanted to know what God was asking of her. O admirable prudence of a faith that surrounds itself with precautions, precisely in order to be strengthened.

Two great lessons are given me here. In imitation of Mary, I must avoid the imprudence of credulity. I am eager to see some event turn out in a certain way. So I study all kinds of prophecies, only to be deceived by false prophecies and to have my faith shaken by true prophecies.

But there is a second and no less important lesson: my need to study the foundations of my religion. Instead of losing my way in a

faith made up of sentiment, I have the obligation, in the face of incessant attacks, to really understand my faith. Earthly knowledge can help me to attain a greater understanding of divine things.

As a result, I won't believe lightly. Following my Savior's advice, I shall not believe that Christ is here or there. I shall believe the Church. At the same time, under the Church's watchful eye, I shall strive to have a better grasp of my reasons for believing.

2. *Mary's Obedient Faith*

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (Lk 1:35). Yes, this was a miracle, an extraordinary miracle. Nothing like this had ever been seen or would ever again be seen on this earth. But when Mary recognized the angel to be a messenger from God she knew she had to submit, and she did indeed do so with the most admirable obedience. Her faith no longer hesitated. *"I am the servant of the Lord"* (Lk 1:38). A new order had begun. Prefigurations were to disappear, the times would be fulfilled and Mary would be the first to believe not what would happen in the future but what was already accomplished within her. Her response: *"I am the servant."*

Mary's faith is certainly worthy of admiration and of imitation. A new life was beginning for her. Why would not a new life begin for us? Why should we not share in the great mysteries through which the Son of God descended from heaven and came to our earth? Why not call Jesus into our hearts through faith? Why not allow him to grow within us? Why not live by Jesus' life?

A world passes before my eyes: the life of the angel, Mary's life, the life of Jesus, the very life of God. For the angel was sent to Mary to announce that the world would be saved and that she was to be an important instrument in this divine work. Mary entered into God's plan as manifested by the angel. The Incarnation was the result, and the result of the Incarnation has been reconciliation between God and humankind. Well, all of this can be accomplished within me if I am willing to live the life of faith, if I am willing to talk about God the way the angel did, willing to listen to God's word like

Mary, and if I allow Jesus to be formed within me. Then, by my faith in Jesus I am sure to go toward God.

3. The Joy of Mary's Faith

"Blest is she who trusted that the Lord's words to her would be fulfilled" (Lk 1:45). This was Elizabeth's joyful cry. And why? Because what had been said to Mary on behalf of the Lord would surely be accomplished. There are moments in life when God grasps us and proposes holiness to us. Evidently, we must respond by making an effort of our own, but such an effort is possible. Well then, we cannot meditate on the mystery of the Incarnation without hearing a secret voice ask us what benefit we shall derive from all this. Do we want to reach out to Mary's faith? That is where our happiness lies because of the graces that will be granted us. But we must put our hand to the plow. Am I ready at last to begin?

V

MARY'S HOPE

Mary's hope had not yet been raised to the luminous heights of the beatific vision. Mary is our hope, but she herself practiced hope.

Let us consider Mary's hope, to discern some of its various aspects: 1) the object of Mary's hope; 2) the certitude of her hope; 3) the shadowy aspects of her hope; 4) the power of Mary's hope and how she can be a model of hope for us.

1. *The Object of Mary's Hope*

The object of Mary's hope was God himself, seen as the supreme good, as the source of all happiness in the eternal life to come.

We should note that in the human soul composed of memory, intellect, and will, according to the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas, the ultimate object of the intellect is the truth given to us by faith, the goal of the will is the happiness to which we aspire through hope. The object of hope is happiness, the greatest possible happiness which can be found only in God, the supreme good.

Mary placed all her trust in God: "*God who is mighty has done great things for me, ... His mercy is from age to age ...*" (Lk 1:49,50). Mary's faith, illumined from above, made her yearn to possess God. In imitation of Mary we must seek our happiness in God alone.

2. *The Certitude of Mary's Hope*

The certitude of hope rests on faith, faith rests on God's word entrusted to his Church. Hope is as certain as faith. Faith does not yet see truth clearly, hope does not yet enjoy the possession of the infinite good but expects it confidently, relying on Jesus Christ who is the author of grace as well as of faith.

I hope because I believe. The damned in hell believe but no longer hope, and that is their anguish. The blessed in heaven

neither believe nor hope, because they see God as he is and possess him. The wayfaring Christian does not yet see, he hopes because he does not yet possess. *“Hope will not leave us disappointed”* (Rm 5:5).

The Apostle Paul does not hesitate to say: I know the One to whom I have entrusted myself: *“I know in whom I have believed, and I am confident that he is able to guard what has been entrusted to me until that Day [the day of judgment]”* (2 Tm 1:12).

Mary did not yet enjoy the beatific vision during her earthly life. She believed and hoped, but the light of her faith kindled the fervor of her desires. What luminous insights her faith must have communicated to her! We do not hesitate to say she must have received all the light possible for a creature during earthly life. And the more her intellect was illumined, the more her will was set afire.

Mary is an admirable model whom we can imitate to a certain degree. Obviously, it is God who gives both faith and hope, but the intellect and the will must respond, and that depends on us. What are we doing to cooperate with the faith and hope granted to our intellect and our will?

3. The Shadowy Aspects of Hope

“Like a sure and firm anchor, ... hope extends beyond the veil, through which Jesus, our forerunner, has entered ...” (Hb 6:19). The figurative veil separated the Holy One from the Holy of holies. We, too, find it hard to see, because faith is not yet clear vision, nor is hope possession. However, Mary hoped because her faith was more clearly illumined, and as a result her hope had greater desires. The goodness, the truth, the justice, and the mercy of God appeared more clearly to her, and she could say with great inner conviction: *“His mercy is from age to age on those who fear him”* (Lk 1:50).

Our hope united to faith will always be shadowy during our life on earth. But the shadows will decrease in proportion to the ardor of our desires.

4. The Power of Hope

Hope works wonders. It reveals the vanity of earthly things, it detaches us from them and makes us love poverty. Did anyone besides Jesus love poverty more than Mary did? She lived by the labor of her hands, had only a stable in which to bring forth the Savior of the world. She lived in a carpenter's workshop, and when Jesus died, Saint John had to take her into his home: *"From that hour onward, the disciple took her into his care"* (Jn 19:27).

Poverty is the counterpart of hope. Those who hope unwisely yearn for the goods of this earth. Those who hope at least a little become detached from earthly possessions. Those who hope in an absolute way practice the virtue of poverty in the most rigorous sense of the word. We need not labor this relationship too much, but we should remember that no one can serve two masters at one and the same time. Let us hope. Let us scorn the things of earth and turn our desires toward heaven.

VI

MARY'S CHARITY

Charity is friendship accompanied by kindness and reciprocity.

Let us consider the virtue of charity in Mary: 1) by defining the virtue of charity; 2) by striving to understand the nature of Mary's charity; 3) by inquiring what our charity should be.

1. *What is the Virtue of Charity in Essence?*

1) Charity is friendship with God. What a strange expression! Yet the wonderful thing about it is that God takes the initiative in this friendship. *"No longer do I call you Servants. You are my friends"* (Jn 15:15,14). So we are God's friends, and this friendship implies benevolence. Can anyone doubt this when we consider what God has done for us? But we, too, must be benevolent toward God. That is the meaning of the first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer: *"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done"* (Mt 6:9,10). And what can we say about the reciprocity involved? God loves us. As soon as we love him, charity is reciprocal.

2) But charity does not seek the object of its love to obtain some advantage for itself. In the words of Saint Augustine: *"I call by the name of charity that impulsion of the soul that inspires us to seek to possess God for his own sake."*⁴ Faith seeks God for the sake of the truth it receive from him; hope seeks God in order to possess the eternal life it expects to attain; charity seeks God in order to be rooted in him, *"ut in Deo sistat"*—so as to exist in God," to quote St. Thomas Aquinas.⁵

We know that God is the supreme rule of our actions and consequently of the virtues. Therefore charity, which is the act by which we seek God for his own sake, is the most perfect of the virtues. Strictly speaking, without charity there is no virtue.

⁴ St. Augustine, On Christian Doctrine III, 10.

2. *Mary's Charity*

Since Mary was endowed with abundant graces from the very first, how can anyone doubt God's charity for her? As for Mary's charity for God, where could we find purer love in any human creature? What was the overwhelming concern of her whole life? God and God alone. God was the one and only motivator of all she did: "*I am the servant of the Lord*" (Lk 1:38). Hers was an obedient love, that is to say, a love that wanted to express itself in the way the beloved wished. It was a very unique love: "*My being proclaims the greatness of the Lord*" (Lk 1:46).

Where can we find a more powerful charity? From the first instant of the Incarnation until the Savior's death, what tenderness for Jesus her God, nurtured by her tenderness for Jesus her Son! And yet the tenderness for the Son was eclipsed by her charity toward God! Everything is sacrificed to this greatest of loves, and that is why she participated in the mystery of the Redemption in love, silence, and the deepest anguish, just as she participated in the birth of a God born in the greatest humility and deepest poverty. Only her Son can describe her love in heaven. We can be certain that this love extends to everything her Son loves, and that she loves us the way her Son loves us.

3. *Mary's Charity, the Model of Ours*

There is little to say here, since we need only meditate and act. "*See that you make them [the lampstands] according to the pattern shown you on the mountain*" (Ex 25:40). And yet when we examine ourselves, we find deep ingratitude if we compare our charity for God with Mary's! That is why we must constantly strive to grow in this virtue, the most perfect of them all. Since we can rest assured that grace will not be lacking to us, we must focus our greatest efforts toward increasing love within us through our actions.

Now here is a wonderful thing. Since the ultimate end of our

⁵ *Summa*, Cf. IIa, IIae, Q. 23, art. 6.

actions is God, it is he who quickens and governs them. But in order to come closer to God we must desire him, we must love him. In order to be supernatural, all my actions, all my virtues must have the seal of supernatural charity. Charity is the essential condition of the virtues. Without charity there is no virtue. It is charity that gives them their form, their reason for being. Their vigor or their weakness depends on the vigor or weakness of our charity.

It is most necessary that we ask Mary to increase our charity in the name of her love for her Son and her God.

Finally, just as the virtue of poverty is related to the virtue of hope, the virtue of obedience is related to the virtue of charity. Let us therefore proclaim with great love: *"I am the servant of the Lord."*

VII

THE PRESENTATION OF MARY IN THE TEMPLE

*“God chose her and made her dwell in his tabernacle.”*⁶ Mary was chosen in advance. From all eternity God wanted her to dwell in his tabernacle. What is this vocation?

We shall now consider:

- 1) vocations in general;
- 2) Mary’s miraculous vocation.

1. Concerning Vocations in General

God wants to put order in everything he does. Consider the angels, each of them a unique species. So, too, with humankind where the happiness of heaven is concerned. God will be the reward of all, and each one will have his or her own reward. God calls all men and women to perfection, but each of us has his or her own particular vocation. What admirable diversity!

God called Noah to save him from the flood and repopulate the earth. God called Abraham to make him the leader of a great people. Moses was to be their lawgiver. Later, David would be their king. The Maccabees would bring glory to the aged Judas. In the New Testament, we have the admirable vocations of the Apostles, the martyrs, the confessors, and the virgins!

The fact is that when God wants to possess a soul, he does everything for the person chosen. He chooses this person in advance: *God chose her and predestined her.*⁷ The choice was made from all eternity.

The chosen one finds God’s call painful, hard, odious. He or she would prefer to be set free. It is a vain hope. God insists. God must be the Master.

⁶ Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 3rd Nocturn and short response for None

⁷ Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

In other circumstances, after God has invited a soul and been refused, he allows that soul to follow its own ways, he abandons it. But this soul had been called, and hatred of God can be all the more vicious in the measure that the call was more intimate and pressing.

Where do I stand before God? What does God expect from me and how shall I respond to his call?

2. *Mary's Miraculous Vocation*

Among all vocations, Mary's is the most certain. We have already spoken of the gifts God bestowed on her. Now we need to say something about what she did for God. She heard the voice, she obeyed. God called her and she responded. It is not easy to respond faithfully to one's vocation. God wants all men and women to be saved. If he calls them all, then hell must inevitably be peopled with lost vocations.

In Mary's case, the opposite is true. She responded to every call from God and cooperated with it. She had the virtue of courageous, admirable cooperation with God. The Lord called her early in life. The Gospel is silent about it, but we have the devout tradition that she dedicated herself to God when she was five years old.

It was a mysterious, solemn moment. Passion and the fire of the senses could no longer cause her to fall. What a contrast between ourselves and Mary's purity and fidelity!

What divine illumination was given to Mary?

Like Noah, she saw the corruption of the world and sought refuge not in the ark but in God's temple. Like Abraham she heard the Lord's voice telling her: leave your home and your family, and she obeyed. Like Moses, she remained in the desert and went up to Sinai, receiving the plenitude of the law through her great love for God. Like David, she won her queenship, but through suffering. Like the Maccabees, she accepted to fight. Like John the Baptist, she made Jesus Christ known. She understood that Jesus Christ wanted her for himself alone, and she said: *"My lover belongs to me and I to him; he brouses among the lilies"* (Sg 2:16). She understood all the consequences of her consecration to God and she accepted

them. She discovered souls attracted by her holy purity who wanted to follow her, she accepted to be their Mother.

There are many who understand nothing of this perfection, but that is a proof pointing to the divine origin of this life. Did not Jesus Christ say: *“Not everyone can accept this teaching”* (Mt 19:11)? So you don’t understand? Then why does your incomprehension set itself against those who understand?

Whatever my vocation, I understand that I must give myself in order to find Jesus and no longer be separated from him. *“I have found him whom my heart loves. I took hold of him and would not let him go”* (Sg 3:4).

VIII

MARY'S PREPARATION FOR HER VOCATION

Mary's vocation was her mission to be the Mother of God. During the interval between the Presentation and the moment the angel came to her, what was her life like? Solitude, adoration, love. Mary retired to a secluded place. She prayed, she loved God with the most ardent love.

- 1) Mary's recollection;
- 2) Mary's prayer;
- 3) Mary's love.

1. Mary's Spirit of Recollection

There is no Christian life without recollection, and recollection demands:

- 1) Struggle against frivolity. One must not allow oneself to be drawn by every distraction. For then the soul is like a house without doors or windows. The wind can enter and pass through without hindrance. The slightest matter causes amusement and levity. Everything is seen in its lighter aspect, but it is impossible to attribute the least importance to the ideas of faith.
- 2) Avoidance of laziness. The soul becomes indifferent, it takes nothing seriously, and has no concern for important matters. The lazy person becomes recollected only when he or she is dozing off.
- 3) But above all recollection implies keeping one's distance from useless preoccupations. There are so many things about which we mistakenly concern ourselves! By focusing all our attention on earthly matters, we completely neglect heavenly things.

Apart from these precautions necessary to everyone who wants to be recollected, it is important to understand that we cannot let

our souls deteriorate in inaction. It is necessary to nourish them with knowledge relating to faith, and especially with whatever nurtures the interior life.

Mary's recollection must have been of the highest order! Can we imagine a virgin concerned for her purity allowing herself to be frivolous? Besides, recollection was easy for her. Filled with graces, her conversation was in heaven. But why would our conversation not be like hers? What is to prevent it? Won't these graces be multiplied in the measure that our soul's recollection makes them bear fruit?

2. Mary's Prayer

Words fail us to describe Mary's prayer. How did she pray? Let us consider her humility, her fervor, and her perseverance. She spent her whole life glorifying God. Did she know beforehand, as some surmise, that she would be the instrument for the Incarnation of the Word? If so, she must have besought the Blessed Trinity to make her more worthy of such a favor. Or on the contrary, was she unaware of this most unique vocation? This is more likely. In the latter case, except for its perfection, her prayer must have been more like our own. It certainly included adoration, petition, and thanksgiving, aflame with the most intense love.

But was Mary's prayer so perfect that it cannot be imitated? To the contrary, we must strive with all possible fervor to pray in union with Mary and like Mary. Mary offers us a perfect model. The difference is that the further removed we are from her prayer the more we must strive to imitate it. This is an indispensable condition for attaining to union with God.

How can we hope to reach up to God except by the act he demands of us, to which he prepares us, and for which he grants such great favors? It was through prayer that

Mary communicated with God. We, too, can communicate with him through prayer.

What were the hallmarks of Mary's prayer? It would be rash to answer this question. Let us put our best into our prayer, and we

shall find it is still a thousand times more perfect in Mary's prayer. As for us, let us strive to overcome our deficiencies, our weaknesses, our drowsiness, convinced that our prayers will be answered provided God sees in them a genuine will to serve him and the sincere desire to glorify him.

3. *Mary's Love*

Mary's love was all the greater because she had a deeper insight into God's perfections. In this respect, we can say she had been endowed in a most admirable way. Yet this very love gave her the profound sense of her nothingness compared to God's perfections. She was so disposed that the more she knew the more she loved, and the more she loved the more she humbled herself in adoration, acknowledging that everything came to her through the most gratuitous kindness of almighty God.

This is an admirable attitude of mind that should make us reflect on our vain pretensions and our odious self-love which prevent us from loving God. We must prepare with our whole being for the arrival of Jesus in our souls.

Ah! we must learn to be recollected, to adore, to love; and lost in this thought that God wants to come within us, let us turn away from the world. Let us adore God, let us love him as he has the right to be loved.

IX

THE ANNUNCIATION

While Mary did not understand her destiny completely, she drew the Son of God to herself through her earnest desire. Finally the time came when everything the Holy Spirit had announced through the prophets would be fulfilled. An angel was sent to Mary.

Let us examine:

- 1) Why was it fitting that God be born of a Virgin?
- 2) Mary's willingness to participate in this mystery.
- 3) The attitude we need to obtain fruits worthy of this great favor.

1. Why was God born of a Virgin?

God does all things in wonderful harmony. He had permitted a woman to be the instrument of the condemnation of the human race through the first Adam. It was fitting that a woman be the instrument of salvation for the human race through the second Adam. That is why after Eve there was Mary.

Eve, seduced by her senses, tempted the father of the human race. Mary, in her virginal purity, called down the Savior of the human race. Thus God, in his infinite mercy, provided a remedy to counteract the evil. We need only take advantage of this remedy, for it is completely available to us. At the same time, what glory for the second Eve to be able to set her foot on the head of the serpent who seduced the first Eve! We need to ask ourselves what we want to give her in thanksgiving. And looking up higher, we must also see what thanksgiving we owe God who worked such miracles in order to save the sinful human race.

2. Mary's Receptiveness to the Angel's Words

We have already seen how prudent Mary's faith was in the presence of the Angel's salutation. But let us pause to consider how

she subjected herself entirely to God: *"I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be done to me as you say"* (Lk 1:38).

How can we describe Mary's life? It was a great act of love, manifested by a great act of obedience and a whole life of obedience, the source of ever more ardent love. Saint Augustine tells us: "Consider this chaste servant, at once virgin and mother." The servant's perfect obedience obtained for her the merit of becoming a mother. Prudently, she had examined whether the proposal brought from heaven by the angel had truly come from God. When she realized it was indeed so, nothing could stand in her way. She obeyed: *"I am the servant."*

This was fitting and proper. For why was she becoming the Mother of God? So that a God-made-man might save the human race by an act of obedience that would lead to his death on the Cross. *"He humbled himself, obediently accepting even death, death on a cross!"* (Ph 2:8).

The formation of Jesus Christ had to start with an act of obedience that corresponded to the supreme obedience of his death on the Cross. When I in turn am ready to share with Mary in forming Jesus within me, I must give her free rein through a supreme act of obedience. Now, this obedience of the will corresponds to the obedience of the intellect through faith. *"We likewise bring every thought into captivity to make it obedient to Christ"* (2 Cor 10:5).

Truth emancipates us on condition that we make ourselves voluntary captives of the One who became a slave for us. And now we see that Mary, at the same time she is obeying, practices another virtue. She believes, but in the most astonishing way, since her faith makes her the first to profess her faith in a God-made-man whom no one had ever envisaged until that moment.

I need this faith of Mary's when God comes to dwell within me in Holy Communion. Why doesn't Communion sanctify me more? Because I do not believe deeply enough, because my spirit of faith is not powerful enough. *"Let it be done to me as you say"* (Lk 1:38). Admirable words, words filled with mystery. O God, I accept in faith all the miracles of your grace. You have spoken and I believe.

3. *The Attitudes We Should Adopt in Imitation of Mary*

Here everything is extraordinary, and the first attitude we need is admiration for such a miracle. *“By the Lord has this been done; it is wonderful in our eyes”* (Ps 117:23). This is something we should contemplate unceasingly: a God incarnate, a God who is the model of the Christian soul; a Virgin who has become a Mother in order to bring forth a God-made-man. And all of this has come about: *“for us men and for our salvation.”* We have enough here to admire for all eternity.

A second attitude: gratitude. It is our ingratitude that is most offensive to God. What ingratitude among baptized Christians, and why? Because they do not reflect, because they are selfish, because they prefer sin to God. My ingratitude must cease. Gratitude proportionate to God’s great gifts will enable me to attain the full perfection for which I was created.

And yet I cannot repeat too often that in imitation of Mary I must humble myself: *“I am the servant.”* That is what I am, a servant and nothing more. But I am God’s servant.

Ah! Lord Jesus, grant that I may admire your infinite greatness, grant that my gratitude may be proportionate to your gifts, and in amazement at all that you want to do for me I may realize every day more clearly how small I am and what splendors you have in store for me.

What I must seek most earnestly in the mystery of the Annunciation is the formation of Jesus within me, in imitation of Mary. Jesus is formed within me through grace, but he also comes within me through Communion. Oh! If when he appears within my heart under the Eucharistic veil, I said to him: *I am the servant of the Lord*, what holy actions he would ask of me, what virtues he would communicate to my soul!

I sometimes yearn for the unique happiness Mary experienced in her divine Motherhood, and I fail to think of the happiness that would be mine if I knew how close Jesus really is to me in Holy Communion!

X

MORE ON THE ANNUNCIATION

Mary, Daughter of the Father, Mother of the Son, Spouse of the Holy Spirit.

Let us enter in spirit into the astonishing dialogue between the angel and Mary. And now let us try to see, not by logical order but according to the Gospel account, how Mary enters into an admirable relationship with the entire Trinity. Then we shall be in a position, together with the whole Church, to hail Mary as the Daughter of the Father, the Mother of the Son, the Spouse of the Holy Spirit.

1. *The Angel's Message*

The Angel Gabriel is sent to Mary. He greets her in these words: *"Rejoice, O highly favored daughter! The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women"* (Lk 1:28). All grace comes from God, and this special grace granted to Mary for the accomplishment of the great work offered to her is the grace to become the Mother of God.

What are we saying? No other creature was ever granted such a lofty privilege. God has the incommunicable privilege of begetting his Son from all eternity. Mary is to have the incommunicable privilege of conceiving the same Son and of bearing him in her womb. But no mere creature can have the power to bring forth a God. The creature needs the help of divine power. That is why the angel says: *"The Lord is with you."* And when a messenger from heaven speaks these words, this is no mere salutation. It is a positive affirmation. Yes, the Lord is with her, both in the conception of Jesus and in his birth, giving her the strength to cooperate in this extraordinary action which will inundate her with blessings: *"Blessed are you among women."*

Mary is so troubled that at first she does not answer. The angel continues: *"Do not fear, Mary. You have found favor with God"* (Lk 1:30). In her perplexity, Gabriel reassures her. She has found favor

with God. *“You shall conceive and bear a son and give him the name Jesus”* (Lk 1:31).

The mystery unfolds. The Desired One of the nations is finally about to appear, he will be brought forth in Mary’s blessed womb and will be called Jesus, that is to say Savior. He will be the Savior of the world. *“Great will be his dignity and he will be called Son of the Most High”* (Lk 1:32). The Son of the Most High will also be Mary’s Son. He will be Mary’s Son and at the same time Son of the Most High. So we see that it is within Mary’s womb that this union of the divine nature with the human nature is consummated.

Let us not go any further, for here we would be led on by the angel’s prophecies with which we need not concern ourselves now except to say that Jesus reigns eternally within the soul that is willing to be subject to him: *“and his reign will be without end”* (Lk 1:33). The Savior will reign without end in a soul that surrenders to him. That is the miracle, that is the grandeur, that is the love of the Savior of our human race.

2. The Action of the Blessed Trinity Within Mary

Now Mary asks how this extraordinary miracle will be accomplished. It will be done through the Savior’s grace. When God sets his hand to his chosen work, it would be very surprising if it were not most wonderful. Here we must scrutinize the angel’s words with great attention. For they remove from the mystery as many of the veils as can be lifted.

Let us silently recollect ourselves and listen: *“The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; hence the holy offspring to be born will be called Son of God”* (Lk 1:35). And he points to the experience of Elizabeth, her kinswoman: *“for nothing is impossible with God”* (Lk 1:37).

Let us rise above the laws of nature. The One who, as God, has only a Father, must, as man, have only a Mother. But God begets his Son through his omnipotence. As for Mary, she will be the instrument of the miracle, but she herself will not actively accomplish it. What can this mean? Here is the angel’s explanation.

He seems to be saying: You see, this is the action of the entire Trinity: *"The Holy Spirit will come upon you."* The Holy Spirit will come within you. He is the Third Person, *"and the power of the Most High will overshadow you,"* the power of the Most High will cover you with his shadow: This is the First Person.

Indeed, the One to be born of you will be called Son of God: *"Hence the holy offspring to be born will be called Son of God."* He whom the angel has called Son of the Most High is now called Son of God, not Son of the Holy Spirit but Son of the Father, and of the same nature as the Father: *"He will be called Son of God."* Mary is the Father's first adopted daughter. We come after her.

The birth of the Son of God whose Mother is Mary according to the flesh came about through the action of the Holy Spirit.

3. The Action of the Blessed Trinity Within Us

Doesn't something similar happen within us providing we are willing to let it happen? Does not Jesus Christ tell us that we must be sons and daughters of our Father: *"This will prove that you are sons of your heavenly Father"* (Mt 5:45).

So we, too, are sons of the Father, since Jesus Christ is our brother: *"Go to my brothers and tell them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God!"* (Jn 20:17). We belong to the family of Jesus Christ; we have the same Father who is God; we have the same brother, Jesus Christ; we have the same Spirit, through whom charity is poured out into our souls. And since this is so, must we not become worthy of such a Father, such a Brother, and such a Wellspring of love?

With this in mind, let us consider the marvel of Mary's response. She sees the abyss of the adorable Trinity open up before her: *The Holy Spirit, the power of the Most High, the Son of God.* And she plunges into the abyss.

That is the state of a soul whose progress in perfection is a perpetual beginning: *I am the servant of the Lord.* Yes, I abandon myself in humility, in obedience, but also with total trust. That is why, if I want to enter the life of faith and holiness, I must, once I

have taken the precautions of prudence, surrender myself with complete abandon. *"I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be done to me as you say."**

These miracles will be accomplished within me if I so will. My God, give me the will, give me the grace, and grant that everything within me may belong to you. Amen.

XI

THE VISITATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN

MARY

“Thereupon Mary set out, proceeding in haste into the hill country to a town of Judah” (Lk 1:39). 1) Mary, as she goes out to her cousin Elizabeth, is the model of gracious relationships. 2) Elizabeth, as she greets Mary with such great humility, is the model of grateful relationships. 3) Mary and Elizabeth, both models of holy relationships.

1. Gracious Relationships

It is a general attitude among the proud and the vain to want to hold on to their dignity. They think it is to their honor to wait until they are treated graciously. The saints do not act in this way. They go out toward those who are of lesser station than themselves. Jesus Christ, when he saved the world, reached out to sinners. Likewise, when God willed to create the universe he reached out to the world and to all his creatures. So, too, with Mary. She, the Mother of God, did not wait until Elizabeth came to greet her. It was enough that the angel had told her Elizabeth was to bring forth a son in her old age. Mary hastened, and although she herself was with child she went into the mountains of Judah. The Mother of God set out eagerly to sanctify the greatest of the children of men within his mother’s womb.

We could do so much good if we took Christian initiatives toward others! True, solitude is good for a life of perfection. But when we are called to a vocation of charity the least we should do is give ourselves without counting our own hardships. It is not a question of knowing whether relations of a certain kind are pleasant or not. It is a matter of whether we want to be apostles not only in public, but apostles in private as well. That is to say, we must be willing to join to our exterior action an interior action by which we

can do great good to those who want to benefit from it. But to succeed in this we must be ready to set aside all thought of self. We must place ourselves totally at the service of God and become his humble instruments for the good of others.

Let us meditate on the dignity Mary saw in Elizabeth, the mother of John. Most probably she had been given a supernatural insight into what John would be some day. Now, this was a very important remote preparation. Mary, through her visit to her aged relative, was cooperating with the Holy Spirit.

Here's another equally beautiful lesson. Mary, a young girl, reached out graciously to her elderly kinswoman. This is a splendid lesson in which the false timidity, stubbornness, and independent spirit of younger persons toward those who are older are transformed into gentle graciousness.

2. Grateful Relationships

Mary greeted Elizabeth. And what a touching response Elizabeth gave without a moment's hesitation! "*Blest are you among women*" (Lk 1:42). She used the same words as the angel. The reason is that she was filled with the Holy Spirit: "*Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit*"(Lk 1:41). The Holy Spirit filled Elizabeth with gratitude and charity. He did so because she was not jealous of her cousin's great privilege. Blest are you among women and blest is the fruit of your womb. She knew very well that her own son was sanctified by the Holy Spirit, but she also knew she owed this grace to Mary's visit and to the presence of Jesus. The fruit of Elizabeth's womb was sanctified by the fruit of Mary's womb. And so it was that Jesus by his own power and John by the action of the Holy Spirit recognized and greeted one another. Elizabeth accepted her own inferiority and that of her son in the presence of Mary's Son.

How delicate were Elizabeth's sentiments! What profound humility! She bowed before her young kinswoman, acknowledging she was less endowed than she! She delighted in owing the sanctification of her son to Mary! "*The moment your greeting sounded in my ears, the baby leapt in my womb for joy*" (Lk 1:44).

Referring to Zechariah's being struck dumb because of his doubts over the angel's promises, she said: "*Blest is she who trusted that the Lord's words to her would be fulfilled*" (Lk 1:45). The blessedness of faith! The blessedness of trusting in God's word! Why? Because all that the Lord has made known to you through the angel will be fulfilled.

These are truly words stripped of all self-interest. Elizabeth was celebrating the glory of Mary, she was celebrating John's joy within his mother's womb, she was celebrating the future of Jesus, the fruit of Mary's womb. When will sentiments such as these inspire us in our relationships with those to whom we are called to do good?

5. *Holy Relationships*

The world is falling apart. Why? Because it is losing the Christian spirit. Because each and every Christian fails to do everything he can to sanctify the souls of those over whom he can exert some influence.

There is no point in saying: I cannot do it. Indeed, what are we capable of doing? But God is there, if we call upon him. And what must we do to make our relationships holy? We simply need to have the desire to do good to souls, just as Mary did for Elizabeth and John. We need only welcome the good that is done to us, like Elizabeth in her gratitude toward Mary. We need only speak about God and Jesus Christ like the two holy cousins. Elizabeth said: "*Blest is she who trusted ...*" (Lk 1:45), and Mary said: "*God who is mighty has done great things for me*" (Lk 1:49).

Theirs was a short conversation, at least from what the Gospel has culled from it. Yet the little we know of it suffices! That is the way we must act, and we shall accomplish wonders of sanctification within ourselves and in others.

XII

MARY'S REASON FOR BEING

Let us pause at this thought: Why was the Blessed Virgin brought into being? Obviously, to become a mother to the Son of God. But why was Mary chosen? Most probably through pure grace. Yet God clearly foresaw that of all his creatures none would respond to his graces as Mary would. We have good reason to say: "*God chose her and predestined her.*"⁸ But after all, if Mary was chosen, God knew from all eternity the perfection of his choice.

Now, in Mary's response to grace, I see several aspects, and today I shall study two of the principal aspects I discern in the first words of the *Magnificat*: 1) Mary's reaching up to God; 2) Mary's joy in God's service.

1. *Mary's Reaching Up to God*

Elizabeth congratulated Mary for all the graces God had bestowed upon her. Mary did not pause to think of herself but cried out: "*My being proclaims the greatness of the Lord*" (Lk 1:46). Here I find the entire reason for my own being as well. God created me for himself, and since he is the center of my being, can I do anything better than work for him, live for him, make of my life a perpetual sacrifice of praise? This confounds those who do not refer everything in their lives to God and do not look to God as the sole term of all their actions. Crime, folly, misfortune threaten those poor misguided ones who do not understand how important it is to work for the noblest and loftiest goals.

Now, with Mary this is not merely a reasoned conviction. It is a transport of love. What else did she have to do on this earth but to praise God and dedicate her entire life to God? When a soul reaches out to its Creator in this way, the Creator, who called this soul out of nothingness, cannot but return love for love. After all, it

⁸ **Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary.*

is God who loved first, and it is not for the Creator to return love, but up to the creature. It is a surprising situation, in which it seems as though the creature is the first to act because God seems so eager to respond.

At the same time, let us not delude ourselves. Mary, inundated as she was with supernatural light, must certainly have foreseen the trials that would descend upon her. Yet she took this opportunity to praise her God in an even more perfect way.

This is a splendid picture of what my own attitude should be. Yes, I was created for God. My life comes forth from him, is preserved in him, and will be eternally united to him. I must be convinced of this and live solely for him so as to be able to constantly say with Mary: my existence is a perpetual act of praise of God: *My being proclaims the greatness of the Lord*; my every effort consists in loving and praising him more perfectly every moment of my life.

2. *Mary's Joy in God's Service*

Mary rooted her happiness where it properly belongs. We encounter many persons who think they are happy. Yet as time passes, they are disillusioned. Why? Because, in the heat of their passions they failed to see that only one thing is necessary: loving God and belonging to him alone. They complain and you hear some of them say: God is not fair.

But let us make ourselves clear. God would not be just if, having created you for happiness, he had wanted you to find it in affections of the heart, in wealth, in honors, in pleasures. But does God want you to find happiness in these things? Obviously not. If, therefore, you want to find happiness where God has not placed it, is it surprising that God should say to you: It's too bad for you if you encounter disappointments? Don't blame God, blame only yourself.

There are others who suffer although they claim they have sought their happiness only in God. But what illusions in their ways of acting! What faint-heartedness! What self-centeredness! Is it surprising that God bestows his gifts on them only in proportion to

what they are seeking? And if they are seeking in the wrong directions why would he give himself to them and be their joy?

Where does my soul take its stand in all this, and when shall I resolve to seek and want only God, using the means God offers me and not those I prefer to choose? Who is the master? Is it he or I? If he is the master and I the servant, is it not up to him to command and for me to obey in order to attain the happiness I pursue without success outside of him?

For Mary, the story is quite different. She wants to glorify God above all else: *"My being proclaims the greatness of the Lord."* God, for his part gives her beforehand a taste of the joys of heaven: *"my spirit finds joy in God my Savior"* (Lk 1:46⁷).

Mary's joy, however, is something very special. *"My spirit finds joy in God my Savior."* Who is this Savior? Her own Son. That is her very unique joy, the joy of being the Mother of her Savior.

Saint Ambrose nonetheless points out: *"If according to the flesh there is only one Mother of Christ, still according to faith Christ is the fruit of all."* That is to say, Christ is conceived in each and everyone of us if we receive the Word of God into pure hearts and sinless souls.

We, too, can rejoice if we join with Mary in saying: my life is dedicated to the glory of God and my joy is proportionate to the totality of my self-giving to him.

XIII

THE HUMILITY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN

MARY

“For he has looked upon his servant in her lowliness; all ages to come shall call me blessed” (Lk 1:48). Another well-spring of happiness is humility. Why? 1) Because it frees us from sin and hell; 2) because it makes us resemble Jesus Christ; 3) because it draws God’s graces upon us; 4) because it opens heaven’s gates to us. Liberation through humility which makes us resemble Jesus Christ, the source of all graces, the pledge of unending happiness.

1. Liberation Through Humility

In truth, what catapulted Satan from heaven? Pride. Although the angels had been endowed with great beauty, they became hideous in God’s eyes as soon as pride tarnished their original splendor. War was declared between the heavenly cohorts, and the arrogant angels were hurled into the depths of hell. There was no more room for them in heaven.

What precipitating cause drove our first parents out of their earthly paradise? Again it was pride, the fomenter of the spirit of rebellion and disobedience. And from that very instant they became slaves of Satan who captured and enchained them under the yoke of the most horrible depravity. Did this not come to pass everywhere?

When a humble God made his appearance and combated Satan’s pride and man’s pride as well through the humiliations he accepted to bear, then and only then did moral freedom reappear on this earth. Yet Mary had prepared the way for the salvation of the human race, and she showed us the great means that had been revealed to her. This means is humility, and for her it was a wellspring of happiness: *“For he has looked upon his servant in her lowliness.”*

2. *In the Likeness of Jesus Christ*

The great happiness of the one who loves is to be like the beloved, especially if the beloved has chosen to show his or her tenderness in a special way. Why did Jesus Christ accept humiliations? To obtain our salvation, to reconcile us with his Father. Humility is precious to him because it is useful to us. Jesus chose to be humble because he loves us.

Let us learn how to humble ourselves in order to prove our grateful love to him by becoming like him. And to this end, let us turn to Mary and listen to her as she tells us: *“For he has looked upon his servant in her lowliness; all ages to come shall call me blessed.”*

Mary is humble because her Son Jesus is humble. Let us be humble because Jesus who chose to be our brother is humble. Let humility give us a family resemblance, so to speak. In imitation of Jesus and Mary, let us bear the hallmark of humility in which, after setting aside the marks of sin, we can begin to restore to our souls the hallmarks of our divine likeness. Then the Father of the universal human family will recognize us and invite us to enter into the heritage he has in store for us: *“We are children of God. But if we are children, we are heirs as well: heirs of God, heirs with Christ”* (Rm 8:16-17).

3. *The Wellspring of Graces*

“The prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds” (Ec 35:17). What happiness to think that I can always expect my prayer to be answered by God! Why is it not always answered? Because I am miserably proud. Humility gives me a chance to see things as they truly are, since it shows me my own nothingness. This is a fundamental grace that teaches me to rely on God alone. By emptying me of self, humility leaves room in my heart to receive the Holy Spirit. I need only want to be humble in order to prepare the way for the Holy Spirit to sanctify me. This is a very serious matter,

because it depends entirely on me. If I want to be humble the Holy Spirit will pour out in torrents the charity with which he is so eager to fill my heart.

How many graces have I lost because I was proud! How many graces will enter my soul when I am ready to be truly humble! O Mary, help my soul to enter into your own frame of mind and make me give God everything to which he has a right because of all that he has done and wants to do for me.

4. *Humility, a Pledge of Happiness*

Does not Mary herself tell us: *“For he has looked upon his servant in her lowliness; all ages to come shall call me blessed.”*

If the rebellious angels were driven from heaven because of their pride, surely men and women will enter heaven only because of their humility.

What shall we see at the last judgment? *“The sign of the Son of Man”* (Mt 24:30), that is to say, the sign of the Cross which signifies the extreme humiliations of the now triumphant God-Man. He will then come in glory, calling all who have humbled themselves with him to share in his triumph.

These are the great things the Lord in his power has accomplished in Mary, to make the power of his name and his boundless mercy shine forth, thus confusing the proud: *“he has confused the proud ... deposed the mighty from their thrones and raised the lowly to high places”** (Lk 1:51-52). He will forgive Israel his servant when through humiliations this people will at last understand the need for penance.

Lord, after your example and in imitation of Mary, grant that I may be humble and, exalted by you because of my sincere humility, I may enjoy your glory for all eternity (cf. Lk 1:54-55).

XIV

THE JOURNEY TO BETHLEHEM: MARY'S POVERTY

“In those days Caesar Augustus published a decree ordering a census of the whole world” (Lk 2:1).

To begin with, let us consider the contrast. Here is a man who by dint of struggles, intrigues, battles, is master of the ancient world and who orders a census of this world. At the very same time a tiny infant yet unborn is brought by his parents to the town of his forefathers and finds only a manger in which to come into this world. Who is the greater of the two? Is it the emperor or the tiny babe?

Let us go on. The mother of this child who will have only a manger as his cradle is herself greater than the man who is issuing his commands to the world. Augustus may well be the master of a portion of the earth for a few years. Mary will be the queen of heaven and earth for all eternity.

And now Mary is preparing for the birth of her Son. What is the nature of her preparation? 1) Mary's solitude; 2) Mary's poverty; 3) Mary's anxiety; 4) Mary's strength.

1. Mary's Solitude

Let us reflect upon Mary's profound abandonment at the moment she was cooperating in the admirable work entrusted to her. Caesar's edict forced her to leave Nazareth with Joseph in order to be registered in the town of her ancestors, probably so she could establish her Son's genealogy but also to emphasize how unnoticed and forsaken his parents were in the city of David, their ancestor.

Did anyone recognize them? Did anyone offer them hospitality? No one. They passed among many strangers.

Either they were the only ones of their kin left in the land, or

their kin scorned them. One thing is certain, they did not even find a place to stay at the inn. They were reduced to seek shelter in a stable. *“To his own he came, yet his own did not accept him”* (Jn 1:11). Mary, Joseph, and Jesus would be alone. They would have the company of angels, but the men and women to whom salvation was being offered would have nothing to do with them.

It was a painful solitude, but such solitude is necessary to the soul in search of God. It was a particularly painful solitude for Mary. A fruitful solitude, for in her solitude Mary was carrying within her the salvation of the human race. I, too, must love solitude and accept everything Jesus wants to do for me in my forsakenness.

2. Mary's Poverty

There is no need to insist. Is there a greater poverty for a mother than to be forced to bring forth her Son whom she adores as her God, huddled with farm animals for the night in a stable? Yet that is how God's works are accomplished.

In Rome the emperor was surrounded with marks of universal power. In Jerusalem the high priest enjoyed a life of splendor. The priest of the New Law could receive nothing from his Mother. The King of kings was subjected to the most total indigence. This is what awaited him, and it caused Mary deep suffering not so much for herself but for her Son.

Yet it was proper that this should be so, for the mystery of salvation will shine forth more powerfully when it becomes more evident that man and his resources contribute nothing to it. Here everything must come from God. When the moment came, Jesus Christ would give his work external glory, but this would be an additional gift. The kingdom of God must come first. Even so, it was hard for Mary as a Mother to offer her God only a few swaddling clothes brought from Nazareth!

3. Mary's Anxieties

Everything seemed to conspire to torture Mary's heart. Why

did God not permit her to give birth before her departure from Nazareth? Why did he not will that she give birth only upon her return from the journey? In Nazareth she could have sheltered her newborn Child in the humble family home. But no. The Savior of the world was destined to be born in Bethlehem, and from the moment of his birth he had to fulfill what he was to say about himself: *"The Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head"* (Mt 8:20; Lk 9:58).

The Son wanted to fulfill the prophecies, but how hard their fulfillment would be for his Mother! The Son wanted to reveal his triumph over the world through poverty, and yet this destitution inflicted great pain on the woman who gave him birth.

Let us go to the root of the matter. If Mary had been simply a devout virgin, she would certainly have suffered. But in cooperating with God's will she derived great strength by suffering as the Mother of God. This is a great lesson for me. I would suffer much less bitterly from life's vicissitudes if I had greater faith.

O Mary, in the name of the trials imposed on your love at the time of Jesus' birth and the courage with which you endured them, teach me to make my own trials profitable for my sanctification.

4. Mary's Strength in the Absence of Human Support

What we should admire above all is the divine power that burst forth where human means were the weakest. It seems that God constantly wants to bring everything out of nothing. Yes, Mary had nothing, Jesus had nothing when he came to Bethlehem. That is why God's power was revealed in a more brilliant light.

Ah! If we had such a conviction in our efforts, we would overcome many obstacles precisely because of their seriousness. God makes fools of us if we try to be important. Man wanted to become God through his own human means and he was catapulted from his dignity. But then *"A God became man so that man could become God."*⁹ Let us conclude:

- 1) We must let God act within us;

- 2) God holds glory in store for us by making us sharers of his divinity on condition that we allow him to act within us, after Mary's example.

⁹ Saint Augustine, *De Nativit. Domini*, Serm. IX.

XV

THE BIRTH OF JESUS IN A MANGER

“She gave birth to her first-born son” (Lk 2:7). 1) Mary adoring the profound humiliation of Jesus in the manger; 2) Mary enriched by the poverty of Jesus; 3) Mary set ablaze with Jesus’ love for us.

1. *Mary Adoring the Humiliations of Jesus in the Manger*

“He emptied himself (Ph 2:7). Jesus emerged from Mary’s womb like a pure ray of light. But what was happening? A God had stripped himself of his glory and revealed himself *devoid of honor* (cf. Is 53:3). He wanted to experience the trials of poverty; he wanted to give himself to us without any magnificence; he wanted to be rejected, scorned, so that, in the face of Satan’s throne of pride, he might make a throne of humility out of a manger. And it was indeed in a manger that his Mother laid him, since he didn’t even have a common cradle. In his presence Mary and Joseph humbled themselves. They had lost their ancient royal status, just as he in a certain sense had fallen from his divine eternity. Oh! humility must be very necessary for the salvation of the human race for a God to need to preach humility in this way!

Indeed, when I burrow down into the depths of my heart, I cannot fail to see the deep roots of self-love, vanity, etc., imbedded within me. Now, all that must be cut down, eliminated. It is hard, but it must be done. Jesus demands it of us by his own example. For he does not merely take humility upon himself. Humility is a deep-seated, unnoticed sentiment. In taking on humiliations, Jesus is preaching to me how far I must go in sacrificing my arrogance, my sense of honor. All that must be ruthlessly destroyed.

Ah! How I need to ask Mary for the insights that she received at that supreme moment. Her soul was so well prepared to receive them that they enabled her to understand how humility is the foundation of Christian virtue. When will I understand that my virtues count as nothing as long as they do not spring first and

foremost from humility?

2. *Mary Enriched by the Poverty of Jesus*

"...he made himself poor though he was rich, so that you might become rich..." (2 Cor 8:9). Joseph and Mary entered Bethlehem, the ancient city of David. Who welcomed them? No one. They were too poor. That was the law. And they were carrying the One in whom are hidden all the treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of God. The world cares little for these treasures. We could tell the world: the One through whom all treasures were made—and who scorns them—Jesus Christ manifests something better than the power to produce wealth. He manifests contempt for their use.

Ah! That is the condemnation of this world. It yearns for riches, it wants only riches. It hungers and thirsts for them. Let the world have its way. But we must be saints.

Now we see the Holy One coming. At that moment there was no room for him in the inn of his ancestral town. But this little stable would some day be transformed into a basilica, and his tomb as well. To know the influence of a people over the world the question to ask would be: Who possesses — with true spiritual worship—the manger and the tomb of Christ?

Mary pondered this mystery: A God who would have so many magnificent palaces over the world and have palaces built for his friends the saints and for his friends the poor. Mary saw all that and reflected: it must indeed be true that poverty is the greatest of riches, since it is through poverty that my Son is establishing his kingdom. Let us follow in Mary's footsteps, let us imitate her, let us be poor, and we shall possess all riches.

3. *Mary Set Ablaze with Jesus' Love for Us*

"Yes, God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (Jn 3:16). *"For a child is born to us, a son is given us"* (Is 9:6). And this Son of Mary is the very Son of God. When Mary brought him forth, she could say: This is the great proof of God's love. And when she

presented him to the shepherds, she could say: *God loved so very much*. Speaking to the Magi, to the Egyptians, and upon her return from Egypt, it was always: *“God loved so very much.”* What an astonishing proof of love! And if God the Father has loved us to that degree, did not the Son love us equally since he willed to be born in such a condition? Ah! *“The love of Christ impels us”* (2 Cor 5:14). This love overflowing from Jesus’ heart was first poured into Mary’s heart. Jesus had such a need to love and to be loved, and from whom could he expect more perfect love than from his Mother? His love was poured out in torrents, and Mary, his Mother and the purest of creatures, returned it as only she could.

Now Mary’s love for Jesus is the model of our own. Granted, Mary received many gifts from Jesus. But once again we ask, why Jesus? why Mary? *“For us men and for our salvation.”*¹⁰ Let us love Jesus, therefore, with all our strength, and draw from this love the reason for the holiness that we must attain.

¹⁰ The Nicene Creed.

XVI

MARY AND THE SHEPHERDS

“Let us go over to Bethlehem” (Lk 2:15). The shepherds are awakened by the angels.

- 1) The lowly are the first to be informed;
- 2) they are the first to whom peace is proclaimed;
- 3) they are the first to actually look upon the Newborn Child.

1. The Shepherds Were the First to Know

While Joseph and Mary were adoring a newborn God, shepherds were watching over their flocks on the plains of Bethlehem. Now, the birth of the King of kings was not proclaimed first of all to the great of this earth, not to Caesar Augustus, although he had commanded the census of his subjects. No, it was announced first of all to poor shepherds. They were of little account, and they didn't have shelter at that time either. Their common poverty gave them the right to be the first to share the joy of the whole world.

It's a strange thing, but when the Son of God stripped himself of his majesty he wanted his messenger to preserve it and to do so in the presence of the shepherds. *“The angel of the Lord appeared to them as the glory of the Lord shone around them”* (Lk 2:9). Do you see the divine brightness that Jesus Christ does not want for himself? The angel was so completely flooded with it that it reflected on the shepherds as well: *“the glory of the Lord shone around them.”*

They were terrified: *“and they were very much afraid”* (Lk 2:9). These were the final terrors of the law of fear: *“The angel said to them: ‘You have nothing to fear! I come to proclaim good news to you—tidings of great joy ... This day in David’s city a savior has been born to you, the Messiah and Lord’”* (Lk 2:10,11).

Why were the lowly, the nobodies, the first to be told? God had sent an angel, but God-made-man wanted a court that shared

his own newly-chosen condition.

Do we want to belong to Jesus' court?

Let us make ourselves small, nobodies.

Do we want to share in his joys?

Let us make ourselves small.

"Let this be a sign to you: in a manger you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes" (Lk 2:12). What humiliations! It was necessary that the shepherds witness them. God had said of the first Adam: *"See! The man has become like one of us"* (Gn 3:22). The poorest of men would be able to say in the presence of the new Adam who was innocence incarnate: *"See! Adam has become like one of us."*

2. The Shepherds Were the First to Benefit From the Proclaimed Peace

What is the heart of the mystery of the Incarnation? Reconciliation between God and man. It means that God is glorified by the peace he has granted, and men have been restored to hope by the Son of God who by his Incarnation became the divine Peacemaker.

Now the shepherds were the first to benefit from this infinite mercy: *"Suddenly, there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the high heaven, peace on earth to those on whom his favor rests' "* (Lk 2:13-14).

This peace was not offered to Herod, nor to Augustus Caesar. It was not offered to the chief priests or to the scribes. It was offered to these poor shepherds, lowly, unknown, even crude, but men who put their trust in God's word. They were given peace.

We, too, can enjoy this peace by humbling ourselves. Only on this condition will we have peace.

There is another condition as well. Sin has snatched God's glory from him, filling the earth with confusion and disorder. Peace has been destroyed by human passions and by all the terrible consequences of sin. That is why there will be peace only when

God's glory has been restored to him. Then the angels will be able to sing from the heavens: Glory to God in the highest and peace to men of good will!

If I want to have peace, I must ask God to grant it to me by proclaiming his rights, appeasing his justice, and becoming small and humble in his eyes.

3. The Shepherds Were the First to See the Child Jesus

The angels had disappeared. The shepherds, filled with amazement, certain that God had spoken to them through the heavenly messenger and enraptured by the singing of the angelic host, said to one another: Let us go to Bethlehem and see the fulfillment of the words just spoken to us. *"They went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger"* (Lk 2:15,16).

The Christ Child manifested himself in his divine weakness. What miracle is this? *"God chose those whom the world considers absurd to shame the wise; he singled out the weak of this world to shame the strong. He chose ... those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who were something"* (1 Cor 1:27, 28).

That is God's way. Is he small enough, weak enough, does he count for nothing? The shepherds, realizing this, blessed and praised the Lord for all they had seen and heard.

As for Mary, she, too, was filled with admiration. *"Mary treasured all these things and reflected on them in her heart"* (Lk 2:19, cf. 2:17-20).

This is a timely example that each of us can imitate by seeking Jesus in the manger of the altar and the tabernacle, prostrating ourselves at the feet of our divine Master in order to serve and love him! Happy the one who receives Jesus, the bread of life, in Bethlehem and places him in his heart so he may reign there! Mary takes Jesus from her virginal breast and places him on the altar of the manger. We seek Jesus in the manger of the altar to place him in our hearts with love.

XVII

MARY AND THE WISE MEN

The lowly would not be the only ones to come to the manger. The great would come in their turn. How were they led to it? 1) through faith; 2) through courage; 3) through their integrity.

1. The Faith of the Wise Men

What was this star? It was certainly a prophecy and a sign. The Wise Men's faith obtained for them the grace of understanding the prophecy and of allowing themselves to be guided by the sign. What graciousness on God's part, allowing the nations furthest removed from the Truth to bring forth men of unshakable faith, whether they had preserved ancient traditions or been inspired by a heavenly grace or perhaps been evangelized through commercial or other contacts with the people of God. In any case, we must realize this was a very special grace, but a grace to which they responded. That is why the Church has seen in the mystery of the adoration of the Magi the mystery of the vocation of the Gentiles.

As for us, can we not see in it the mystery of our own vocation? There are too many of us who plan for our future without a single faith-filled thought! Far too many Christians use their Christian faith for their temporal advancement. Their future is not governed by their faith. It is their faith that submits to their plans for the future. As for us, let us go to Jesus Christ for himself. Let us say without hesitation: *"Where is the newborn king of the Jews?"* (Mt 2:2). And let us proclaim the kingship of Jesus Christ in the face of all the Herods.

We haven't sufficiently reflected on this. As soon as he was born, Jesus Christ wanted to be surrounded by the lowly clan of the shepherds, but he wanted his titles to be known. They were not to be proclaimed so clearly until they were inscribed on his Cross on Calvary. But in the face of King Herod: *"during the reign of King Herod,"* the wise men of the East would come and say: *"Where is*

the newborn king of the Jews?" What a strange kingship! He is truly a King, and his empire is greater than all others, it is the empire of the souls of men and women. His kingship is like his priesthood of which it has been said: *"Jesus, because he remains forever, has a priesthood which does not pass away"* (Hb 7:24). He was opposed, he was pursued, he was rejected, he was thought to have been overthrown. Yet very soon after the foundation of the Church the Apostle John wrote these words: *"A name was written on the part of the cloak that covered his thigh: 'King of kings and Lord of lords.'*" (Rv 19:16).

The Wise Men had faith. Saint John saw the Kingdom of Jesus Christ through faith. Let us also seek Jesus Christ through faith.

2. *The Courage of the Wise Men*

It takes courage to come and tell a sovereign: "You are not the legitimate master. Leave, yield your place to another because there cannot be two kings in the same kingdom." Herod realized this so clearly that he was prepared to kill Jesus Christ.

To come and sow confusion in an entire city simply by asking a question is no trifling matter: *"At this news King Herod became greatly disturbed, and with him all Jerusalem"* (Mt 2:3). But the Wise Men felt the need to confess their faith. It didn't matter whether anyone believed them or not. That did not bother them at all. They owed it to Jerusalem to tell the truth. They asked unhesitatingly: *"Where is the newborn king of the Jews?"* (Mt 2:2).

Do we not see this happen every day?

The world is filled with three sorts of persons: There are the courageous ones and they are very, very few. There are the unbelievers. They deny the truth, they deny the rights of others. At that time the Romans had no idea Jesus Christ had any rights, and in a certain sense they can be forgiven for their ignorance.

Then there are those who see the truth, the rights, and yet dare not proclaim them. Herod, in his perplexity, consulted the chief priests, the scribes of the people, the priesthood and the lawyers. After he had consulted with the priests and the lawyers, he was

given an answer whose consequences they did not see at first: Christ was to be born in Bethlehem. But what signs were there that this prophecy was approaching its fulfillment? So they answered clearly. But once they knew Jesus was to be born in Bethlehem and that his star had appeared in the heavens, would they go to Bethlehem, would they really try to find him? Not at all. They would remain at home. It was more convenient, more prudent, and more cowardly. Christ's rights would not be proclaimed by them. *'7 will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and thwart the cleverness of the clever'* (1 Cor 1:19, citing Is 29:14). The Wise Men would be more courageous. They would follow the star to the end and they alone would be rewarded.

3. *The Wise Men's Integrity*

They heard the call of duty, and they were resolved to obey. Should they remain in Jerusalem with the priests, the scribes, Herod and the entire population? No, no, such cowardice was not worthy of them. They would forge onward to the end, and they would receive their reward. After the act of faith and obedience they had made in the synagogue, they would see the star again, they would find Jesus.

How great was their joy in seeing the star once more! *"They were overjoyed at seeing the star"* (Mt 2:10). And if the sight of the star filled them with joy, how much greater would their joy be on seeing the Child! *"...and on entering the house, [they] found the child with Mary his Mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage"* (Mt 2:11). Faith had given them supernatural courage; supernatural courage empowered them to go forward with integrity and candor. It is through integrity and candor that we find Jesus.

The Wise Men worshipped Jesus and offered him their gifts. They could not let the Child have them, but entrusted them to Mary. She in turn would present them to him at the proper time (cf. Mt 2:11).

Then the Wise Men returned home simply and honorably. They were told not to pass through Jerusalem again. They did not, but

chose another road. They had come by way of the synagogue and they returned guided by the Truth they had worshipped at the end of their pilgrimage.

XVIII

MARY'S FLIGHT INTO EGYPT

Scarcely had the Wise Men departed when an angel came to warn Joseph to take the Child and his Mother and set out for Egypt. Let us admire:

- 1) God's watchful care of his own;
- 2) the obedience of Joseph and Mary;
- 3) the Holy Family's trust.

1. God's Watchful Care of His Own

Herod quickly discovered he had been deceived by the Wise Men, in the sense that God had deceived the deceiver. Indeed! Did it not seem that Christianity was about to be stifled in the Child Jesus' crib? Herod, like a bird of prey, hovered over Bethlehem in a certain sense, awaiting the moment to pounce on the object of his hatred, since he was the usurper and Jesus was the victim but at the same time the true king.

Well, at the proper time after the Wise Men had worshipped the Messiah to fulfill the prophecies, the Divine Child was rescued at the very moment the emissaries of the old Idumean king were commanded to massacre all the boys in the city of David "two years old and under" (Mt 2:16). This terrible command was to be carried out so the dreaded child would perish in the universal massacre. But Herod's designs were foiled. For the Child had fled and the Desired of the nations had sought asylum among the Gentiles like David his ancestor during Saul's persecution. Jesus would return after Herod's death, and then live in Nazareth to fulfill another prophecy. After a hidden life of many years, he would reveal himself at the proper time, to teach all men and women the Good News.

When shall I understand that God's works must bear this seal of persecution, of apparently insuperable obstacles smoothed away and successes achieved even through contradictions. But for that to

happen we must let God do things his way and simply be his most obedient instruments!

This little Child was to go to Egypt, carried there by his parents. He would begin his earthly life as an exile. Not content to have voluntarily exiled himself from heaven, he would be an exile on this earth. He would have no permanent dwelling. Conceived in Nazareth, born in Bethlehem, obliged from his earliest days to flee into Egypt, he chose to live in poverty, abandoned to the Providence that would never forsake him.

When will our surrender to God's will be in some measure like his?

2. The Obedience of Joseph and Mary

The angel spoke to Joseph and warned him. Joseph obeyed on the spot. He took the Child and his Mother and set out without knowing where he was going. His is an admirable example of prompt obedience. It was very important that Joseph obey in this way. If he had lingered, Herod's henchmen would have reached the manger and the Child Jesus would have been engulfed in the universal massacre. Joseph's was a blessed obedience that would save the Savior of the world and keep him safe for his Father's hour, the hour he would die as he himself obeyed even to death and death on the Cross.

What magnificent examples of obedience the Holy Family gives us! So perfect was it that we can consider this family the first of the religious communities. Mary and Jesus, Mother and Child, obeyed the lowly artisan to whom the angel had revealed God's will. There was no grumbling, no delay. God's will had been made known. That sufficed. Mary and Joseph had been entrusted with a treasure from heaven. They would protect and preserve it at all costs. They were not held back by the difficulties facing them—the wintry season, the exhausting journey, indigence, ignorance of the language and customs of a foreign country. The tiny community would edify the Gentiles and prepare the hour of the Good News.

What a stirring example for those who trust only in their own

judgment! After the obedience of the Holy Family, would obedience ever be hard again? For a religious community it is a condemnation of self-serving interpretations of the Rule and of the superiors' commands. Shall we ever understand that disobedience all but destroyed the human race and that obedience will save it?

3. The Holy Family's Trust in Providence

What is most worthy of admiration and imitation is the trust this most blessed of families had in God's protection. They believed in God, they hoped in God, and with untold love entrusted themselves to God the Father.

Now, Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, cannot be said to have believed in God, since he himself is God the Son. As man, however, he entrusted himself to his Father. In later years he would spend nights in prayer to the Father, and as he was dying on the Cross he entrusted his spirit into his Father's hands. As for love, who can fathom the love of Jesus' heart? Then, of course, there were Mary and Joseph. They were expected to practice faith, hope, charity with boundless trust in the power, the wisdom, and the love of God thrice holy!

That is the way, the only way divine works are carried out. There is no divine work without an invincible trust in God's paternal intentions.

Let us take flight, let us hide, let us be homeless, let us accept exile and its consequences. But let us do all this trusting in God. "*Commit to the Lord your way, trust him and he will act*" (Ps 37:5; cf. Ps 55:23).

XIX

MARY SEARCHES FOR JESUS AND FINDS HIM

Once they were back home in Nazareth the Holy Family fulfilled their religious obligations. They went up to the Temple with Jesus, but on the way home Mary and Joseph discovered Jesus was not with them. There are several lessons to learn from this.

- 1) The need to guard the graces granted us;
- 2) the need to search for gifts that have been lost;
- 3) the need to rise above human considerations where salvation is concerned.

1. The Need to Guard the Graces Granted Us

We can learn a great lesson from the apparent negligence of Mary and Joseph in Jesus' regard. When he was twelve years old they took him with them to Jerusalem to celebrate the Pasch. Having fulfilled their legal obligations, they set out for their home in Nazareth. But where was Jesus? They probably thought he was with some of their relatives or friends. This was an imprudent assumption. Jesus was not among them.

This is a painful example of what happens to those who fail to be vigilant. They had been called to the closest relations with God. Our Lord had given himself to them over many years, they had followed him everywhere, in solitude, works of charity, poverty, humiliations, persecutions, labors. They had demonstrated an ardent zeal for their Master. Then all of a sudden, after carrying out great obligations, they trust in their past accomplishments, they depend on their habitual attitudes, and for lack of vigilance they discover that Jesus Christ has disappeared. His graces have been withdrawn.

What caused this misfortune? It may have been presumptuous trust or perhaps somnolence when there was need to be wide awake and vigilant. In the end, grace disappeared and they realize what happened, but too late.

Do we not lose Jesus in various circumstances through our own fault? We are not speaking here of lukewarm or lax Christians, but indeed of fervent ones. Was anyone more fervent than Mary and Joseph? Had anyone watched more carefully over Jesus up to that time? Or protected him more carefully? Or loved him more? True, there were legitimate excuses, but that didn't change the fact that Jesus was not with them. Was it their fault? Rather it seems that Providence permitted this to show us how carefully we must preserve Jesus within us when we have the good fortune to possess him.

We have food for much reflection in this episode of Jesus' life.

2. *The Need to Search for Lost Gifts*

"As they were returning at the end of the feast, the child Jesus remained behind unknown to his parents" (Lk 2:43). So Jesus remained in Jerusalem. Certainly, this in itself is a great mystery. But what matters here is that Jesus shows severity toward those he loves most when they fail to be as vigilant as they ought.

"Thinking he was in the party, they continued their journey for a day, looking for him among their relatives and acquaintances" (Lk 2:44). There are those who say that the men went home together, and the women returned as a group. So Joseph thought Jesus was with Mary, and Mary thought he was with Joseph. Since neither of them expected him to be anywhere else than with the other, they did not notice his absence until they had travelled a whole day. They sought him among their relatives. It was only in the Temple that he would be found. What worry, what anguish for Mary and Joseph until they found Jesus!

This is an admirable example. True, we can lose Jesus, even if it is not our fault at all. Our Divine Master's intentions are such that no one can predict when, amid dryness and darkness, it will please him to conceal his presence. He does not withdraw from us, but he makes believe he is *"going farther"* (Lk 24:28), as in the case of the disciples of Emmaus. Let us persevere. Let us be courageous. God will be there, ready to be seen once more, like Jesus in the Temple

of Jerusalem where his parents found him.

3. The Need to Rise above Human Considerations Where Salvation is Concerned

What did Jesus do? Child though he was, a Child God, he had the courage to separate himself from his parents. He was found *“in the midst of the teachers”* (Lk 2:46). If we lose Jesus we have perhaps deserved to lose him for not holding to sound doctrine, following instead the path of sentiment. We must follow the path of truth.

“They came upon him in the temple sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions” (Lk 2:46). He listened to them, questioned them. He was learning and at the same time teaching them more than they were able to teach. Everyone was attracted by his charm: *“All who heard him were amazed at his intelligence and his answers”* (Lk 2:47).

Twenty years later most of his admirers would condemn him to death because of their jealousy. But at that moment in the Temple they were not diffident. That is why Jesus spoke to them, to prove that if they later rejected him when he taught them *“as one having authority”* (cf. Mt 7:29) they would be guilty for not accepting him.

Meanwhile his Mother sought him, found him, and addressed tender reproaches to him.

“Why did you search for me? I was about my Fathers business” (cf. Lk 2:49).

When shall we be about God’s business?

XX

MARY AND NAZARETH

“He went down with them then, and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them” (Lk 2:51).

- 1) The obedience of Jesus;
- 2) Mary’s constant and searching scrutiny of her growing Son;
- 3) the growth and development of the Son of God in his human nature.

1. The Obedience of Jesus

“He was obedient to them.” The truth of the matter is this. From the time he was twelve until he was thirty, Jesus lived with Mary and Joseph, and the only detail we learn about those years is this: He was obedient to them.

Readiness to obey God is a general attitude, as is readiness to obey laws. But obedience to one’s parents and immediate superiors is a specific, daily obligation. Every day, several times a day, it often involves difficult duties. No matter. We must obey if we want to do what is right.

If we consider the family as the fundamental element of human society, we must admit that fatherhood implies authority to command, and consequently that power descends from above. The model of the king is a father. Children do not originate the family, the father does. That is why obedience is necessary. Societies are always more stable where power is less subject to controversy. Jesus Christ himself said: Give unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar. It was Jesus who established the family under the sign of obedience and obtained remarkable results. Satan turned heaven upside down and excavated the depths of hell by his disobedience. Adam was driven from his earthly paradise by his disobedience. Obviously in human governments the threat of tyranny can be very real. Yet there is a presumption in favor of power where the idea of God is firmly held. When abuses do arise in such societies the chances are

they will be minimized.

2. *Mary's Constant and Searching Scrutiny of her Growing Son*

Everything about Jesus' life was the object of his Mother's constant and searching scrutiny. *"Mary treasured all these things and reflected on them in her heart"* (Lk 2:19, cf. 2:51). Here was the greatest of mothers becoming the voluntary disciple of her Son. She devoted her hours and days to reflecting in her heart on all that she witnessed. Every good mother, and religious superiors, too, should be concerned with the smallest details of the lives of those entrusted to their care.

In the case of Jesus, Mary's work was made easy by the perfection of her Son. Yet is it not obvious from the reproach Mary addressed to him when he was among the doctors in the Temple that maternal love should not refrain from the necessary firmness where the training of souls is at stake?

Looking at things from another perspective, we find deep teachings in these words: *"And his Mother treasured all these things and reflected on them in her heart."* Mary meditated lovingly on every detail relating to Jesus' life, and she put this knowledge to good use. She strove to apply these teachings to her own life. Jesus became her model. That is what I must do if I want to attain the perfection of Christian living. Jesus must be my law: *"Christ is the end of the law. Through him justice comes to everyone who believes"* (Rm 10:4). That is how I must govern my behavior. In everything and for everything, *the end of the law is Christ*. Ah! If I would only study all the details of Jesus' life, I would find countless practical, admirable and divine lessons!

Jesus *"progressed steadily in wisdom and age and grace"* (Lk 2:52). Every day he continually teaches me by the various developments in his mortal life. Why don't I ask him to show me how to develop in his footsteps?

Above all, I should remember that when I ask him for guidance I must receive it with the love Mary had when she scrutinized her Son.

3. The Growth and Development of the Son of God According to His Human Nature

“Jesus, for his part, progressed steadily in wisdom and age and grace before God and men” (Lk 2:52). Commentators point out that the real development indicated by the Evangelist is simply a more perfect or more extensive manifestation of what was already present in the Word but revealed gradually.

In the measure that the Word’s human nature attained greater maturity he spoke with greater wisdom, he manifested greater virtue.

This admirable disposition should serve as the model for all our behavior. Everything within us must assume new dimensions. It must be said of a fervent Christian: *“he progressed steadily in wisdom and age and grace before God and men.”*

Let us ask Jesus to make himself known to us in his various stages of growth and development and enable us to imitate him through persistent effort.

XXI

MARY AND NAZARETH: WORK

“Is this not the carpenter, the carpenter’s son?” (Mk 6:3, Mt 13:55). That’s what the Jews said about Jesus Christ when he began to evangelize. Jesus was an artisan, the son of an artisan. He chose to work. What is work? 1) An expiation; 2) a safeguard; 3) an education.

1. *Work, a Means of Expiation*

“By the sweat of your face shall you get bread to eat” (Gn 3:19). Together with death, work is the great punishment for sin.¹¹ Men and women must work. That is the law. It must be endured. That is the portion of all, and those who refuse to work can expect punishments of another sort. A nation that does not work is a nation that quickly sinks into pleasures and the mire of the passions. Such a nation is preparing for slavery. The Christian who does not work is weakened and more readily turns to evil.

However, punishment does not expiate. Consequently, after the first punishment, there were others. Now, here is the wonderful thing about it. Jesus came to our earth, and through the merits of his sweat work became an expiation. The harsher the work, the more meritorious it would be, and work would become a constant means of purification. Christian work would never again be the portion of slaves alone, since through work we find a means of being reconciled to God.

What kind of work do I do? How well have I been offering my work to God up to this time?

2. *Work, a Safeguard*

When does Satan have a better hold on us than during our

¹¹ The reference would seem to be to tedious, exhausting, unrewarding work, rather than

leisure moments? The slothful are those he most easily conquers. They are in a state of perpetual fluctuation: *“The soul of the sluggard craves in vain...”* (Pr 13:4). He wants and yet he does not want. He looks at everything in the light of what costs him the least effort. Since sin is always easier than fulfilling the law, it is easy to conclude in which direction the slothful will turn.

Jesus’ life of work gives us an admirable example. As God, he is always acting, thereby imitating his Father: *“My Father is at work until now, and I am at work as weir* (Jn 5:17). Yet that is not what I have in mind now.

Not only is work an expiation, it is also a safeguard. The busy man does not have time to entertain evil thoughts, and if they come to mind, he will repel them more easily.

Once evil thoughts have had a chance to influence us, evil effects inevitably follow because we have not held fast to the good.

These are the reasons why we must apply ourselves to our work with energy and determination.

3. *Work, and Education*

I am speaking of supernatural education. I reflect on the Fathers of the desert. They were constantly working, and they prayed while they worked. They considered work the necessary condiment for their prayers.

Sheltered from the sun in their caverns or cells, sitting on the ground, with their supplies of palm leaves to weave mats, they worked and they prayed. Prayer charmed away the tediousness of the work, the work gave their prayer the aroma of penance. At the same time they found it so much easier to raise their hearts and minds to heavenly matters.

Ah! All this is but a feeble image of the work that went on in Nazareth and of the thoughts that accompanied this work. It was work accomplished in union with God who is always acting and whose activity can be dened only as pure act. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph worked unceasingly, and prayed as they worked. When they

to work per se.

rested by conversing, they kept their conversations on a lofty spiritual level.

In order to see work as a means of spiritual formation, of education, we must see its divine side, just as Jesus did during his labors in Nazareth. Jesus, grant me the grace of working in order to do penance for my sins, to preserve me from sin, and to draw me ever closer to yourself.

XXII

MARY FORSAKEN

God is truly wonderful in his saints and in the trials he demands of them. He wants us to know that he has his own requirements, and he chose to place Mary in a condition of humility.

At Cana, Jesus said to Mary: *“Woman, how does this concern of yours involve me?”* (Jn 2:4).

A woman praised the womb that had borne Jesus and the breasts that had nursed him. In reply, he declared that far more blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it (cf. Lk 11:27-28).

When someone told Jesus his mother and brothers were waiting to speak to him, he answered: *“Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?”* (Mt 12:47, cf. 48-50). In his mission, he refused to let any human obstacle hold him back.

Even so, Mary’s condition was no less remarkable. Let us consider: 1) her forsakenness; 2) her solitude; 3) her silent resignation.

1. *Mary’s Forsakenness*

Mary offers an incomparable model for the soul willing to be vivified by the trials that mould saints. For thirty years less three days Mary was never separated from Jesus. She knew the value of her treasure, and kept a very loving watch over it. As Jesus grew in wisdom and grace revealing new perfections to her, she loved him more and more, her heart’s delight grew. Mary, Mother and Virgin, kept experiencing ever greater tenderness for her Son and her God.

However, the moment of separation had to come. They would meet from time to time, but only under circumstances when Mary’s presence did not hinder Jesus’ ministry in any way. The time for intimate conversations had come to an end. Instead, Mary experienced the cruelty of being forsaken, all the more poignant because the delights of the past made her feel keenly the bitterness

of her privations. Such must be the condition of the soul determined to advance spiritually.

Mary acquired great merits while she remained apart from Jesus. It was not that Jesus was far, but his daily presence had ended. He had not ceased to love his Mother. He wanted to teach souls that after Mary's example, those who would strive for perfection need to learn there are circumstances when one must leave Jesus for the sake of Jesus.

Lord, grant that I may never leave you for any other reason, but that when you so wish I may be ready to leave you to prove how much I love you.

2. *Mary's Solitude*

What was Mary's solitude like? Certainly, she had daily contacts with others. Yet was not the whole world a solitude the moment Jesus was no longer near her?

This is a serious question. When shall I understand this solitude of the heart in which it would be good for me to rest if I want to advance in the spiritual life? Obviously, there are moments when the solitude of the cloister has its advantages, but that is not the solitude demanded of me, at least not as it is demanded of the Trappist, the Carthusian, the Carmelite nun. What is demanded of me is solitude of heart. I am far from everything in my thoughts. Jesus has withdrawn from me, I am seeking him, I do not find him. I stand before him, but he does not look at me. I cry out, but he does not listen. In the words of the prophet, "*Then you turn upon me without mercy and with your strong hand you buffet me*" (Jb 30:21). I must accept this apparent harshness.

I shall go to Mary, I shall seek to console her in her solitude, and she will console me in mine.

3. *Mary's Silent Resignation*

Silence is a great sacrifice when we have so many sufferings to tell about, so many complaints to formulate! No one had more

reason than Mary to complain about Jesus when he deprived her so abruptly of her past consolations. Indeed, what complaint did Mary express? Silence. The hope that it would not continue forever gave her strength, to use the words of the prophet: *"In quiet and trust your strength lies"* (Is 30:15).

Authentic strength lies in a silence filled with hope. Everything that is of this earth is of short duration. Mary knew it, she was silent, and she hoped.

Lord, give me the strength of hope and silence, and all my trials will be shortened.

XXIII

MARY'S COMPASSION

The hour of sacrifice had arrived. Jesus was about to be immolated and Mary would share in his sufferings. There are a few authors who claim that Jesus, who had asked Mary's permission to assume a body within her chaste womb, also asked her permission to die. They also claim he then allowed Mary to be present at the Last Supper. These are touching details, and there is no reason why our devotion should not be nourished by them. Actually, the Gospel account provides us sufficient information to enable us to understand how much Mary suffered. Let us contemplate Mary during Jesus' agony and at his death.

1. Mary During Jesus' Cruel Sufferings

It is certain that Mary knew in advance that Jesus would be for her the source of the most acute suffering. We have Simeon's prophecy, the cruel sword that constantly threatened to pierce her maternal heart. Now, since the Apostles had been forewarned of Jesus' death, why would Mary not have known about it? It has been said she was kept away from the tribunals. That is understandable. Yet this Mother was too much concerned with what was in store for her Son not to try to see him during his last moments. True, his suffering was foreseen. Yet the sight of what a God-Man can suffer far exceeded her apprehensions! What she saw made her surmise all the rest.

But why speak about what Mary saw with her bodily eyes and what her mother's love made her surmise? Didn't Jesus himself explain the meaning of his sufferings to her? What she saw was what Jesus Christ showed her.

The tragic procession moved toward the place where Pilate would pronounce the solemn words: "Look at the man! Look at your king!" (Jn 19:5,14). Mary would then see the fulfillment of the angel's words in a most cruel way. Yes, here was the man to whom

she had given birth. But was this the king who had been announced to her? He had a scepter made of reeds, a crown of thorns, a cloak of royal purple, but what derision! Then he was stripped of this attire. And why? To be crucified. Mary saw the adorable Victim under the weight of a crushing and ignominious load. She could not offer him any comfort. Jesus Christ was turned over to his executioners, and her hands could not give him support. Jesus and Mary could only look at one another, and how poignant the Son's look must have been!

Now this was the suffering of the Mother of God the Son. Mary's grief had divine majesty. We see how closely their sufferings were intertwined! Everything Jesus suffered had repercussions in Mary's soul.

Ah! The union between Mary's suffering and the sufferings of Jesus is a great lesson on how I must unite myself to the Son and to the Mother at this most dreadful moment.

2. Mary's Presence at Jesus' Death

Jesus had now reached Calvary. At first, Mary, Saint John, and the holy women looked on "from a distance" (Mk 15:40). Then Mary saw the Cross laid on the ground, and Jesus stretched out on the instrument of torture. She heard the noise of the hammers driving the nails into the sacred hands and feet of her Son. She looked upon the greatest of all victims raised up between earth and heaven and the Cross falling heavily into the hole prepared to receive it.

Mary understood her Son's tortures! All these tortures had their repercussions in the innermost depths of her being. The supreme moment had arrived. Having finished their grisly work, the executioners divided up the garments of the Crucified among themselves. Then Mary came forward and stood at the foot of the Cross.

Who can describe the bodily sufferings of the God-Man? They were proportionate to the divine refinement of his human nature. His hands and feet had been pierced, his body was a bloody mass

from the scourging, his head was bruised and bleeding from the crown of thorns, he was consumed with thirst, and the pull of the nails on his muscles and tendons was excruciating. What a frightful state!

What can we say of the sufferings of his penetrating intellect? The uselessness of his execution for so many, the thought of all the Satanic schemes against his work of Redemption, all these things were horribly present to him. He accepted everything with humility.

And what of the agony of his loving heart, the object of so much hatred, ingratitude, scorn, insults, and sacrileges? Yet under the blows of divine justice, he submitted totally.

Meanwhile, all these sufferings had their repercussions in Mary. No one will ever know how much she suffered from her Son's sufferings.

For three terrible hours there was silence during which seven solemn words escaped Jesus' lips. We shall reflect on only two or three of them.

"I am thirsty, *sitio*" (Jn 19:28). A burning fever consumed his veins from which the blood had been drained. Above all, he thirsted for the souls he wanted to redeem. That was the cause of his exhaustion. He wanted souls and they refused to come to him. He was thirsty, "*sitio*." Mary was thirsty, too. Indeed, if Jesus was exhausted from loss of blood, Mary was exhausted from weeping. When Jesus said to her: "There is your son" (Jn 19:26), a terrible battle raged within this divine Mother's heart. She wanted everything her Son wanted, she wanted the salvation of the men and women he had come to redeem, but she saw them as her Son's executioners. She accepted them nonetheless, and the Church was being born in Jesus' words and in Mary's loving acceptance.

Mary suffered deep humiliation at the sight of the outrages to which Jesus was subjected. Hers were the most excruciating maternal sufferings ever endured because of her very perfection. She made an incomparable act of faith when the dying Jesus cried out: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt 27:46,

citing Ps 22:2¹²). It almost seemed as if Jesus were declaring he had been rejected by God and that consequently he himself was not God. Mary's love was greater than all possible doubts. She is my model. Yes, humility, the acceptance of suffering, these are the fruits of my reflections on Mary at the foot of the Cross.

O Mary, teach me the wonders of your Compassion and impress them in my soul!

¹² This Psalm describes the Passion and Triumph of the Messiah, ending on a very joyful note.

XXIV

MARY RECEIVES JESUS INTO HER ARMS AFTER THE CRUCIFIXION

Jesus, the Victim of the sacrifice, had manifested his progress in wisdom, grace, and perfection as his life unfolded. No one had rejoiced more than Mary in the unfolding of her Son's divine beauty. This had increased her love for him prodigiously so that when the hour of suffering came her sorrow was vast as the sea. Now, these sufferings were over. Jesus had died, he had been taken down from the Cross, and his sacred body was, in accordance with tradition, placed at the feet of his Mother and then carried to the tomb.

Let us examine what Mary teaches us in these two most precious acts: 1) the descent from the Cross; 2) the burial.

1. Mary at the Descent from the Cross

Jesus had breathed his last. "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Ps 31:6; Lk 23:46). His soul had gone into limbo. Jesus' sufferings were over, but Mary's would persist for some time. She remained at the foot of the Cross. Who could separate her from these mortal remains where Divinity dwelled? She remained there in silence, adoration. Jesus had expired. Who was there to adore him? Mary, John, the holy women. This is the story of so many churches in our own time.

The sound of footsteps was heard. Although the Apostles had fled, the timid disciples had taken heart. Joseph of Arimathea had the courage to ask Pilate for Jesus' body. His request was granted. Longinus took the precaution of piercing the Victim's heart, and graces flowed in abundance.

Joseph and Nicodemus went up to the Cross, detached Jesus' sacred body from it and respectfully deposited it according to tradition on the knees of his Mother. It had rested on her knees in Bethlehem, and now rested on them on Calvary.

Mary's hands and clothing were bloodied by contact with her Son's terrible wounds. Mary was the first to celebrate the feast of the Body of the Lord. What a mystery! She would in the future discover many sacrileges committed through Satan's hatred: unworthy acts by priests, crimes, ingratitude, impenitence, apostasy, the fury of heretics. Mary sensed all that and wanted to offer her Son an anticipatory reparation. May Mary's devotion to the sacred body of Jesus be the model of the worship we give him as well. There is no more beautiful way to honor the body of Jesus than to do so in union with Mary, the most perfect of adorers! This is especially true when we are suffering deeply.

Jesus' body was anointed with myrrh and aloes and wrapped in the shroud that his Mother was too poor to provide for him. Joseph of Arimathea had seen to this need. It looked as if it was all over for Jesus. If his body had not been the body of God the Son, it would have remained forever hidden from his Mother.

The cortege formed and proceeded to the tomb where Jesus' body was to be laid, and Mary went with the others.

Such were Mary's last honors to her Son. Such is the homage Catholics render him when they busy themselves about his altars. The altar is his tomb, the corporal is a shroud, the incense replaces the myrrh and the aloes. Let us adore Jesus as he descends from heaven at the priest's voice, just as Mary adored Jesus after his descent from the Cross. When we ask for consolations as we kneel before the Jesus of the altar, let us remember that among the marks of Eucharistic worship should be sadness at the thought of all the Divine Victim suffered for us and eagerness to share in his work of Redemption through our own sufferings.

2. Mary at Jesus Burial*

When the shroud was placed over our Savior's sacred face, Mary experienced the solitude that only love can feel when the beloved is taken away and disappears forever. What, then, must have been her emotions when the tomb was opened, Jesus placed within it, and the stone replaced at the entrance and sealed for fear

of the Pharisees!

Mary returned to Jerusalem without Jesus. What happened on that first night, as she suffered silently in an agony of faith, hope, and love? Ah! She must surely have known, like Job on his dungheap, that the Redeemer lived. But when would she see him again? This was a terrible question to ask while his enemies rejoiced in their triumph over him.

Whoever wants to attain perfection must accept every kind of separation. Mary accepted the most painful of them all, separation from her Son. A tomb now kept Mother and Son apart. We, too, have witnessed these sufferings. But has any of us been called on to mourn the loss of such beauty and perfection as those of Jesus?

Does any mother have a heart like Mary's? As Jesus was dying, he could say: Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit. When Mary came away from the tomb, she could say to Jesus: My Son, I leave my heart in your hands.

Mary remained in thought, in sorrow, and in love close to the body of her dead Jesus. In so doing, she learned to die to herself. Jesus was really dead, but there is also the mystical death of the soul that is turning away from the world, from all created things, in order to cleave to God alone. Mary gave us an example of this mystical death as she came away from the tomb. Yes, we must leave everything, even consolation, in order to weep and suffer close to our Beloved. Mary's compassion teaches us a great lesson: we must die to ourselves the way she did when she came away from Jesus' tomb.

Yet this process is shrouded in great mystery. The first man was created on the sixth day. The greatest of all men, the God-man, was put to death on the sixth day. Like his heavenly Father, he was to rest on the seventh day and come forth glorious after assuming his transfigured life. But before reaching that point Jesus seemed to have had such a need to suffer that he wanted to suffer not only in his own heart, but also in his Mother's.¹³

¹³ It might be pointed out that Jesus allowed his Mother to suffer so much in union with him because her suffering, like his and subordinate to his, was redemptive. She was sharing in his great work of saving the human race, and she did so willingly, serenely,

This is very illuminating for us. Suffering is indeed punishment, but since Jesus accepted it and allowed his Mother to share in it more than any other creature, the greatest mark of love Our Lord can give us is to allow us to suffer greatly so we may learn to endure and, if need be, desire suffering.

knowing she was cooperating in the work of Redemption for which her Son had come into the world. We, too, are called to share in the Redemption by uniting our sufferings with those of our Redeemer.

XXV

MARY AND THE RESURRECTION

The time for sorrow was over. When the holy women went to the tomb, the angel showed them that the stone at the entrance had been removed and said to them: “He is not here. He has been raised” (Mt 28:6; cf. Lk 24:6). The women hastened to announce this news to the Apostles. Can we imagine they would not have announced this great news to Mary, in the event Jesus had not done so himself?

Now the risen Jesus had no greater desire as a Son than to communicate the fruits of his Resurrection to his Mother.

This offers us a model. Jesus communicated these fruits, Mary received them and made excellent use of them. Since we are destined to receive them in our turn, let us ponder and understand.

Mary was being prepared to share her Son’s risen life: 1) by her constant thought of heaven; 2) by her constant increase in grace, the prelude to the glory of heaven; 3) by the most perfect imitation of the virtues of Jesus now triumphant in heaven.

1. The Thought of Heaven

“Since you have been raised up in company with Christ, set your heart on what pertains to higher realms where Christ is seated at God’s right hand. Be intent on things above rather than on things of earth” (Col 3:1,2). The Apostle raises no doubts about our being raised up with Jesus Christ. The miraculous effect has extended from the Conqueror of death to all whom his death redeemed. We must not forget that Jesus Christ resurrected the whole human race in himself. To quote the Apostle Paul: “Both with and in Christ Jesus [God] raised us up and gave us a place in the heavens” (Ep 2:6). Jesus Christ seems to have shared his Resurrection with all humankind. But then we must also be one in spirit: “Since you have been raised up in company with Christ, set your heart on what pertains to higher realms...”

Can we have any doubts about the heavenly aspirations of Mary? It could certainly be said of Mary that her citizenship was in heaven (cf. Ph 3:20). That must be true for us as well. But what a heavy pull the things of earth have on us! It is a cruel alternative. Our senses shackle us, faith raises us heavenward. In this battle between the desire for the things of heaven and those of earth, we too often succumb to earthly things. But Jesus Christ is not to be found on our earth. He is in heaven, “seated at God’s right hand.” That is the truth of the matter.

After Jesus’ Ascension, Mary thought only of the moment when she, too, would go to heaven. What about us? When shall we yearn for heaven as our homeland and no longer cling to the things of this earth?

2. Mary’s Increase in Grace, Prelude to Glory

“O death, where is your sting?” {1 Cor 15:55}. Death has indeed been vanquished. But is there nothing left to do? Yes, there is much. Jesus Christ and Mary are our models. After his Resurrection, Jesus was transformed. He had not yet gone to join his Father but he was ready to go; He was already glorious. His body had come forth from the tomb spiritualized. It could pass through walls, appear and disappear from view at will. A few weeks later Jesus would rise up to heaven through his own power, his body sharing in his soul’s glory.

Jesus Christ was now glorious. And whom did he allow to share most fully in his Resurrection? Was it not Mary? And if so, what happened in Mary’s blessed soul which had already received so many graces?

Let us plunge in thought into the depths of virtue granted to Mary: humility, self-giving, obedience, faith, hope, love. If we keep searching, we shall reach unfathomable depths. Now these graces are the pledge of those to be granted to us. The glorified Jesus gave them in superabundance to his Mother, and from the graces she received during her mortal life, we can have an inkling of the glory that awaited her in heaven.

All of this teaches us an important lesson. “Each of us has received God’s favor in the measure in which Christ bestows it. Thus you find Scripture saying: ‘When he ascended on high, he took a host of captives [the just of the Old Testament whom he freed from limbo] and gave gifts to men’” (Ep 4:7-8). The fruits of the Resurrection are not just for Jesus and Mary. They are for all those of us who want to benefit from them. We have been emancipated, captivity is now captive, and all the gifts necessary for salvation are at our disposal. Let us take advantage of them and walk in the path of the saints so that we may be glorified like Jesus, the Holy One, who was never subjected to the corruption of the grave: “my body will live on in hope, for you will not...suffer your faithful one to undergo corruption” (Ac 2:26-27). Glorified, too, like Mary, the Queen of all saints.

3. Mary’s Imitation of the Perfections of Jesus

Why didn’t Mary die of sorrow at the foot of the Cross? Why did she not rise again with Jesus? Why did she not ascend into heaven with him? She still had work to do. It was fitting that she remain on earth to be the model of a creature growing in holiness. Mary remained with us for quite a long time as our wonderful model.

Even so, we can say that after the sufferings of the Passion, the soul that wants to be immolated finds certain admirable states through which God may please to have it pass. For such a soul the world vanishes and a new world

XXVI

MARY AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

After the Ascension, the Acts of the Apostles tell us, Mary was with the disciples awaiting the descent of the Holy Spirit (cf. Ac 1:14). Did she need the Holy Spirit? Could it be that the creature for whom the Holy Spirit had done most needed to receive still more from him? Well, yes. “In my inmost being you teach me wisdom” (Ps 51:8). And there are always new depths to reach. There is constant need of more abundant graces, of more burning love. That is why Mary was present in the Cenacle on Pentecost.

1) She was there for her own sake; 2) she was there for the sake of the Church. Let us inquire how, after her example, we need to call the Holy Spirit into our hearts for our own sakes and for our brothers and sisters.

1. Mary Received the Holy Spirit for her Own Needs

The truth is that we always need God and his love. It is of the essence of our limited nature to be able through grace always to love God more. For not only did he create us and redeem us, but he wants to sanctify us by his love. In this respect, Mary’s condition was no different than ours. She received many more spiritual insights than the rest of us, and these insights showed her the spiritual riches she could still acquire. She loved and her love kindled in her an immense thirst to love still more. The Holy Spirit had given her God as her Son, but the Church does not hesitate to call Mary the spouse of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit wanted to give her more graces every day so that she could have more to give.

Our souls are not called the spouses of the Holy Spirit, but they are his temples. While we grieve the Holy Spirit through sin, we rejoice him through the practice of the virtues, by our love, our gratitude. That is what we must aspire to. In what ways do I want my spiritual life to advance? This progress will be proportionate to the extent to which I allow the Holy Spirit to act within me.

What a strange aberration of the human spirit! God wants to pour his love and his blessings into me, and I raise obstacles to his loving plans which assure my happiness. Through God's infinite mercy, I am invited to plunge my being into the life of the Father, my intellect into the light of the Son, and my heart into the love of the Holy Spirit. But I draw back, I hesitate. What a strange mistake!

I shall turn to Mary and beseech her in the name of the new graces the Holy Spirit communicated to her on Pentecost to obtain for me from the Holy Spirit the victorious graces which will subjugate me and force me to purify my whole being. Then the Holy Spirit can give me secret inspirations through which I shall know how to comply with everything that is asked of me as perfectly as possible.

2. Mary Received the Holy Spirit for the Good of the Church

This is certainly one of the most admirable mysteries of the Christian life. All of us, whoever we are, contribute our own stone, whether large or small, to the building of the society of God among men, namely, the Church. Mary had provided the cornerstone when she gave Jesus to the world. After making an immense contribution, she had the right to rest. But does love ever rest? As long as there is something to consume, it continues to burn. Such was Mary's heart. She had given Jesus to men. Now she wanted to give humankind to Jesus. In the Cenacle Mary was present, drawing down the gifts of the Holy Spirit from on high through her prayers. She kept watch over the future of the Church, experiencing the anguish of maternal love for those called to evangelize and for the souls to be saved.

Here we see Mary under a twofold aspect. She is the humble Virgin whose love, through the Holy Spirit, is united to her Son's love for souls. She is the admirable model of the saints who pray for the conversion of sinners, for the perseverance of the just. Mary is also the Queen of the Church. It was in the Cenacle that she took possession of her title as Mother and Queen of the Church. In this capacity she presided over the communication of power from on

high that her Son had announced to his Apostles.

When shall I, in my turn, give selfless service to the Church through my prayers and actions? When shall I ask the Holy Spirit to make of me a less unworthy instrument, so I can serve the Church with all the zeal that befits a son of the Church and of Mary?

XXVII

MARY AND THE EUCHARIST

During the long years between the Resurrection of Jesus and the Assumption of Mary, there would have been great sadness for Mary's maternal heart had not the presence of Jesus consoled her. Certainly we can assume that her divine Son deigned to appear to her, but in any event we know she had the Eucharist.

Let us consider the hope Mary drew from the Eucharist and the love she derived from it.

1. Mary's Hope When She Received the Eucharist

Tradition recounts that Mary received Communion every day from the hand of Saint John. And why not! Had not Jesus told the Apostles: "Do this in remembrance of me" (Lk 22:19)? Was anyone more deserving to receive the Eucharist than Mary? And if Saint John celebrated the sacred mysteries every day, why would Mary not have participated? Did anyone have a greater right to do so? In communion Jesus returned to Mary what he had received from her, his body formed within the womb of the purest of virgins.

In giving of himself to Mary through the hands of John or of any of the other disciples, Jesus consoled her by strengthening her hope. Mary could have thought she was forsaken. Jesus had risen to heaven and she remained on earth for many years. How long it seemed to her! But Jesus came frequently to visit his admirable Mother whom he wanted to sanctify still more through the anguish of waiting. It would seem that since the first Christians kept the Eucharistic bread in their homes, Mary may well have been the first to suggest this invention. In the presence of the tabernacle Mary was never far from Jesus. What a source of patient hope for her!

But don't I have Communion, too? Don't I have the tabernacle? Why don't I make the most effective use of them as Mary did? Why should I not go to Jesus to gain strength and learn to depend more completely on heaven's help? Since my Master's body is

safeguarding my soul for eternal life, I have in Communion the greatest source of hope. Jesus entered heaven first. He comes down to teach me how to follow him there. When shall I live a life centered on heaven?

2. Mary's Love in the Presence of the Eucharist

Devotion to the Eucharist is addressed to the whole Jesus Christ. The Eucharist contains both the humanity and the divinity of God-made-man. In the Eucharist Jesus is all he was in Bethlehem, in Nazareth, in the mountains of Galilee, on Lake Tiberias, in the desert, in the Temple, and on the Cross. He is the same Jesus, Son of God and Son of Mary. After his glorious Ascension, Mary's encounters with him in Communion must have united them in love as never before.

As Jesus was dying he had said to Mary, referring to his beloved disciple: "Woman, this is your son." When John celebrated the Eucharistic mystery and gave Mary the consecrated bread, he could repeat the same words to Mary: "O woman, here is your Son!" Who can describe the effusions of love exchanged between Jesus and Mary at those moments?

O woman, here is your Son, no longer under mortal appearances, resting on your maternal lips and reminding you of his state before his birth. He is truly the hidden God, but also the God of love.

Mary returned this love only as she could. I, too, must be filled with this love. How do I love when I receive Communion? When shall I understand the full meaning of the words: "The life I live is not my own; Christ is living in me" (Gal 2:20)? This will happen only when I make the great resolution to live for love of my Lord and Master.

What a problem! I love creatures, I love myself above everyone and everything else. Can I say I truly love Jesus Christ? This is an astonishing question for a creature upon whom God's immeasurable mercy has been lavished. For there is no more magnificent mission for a Christian, and above all for a religious, than to be totally

dedicated to bringing others to love Jesus Christ.

Mary, you will help me to fulfill this mission. By your help Jesus will be loved in me and I will bring others to love him through your intercession.

XXVIII

MARY, QUEEN OF THE APOSTLES

When Jesus ascended to heaven he left Mary on earth for many long years. He did so for a purpose worthy of himself and of her. Mary gave support and encouragement to the Apostles and prepared other workers to preach the Gospel. Can there be any doubt about it? To deny it would be to doubt the perfection of the works entrusted to Mary on our earth. Now, what work is more perfect than the formation of apostles destined to be true pillars of the Church as well as its guiding lights? 1) How did Mary carry out this admirable work? 2) What were the results of her work?

1. Mary Gave Support to the Apostles and Prepared New Workers to Preach the Gospel

A. *Through prayer.* In this she imitated her divine Son who chose the Twelve only after spending nights in prayer. “*Then he went out to the mountain to pray, spending the night in communion with God. At daybreak he called his disciples and selected twelve of them to be his Apostles*” (Lk 6:12-13).

Mary called down upon them new outpourings of the Spirit whom they had received on Pentecost. She could say to them as Paul did to Timothy: “*I remind you to stir into flame the gift of God*” (2 Tm 1:6). She prayed for them. Is not every Christian invited to share in her prayer? If we only knew how necessary prayer is! Our need for apostles is immense. If we do not have enough apostles, is it because we don’t ask for them?

B. *Through her example.* The heart of the apostolic life is the desire for God’s glory, zeal for the extension of the kingdom of Jesus Christ, zeal for the salvation and sanctification of souls. Is there even one Christian who lacks the means of sanctification? This was Mary’s consuming concern. Dedicated as she was to the glory of God, to the fulfillment of her Son’s work, to the conversion of souls, she did what she could to preach by her example. Did she preach in

public? We have no indication that she ever did. Yet Mary had all the virtues of an apostle. Above all, she was filled with the fiery zeal of an apostle. She was truly an apostle in her soul, restoring the energy of the Apostles, encouraging them and teaching them to be more generous laborers in the Lord's vineyard, more valiant warriors for his cause, and more eloquent heralds of God's word. There is nothing to keep me from having this sort of influence among the poor and disadvantaged if I so will.

C. *Through her action.* Mary was incessantly active. Her great concern was the Church and the Church's servants. Of what use were Jesus' ascent into heaven and his triumph over death if his work were not perpetuated? So Mary devoted herself to this admirable work already surrounded by so many perils. For already the seeds of evil had sprung up among the workers of the Gospel. Had not Paul said of some of them: "*Everyone is busy seeking his own interests rather than those of Christ Jesus*" (Ph 2:21)? So we find that self-interest existed even in the midst of persecutions. Yet even persecutions presented dangers. Mary watched vigilantly, and after she had prayed she acted. How magnificent is the mission to lend support to priests or to train young men for the priesthood! Should not this be the concern of many who, in imitation of Mary, are ready to work for the sanctification of those called to the priesthood and to the apostolic life?

2. *The Results Mary Expected From the Apostles*

To get an idea of what Mary had in mind, we must see how she kept repeating to the Apostles and their co-workers even more eloquently than Saint Paul did: "*You are my children, and you put me back in labor pains until Christ is formed in you*" (Gal 4:19). She had given birth to her divine Son without pain. But Christians, indeed all those called to be apostles, caused her untold anguish! Yes, it was for them that she experienced labor pains. And what was she striving to communicate to them?

(1) *The holy convictions of faith.* Mary, the most excellent Mother of believers, the reservoir of faith, if one may say so, wanted

to spread the faith to the ends of the earth. Now, what more powerful channels for spreading the faith than apostles, providing they understood the treasures of truth deposited with them? They were to pour out the undiminished truth into minds ready to receive it. Only a truly convinced apostle can convince others. That is why there must be a powerful effort to spread the conviction of this faith, the foundation of the entire Christian edifice.

(2) *Energy in the face of every peril.* The Apostles were faced with every kind of peril. Saint Paul enumerated them (cf. 2 Co 11:23-28; Rm 8:35-39) and then declared that nothing could separate him from the love of Jesus Christ.

On Calvary nothing had separated Mary from the dying Jesus, the Victim for sin. Nor had death separated her from him. More than anyone else she could say: See how much I have loved! Gentle and strong, her maternal energy had braved every obstacle. During the years after Pentecost, this energy with its holy contagiousness was communicated to all with whom Mary had contacts.

When shall I be energetic enough to communicate my apostolic zeal to others?

(3) *Prudence.* Energy does not exclude prudent precautions. Jesus had said: "*When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next*" (Mt 10:23). Mary, the most prudent Virgin, did not want a rash zeal to drive the Apostles to actions devoid of value because of their recklessness. For strength to be genuine it needs to be carefully controlled. Mary did not want them to set out on imprudent ventures. Oh! Who will give the Church men and women who bear much fruit because they use their strength prudently!

(4) *Selflessness.* Mary was born poor and she died poor. If John had not offered her shelter after Jesus' death she would have been homeless. Mary knew that selflessness amid poverty is the touchstone of the apostolate.

XXIX

THE PRELUDE TO HEAVEN

Scripture is silent on the last moments of the Blessed Virgin Mary on earth. Yet we are sufficiently aware of her virtues and sentiments to have some idea of how she prepared for this great transition.

1. *The Years of Waiting for Heaven*

A. Why did Mary remain so long on earth after her Son's death and Resurrection? (1) through obedience; (2) through patience; (3) through love.

(1) *Through obedience.* Jesus Christ was obedient even to death on the Cross. We can say that Mary was obedient even beyond the death of the Cross. After Jesus had completed the work of the Redemption he ascended to heaven to take possession of his kingdom. Why did Mary not join him at once? Jesus, the first fruits of those who sleep, took with him a cortège of patriarchs and prophets. Why was Mary, after her Son, not at the head of this triumphant army? Because her hour had not yet come.

From her exile she could repeat the words that Jesus had spoken to her at the marriage feast of Cana: "*My hour has not yet come*" (Jn 2:4). She was to wait with supreme obedience. Since her Son commanded her to live out of obedience, she would spend many more years on our earth. *Alas! my exile has been prolonged* (cf. Ps 120:5). When will my obedience be as perfect as Mary's?

(2) *Through patience.* She waited patiently. "*I have waited, waited for the Lord*" (Ps 40:2). What wonderful self-possession! Jesus had told his Apostles: "*By patient endurance you will save your lives*" (Lk 21:19). These are surprising words. The fruitfulness of the apostolate stems from the capacity to suffer. It was fitting, therefore, that the Queen of Apostles give this great example of patience to the apostles of all times. I can think of nothing more admirable than this patient waiting for death. She yearned only for

the new life her Son would grant her. She understood better than anyone Saint Paul's words: "*For, to me, 'life' means Christ; hence dying is so much gain*" (Ph 1:21). It would be gain for her when her final hour on earth arrived. But no, she would continue to live and to live patiently. She would rein in the leaps of her maternal and virginal love. She would wait.

What a condemnation of my impatiences, even those that might appear most legitimate! Yes, Lord, I shall learn to wait. I shall say with the prophet and with Mary: "*I have waited, waited for the Lord.*" When at last I shall be able to add, as David did, "*and he stooped toward me and heard my cry*" (Ps 40:2), that will mean everything has been accomplished not according to my desires but to yours. Then in perfect patience I shall be able to say: "*Let it be as you would have it, not as I*" (Mt 26:39).

(3) *Through love.* Mary loved Jesus above all else and lovingly carried out his every wish. Now, Jesus had entrusted the first steps of his Church to her care. Mary, from her solitude, was called on to watch over them. How great must her love of Jesus have been for her to agree to postpone her entrance into glory in order to carry out the Savior's work? How great must her love for souls have been that, in order to prepare their salvation, she accepted to delay her hour of triumph?

O Mary, obtain for me this love of souls and teach me to be willing, in order to fulfill my task as an apostle, to sacrifice the joys of heaven as you did, and even more the joys of this earth. Then I shall be able to offer more numerous conquests to Jesus.

2. *Mary's Yearning for Heaven*

So Mary waited with great obedience, great patience, and great love. Yet this attitude did not lessen her yearning for heaven. Her desires were increased by her detachment from the things of earth.

Was there anything she could cling to here below? Her Son had preceded her to heaven.

Wealth and material possessions? She had none. She held them in contempt. Can we doubt that when she received gifts she

hastened to distribute them to others?

Joy? Where could she find joy apart from Jesus?

Her loved ones? Certainly there must have been many. Yet everything was subordinated to what was truly useful and necessary. After it had been useful for Jesus to come into the world it later proved useful that he leave, *"It is much better for you that I go"* (Jn 16:7). Mary would be able to say the same thing when the providential moment arrived.

No, nothing held Mary to this earth, and everything called her to heaven. Holy desires, purified by the virtues that calmed their fire to meet her needs, gave the most excellent of creatures, the Mother of God, her final perfection.

What happened when Jesus came to meet his Mother, surrounded by the angels and saints? God the Son saying to his Mother, one of his creatures: "Come o my Mother, come into my kingdom!" A creature saying to her God: "I come, o my Son, I follow you to the place where you are at last calling me." *"My lover speaks; he says to me, 'Arise, my beloved, my beautiful one, and come'"* (Sg 2:10). And the angels, contemplating this wondrous scene and crying out in their turn: *"Who is this coming up from the desert, leaning on her lover?"* (Sg 8:5). O the great joy of Mary, leaning on her Beloved! O the great joy of Jesus, leading Mary into the haven of eternal happiness!

When I have attained Mary's detachment, when I have taken on her desires, and when I have awaited the hour of my deliverance in obedience, patience, and love, I am sure

Jesus and Mary will come to meet me. Mary will recognize me as her son, and Jesus will see me as his brother. Together they will lead me to the place they have lovingly prepared under the Father's watchful eye for those who have served them on this earth.

XXX

MARY'S ASSUMPTION AND TRIUMPH IN HEAVEN

1. Mary carried to heaven by Jesus.
2. Mary glorified by Jesus.
3. Mary made powerful by Jesus.

1. Mary Carried to Heaven by Jesus

It can be said that when the eternal Word came down from heaven to live on this earth among men he chose Mary's chaste womb as the chariot of his humility. Mary provided him with his body and his blood, conceived by the action of the Holy Spirit in a most wondrous way. Yet Mary had been chosen because of her lowliness, her humility. Now Jesus wanted to make returns to Mary for the service she had rendered to him. Mary had been able to render her Son service only in accordance with the state he wanted to assume. Jesus, for his part, wanted to give his Mother a proof of love in conformity with his glorious transformation in heaven. Jesus had entered a new state and he was introducing Mary into it as well.

That is why the Church honors Mary leaning on her Beloved. Mary needed Jesus' help in order to enter heaven in body and soul. When the moment arrived, Jesus was eager to reward Mary in heaven for all she had done for him on earth, and to reward her abundantly.

If I reach out to Jesus in this world, follow in his foot- steps, and offer him my whole life in imitation of Mary and in the practice of the virtues of which she gives me the example, I shall certainly be transformed and grow in perfection. Then, in imitation of Mary I shall be transported to heaven by Jesus.

Fortunate are those who, like Mary, are welcomed into eternal life by Jesus!

2. *Mary Crowned with Glory by Jesus*

Jesus himself welcomed Mary into heaven. What was their meeting like? What love must have been exchanged between them! Mary certainly had been waiting for Jesus, but we can also say that Jesus had been waiting for his Mother. In the secret depths of his wisdom and love he had delayed the hour of their reunion. Finally this blessed hour had come, and some compensation was in order for such a long delay.

What would Jesus do? It was up to him to give his Mother the crown won by the sacrifices of such a long period of waiting. Who can describe the beauty of the diadem, the royal splendor, the gifts of understanding he bestowed on her intellect, the flames of love he kindled in her heart, the superabundant joy he poured out on her? Who can describe the Mother's raptures on being reunited to her Son and the glories the Son lavished on his Mother?

Now all of this can be in my future if I so will. Not in the same degree of course, but in a degree that will leave me perfectly satisfied, surpassing anything I can imagine. Providing I remain faithful. Far from being jealous of the creature beloved above all other creatures, I want her glory to increase to the maximum since it is a pledge of the glory I myself shall some day obtain if I follow in Mary's footsteps.

3. *Jesus Makes Mary All-Powerful in a Certain Sense*

Mary is not powerful by nature. She is powerful only through the communication of divine power. Yet it pleased God to make his divine power shine forth in her. This wonderful power has become as it were a new bond between Jesus and Mary. But it is a bond that works to our advantage. For it is in order to do us still greater good that Jesus calls Mary to help him, even though he has need of no one. He seeks her help first of all to show his love for his Mother. He wants to give her a new title to add to all the others, the title of benefactress of humankind, through the power he confers on her for our sakes. Finally, he calls Mary to help him in order to show his

love for all of us, for whom he created new sources of graces and blessings. In heaven Mary participates in the very power of Jesus. The Queen of Angels remembers that while she is also the Queen of all men, she is first of all their Mother. After bringing them forth in sorrow on Calvary, she can now crown them in heaven in her glory.

A CALL TO CONSECRATION

As we close these meditations let us make a pact with Mary, whose virtues we have contemplated. Let us promise to imitate them. Let us make a bouquet of her virtues that seem best suited to us and promise to carry them in our hearts. That is how we shall come to resemble her.

1. *Mary's Humility*

Sin entered the world through the pride of Satan who cried out to God: *"I will not serve!"* The Son of man came to this earth to destroy pride in the humility of the Incarnation and through the humiliations that were to follow from it.

In this wondrous mystery in which God consented to take on the infirmities of human nature, he chose to use as his instrument the humblest of his creatures. Was anyone ever humbler than Mary? It was humility that drew God's gaze to the one who was to be the Mother of his Son.

When shall I be truly humble? When shall I accept every humiliation that God may demand of me?

O Mary, my consecration to your service can begin only when I have conquered my pride and my self-love. Grant that this may happen for me today.

2. *Mary's Purity*

Impurity is such a tragic source of weakness. The impure person is dominated by his senses and the Spirit of God cannot dwell in such a one because *"he is but flesh"* (Gn 6:3). O slavery of the soul held fast by the chains of impurity! O freedom of the angel and of the person who has become akin to the angels through purity!

Mary, who always remained a virgin, became even more virginal through the very purity of the God who was her Son. Mary

will be my model. Like Mary, I shall consecrate my whole being to God in order to be purer. Jesus Christ, in giving me his body and blood, the bread of angels and the wine that brings forth virgins, will help me to live a life totally consecrated to purity.

O Queen of Angels, pray for us so that under the wings of the seraphim who surround your throne we may burn with flames of heavenly love, and by consuming all our sins in them become worthy subjects and sons and daughters of the Queen of Virgins!

3. *Mary's Faith*

The prophet cried out: *"I believed, even when I said, I am greatly afflicted"* (Ps 116:10). Was not Mary the one most qualified to speak these words after an angel announced to her that she would be the Mother of God? But who was she? A poor and unknown creature. Yes, she believed and she gave her consent. *"I am the servant of the Lord"* (Lk 1:38). At Bethlehem she believed that a God wanted to be born in a stable, flee to Egypt, and live for thirty years as a poor artisan. She believed in spite of the rebuffs her Son received. She saw her God tied with ropes, scourged, crucified, dying, taken down from the Cross, reduced to the state of a corpse, enclosed in a tomb. In the face of all this, she continued to believe. On the sealed tomb she repeated her canticle: *"My being proclaims the greatness of the Lord"* (Lk 1:46), so great was her faith.

O Mary, in whom *"the author and perfecter of our faith"* (cf. Hb 12:2) became incarnate, give me faith that moves mountains so that I may always speak in conformity with my faith and say like David: *"I believed, even when I said, I am greatly afflicted."*

4. *Mary's Recollection and Prayer*

Mary witnessed the greatest miracles and treasured them in her heart because she was recollected. What was Mary's life like after the Nativity? Jesus' body was no longer within her chaste womb, but the spirit and love of Jesus would always be in her heart.

I should like to ponder this in order to have some idea of the union between the thought of Jesus and Mary's prayer. Can anyone doubt that he who is the Word of God, eternal Truth, infinite Wisdom, was her teacher?

Why do I not, after Communion, and before my crucifix or the tabernacle, say more often to Jesus Christ: "*Stay with us*" (Lk 24:29)?

O Jesus, who absorbed the thoughts, sentiments and prayer of Mary, why would you not absorb my whole being? Why, in imitation of your Mother, should I not strive to be recollected, to pray, to think, totally absorbed by you? Why should I not at last become a recollected and prayerful Christian?

5. *Mary's Love of God, Jesus Christ, and the Church, and Her Zeal for the Salvation of Souls*

What was the all-embracing concern of Mary's life? God. "*The Lord begot me, the firstborn of his ways*" (Pr 8:22). In the order of creation, Mary came first in God's intentions. It can also be said that Mary turned toward God from her earliest moments of consciousness. God was her beginning and her end. He was also the center of her life. Can we suppose that Mary found repose in anyone or anything but God? God the Father had given her his Son, and since this Son was God, she loved him both as her God and as her Son.

The supreme work of the Son on earth was the founding of the Church he had acquired by his blood. After God the Father and Jesus her Son, Mary loved the Church above all else. Finally, since the Church was instituted to bring salvation and sanctification, Mary was dedicated from the start to the salvation and sanctification of souls.

That is the order of Mary's love, and it must be the order of my love: God, Jesus Christ, the Church, souls.

O Mary, at the conclusion of these meditations offered to your glory, grant that I may truly understand your place in God's plan of salvation and find in it the reason for my existence. Adorn my soul with all the virtues that have made your soul beautiful, so that I may

Mary, Our Mother, Our Model and Our Queen

be your imitator, your adopted child, and find in you my model of perfection. In your love, help me to attain to the holiness that God will some day reward at your feet in heaven. AMEN