

FATHER DIGNAM'S  
RETREATS

(FATHER AUGUSTUS DIGNAM, S.J.)

*WITH LETTERS AND NOTES OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION  
AND A FEW CONFERENCES AND SERMONS*

(NEW AND ENLARGED EDITION)

WITH A PREFACE BY  
FATHER GRETTON, S.J.

*The love of Jesus maketh a man despise himself—a lover of Jesus and of truth*

LONDON: BURNS & OATES, LIMITED

NEW YORK, CINCINNATI, CHICAGO: BENZIGER BROTHERS

**Imprimatur :**

**FR. ALBERTUS LEPIDI, O.P.S.P. Ap. Magister.**

**Imprimatur :**

**FRANCISCUS CASSETTA,  
PATRIARCHA ANTHIOCHENUS, *Vicesgerens.***

## PREFACE.

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THE Very Reverend Father General of the Society of Jesus, in his letter to the writer of *Father Dignam's Memoir*, says: "In this Memoir the good he did in his life will be perpetuated and extended. A special fragrance hangs round his memory." One, perhaps the chief, element of this special fragrance, all who knew the Father will agree, was his special devotion to the Sacred Heart, ever pleading for us, and, above all, his continual labour to make that Heart and Its pleading known and loved. His continual labour—just as honey is the sweet and fragrant product of the *manifold toil* of the hive.

The beautifully organized labour of the bee, most busy among the great and little creatures of God, has in all times attracted the mind of man, himself a toiler; and it calls forth praise from the mouth of the Church, when, after toiling through the penitential season of Lent, she, full of song, sets up the light of triumphant joy in her sanctuaries at Eastertide; and again, when she celebrates the martyrdom of St. Cecily, and sings of her: "Busy like a bee, thou didst serve the Lord." With this image in the mind, we shall, perhaps, more fully relish the samples of Father Dignam's Retreats and

Conferences offered to us in this volume, which, it will be found, will serve as a kind of window in the hive of his days and years, that through it, we may see how busy he was, on what kind of work, and how the honey, which he was continually gathering for the nourishment of others, was also the daily food of his own soul. This last we shall be the better able to see, in that we have already been given the Memoir of his life, and have admired in it the abundant store of his virtues and good works, as the rich product in himself of that hidden labour of the hive, prayer and meditation, examples of which we are now about to examine in this book.

The Memoir alone, or the Retreats and Conferences alone, would not have sufficed. But, together, they enable us to discern how the path of the Father's daily life led up to the chair or pulpit from which he taught, and from them ascended again ever to higher things. I shall be forgiven, I feel sure, if I add my own testimony in this matter to that of the Memoir. Not that I have any but a few little facts to relate; but they are facts whose meaning and value are raised out of the common by this: that they took place in the first weeks of his last illness, in the critical time when God seems to put the soul and its virtue to the final test, in which it is proved, in the sight of men as well as of angels, whether or not the harmony between a man's preaching and his practice has been the real and genuine result of an ever-growing love of God.

When in the evening of the day that suddenly summoned me home to take the reins out of his

failing hands, I saw him, and saw what a wreck he was of his former self, and instinct led me not to ask him for any instructions or direction, but simply to say: "You need have no anxiety, Father; I shall do all the work until you get well," his face lit up and he said slowly, and most fervently, "Thank God." The tone of it was unmistakable: it did not matter what was to become of him, or what he suffered, so long as the work of the Sacred Heart was not neglected. This spirit of self-effacement appeared more clearly still next day, when I begged him to let me recommend him in the *Messenger* to the prayers of the Associates. "No, Father, no," he said, "in this work, we have to efface ourselves." He meant it, and was earnest and sincere about it. Sincerity had always been a great word with him, and in many places in his writings it may be found suddenly appearing like a warning finger: "But let us be sincere."

So therefore, in those sad days when the truth was being forced upon him that his work was over, he was throughout quietly business-like in putting himself aside, and in submitting to the melancholy process of being "shelved."

No cloud was seen on his face when he handed over one thing after another to his successor. The Cross was there, but no one could see even the shadow of it. So thoroughly did he then efface himself, that, when a few months after he was no longer, even nominally, the Central Director of the Apostleship, there was no need for any further relinquishing of authority or powers which he had

already voluntarily ceased to wield. That this was not mere apathy due to illness was clear enough, when, as was often the case, he had to be consulted. His interest then was as keen as ever, and his opinions as decided, and as strongly expressed. But there was a wonderful and childlike resignation of himself into the hands of others, which, again, was clearly not weakness, but an easy self-control, the fruit, no doubt, of many years of persevering growth in the unselfish love of God.

A quality that often clearly showed itself when he spoke about the work of the League, was his great and abiding gratitude to its Local Directors and Promoters, and to all who, in any sense, could be called its benefactors. There was evidence enough among his papers of the thoughtful care with which he was in the habit of writing to them, either to answer their questions, or to encourage or direct them. No pains seemed to him too great, no opportunity or means too trivial, if only he could secure some increase of devotedness in the Promoters and Associates.

That his model in this was the Sacred Heart Itself appeared from a little incidental remark of his a few days before leaving Wimbledon. He said that one ought not to be puzzled by the mass of temporal favours asked for and obtained by members of the League, nor hastily conclude that the pure love of God was kept somewhat out of sight. These favours were our Lord's way of attracting numberless souls to His Heart, for they were a proof of Its unspeakable tenderness.

To adapt a Scripture phrase which, unhappily, in the first instance refers only to poor sinful Absalom, Father Dignam seemed to look upon the Divine Heart of the God-Man as very human in Its dealings with us, and as ever "*enticing the hearts*" of men:—*solicitabat corda*.<sup>1</sup>

The phrase—I once heard it used by Father Dignam in another connection, and that is why it occurs to me—leads us to the parting words the Father spoke to me before leaving Wimbledon. He was waiting for the cab which was to take him away, and as we were for a few moments left alone, he suddenly seemed to desire to implant in my mind a germ, in a few pregnant words, of the great tree of which he himself had watched the growth, and gathered the fruit so long.

"The idea of the Sacred Heart pleading for us," he said, "is a *great revelation*, and it has to be made known." I answered that surely it had been made known, and very widely, already. "Only to a handful," he said, "in comparison to all who might know it, and ought to know it, if one could only get them to listen."

Here again was the *solicitabat corda*. He would *entice the hearts of all*. He spoke sadly, as if he had succeeded in helping to win only a very few. And yet, he seemed to say, the Idea, the Revelation, was so great, so beautiful, the wonder is that it had not long since captivated every Catholic heart.

Well, in the Retreats and Conferences given to us in this book, we can see how he strove directly or

<sup>1</sup> 2 Kings xv. 6.

indirectly to draw hearts to the knowledge of this Revelation ; and whether those who heard him were young or old, whether priests, or religious, or laymen, whether they came under the influence of his words alone, or gathered together in numbers, the attraction, secret or open, was ever to the same Centre, the Sacred Heart. Indeed, it may not be unfair to say, that if the sense of this attraction manifest or hidden, were not there, these Meditations and Conferences would be robbed of a great part of their force, and that the special fragrance to which the Father General bears testimony, would lose much of its sweetness, and, perhaps, altogether vanish.

May this book, then, of his Retreats and Conferences fulfil his burning desire, and itself be a powerful allurements to the hearts of many, drawing them, as it surely will, to a greater knowledge and love of the Sacred Heart ever interceding for us ! May it be to many what the drop of honey in the weary march<sup>1</sup> was to Jonathan, an enlightening of the eyes, that they may fully realize what it is to be loved by the Sacred Heart, what it is to love It, and what it is to labour for It ! May it fill the breasts of all that read it with the fire which burnt in the heart of him whose words it enshrines ! and may their whole life, with all its prayers and labours and sufferings, thereby become more and more like his, one prolonged, uninterrupted aspiration : “ Heart of Jesus, Thou lovest, Thou art not loved, O would that Thou wert loved ! ”

<sup>1</sup> 1 Kings xiv. 27.



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*Letter from His Eminence Cardinal Mazzella, S.J., Cardinal Protector of the Institute, to the Mother General of the Poor Servants of the Mother of God.*

ROME, 15th December, 1895.

REVEREND MOTHER GENERAL,

Yesterday I had the honour and pleasure of presenting to the Holy Father the Life of the much-regretted Father Dignam, S.J. Having previously read it, I could thus tell him that it describes to us a man who was all intent on propagating the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in England, and the great co-operator in the firm foundation of the much-esteemed Institute of the Povere Ancelle della Madre di Dio e dei Poveri (Poor Servants of the Mother of God and the Poor), and, therefore, a lover and benefactor of theirs. Such a book cannot fail to give edification to the faithful, and, above all, to the said Povere Ancelle, who will find in it the spirit of their holy Institute perfectly described. All this led the Holy Father to accept with pleasure the filial offering, and to impart to you, and to your Institute, the Apostolical Benediction. Nothing more remains to me, but to hope that the blessing of the Holy Father may cause this book to bear more and more salutary fruit.

Reverend Mother General,

Most affectionately at your service,

C. CARDINAL MAZZELLA, Protector.

*Letter from His Paternity the Very Reverend Father General of the Society of Jesus.*

ROME, 7th October, 1895.

DEAR REVEREND MOTHER GENERAL,

I beg to return sincere thanks for the edifying *Memoir of Father Augustus Dignam*. The good that his words did to individuals in his lifetime will be perpetuated and extended to others, by the numerous extracts from his letters now published in this *Memoir*. But who can estimate the spiritual help he gave to countless souls by his fervent instructions, counsels, exhortations, continued for so many years in the *Messenger of the Sacred Heart*? He was truly an Apostle of the Sacred Heart, and so his work in life was visibly blessed, and a special fragrance hangs round his memory after death.

May our Divine Lord impart to us something of the same fervour and zeal, in spreading devotion to the Sacred Heart.

Believe me, dear Reverend Mother General,

Yours sincerely in Christ,

L. MARTIN, S.J.

Reverend Mother General M. Magdalen,  
The Convent, The Butts, Brentford, London.\*

\* *Memoir of Father Dignam, S.J.* London: Burns and Oates.

## INTRODUCTION.

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IT has afforded no small consolation to those concerned in the compilation of *Father Dignam's Memoir, Retreats and Conferences*, that these works have not only been appreciated by many, but that they have proved to be of spiritual assistance to various persons, both to Religious and to others.<sup>1</sup>

The fact that a second edition of *Retreats*, has become necessary confirms this assurance. Nothing surely would have given more joy (and we trust does now give it) to Father Dignam's heart, than to find that the records of his life, and of the words he said or wrote, should serve to continue his work for souls; it is hoped that this new edition may also aid to perpetuate those labours of his. For it has been beautifully said, "that with unwearied energy he toiled to his last gasp in the work of forming spiritual men and women."

Few things could have given him more consolation than the following letter from a Father of the venerable Order of St. Benedict, concerning the *Memoir*. "I usually find printed letters rather hard reading; they skip so from subject to subject. A thought may be expressed in a striking way, it does

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix.

not seem to have time to get in. I must, however, make an exception to the letters of the good Father. There is such a unity of spirit, and such a straightforward simplicity in them, that I found them very profitable reading. My favourite is the one, 'To a Nun' (pp. 214—216). One sees the clearness of insight, and the whole-heartedness of Father Dignam in that letter. It is to me a real treasure in itself. I cannot say how often I have read it over. If I could say that I had thoroughly learnt the lesson, I should be saying that I was ready for Heaven." May it, therefore, be that in Father Dignam shall be verified God's own promise: "*My elect shall not labour in vain.*" "*He shall see a long-lived seed,*" and as in his life "*he brought forth fruit, that fruit shall remain.*"

Naturally, the Memoir has evoked many a reminiscence of Father Dignam. One speaks of the delight the boys at Beaumont used to take in the Conferences which he gave every week to them during the year that he was Spiritual Father at Beaumont. How they looked forward to the day, clustered round him as he spoke, and found his exhortations all too short. There is a touching little story connected with Beaumont.

There are incidents in life, which, though slight, are at times so woven together, that their recital tends to quicken our faith and love for our Divine Lord.

A mother, pondering the future of her unborn child, dedicated it to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, signing her act of consecration, June 1st. After the

birth of her son, she, together with her husband, renewed this act in a very solemn way.

When Father Dignam was Spiritual Father at Beaumont, this son was finishing his education there, and, by the Father's care and direction, was led to join the Society of Jesus. The Father urged him not to wait till September, the usual time for novices to enter, but to go at once; and thus, ignorant of his mother's consecration of him, and by a mere accident, he entered the Novitiate on June 1st, and made his vows two years afterwards on the same date.

And it so befell that, twenty years later, it was into the hands of this Father, thus consecrated before his birth, and thus led by him to the Society, that Father Dignam in the course of obedience resigned the most beloved work of his life—the direction of the Apostleship and *Messenger of the Sacred Heart*.

The mother who had offered to the Sacred Heart her child before giving it birth, was, like her husband, a very fervent Catholic.

They were friends of Father Dignam, and were living at Boulogne at the time he was stationed there. She was a fervent Promoter of the Apostleship long before it was revived in England. She was, indeed, a heroic soul, all aflame with the love of the Sacred Heart. *Thy Kingdom come* was ever on her lips.

She held Father Dignam in high esteem as a truly apostolic man, remarking: "What a director we have in Father Dignam!" and she used to compare him to Père Ramière, whom she knew very well. She was one of those souls in whom Father Dignam must have taken great delight, as she truly

carried out his advice to forget ourselves for God's interests. When her Jesuit son came to her on her death-bed, she feared he had been called away from a convent retreat for her sake, and exclaimed, with her failing breath, that he was not to think of her—but "go back and finish the retreat."

Another Benedictine Father thus writes: "It is twenty years ago since our well-remembered Retreat at R— by Father Dignam. I am sorry not to have any notes of it at this time. It stands out in a singular way among the many Retreats I have had in my lifetime. We had been sorely tried; we all felt as if Father Dignam had been sent from Heaven. I remember speaking to him of a Retreat I had heard given at Subiaco by Father Minini, S.J., and his saying, in his quiet, half-joking way, that it discouraged him to know we had heard such great masters. He himself had the art of letting people know their failings clearly, without leaving any soreness behind. He was wonderfully kind, and I can even now remember the tone of his voice when (after I had rendered a slight service to one of his brethren) he said, 'Oh, what a kind thoughtful creature you are!' Individually I owe him *very very* much."

The late sacristan of Holy Cross Church, St. Helens, often spoke of the edification Father Dignam had given. His thanksgivings after Mass were always long, and marked with deep recollection. The sacristan would frequently find the altar-boys making a noise, and people would enter the sacristy on business; but Father Dignam would be kneeling

immovable like a statue, quite unconscious of what was passing around him—lost in prayer.<sup>1</sup>

It has been thought by some, that in the Memoir enough stress was not laid on Father Dignam's knowledge and love of the *Imitation*. It was, however, supposed that this would speak for itself in his letters. In a certain sense Father Dignam may have been said to be a "man of one book," though, of course, Holy Scripture, which he loved so exceedingly, and the Spiritual Exercises, came before the *Imitation*. But he seemed to know this latter book by heart, and so to bring it into play that it threw a fresh light upon every phase of the spiritual life. In the Retreats given to the Poor Servants of the Mother of God (and probably elsewhere), he always chose chapters of the *Imitation* to be read by the Sisters in free time: and his choice alone had such a significance, that it formed a valuable instruction in the knowledge of this wonderful book. He had two favourite quotations from the *Imitation*. The first, *nudus nudum sequar*, which tells us how the soul, stripped of all self-love, *naked follows the naked one*. This, which is the highest summit of perfection, was the object of his desire, after which he was ever struggling and aiming. The other motto exactly describes what he was. *The love of Jesus maketh a man despise himself, a lover of Jesus and of truth*. Even in his great humility, though he would have denied that he was

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Williams, the devoted sacristan of Holy Cross for about thirty years, venerated Father Dignam. He died on the first anniversary of the Father's death, 26th September, 1895, apparently consoled by the invisible presence of the director he had so valued.

detached from, and stripped of all things, he must have owned he loved Jesus and he loved truth. It has also been remarked that enough has not been said of his love of truth. With him all policy and double-dealing could not live; if not cured by his teaching, the offender shrank back from him.

“Was he not,” writes one, “like the great Archangel in Doré’s splendid picture of St. Michael’s battle with Lucifer, when the artist makes you *feel* the difference between truth and falsehood? His face when he looked at the Tabernacle, and his voice teaching us to be *true* in all things, reminded me often of that angelic form leaning on his sword, looking up to Heaven, giving all glory of the victory over the prostrate foe to the Most High, and saying *Who is like unto God?* So did the Father constantly teach us that God is all, we are nothing; let us be *true*—humility is *truth*.”

His spirit of gratitude was deep indeed; he was permeated by it. Never did he forget to thank for the smallest service rendered him; and how intense was his gratitude to God! Never can the writer forget an occasion on which he said, lifting his eyes to Heaven: “Oh, my child, *how* can we thank God enough for our vocation? Never, never can we do it enough.” The words, the gesture, the glowing look taught more than a sermon could.

It has been often eagerly asked if Father Dignam ever committed to paper any records of the inward workings of his own soul, such as has been frequently done by holy people, and of which there is a notable instance in the case of Père Olivaint, S.J., of glorious



memory. How many hearts have been strengthened and guided by the revelations of *his* soul can never be counted.

If Father Dignam followed this course he must have destroyed all his papers; and only by an accident a few fragments remain, which give us a glimpse of his inner life.

They must, of course, be read in the same manner in which we study the outpourings of Père Olivaint and others, who could see no good in themselves where others perceived heroic virtue, and nothing but evil in themselves where others could perceive none. So Father Dignam, who was indeed meek and humble of heart, and overflowing with the deepest contrition, writes in the early days of his religious life during a Retreat: "I had given up perfection. Oh! since I last made this meditation (on religious life), how unfaithful I have been to its lights and lessons; but especially since the last great crowning grace, the vows. Though never owned, perhaps, in words, the work was abandoned. My Jesus, how patient, how merciful art Thou! I will never cease, by Thy grace, to seek to make myself more pleasing to Thee. The two great infidelities have been (1) the tongue, (2) bodily self-denial. I have yielded to the old folly; nicknames, raillery, and perpetual nonsense have driven spirituality away, a work which a quiet deliberate search after every possible ease and comfort of body has completed, and I have been *thoroughly tepid*. Mental prayer has been almost lost, because I never could feel that I was aiming at perfection."

At another time, after he had made a meditation on the joys of eternity, which he owns was "good, with devotion," he says, "I renewed my good resolution that the future may let me settle into a holy Religious. Hitherto, I have been driven about by every wind; deceived by my own vanity, and nearly wrecked. Now, I am to begin. Shall I abandon perfection in the Society? Shall I think my position incompatible with it? Shall I give up at my failures? I am still in the same house with Jesus Christ; He will not refuse to help and preserve me. Through Him in the Blessed Sacrament I must attain perfection. But not devotion for *others* to *admire*, but for Him alone to know of. Every Sunday morning, at first coming to my room I will make ten minutes' reflection, keeping before me my especial object,—the cure of the tongue, selfishness, bodily ease."

The second fragment which remains to us thus runs: "O blessed, O happy vocation, to live the life of Jesus Christ upon earth, to fulfil most perfectly the end of man, to enjoy the highest place in His love, and happiness in Heaven! May all the miseries and torments of this world be inflicted on me, rather than ever to cease to love Thee more and more dearly, rather than ever cease to hold this the most precious grace that can be given to me—to die a true and worthy child of St. Ignatius! You, dearest Mother, did not bring me here without sincerely desiring and intending to grant me the grace of true devotion, though I have hitherto prevented you. Now, I declare that I will try unceasingly to

co-operate with you, by conquering myself. Gentleness, charity.”<sup>1</sup>

These resolutions were kept surely, for were not the distinguishing virtues of his life gentleness and charity? The gentleness of a mother was his. On one occasion, when the remark was made to him that he was treating a very unrepentant culprit with too much kindness, he replied with a look of indescribable sweetness, “Ah! you don’t understand what a priest’s heart is.” To those in trouble, sorrow, or repentance it was impossible to express his gentleness. In compiling the *Memoir* and the other volumes, a very large number of Father Dignam’s letters have been perused; many of them written with the utmost unreserve and confidence; and yet not one word against charity has ever been found amongst them. The faults of others are seldom spoken of, and never without regret, excuses, and tenderness; and so it was with his conversation. *The law of clemency was on his tongue.* When faults were mentioned it always seemed to give him sorrow: for God who was offended, and for the person who had failed. His tone of voice in speaking of others taught deep lessons to those who hung upon his words, and formed in them habits of charity.

He was always most reticent about himself; though willing enough to speak of his faults and blunders at times, he always shrank from any sort of praise or admiration. It is therefore surprising to find a certain description of his own feelings, given in a

<sup>1</sup> Later on a few more fragments of this description were found.—*Conferences*, pp. xv.—xxiii.

conference to nuns, in February, 1888, just after he had returned from making his Retreat at St. Beuno's.

The object of this conference was self-abnegation ; and he began by saying : " I suppose you know I am just out of Retreat, and I am going to speak to you simply, as I always do, about what occurred to my mind during it. Before I made my Retreat this year, I read a letter of a Jesuit to another Jesuit, in which he commented on the excellence of the Spiritual Exercises. He concluded by saying that he considered any Religious, receiving such a spiritual training as that conveyed by the Exercises, was in great danger, if with such spiritual knowledge he had not the virtue of abnegation. The fact of being looked upon as a spiritual person might make him presume that he was such ; while, in reality, his interior life might not at all correspond to his spiritual enlightenment ; and he who bestowed so abundantly upon others out of his spiritual store, might be himself a Religious only in name." The Father then pointed out, that the habit and state of life do not make the Religious, and that only by self-denial can we truly follow Jesus, who says : *Deny thyself, take up thy cross and follow Me* ; " and this thought," he says, " ran all through my eight days' Retreat like one chord constantly repeated in music, each meditation repeated it ; in fact, it came up so clearly, that all else seemed to vanish."

After some further instruction to the nuns, giving a rapid *résumé* of the lesson of self-denial inculcated in each of the meditations, he then went on to say : " Thus, all through the eight days' Retreat, in my

solitude the Holy Spirit instilled into my mind the truths I impart to you ;” and at the close of the conference, he said, “ Such are the lessons which I would convey to you ; but they must come to you with much less force than they did to me, under the direction of the Holy Ghost, who showed me these truths in so clear a light during my Retreat.”

This revelation of himself is so unlike him, that we can only suppose in this Retreat he must have received special graces from God, of which he was, as it were, compelled to speak to those he trusted, and that, from this time forward, he was lifted to a higher phase of sanctity.

Readers of the *Memoir* will perhaps recollect a passage (p. 416). One of Father Dignam’s spiritual children writes : “ I cannot quite remember the exact time, but I think it could not have been later than 1889, that I perceived a great change in Father Dignam. He was becoming more supernatural.” She thought he had attained a higher phase of sanctity,—had become, as we say, a saint.

Certainly, as the years passed on, his self-denial grew and increased. He was, as all weak persons are, greatly dependent on sleep, and had hitherto enjoyed that great blessing. But now the hours of sleep were often sacrificed that he might finish some pressing work ; and over-work and over-anxiety constantly made him sleepless ; in which case he would rise and go back to his desk. He could not bear the Apostleship business to be in arrears, and it was a real pain to him to leave letters of direction so long unanswered. He once said, that he had such deep

untold happiness, in having been chosen to promote the work. And that it was wonderful he should keep so well, leaving his room only once in the week to go out. His *one* sorrow was that so many—priests especially—could not see the beauty and value of the work.

Those who loved him now wonder at the blindness which prevented them from perceiving that with him the sword had worn out the sheath, and that the silver cord would soon be broken, and the golden fillet shrink away. It was the feeling that life without him was so impossible that closed their eyes to the truth. The unselfish desire to help others caused him to long to live.

He knew well how many hearts were saying to him the words addressed to St. Martin by his disciples: "Father, why wilt thou go away from us? unto whom wilt thou bequeath us in our sorrow?" and he willingly prayed: "Lord, if I be still needful to Thy people, I refuse not to work." He was always fond of this prayer of St. Martin, and had exhorted more than one Religious to use it when on a sick-bed.

When our Lord was in His Agony, He asked that the Chalice might be removed from Him. The trial that seemed almost beyond the strength of the dear Father was the deprivation of his Mass. In his perfect resignation he, too, would ask that *this* cup might pass from him! "I am so discouraged," he said, to one of his religious brethren, "because I cannot say Mass." This was after his severe fainting-fit in March, 1894.

His tender Master did allow this trial to be removed until he was actually called to pass into the valley of the shadow of death.

One who was present when Father Dignam was taken ill at the altar in August, 1890, relates that he broke down at the Gospel, and went into the sacristy, where he fainted. When the doctor tried to get some brandy between his lips, he resisted, murmuring, "My Mass! I have not said my Mass!" Father Dignam once said, "Mass is my life—without Mass I must die"<sup>1</sup>—it is well to record that he was one of those on whom Mass has a *physical* effect, as well as spiritual. He went to his Mass in utter feebleness—he returned with new strength. But he loved the Will of God better even than his Mass. On his lips was ever the wonderful prayer of St. Ignatius: *Sume et suscipe*.

When he was once asked, in his closing days, how he felt, he replied, "Very poorly, indeed;" but with a smile, "I don't forget my *Sume et suscipe*."

He had made this prayer and this offering so constantly through life, and God had taken him at his word. All that he could offer had been accepted; and the all generous Master had, in return, given him His love and grace in abundance in life, and has now given these gifts to him in fullest measure, "pressed down and running over," in the Kingdom of his Father.

<sup>1</sup> *Memoir*, p. 456.

## Section 1.

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N.B.—These notes of Retreat were taken down as the words fell from Father Dignam's lips, or immediately after he had spoken. They were in no way revised by him ; but they faithfully render his thoughts and ideas, and in many cases his actual words. Still, great inequality of style and length must be naturally expected. They were not all taken down consecutively, or by the same person, and in few cases is the whole of the meditation given. The points which made the most impression upon the hearers were retained before others. Though the great desire of the compilers has been to render this volume useful to those who wish to make private Retreats, no attempt has been made to add preludes or colloquy, which in many cases were not given by the Father at all, or, except in rare instances, were not recorded. It must be clearly understood that these meditations will be almost useless to those who are not well acquainted with the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius ; and it will be necessary for readers of them to have a copy of the Exercises as well as of the Holy Gospels in their hands. The Edition of the Exercises used for reference in this book is the translation edited by the late Father Morris, S.J.<sup>1</sup> The primary intention of the present volume has been to provide matter for the use chiefly of Religious who wish to make private Retreats. The second, to give more of Father Dignam's letters and notes of direction than have already appeared. It was hoped that space could have been found for all the material in the compiler's hands, but this has proved impossible ; and only a choice could be made amidst an *embarras des richesses*. It is earnestly desired that an opportunity may occur of making use of what remains in the compiler's hands at a later period.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> London : Burns and Oates.

<sup>2</sup> This has now been done in *Conferences*, and in the present enlarged edition.



# RETREATS.

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## First Retreat.

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### FIRST DAY.

#### FIRST MEDITATION.

#### *How to make our Retreat.*

1. THE spiritual exercises of a Retreat are likened by St. Ignatius to the exercises of the body in *taking a walk*, in *making a journey*, or in *running*; and we should see which is to be our way in making our Retreat.

Those who *take a walk* generally go along familiar paths, and soon return whence they came.

Let us look into our past lives, and see whether we are only going round and round to the same point, like a cat after its tail.

Those who *go on a journey* have an end in view, and all their efforts are to attain this end, without thinking of their return, or letting trifles turn them aside.

Those *who run* are those who go with speed on their way.

Which of them is to be our way in the Retreat?

2. We should propose to ourselves to learn the truth about ourselves, that we may clear our hearts of disorderly affections, and so be able to see the

will of God in our regard. In full a hundred places in Scripture, God's love for those who love the truth is referred to. Even many Religious do not care to see the truth; but hug their delusions with affection, though perhaps unconsciously.

By "disorderly affections" is meant inclinations not founded on clear reason or on faith. If we are in joy, or if we are in sadness, let us ask ourselves the cause of it; and if our conscience can give no satisfactory answer, we may conclude the feeling is disorderly.

3. Three dispositions are very necessary for the Retreat—a good-will to be alone with God, abandonment to God's will, and patience with dry truths. We must not be troubled at having by obedience to attend to any charge or work; obedience will make it all safe and good for us. The *ten additions* should be carefully attended to, and the particular examination *made* on them and *marked*.

Any one doing this faithfully during the Retreat may look up to God and say, "I have done my best." Prayer is not so much wanted in the Retreat as *consideration*—if we are deeply impressed with the truths, our prayers will be better all through the year.

## SECOND MEDITATION.

### *On our Last End.*

I. "Man was created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul."

Our creation means that we are breathed forth from God, to return to Him again. He places us at a little distance from Him, as a mother does with her child, to see what it will do.

We were created to *praise*. The praise which is an aromatic fragrance to God is our *liking* His service. It is an error to suppose we cannot like what we choose. Our likings are with God's grace under the control of our will. We came into Religion on purpose to control our likings, in order to like obedience, poverty, work.

The true picture of a tepid Religious is, that she has left off liking her life and its duties—she goes back to the husks of the swine, leaving the pearls by her side, just as swine would do.

2. David was a man "according to God's own Heart," because of his spirit of praise. He preserved this spirit in spite of his great sins, his deep contrition, and loss of temporal prosperity. We can have this spirit, if we ask for and earnestly desire it.

It is a most precious gift, so pleasing to God, so greatly influencing our whole lives, making hard things easy, turning away our minds from petty vexations, and rendering our service of God a joyful one, and therefore most acceptable to Him.

3. Praise is the creature's answer to the beauty and kindness of the Creator. Our relations with God as His creatures, are the nearest and dearest and sweetest claims to the mercy of Him who knoweth the frailty of those whom He has made.

## CONSIDERATION.

*The Particular Examination.*

The particular examination is an exercise, the true nature of which is very generally misunderstood.

When rightly understood and sincerely and perseveringly practised, it is nothing less than an efficacious means of perfection; but it is painful to nature—so painful that not a few take refuge in austerities and contemplation, rather than endure the slow crucifixion of the interior man which the particular examination entails. Not unfrequently, also, men delude themselves into believing that liberty of spirit is restrained by its constant repetition, and cease to persevere.

The particular examination is a concentrated struggle of the will—not with all our faults equally, but with one specially chosen as the most important to be overcome. It perfects the will by renewing the concentrated resolution in the morning, at noon, and night; puts it in practice by vigilance, scrutiny, humiliation, and sorrow. It uses no violence; but patience with failure, longanimity in effort, constancy in renewal of purpose,—these are its means to victory, a victory, however, which in this world will never be fully attained.

Those called to the active service of their neighbour, who may expect frequent changes of Superiors, who may be changed from place to place, from charge to charge, who are surrounded by many occasions of sin, and, while living in the world, are not of the world—these must aspire to solid virtues,

rooted in the understanding and in the heart by habits of self-knowledge and self-conquest, acquired by the particular examination or some similar exercise.

It consists of two parts, the matter and the form. The matter is the fault selected for attack, or the virtue of which a habit is to be acquired: and the aid of a wise counsellor is often necessary for its choice. The form is the practice of the exercise three times a day. Of these three times the first is at rising, when the resolution to watch and struggle against the fault chosen should be renewed *for the coming morning*; the second is at noon, when the conscience is examined in order to find how often the fault has been committed, and the number noted in the book, the due acts of self-humiliation, contrition, hope, and the renewal of our resolution *for the rest of that day* are made; the third is before retiring to rest, when the exercise as made at noon is repeated.

For the matter, always choose some outward defect first; and then, when these are all conquered, proceed to the higher walks of spirituality. It stands to reason that by concentrating our efforts against one particular defect, we must in the end conquer it.

There are two temptations to be guarded against in this—the first is that the devil, when he sees we are in earnest on any one point, will remove all the temptations to that fault out of our way; and so when we come to find we have no faults to note down for some days, then we give up and think we have conquered; as soon as we do that, Satan puts

on full steam, and we fall fifty times in the day, and so give up in despair.

The second is that when we are really striving in earnest, and constantly fall, and constantly make our act of sorrow and renew our resolution, the devil will whisper that we cannot be in earnest or we should not fall so often, so we had better give it up than act the hypocrite. These humiliations, though slight, of our constant falls, so keenly felt, bring us nearer to our Lord, and make us dearer to Him than if we never fell; and to persevere in spite of them is solid sanctity.

Père de Ravignan, a man steeped in spirituality, says he would consider as a most excellent fruit of a good Retreat the particular examination made carefully during the next year.

### THIRD MEDITATION.

#### *On our Last End (continued).*

I. We were created to reverence. Any other spirit in a creature is simply ridiculous. What is the attitude of our minds towards God?

We can discover this by the habitual tendency of our thoughts, more than by our words and actions.

To brood over our sufferings is poison to the soul—so also is pondering over the faults of others.

The best thoughts to keep our souls in peace are of God's mercies to us, which give us joy, and of our sins to keep us humble.

Peace is the field in which all virtues play. We cannot be too fastidious about the food of our souls.

2. Reverence, or holy fear, is very different from servile fear. It is the deep self-annihilation of the creature before the Creator. Reverence is the creature's answer to the immense sanctity and justice of the Creator.

3. We ought to pray for great things,—such as wisdom, and the spirit of praise and reverence.

How can we tell if we are wanting in wisdom?

By the following signs :

1. If we are always proving ourselves in the right.

2. If we judge rashly in thought.

3. If we attach ourselves to trifles.

4. If we are always quoting others in support of our own opinions, especially the words of priests.

5. If we have an abrupt manner.

6. If we are full of self-excuses.

7. If we choose for ourselves.

## SECOND DAY.

### FIRST MEDITATION.

#### *On Creatures and Indifference.*

1. "And the other things on the face of the earth were created for man's sake, and in order to aid him in the prosecution of the end for which he was created."

Creatures are the veil which hides God; they are good angels to help us, or evil ones to turn us away from God, according to the use we make of them; but He has too much respect for our free-will to interfere with us and force us.

Creatures are but *means*, not scattered broadcast, but picked out and chosen by God for each one of us.

There are material things and moral, some straight from God (and of these, humiliations are the most precious)—some from other people. Have we used all these in order to praise, reverence, and serve God only?

2. Our first impulse about creatures should be to renounce them, and to say, "You are not God."

A right use of creatures *is* our service of God.

We are pilgrims, and we must use creatures with the indifference of pilgrims.

Consider the example of the Archangel Raphael:

"For when I was with you I was there by the will of God."

We must never deliberate between good and evil, for this would be an insult to God.

We cannot deliberate on things already fixed. We can only choose between those that are indifferent in themselves. We cannot be indifferent to the creature *God has chosen for us*,—such as our vocation, for instance.

3. There are four great obstacles to this indifference to creatures:

A *perverted will*, which takes for its rules false maxims.

A *slothful will*, which postpones all good actions.

An *infirm will*, which cannot bear the thought of any trouble.

A *reserved will*, which will do *this* but not *that*; bear with one Superior, but not with another; endure a



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reproof given sweetly, but not if bestowed in any other way.

Let us pray for and strive for true wisdom in indifference to creatures.

## SECOND MEDITATION.

### *On Sin.*

1. The fallen angels would not abase themselves before God.

Their greatest gifts were turned to their greatest condemnation.

Adam and Eve used their judgment to disbelieve the word of God—they *tried to go as far as they could to evil*. They were deceived and blinded by the devil. Then they were covered with *false shame*—and thus do those act who try to hide themselves from God, and are unwilling to think of their sins before Him.

2. Perfect contrition is hindered because we feel the disgrace of sin. We are ashamed of our unworthiness, and we rest in thoughts of self instead of turning to God, and then comes discouragement and sadness.

St. Ignatius' method of obtaining contrition is to make us see what sin has done in us, and what it has done to our Lord.

3. Contrition is not an effort of the *heart*, but of the *will*.

Let us sit down by the polluted wells and see our sins in sad procession. What meanness there is even in the least of them! and then see how

generously and how nobly our Lord has borne with us, expecting this act of contrition that we are going to make.

CONSIDERATION.

*On Meditation.*

Begin your meditation by a real, good, earnest act of the presence of God. "O my God, my Sovereign Lord, who hast absolute dominion over me, Thy poor miserable creature—behold me here before Thee to adore Thee, to praise Thee, to reverence Thee. If Thou wert only to look on me for one minute, it would be infinitely more than I deserve, and yet Thou hast done so much for me and I have offended Thee so much by my sins; still Thou sufferest me in Thy presence, Thou knowest my weakness, my imbecility, my foolish distractions, and still Thou permittest me to sit at Thy feet."

Your volatility of mind can and must be conquered. If the book itself does not suggest a suitable idea, there are always the persons, words and actions. If the words do not help you, you can always sit down at our Lord's feet, take your crucifix in your hand, and tell Him how miserable you are; if you cannot even stay there, say: Jesus, help me; Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, keep me in your presence. I am firmly convinced that the best kind of meditation is to sit at our Lord's feet, waiting for Him to speak to us—and, if He does not, asking Him to put something in our hearts to say to Him—but quite prepared to pass the time without His doing either the one or the other.

Make a good hearty act of good-will, and firm determination to spend that half-hour in the presence of God, and be sure God will *be pleased*, however imperfect and incapable you may be. It is Jansenism and pure pride which says: I am so bad, God cannot be pleased with me. God does not love us because we are good, but because He created us, called us out of nothing—created us for Himself, and He is foolish with love for His creature. The worst and most persevering badness cannot ever wear out the infinite, untiring love of the Sacred Heart.

As far as my own experience goes, the great means to acquire the spirit of prayer is: *Sileant omnes creaturæ*. Recollect yourself within yourself as a poor miserable atom of nothingness, and worse in the presence of the all Holy, Almighty, all Glorious Majesty of God. All good prayer comes out of this. Until we shut out all creatures—until we see ourselves as we really are—poor, miserable, blind, naked lunatics—God cannot take possession of us; and even when He does condescend to visit us, as soon as self comes in and says: “Ah! now I am praying well,” it is all over; there is nothing left for us but to sit down in our misery and rags, and bear our own wretchedness peacefully till it pleases His Divine Majesty to visit us again.

Be alive to the importance of keeping the “great silence.” The ten additions<sup>1</sup> contain in themselves the essence of the religious life.

From the time when you put away your last piece

<sup>1</sup> *Spiritual Exercises*, p. 28.

of work at night, till after Mass the next morning, every thought of worldly and natural interest must be banished. This is of so much importance that the devil is sure to try his utmost to prevent your forming the habit, but you *must* persevere, a bad habit can be replaced by a good one.

*I can do all things in Him who strengtheneth me.*

When you wake, recall the meditation, if it easily occupies you well; but if not, keep your thoughts for God—say some psalm, some prayer. If you let worldly thoughts and interests come in, how dare you say that you are *determined* to become a prayerful soul, as far as God will give you grace? You must call your *will* into action. If you wished very much for anything and knew you could get it by an act of self-control, you would be sure to do it.

When you have done your utmost and really cannot overcome your distractions, then turn them to good account. Take your crucifix in your hand and sit at our Lord's feet in silence like Mary Magdalen. How contented she would have been to sit there for half an hour, or an hour, even if He took not the slightest notice of her! It is far more than you deserve, to be allowed to show Him your homage by staying for half an hour or more in His presence.

### THIRD MEDITATION.

#### *Our own Sins.*

1. Let us have pity on our own souls, and do not rashly expose them to the occasions of sin.

If you guard them you will then deserve the mercy of God. You must meet your sins at the bar of God's justice; so keep their memory green before you now, and wash them out with tears of compunction. Bear willingly and lovingly the shame of them; an act of contrition by God's mercy is enough to gain forgiveness of our sins, but not enough to blot them out from God's remembrance.

*We* must remember them that *God* may forget them. We go on in our sins because we do not try to discover their *root*. This would lead to self-knowledge, which, after all, is the real work of the spiritual life. David understood this and said, "From my hidden sins, O Lord, deliver me."

2. True shame is the willing acceptance of the disgrace we have brought on ourselves, which we accept, thanking God.

Then we turn to God and grieve over the offence, sure that we are forgiven, full of sorrow for the pain we have caused Him.

#### *Motives of Shame.*

1. We are but creatures.
2. Our want of correspondence with grace.
3. Our sins, and all they have cost our Lord to wash away.

#### *Fruits of Shame.*

1. The best disposition for Holy Communion.
2. It disposes us well for prayer and the Sacraments.
3. It renders us forbearing to others.

4. It is a preventative against relapse into former sins, or the fall into fresh ones.

5. It makes us ready for humiliation and reproof.

Never forget past sins, and those habits wilfully indulged in which were sure to lead to sin.

Take those sins to the foot of the Cross, and let the stream of love from the precious Wounds whose source is in the Sacred Heart once more run over them, and never let yourself put off the garment of shame. Those who have made least progress are exactly those who have been most unwilling to put on this garment of shame. Self-abjection can only come from keeping green the memory of our sins, and it is the starting-point of the spiritual life.

### THIRD DAY.

#### FIRST MEDITATION.

#### *Particular Judgment and Hell.*

1. There are not two Jesus Christs. The same Jesus, so loving, so desirous of our salvation, will judge us. He will "search Jerusalem with lamps" that He may discover something to reward with His unerring judgment.

He will sift carefully all that has been *for self* from all that has been *against self*. He will separate the fibres with exquisite discernment, and He will be obliged to subtract whatever has been for self from the weight of glory He had been preparing for us. We shall reap as we have sown.

What the enemy has sown in the night of our darkness by passion or negligence will certainly crop up, and we shall taste its bitterness; but we can turn even the *creature* "cockle" to our profit by eating our bread of humiliation with patience, which will bring us back to God.

Those are nearest to God who are crying, *Lord, that I may see*, or with St. Austin, "Let me know myself, let me know Thee."

2. The pains of Hell—the devils, the horror, are only the accidents of its torments. The essence is the loss of God to those hearts created with such a capacity for enjoyment, and which He alone can fill; and with this fearful loss is the embrace of the creatures for which the soul is lost. Revenge—self-will—ambition and the like. This fact should make us dread the seduction of creatures which have such a terrible power of making us spurn the Creator.

Imagine having to dwell in that loathsome abode—with the loss of God—and embraced by the creature which the soul now hates, and thinking of the Passion which now is all in vain.

The Passion which is now our consolation, our healing, the object of our tenderest gratitude, will then become an endless source of unavailing regret and despair.

3. Hell shows us so clearly what living for self comes to.

We came from God and are made only for Him, and our interests are the same as those of God—to live for Him and then go to Him. All that favours

self is against God and against our own interests. He that does not "hate his own soul" shall lose it.

Let us gain this light from looking upon Hell—let us gain this deep conviction to aid us in time of temptation. Hell is the home of those who wilfully prefer self to God. To form an idea of what the loss of God would be, let us imagine our convent laid under an interdict—the Blessed Sacrament solemnly carried away, and we having to come in shame and humiliation into the chapel with the Tabernacle empty, and no Mass for us. What acute pain we should suffer! To good Religious the thought of Hell should ever remind them of the mercies of God. They should say to themselves, "I might have been there, but God has prevented me."

#### SECOND MEDITATION.

##### *St. Mary Magdalen.*

1. St. Mary Magdalen at our Lord's feet in the Pharisee's house is an example of a soul that has perfect trust in our Lord's love for her, and that can refuse Him nothing in return. She *understood* our Lord, she thought our Lord must love her or He never could have come into the world to die for her, and thus one word from Him was so much to her. Her heart was human, and she felt keenly the cold glance of the Pharisee and its humiliation, but she loved our Lord.

We must learn from her not so much contrition, which is a great grace, or love of our Lord, which is



the highest of all, as a deep conviction of our Lord's love for us, which will bring trust, and out of trust, love.

2. The Pharisee represents another class of souls, timid and vacillating, who hardly dare to let the grace into them, for fear our Lord should ask too much of them. Simon rashly judges St. Mary Magdalen and our Lord—yet our Lord gently tries to win his heart. He speaks to him before He speaks to Magdalen. "Simon, I have somewhat to say to thee."

It ought to be a greater joy to us when we overcome the malice and obduracy of some uninteresting soul, than when we have lavished our bounty on some loving good soul.

3. Our Lord's loving complaint, which shows us how His Human Heart feels coldness and neglect, just as we feel when we are ill and suffering, and do not think enough consideration is shown for us, also our Lord shows how He loves *little* loving acts.

"Thou gavest Me no water for My feet, but she with tears hath washed My feet. Thou gavest Me no kiss, but she hath not ceased to kiss My feet." Then He spoke to the Pharisee of His Eternal Father when He said, "A certain creditor had two debtors, the one owed five hundred pence and the other fifty pence, and he forgave them because they could not pay their debt." These words also show how we are to make stepping-stones of our sins, and that after five hundred falls we may get nearer to God than after only fifty; if we love more, and always trust, we can be forgiven, and begin again after the five-hundredth time.

## CONSIDERATION.

*On Purgatory.*

The subject on which I propose speaking is Purgatory. I do not mean to exaggerate or imagine, but simply to place it before our eyes in all its reality. And what place can have greater interest for us Religious than this region of holy souls, all dear to the Sacred Heart of Jesus? Purgatory, properly understood and seriously thought of, helps us all through life. Our meditations, our every duty, will be more carefully fulfilled if done in the light of Purgatory. To all it will be useful. The generous Religious will be filled with holy zeal to render every assistance to those holy souls. The zeal which moved saints to spend themselves in trying to save souls will move us to assist in liberating them and rejoicing the Heart of Jesus, who yearns to see them united to Him. The ungenerous, from motives of fear, will be led to fulfil her duties carefully, so as to shorten her time of expiation after death. We have all reason to fear it; for, if we are honest with ourselves, we are all ungenerous souls. We cannot bear much. Which of us could hold even a finger in the gas and wait to see the effect? None of us like to be burnt.

Then first let us consider Purgatory in connection with *Religious*. I am not picturing a thing which has not happened, or does not happen. Purgatory is a reality, and *religious souls* are suffering there. Choose from amongst them a class most like ourselves; Religious who have worn our habits, been trained by our Rule. Then consider our relations

with them. What if it should be appointed, as most likely it is, that Providence leaves the souls of our departed Sisters to our charity? This appointment appears from revelations of many saints. We hear of souls of Religious complaining of the neglect of their Sisters, whilst at the same time the usual prayers and suffrages of the Order had been offered for them. How do we know if God will accept the suffrages offered for us, or if He may not apply them to more deserving objects of compassion? Only a few days ago a passage came before my eyes in which a religious soul complains of the neglect of her Sister, "O for one day of perfect silence!" she cries, "one day of truly humble and interior life, how much relief it would afford me!" From this we learn, dear Sisters, that mere *routine prayers* offered by Religious for their departed, are not sufficient. Such God takes from *poor worldlings*, but from *Religious* God expects *kind for kind*. To expiate the Rule broken the Rule must be strictly fulfilled. Recommendation for recommendation, vow for vow, and the practice of virtues attached to the vows,—humility and sisterly charity, to expiate the neglect of the same. In the region of suffering souls how the *Religious* may expect *rigorous justice*! If Religion is the scene of the *greatest refinement* of God's graces, lights, mercies, and tenderness, how also the Religious may expect in Purgatory the *refinement* of *God's justice*! God will glorify His justice in the souls of Religious. What may they expect to suffer for resistance to grace, which is the beginning of pride and rebellion; what for entertaining an interior

spirit of contempt for rules or observances, or continually failing in sisterly charity; for *wilful* faults, and faults where *good-will* has been wanting; failings which, in the eyes of the world, appear trifles, but not in the eyes of God, who expects perfection in His spouses, corresponding to His infinite goodness and mercy in having drawn them from the world to Himself? Even souls destined to a high place in Heaven may have a long expiation for faults and imperfections, for which they were not *truly sorry*! How much this should increase our fear! Wonderful, and yet true it is, that the more *holy* and *pure* the soul is, the greater is its *holy fear*. When we look at those masters of the spiritual life, Alvarez and De Ponte, how striking is this characteristic in their lives! As we watch Father De Ponte moving about the house engaged in his various duties, we hear him heave deep sighs; and, though we might expect some fervent and rapturous ejaculation like that of St. Francis to escape from his lips, we hear on the contrary, words which show that *holy fear* fills his soul: "When Thou comest to judge the world, O Lord, condemn me not, I pray," for the thought of Divine justice occupies him. Here, then, is food for our soul. If we are discouraged Religious it will not benefit us. *Discouragement* leads us to be ashamed to acknowledge our weakness in being full of faults. *Fear* leads to humility, to owning our nothingness and weakness, our capability of every fault, unless sustained by the hand of God. Holy fear tells on all our religious life. It leads us to observe silence: recommendations of Superiors; customs of the Insti-

tute; Holy Rule, and not the Rule only, but the *spirit of the Rule*, and the virtues attached to it, and by our fidelity to shorten our own purgation, whilst, at the same time, we assist the souls of our Sisters who are suffering for their *negligence* with regard to the same—yes, kind for kind.

In this world the most lamented are often the least prayed for. Time passes, and the dear departed are forgotten. Not so in Religion. How our Sisters are looking forward to our sisterly charity! They are *our portion*. Perhaps when they were with us they thought they could rely on our friendship and love to help them! but, alas! how soon we forget them! Perhaps some dear religious Sisters are longing for a day of *perfect silence*, or some *acts of sisterly charity*, that they may be released from their pains. *Prayers* are not enough; deeds are required; and such deeds as are specially dear to the Sacred Heart of Jesus,—acts of meekness, kindness, and forbearance.

### THIRD MEDITATION.

#### *Kingdom of Christ.*

Composition of place. Our chapel. Our Lord in the tabernacle, our King.

1. We in our livery of Jesus Christ, our habits. Our Lord has called, and we have responded to His call. He asks us to do as He has done. Our vocation is a victory of souls. How necessary that we should follow our Lord closely and perfectly! We should be foremost in the ranks. Our hearts should be in

the centre of the fight—and they must be mortified hearts. Fear success if you have not such hearts—remember that stars have fallen from Heaven.

Humiliations are the best and kindest gifts God can bestow on us. Try and grow familiar with our Lord in daily meditation—the more we bring Him before us, the more we shall love and imitate Him, and work with more devoted affection. There is, of course, the way of exactness and fear; but it is a dreary road; and souls full of imperfections for years, yet cultivating personal attachment to our Lord, will sometimes give a bound and start anew with a generosity rarely found in souls of the other class.

2. Of those who respond to the call, some will try to be near Him first in the danger.

Do we wish for this place of honour? We can obtain it by fidelity to the toilsome duties of our daily work, and cheerful acceptance of the mortifications we must suffer through common life. In the heart of each one there is “self,” an ally of the devil; this is God’s enemy, and the one we are called upon to conquer for His sake. We should not only resist the temptation itself, but we should so quell and keep down our passions that they will not *dare to think of rising* in rebellion within us.

Our Lord ought to be our all. Nothing that is not referred to Him can secure a lasting reward. What is the value of the work which you take in hand? If not done in *His* name and for *His* sake, it is useless.

3. Now, answer our Lord’s call, each one from her own heart.

Promise Him an entire oblation of *self* and fidelity

in His service. Remember His own words: "He who will not take up his cross is not worthy of Me."

The offering of ourselves, after meditating on the Kingdom of Christ, will be according to the resolution we have made. Our Lord, in asking us from the tabernacle to make the offering, bears the marks of His crucifixion, and so He asks for a crucified offering. We should be merciful to our Lord and make Him amends for the world, which has so little mercy on Him.

## FOURTH DAY.

### FIRST MEDITATION.

#### *The Incarnation.*

*St. Luke i. 26—38.*

I. As the Eucharist is to the rest of the Sacraments, so is the Incarnation to the other mysteries of our faith.

To ask earnestly for a knowledge and love of our Lord's Humanity is a step in the spiritual life.

We have not the courage to imitate our Lady, because it costs too much. The Angel Gabriel had never seen such perfection as hers out of God. He left Heaven to find it on earth. Mary's devotion was to the *Will of God*—the safest devotion, the most free from delusion.

Do we like to be interfered with? Do we cling to what we call our "rights"? Do we not entrench ourselves in our own castles? But we left our

castles and our ladyhood to become *Ancillæ Domini*—if we are *Ancillæ*, where is our *Fiat*?

Devotion to our Lady is a great means of avoiding temptation. She should be a bright spot in our lives. Her character was bright, free, active, and gentle.

2. It is our privilege that our life is one of *drudgery*; by this we earn our highest reward, so that we ought to be *bright*.

The devil makes a nest, and lays his eggs in a gloomy heart; he loves darkness. We should be free from all desires that take away the peace of our souls. Sometimes we let very small things destroy our peace. We must be active, always ready to help others, and to have our orders changed, and not confine our activity to work that we like. We should be gentle, unobtrusive in our charity; quiet and calm in our exterior and heart.

3. Mary and Joseph were leading an untroubled life. As soon as our Lord came, suffering came. It is always so when our Lord is in our hearts. It is the law of the crucified.

Be solicitous only about the sufferings you cause to others; care nothing about those they cause you. Religious should be intent on acquiring solid virtue, which enables us to conquer ourselves, and set our lives in order.

Some virtues are beautiful, and gain merit, but can hardly be called solid, because liable to illusion. Almsgiving, exterior mortification, prayer, poverty, love of the Sacraments, are some of this class; the solid are first, humility, which is sanctity, *love of*



*humiliations*, which is almost as high; and then abnegation, obedience, the queen of virtues, patience, peace of soul, and compunction. Begin at compunction, and go up to humility to attain sanctity. Humility is only grasped bit by bit. Happy shall we be if we gain it grain by grain. These are the virtues which aid us to conquer self. Those which put our lives in order are like that hidden virtue of love of common life, which banishes singularity. To practise mortifications with leave is not singularity.

## SECOND MEDITATION.

*The Visitation of our Lady to St. Elizabeth.*

*St. Luke i. 39—56.*

1. When we are told any great news—that we are appointed to some charge, for instance—and at the same time hear that some one is ill, should we not be inclined to say, “Oh, I have just heard such important news, I cannot attend to that little ailment”?

Our Lady is utterly unselfish, and thinks only of the good she can do. She goes *in haste*. Let us fix our gaze on her. She is perfect in her modesty; there is no disorder in her dress; she is calm and dignified; her whole attitude breathes recollection of God’s presence. When *we* are in haste, are we not flurried and easily put out?

2. What a meeting was that between the two

Saints, each preventing the other in charity and cordiality!

St. Elizabeth, the older, paying such deference to her young visitor, and recognizing with the eyes of faith that our Lord was within her, as we now see Him in the tabernacle. She said, "Whence is this to me that the Mother of my Lord should come to me? For, behold, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy." Our Lady replied by her glorious *Magnificat*, that song of humility. She does not deny God's gifts and graces to her. She does not try to pass them over. *True* humility never does; but she instantly refers them to God, and gives to Him the glory of them. St. Elizabeth adds, "Blessed art thou that hast believed, because those things shall be accomplished that were spoken to thee by the Lord."

Can it be said of us that we have believed the word of God spoken by our confessor or Superior? When our confessor says we are not to trouble about such and such a matter, do we leave it so, and go to Holy Communion? Simple obedience from faith is best of all, recognizing God's will spoken by His priest.

If our Superior says we are to act in a certain way or accept a charge, let us accept it, and God will gain more glory from our simple obedience than from our imaginary humility about our unworthiness.

Oh! if this could only be our epitaph, "Blessed is she that hath believed!"

3. What a holy influence over each other was

exercised by our Lady, St. Elizabeth, and St. John the Baptist!

We should never be influenced by manners; if we are, it causes much misery in community life, and implies want of reverence for each other, and is a yielding to nature. Can we imagine our Lady thinking to herself of St. Elizabeth, Is she pleased to see me? During her three months' visit, did our Lady think much about manners? When by obedience we are deprived of our spiritual duties, we should remember that our Lord can act as He pleases—even independently of the Sacraments—just as He chose to sanctify St. John the Baptist in the womb of his mother. During the three months of our Lady's visit what charity she showed, what prayers she made, what devout conversations she held! There was no yawning nor *ennui* nor disgust—no snapping or snarling, no judging of motives—because there was no self.

#### CONSIDERATION.

##### *The Journey of Life.*

We are *viatores*, travellers, journeying on towards our home. Thus St. Paul entitles us. Those in Heaven are *in patria*. We must have labours and sufferings in our way,—a rough one too; but we have our Lord with us, though we are deprived of the enjoyment of His presence, inasmuch as, though present, we do not see Him,—the fruition is reserved for Heaven.

Yet, how full of consolations and blessings is this life of ours, how full of certainty, compared with the life of many good people in the world, who have but vague doubtful signs to enlighten them on their journey! And yet how we grow weary and tired of only having to constantly begin our struggle anew, though sustained and cheered by His Divine Presence. Passions and evil habits, which we thought to have long since brought under subjection, are there still quite strong. Faults, which, if our memory does not deceive us, we undertook to correct in our very first Retreat, and here we are still working at them and have still to begin again. We feel like one rolling a stone up a hill, and when near the top in our imagination find it once more at the foot, and have to commence the upward journey anew. We know that there is a saying that fire clears more ground in a few moments than tools could clear in many days of labour. It seems to me that for us this fire will be brought to bear upon the ground of our heart by means of the Morning Oblation. This we make in union *with* Jesus, not only for Him, in Him, and by Him, but more than all *with* Him, so that He becomes present at all our actions, and we perform them along with Him. We take our meals with Jesus, we make our meditation and spiritual reading with Jesus! How this helps us to overcome our faults! How can we do what gives Him pain and in His very presence, for He is with us? And if we do forget ourselves, how our contrition improves by the same thought that Jesus saw me do the wrong, and He now awaits me to say that I am sorry! This thought

guards our imagination. How much this imagination of ours can go through! How the thought of being united to Jesus makes us drive away the thoughts which He would reject! It helps us to overcome selfishness. He who gave all for us cannot bear to see us seeking self. If a corner of our hearts is given to self, Jesus departs. This union with Jesus helps us to observe sisterly charity, and a sweet devotedness to holy Religion. It keeps us in holy simplicity, for, united to Jesus, all is open before Him, there is no secret corner in our hearts. It is this holy union which gives that air of sweet simplicity and joyousness to the life of a Religious, which so much impresses those who visit a religious house. A man of the world sees it at a glance.

We possess in our midst Him who can cheer and comfort us. What would life be to us if He were not here in the Most Holy Sacrament, hidden, it is true, but, nevertheless, making His presence felt by the happiness and joy which He pours into our souls? Here in His presence let us expose to Him our faults and imperfections, which pain and humble us, and ask His assistance in our struggles to overcome them; instead of cherishing them in our hearts, let us make real efforts to get rid of them, though to our sorrow we may find them sprouting up again; yet they will grow weaker and weaker if we keep up our union with Jesus; and we may yet have the happiness of gaining the victory over them.

## THIRD MEDITATION.

*Bethlehem.**St. Luke* ii. 1—20.

I. After the embassy of the Angel Gabriel to our Lady, God seemed to have forgotten her—to have left her, in her hour of greatest need, to get on as she could.

Does not this remind us of the apparent or real forgetfulness of Superiors? Our Lady had to take a painful journey, and to be exposed to the rude gaze of men. Should not we have thought, "Is this the way God should treat the Mother of His Divine Son?" How very strange this is! And then, perhaps, we should have added, "Thy will be done." I don't wish to give way to wrong thoughts—*but* still it *is* strange—and do we not in this way keep a sore place in our hearts which we do not get rid of? We let some sense of injury, or neglect, or some suspicion, rankle deep down in our hearts, and take root there; and then, when a great temptation comes, this bursts forth and destroys our peace. After a difficult journey of eighty miles, our Lady came to Bethlehem, to find no lodging, "no room in the inn." She is in the midst of a noisy crowd, so repugnant to her love of silence and solitude. At last, by the dim light, they find the poor stable, and Mary can lie down. She is weak and very weary, the darkness of night draws on. Some dread the darkness; "there are fears in the night." What should we have felt then?

2. When our Lord sent the angels to the shepherds, they did not make any difficulty about fulfilling the angels' orders, as regarded their flocks, the distance, the darkness, and coldness of the night; but, with simple, unhesitating obedience, they left their flocks, being perfectly detached, and said, "Let us go and see, that we may adore."

What a beautiful lesson for us! Superiors tell us to do something that is far less difficult than what the shepherds were requested to do, and we have heaps of excuses because we are not detached. Again, the shepherds did not wonder at our Lord choosing them in preference to others; they were filled with awe and reverence at the sight of the angels; but their simplicity was so great that beyond the *fear* (holy fear) they had, there was no thought as to why they were preferred. Was it because they were better than others, more useful, more able to spread the wonderful news? No such thoughts passed through their simple minds. They went into the cave, and adored our Lord in the manger with perfect simplicity, not thinking of the preference shown them, or of anything but simply adoring our Lord.

3. Contemplate the joy of the angels; the smallest faithful preference of God gives joy to them.

The shepherds were the most fit on earth to profit by the grace of being called to Bethlehem, because of their simplicity. They made no inquiries, such as haughty Religious do. Their poverty of spirit and detachment led them straight to our Lord.

## FIFTH DAY.

## FIRST MEDITATION.

*The Purification of our Lady.**St. Luke* ii. 22—38.

Contemplate our Lady.

1. See how faithfully she observes the law; she was completely exempt from the penalty of a purification,—she, the all-pure, the spotless; but, out of respect to the law, she went through the custom.

Do we love our Rules? Is each one sacred to us because God speaks through them? Nature cannot bear checks on self; any safeguard proposed is revolting to pride, but strict observance of Rules is an essential part of religious perfection. Watch our Lady as she goes to the Temple—her perfect modesty—her eyes cast down; how could she think of what was passing around with Jesus in her arms? When we go out into the streets we do not indeed carry Jesus as she did; but is not the spot yet warm with His presence where He has loved to nestle at Holy Communion? How important is our exterior demeanour! Even the poor and ignorant are sharp enough in taking scandal.

2. The service of our Lady imprints the love of purity on her children, and this ought to be joined with humility, kindness, and gentleness; and by this means we can instil a love of angelic purity in the hearts of many who would learn by no other means.



If we like we can become the living image of our Lady. Study her looks, her manner, her walk, the tones of her voice, but, above all, her self-abasement and cleanness of heart. She is the model of self-abjection—the true posture of a creature in presence of its Creator; and this is the grand science of life.

Our Lady was free from idle curiosity, and is a reproach to those who keep the avenues of their hearts open; always desiring, craving, wondering, and listening with hungry ears to the miseries of our poor humanity. It is our thrice-blessed privilege as Religious, to be exempt from this knowledge; let us value it, and ask our Lady, the Seat of Wisdom, to give us a dread of any knowledge which can defile, weaken, or sadden.

3. Behold St. Joseph, the worthy imitator of our Lady's virtues.

They redeem the Child out of their substance; we also can buy Him, and have Him for our own, if we will pay the cost. What a beautiful picture is holy Simeon, a man of one idea—to please God in everything! He was waiting for the joys to come, unlike those who must have something in hand; meanwhile, holy Simeon served God for nothing on earth.

Old Anna, too, is a splendid character. Perhaps she chattered a good bit, and many are tempted to chatter in silence-time. Eighty-four years is a long time. She must often have been weary, and had many pains and aches. She is a good example of fidelity in God's service. Every one, no matter how fervent, is weary at times—prayer and teaching,

work and prayer, it wearies by its monotony. Let us cheer up our hearts, *go on*, stick to it, keep our Rules that we learnt long ago—to keep them in time of desolation. We cannot force consolation to come, but we can *always go on*. Our vows are like, and unlike, the marriage vows. We have espoused our Lord for better, for worse, in sickness, and in health; but not till death part us—but until death shall join us with Him and to Him for evermore.

SECOND MEDITATION.

*The Flight into Egypt.*

*St. Matt. ii. 13—23.*

I. There are times when we are alone beneath the eye of God; no Superior is there to watch; we have no one to edify or scandalize. Alone—with God only as our witness.

Without any change in community life, we can change from being commonplace, every-day Religious into interior ones, who are always paying to God the homage of the heart.

Let us look at the lowly dwelling—St. Joseph asleep in one room, our Lady and her Divine Child in another. Watch our Lady's tranquil slumber, the calm, peaceful sleep of purity and holiness, of a soul constantly in God's presence, "the sleep He giveth to His beloved." St. John Berchmans' passion was to imitate her, and represent her to others. He prayed that sleep might come quickly, and he tried not to move in sleep so as to be like

her. Let us imagine how she behaved in the silence and solitude of her room.

2. How brief is the order ! St. Joseph is not told exactly where to go, nor how long he is to stay, nor how he is to support himself.

Put yourself in St. Joseph's place. Could he not have said : What ! is the Most High to fly from the persecution of earth ? Is Almighty God to run away from a weak earthly king ? Might he not have asked for a little delay, for more exact instructions ? No, he does not ; he is silent, prompt. He is governed by perfect and willing obedience. He obeys with *alacrity* (a word on which we might most usefully ponder). The message comes to St. Joseph, the head of the family, not because he was the holiest or most exalted.

3. Our Lady does not complain that she was not treated with deference ; but obeys simply, cheerfully, and with *alacrity*. She gazes out into the uncertain future without doubt or fear or thought that God is hard. Hard !—how could He be hard ? Impossible ! The crucifix on the altar tells a different story—a story of love in return for ingratitude, love that never ceased, not even when the last drop of blood was poured out, and a bitter death endured.

The way was uncertain, rough, and dreary, but she accepted it as a mysterious manifestation of Providence. How the dark weary hours of life were consoled and brightened by this thought—so true in every event of life, no matter how trifling—God destined it for me from all eternity. He cannot have designed anything but for my good.

True, our Lady had our Lord with her ; but not more truly than we have Him in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, where His abiding presence is our comfort and our hope. Where Jesus finds entrance, *there*, also, enters the Cross, "Happy are they who bear it bravely, thrice happy they who love it." We have constant opportunities of practising the lesson taught us by this great mystery. Obedience often costs us much—the fear of persecution, or what will be thought of us—human respect—clinging to natural affection and love of self—all these are painful to bear ; but let us remember we are imitating the Holy Family in their flight into Egypt.

#### CONSIDERATION.

##### *The Spirit of Prayer.*

You know how impossible it is to be true women of prayer without the practice of abnegation and mortification.

What prevents our intimate union with God, but our unworthy clinging to self, and the unmortified affections of our hearts? And yet it was to be women of prayer that God called you into Religion, where none can be truly happy without a love for prayer. If there are any here who have not acquired this virtue, this holy habit of prayer, I beg of them to look to themselves in time ; for if the present life of such a one be miserable, what will the next, the future life of such a Religious be? I do not mean the Religious who finds a difficulty in prayer, who

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spends the time of prayer in torture, from dryness and distractions, and ends meditation with a feeling of relief that the laborious efforts she has been making have come to an end. But I mean one who shirks prayer, who neglects it. Think of a prayerless day, a day spent without once addressing God, when, as David says, "The soul is as earth without water." Who that loves God could spend many such days? The love of God and the love of prayer go hand in hand: one is the measure of the other. He who seeks to love God, seeks also a love for prayer, and ever earnestly asks it of God. How many graces we lose by neglecting prayer! for our Lord's words hold good, "Every prayer is answered." Scarcely is the eye of the creature raised to God than the Divine Eye falls upon it, and instantly a ray of grace darts into the soul. Every one amongst you can become a lover of prayer. It is a grace to be asked for, and if earnestly sought will surely be granted. The thought occurred to me, — whether by inspiration or not, I do not know, — it was, that we lose the gift of prayer through our want of gratitude to God who bestowed it. This is a point with our Lord which we should never forget. He does not like us to take His gifts, and make them our own without thanking Him. Thus in time of consolation and spiritual fervour, let us think how unworthy we are of such a gift. "Who am I to be thus blest?" Sometimes consolation and an attraction to prayer lead to self-esteem; then God withdraws it. One thing is certain. God desires

to bestow His gifts upon us: and if He does not, it is that we prevent Him by our want of humility, and also by our want of earnestness in asking for them. Humility is truth. The humble soul returns all her gifts to God; and when tried by dryness and distractions labours as earnestly at prayer as when enjoying consolation and comfort. It is not the prayer in which the soul is ravished into Heaven and filled with spiritual sweetness, which shows true love of God; but the one made on the cross, in desolation and suffering, for in this the soul seeks God unselfishly. To become lovers of prayer, much depends on ourselves. If we have not a great facility in prayer, we must let business-like habits and methods make up for it. St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi was ravished into an ecstasy at the sight of every blooming rose; so let all things remind us of God and prayer. Father de Ravignan has a good thought on the subject, "Never come before God empty-handed." Thus God commanded the Jews. He loves our oblations. Sometimes from pride we imagine them too small to offer Him; but the truly humble and simple-minded refer everything to God. No matter how trifling the joy, God is delighted to receive it; no matter how trifling the cross we offer Him, He looks into our hearts to see with what love we make the oblation.

Lastly, let all your prayers be made through Mary, and ask through her the gift of prayer. All we obtain from the Sacred Heart must come to us through Mary; all our offerings to the same Divine Heart must ascend through Mary.

## THIRD MEDITATION.

*The Hidden Life.**St. Luke ii. 51, 52.*

1. To imitate our Lord really in the hidden life costs a great deal, and is much more difficult than we might suppose, because it requires the greatest interior mortification, which is no easy thing.

He spent thirty years in teaching it to us; but if we go on trying, even though we fail up to the last moment of our lives, we shall have the same reward as if we succeeded. It is of this part of our Lord's life only that the Holy Ghost had said He made progress; and this was to show us that true progress consists in constant fidelity to the interior life.

2. What glory our Lord rendered to His Father by His life of toil!

It was not a lady and gentleman with their little boy who condescended to a life of poverty at Nazareth; but they really lived the lives of poor labouring people in every way; so much so, that no one about suspected who they were. Do we labour as they did for God's glory, seeking only how to please God? The most humble occupation of religious life cannot be compared to the life at Nazareth. A God labouring and toiling to accomplish the will of God! What a wonderful work for souls we can accomplish by our hidden life! Religious life has all the qualities of a happy life.

When we have left the world we ought to be completely unknown to it, our identity forgotten, and

each be only a member of a community, unknown to all save God and our Superiors, and never do anything to bring ourselves into notice.

Our Lady is the model of the hidden life of a Religious. A good method of prayer is to meditate on each of our Lady's senses, and try to model ours on hers; and so, with her manner, deportment, interior disposition, and virtues, endeavouring to copy her. The virtue that never changes is always the least noticed—it is so taken for granted that it causes no remark.

3. The hidden life is the great meditation for us. In the council of the Most Holy Trinity the years of our Lord's life were fixed, as well as the way in which those years were to be spent.

The hidden life teaches us a life of obscurity. This exacts a repression of the most indomitable passion of the heart,—which is a craving to be loved, to be esteemed. What an hourly crucifixion goes on in a soul which has a passion for a life of obscurity! There are souls of this stamp. If we cannot yet attain to it, let us, at least, work with the graces God gives us now; and, perhaps, the day may come when we shall hear, "Friend, come up higher," and an imitation of His hidden life will be given us.

## SIXTH DAY.

### FIRST MEDITATION.

#### *The Two Standards.*

1. The devil sets up his throne in that part of the house where he has most gratification.



He calls all our bad angels together, for we each have a familiar devil. There are Religious, too, at the devil's parliament,—those who lead others astray, who neglect common life, who give bad example. The devil will tell his followers to tempt a community to multiply their wants, to seek gratification, to murmur when refused, so that holy poverty may be relaxed, and our souls soften, to refuse what is hard to flesh and blood. He will distract them thus in time of prayer. After this he will lead them to pride, so they will become self-willed in opinions and judgment; and the work is done.

2. Our Lord will have round Him His angels, and the Religious who will help Him by their good example, particularly by leading the common life.

He will say, teach other Religious not to desire this or that, to dread the use of creatures simply for gratification—to yield promptly and generously when Superiors refuse their requests—to wish for nothing out of common life—to follow all community exercises without seeking for the smallest dispensation. Then if they have no sweetness in prayer it will at least be solid, and they will gain from it strength to conquer themselves; and thus they will learn true abnegation, from whence cometh humility.

3. The devil sometimes gains an entrance into a community if holy poverty is relaxed, even when sanctioned by Superiors. How much more then will he succeed if Religious dispense themselves without sanction!

“My greatest mortification shall be common life,” says St. John Berchmans. The devil may

tempt us to the "love of riches," by leading us to relax in holy poverty, and to love comfort. God needs our help. The work will not be done without us, because such is His will. His enemy and ours is the same, *self*. Few souls are saved, and those with little perfection, by a selfish Religious. The work that God appoints us to do to help Him is not only in appearance, but a *real work*, which we cannot do unless we overcome ourselves. This is the pruning of the vine branches, without which they cannot bear much fruit.

SECOND MEDITATION.

*Baptism of our Lord.*

*St. Matt. iii. 13—17.*

1. A humiliation rightly borne before others never lessens our power of doing good. St. John the Baptist lived, laboured, suffered, and died for our Lord, yet he was set aside. "He must increase, but I must decrease!"

Our Lord began His public life by an act of humiliation, ranking Himself among sinners. And then it was that the heavens opened, and glory was given to God. We should prepare ourselves for correction and humiliation. We lose so much by not being prepared. The words of a Superior have almost a sacramental grace for those who are prepared to receive and profit by them.

2. Let us look at the persons—first, the motley crowd surrounding St. John the Baptist, men of all

kinds, all eager about the affairs of their souls. Look at the Pharisees and Sadducees, who braved human respect, and set at naught the opinion of the world, which before they had held in such esteem, in which they were so anxious to maintain their positions and reputation.

St. John the Baptist did not receive them with much consideration, as they might have expected. He said, "Ye brood of vipers, who hath showed you to flee from the wrath to come?" We should learn to receive direct and pointed reproof, to accept humiliation, and say, "There is a humiliation, so it must be for my profit." We may feel it keenly and bitterly, we may writhe under it, but we accept it, and say it must be good since it came from God, and thank Him for it as He sent it.

3. Then the holy Precursor himself, that type of consummate sanctity, not only was he sanctified from his mother's womb, but he led such a saintly life. Consider his wonderful austerity—his rude clothing—coarse food—and complete solitude; then comes his unbounded popularity, he is followed by admiring crowds, who hang on his word, over whom he exercises such sway; and about all this he is utterly unconcerned and so willing to give it up. He says, "He that shall come after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear; He shall baptize you in the Holy Ghost and fire. Whose fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly cleanse His floor; and gather His wheat into the barn, but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire."

Our Lord praised him as He had never praised

man before; he was "a shining light," and when our Lord came he was content to forego it all, and to sink into such utter nothingness that the wicked King who had feared as well as hated him, could cast him into prison; and then he died a disgraceful, loathsome, and bitter death.

That was the end of that glorious and holy life which gave such glory to God. This lesson is not only for Superiors; each of us, however lowly, may take it to heart. We all wish to shine, to excel, and distinguish ourselves.

Let us contemplate our Lord as He draws near the holy Baptist. He has come from Nazareth, from that happy home, where He has left His beloved Mother desolate and sad; even now He can see the traces of her tears upon His cloak: but she gave Him up willingly, because it was His Father's Will.

CONSIDERATION.

*The Good Samaritan.*

*St. Luke x. 25—37.*

The Jews considered no one their neighbour who was not a Jew; therefore, our Lord in the parable showed them that the real neighbour, the one who acted charitably towards the man who had fallen among robbers, was a Samaritan, while priest and Levite passed him by.

Our Lord has taken compassion on you by leading you out of the world and bringing you into

your community; and there is no difficulty about who is your neighbour. "A man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho," that is from grace to nature. He fell among robbers. "And they stripped him." Sometimes we are stripped of fervour and grace; we fall away from our acts of virtue; and then we are wounded by our infidelities; and so we fall gradually. In the Levite, the priest, and the Samaritan, we see one aiming at the highest perfection—one not aiming quite so high, but still good, in the middle state of souls as it is called—and one leading an indifferent sort of a life, and taken up with vain and worldly things. "They passed him by." They see some in need; but they think, "If I do anything it will be a bother, it will cost me something;" and so they all pass by. Then the Samaritan came, and went up to him; he bound up his wounds, and poured in oil and wine, and set him upon his own beast, took him to an inn, and took care of him.

There is a beautiful lesson contained in these few words; and if we meditated on them for years, we should always learn something from them. "He went up to him." Mark well these words, for it is the first step of charity; he went up to him, he bound up his wounds, and poured in oil and wine.

To listen with patience to the troubles of another, and then help her with gentle words—the oil of charity, and the wine of strength and encouragement. It is often a great act of charity to listen well. We come to our examinations, and see what faults come through the tongue, and make great resolutions as to what we shall say, and what we shall not say; but

we do not often think about the importance of being good listeners.

Then the Samaritan, we see, does not simply perform the act of charity and then go away and do no more; but the next day he gives the host two pence, and promises to repay him what he shall spend over and above. We see he gives up his little, and promises the rest of what he is unable to give then. Now, in a community there is always some one in need; and, therefore, there are always occasions for practising these acts of charity. We should go to recreation ready to make ourselves agreeable, and at the beginning send up a loud cry to God from our heart, "O my God, grant that I may do good to some one;" and very often we can do great good by simply being a good listener; for it stands to reason there must be some listeners, and not all talkers.

The reason we like to pour out our own troubles, and not concern ourselves to listen to those of others, is, that we are so wrapped up in that dear object, *self*; and what does it matter about any one else so long as self is all right? Whereas if we forget self, and listen patiently to what others have to say, we can often give a great deal of help by putting in a word of sympathy now and then. Don't look like a very highly polished poker, and as if there were written on your brow, "Don't come near me." And it is a sort of helpful charity you should have, one for another. Like the Samaritan, give of your little—a kind word goes a long way. Listen gently, and let those who have troubles of their own be the more ready to ease the trouble of others. Forget

self, and be one of those to whom any one can come for assistance and will be sure of a kind word at least. Like the Samaritan, give the little you have, and promise the rest.

## THIRD MEDITATION.

*The Woman of Canaan.**St. Matt. xv. 22—28.*

1. Ask the grace to have such lowly reverent hearts, as to trust our Lord in the midst of rebuffs and greatest humiliations; not to murmur at God's Providence; to learn how our Lord hides Himself behind creatures, as He hid the love and compassion of His Sacred Heart behind the harshness He showed to this poor woman.

She called and shouted after Him; the Apostles interceded for her—it is rather a good thing to shout at *them*,—but their first object is to get rid of her. “Send her away, Lord, for she crieth after us.” They knew He would not send her away empty.

2. But our Lord passes on and takes no notice of her. At last, importuned by His Apostles, He said, “I was not sent but to the sheep that are lost of the house of Israel.” He seems to say, “Not for such as thou, rough and wild; thou art not of My flock.” Our Lord tries those who are generous. He is so often disappointed in our trust that He eagerly seeks for a soul whom He can try, and rejoices when He finds one. He fears to discourage, to “break the bruised reed,” to “quench the smoking flax;” and

yet He desires to try the generous soul up to the last point, that it may gain a more plentiful reward. This poor woman, under the double humiliation our Lord had given her, casts herself at His feet, and looks up into His eyes. She knows she can never look into those eyes without feeling their love and compassion. She utters that beautiful, trusting prayer, "Lord, help me." "O Sacred Heart, help me."

3. But still our Lord refuses the eager panting love, showing great coldness, and harshness, and uttering the hardest words He had ever spoken.

Still pouring into her heart floods of grace and trust, He says, "It is not good to take the bread of the children, and to cast it to the dogs." And from the depths of her humility and trust, she made that most beautiful answer which is to be repeated by saintly lips in all generations, "Yea, Lord; for the whelps also eat of the crumbs that fall from the table of their master." Then the Sacred Heart can no longer contain Itself. "O woman, great is thy faith; be it done to thee as thou wilt!" And her daughter was cured from that hour.

## SEVENTH DAY.

### FIRST MEDITATION.

#### *The Washing of the Apostles' feet.*

#### *St. John xiii.*

1. What a sublime introduction preceded what was of itself a common action! This shows us the



value of the hidden virtues of charity and humility. Let us consider the character of St. Peter: his vanity, presumption, and love of notice. He is always thinking he knows best, bringing on himself many humiliations by his impetuosity; and yet he was never cured till after his great fall. But he never failed in his loyalty to our Lord. He was ever ready to submit after his faults; and this always touched the Sacred Heart.

“Dost Thou wash my feet?”

He did not understand it—he was quite ready to correct his Superior.

“Thou shalt never wash my feet.” Calm confidence in his own ideas! Our Lord knew how to deal with him; he could never bear separation. “If I wash thee not, thou shalt have no part with Me.”

Then we see in him the restless running into extremes of an undisciplined mind. “Not only my feet, but also my hands and my head.” There are some people to whom you are afraid to make a suggestion; they rush to an instant remedy.

If we could but realize our own weakness, and the need we have of God’s help, and His readiness to help us, we should look to Him with so much more confidence; we are like those limp dolls that children try over and over again to make stand up.

Consider the character of the Apostles; the devil is said to have pronounced them “a poor lot.” Our Lord called them to be with Him that they might be formed. He was their model, and gave them instructions on any questions or difficulties they met with, just as He does now in the Blessed Sacrament.

We should go to Him in the same familiar way when we want His help.

2. "He that is washed needeth not but to wash his feet, but is clean wholly," teaches us a lesson to correct and confess our real faults, not tormenting ourselves about our past lives, or accusing ourselves of some trifles which only tend to disguise the real faults that we have not the will to correct.

How solemnly our Lord teaches the lesson of what He had done! "You call Me Master and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If then I, being your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet." If we ought to exercise charity towards each other, how much more ought we to be ready to submit and humble ourselves before those who we know by faith represent our Lord to us!

3. The conduct of the Apostles teaches us that we can have reverence and personal love of our Lord at Holy Communion, even if our minds are weary and distracted.

This is *My Body* which shall be *delivered for you*.

When we go to Holy Communion, our Lord's Body is in our power. Like the Paschal Lamb, It is *delivered* to us for our sins. Do we deliver our bodies to our Lord by restraining self-indulgence, which will become harder as we grow older?

He delivers His Body for us, as our Victim of reparation; we spurn this gift when we give way to discouragement. *Do this in remembrance of Me*.

Our Lord loves us to remember Him. How do we use practices that tend to remind us of Him, to

make our thanksgivings profitable, and prevent anything like sameness or routine? And do we then intercede for others, and especially for sinners, and thus remember Him who gave Himself for them and for us?

SECOND MEDITATION.

*The Agony and Betrayal.*

*St. Matt. xxvi. 36—56.*

1. Our Lord approached this Agony covered with shame and sadness, sunk in desolation of spirit under the weight of His Father's anger. In this spirit He went through His Passion.

He accepted the intense pain of His Passion that we might not suffer through all eternity. He saw all the dishonour,—the execrations of those on whom He had heaped favours, the insults, the mocking, the loathsome jest, the injustice, all that His most sensitive Soul most recoiled from, poured upon Him; and the torture of His Sacred Body exquisitely formed for pain—the cords, the lash, the tearing of each nerve, the suffering of every limb and every sense.

2. But this was not the worst. He saw all the sins of the people of God, of those chosen by Him, of priests, of Religious—the power of wasted graces, to be turned against God to outrage Him.

His Divinity enabled Him to see and realize the enormity of each separate sin, and all that have ever or can ever be committed; and then He turned His eyes to God, cast down, and blushing for shame, and made His most perfect act of contrition, *and gave it*

to us. We have only to unite our poor, miserable acts of sorrow to the act of contrition He made then, and, if our sins were as great as the sea, our sorrow can be the same, *because it is His sorrow*, vast as the sea.

“Behold, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the ancients of the people.”

Our Lord's betrayal, surrounded by a brutal mob, is an image of our souls when we let the reins go, and give way to self-indulgence. Sometimes we unhappily find all the good we have so earnestly tried to gain during a Retreat entirely lost. The passions that are in our hearts, however carefully muzzled at present, when they are let loose may be compared to the mob which assailed our Lord in the Garden. We treat Him, then, in the same way in which they treated Him. In a mob each one excites the others to greater insult and audacity; so it is with our passions. Every inordinate word, that is, every word on forbidden subjects, or at forbidden times, is like another injury to our Lord.

3. How gently and mildly He expostulated with them! How do we expostulate with those who are rough or unkind?

St. Peter cut off the servant's ear because he acted first and thought afterwards, and so was sure to do the wrong thing. How gentle was the rebuke given by our Lord, “Put up thy sword into its sheath.” And He touched the ear and healed the man. So like our Lord, always gentle, always unselfish!

## CONSIDERATION.

*In all things I sought rest.*

Let us consider what help these words can be to you—*In all things I sought rest.*

How we all seek peace! It is the object of our search—our rest. *In all things I sought rest.* Now, we know the rest for which God made us—the rest in His Bosom. In our Retreat we have considered this, that God made us with a design, a planned design, the end of which was a place in His Heart—in His Bosom; this He designed and intended I should occupy. For no other purpose was I created, but to be thoroughly His. All He put into me—dispositions, qualities, tendencies, sympathies, all mixed up in my soul for this one end, to fit me for my particular place in His Bosom.

No two beings are created to give God the same glory—but a particular character, a particular place in His Heart. For this alone I am created; this alone will give my soul rest.

Whatever else I may seek after, I shall still be uneasy, restless, out of my place. God made me for that particular place; and my eternal happiness, the everlasting rest of my soul, consists of that for which it was made—first for God's glory, and, secondly, for my own happiness; these two are one. The fulfilment of God's design is the perfect accomplishment of His glory and of our everlasting happiness. God's glory and my happiness are one and the same thing. If we give Him one, we give Him also the other. If

we deprive Him of one, we deprive Him also of the other. What is not God's good, is not good for me. Bring all to bear upon that. Peace is my supreme good. God's interests are mine, and mine are God's; and whatever is good for God, is good for me; and whatever is bad for God, is bad for me.

I was created for infinite happiness.

If this truth takes possession of us, we should have our minds clear, and our hearts strong. If I seek God's glory, I seek what is good for me, and then grow stronger. I have to seek after what is for God, and I am certain it is the best for me. If once we were certain of this truth, and to be so is true simplicity,—God's good is my own good,—then what strength we should have!

It seems to me that souls once convinced of this would embrace three great elements of peace, upon which our present and future happiness depends. The first is to do, each day and hour, each and every action with the full possession of my soul. Secondly, to use my thoughts wisely. Thirdly, to leave off grubbing into my spiritual state, and be up and doing. These are the three principal means of preserving peace.

Instead of doing each action with full possession of soul, we go to our work in a half-hearted sort of way, thousands of vague thoughts hanging about us, detracting from the perfection of our work. All Religious need full possession of all their faculties in doing their work, they need the full, calm possession of self. No thinking about what I said, or what I am going to say—what I shall do when this or that

happens. All these solitudes fritter away the full possession of our souls. We are divided people—very little people at best; we need all we have to do our work well, even if it were only to scour a dish. We should bring to it honourably and worthily the full possession of our souls. Work is well done in proportion to our talents; but we often seek too much after natural satisfaction, when the soul is far from the thoughts. The one theory upon which God's glory hangs is, that the soul should be calmly possessed, undivided by solicitude. The picture of a full life is one where each action is worthy of God.

That is the first element. The second, and necessary means to the first, is the right way of thinking of our own faults. If we learn to look on our faults as good for us, they would turn to profit. We should turn to God and say, "I am sorry for having pained Thee." Then, quite tranquilly, we should thank God for so generously bearing with the fault, that we might profit by it. Thank Him for the humiliation which will do you no harm. Tell our Lord you are sorry for the pain you have caused Him; then be at peace, knowing that He at once has forgiven you. This way of looking at our faults brings a habit of mind full of peace, and a love of self-abjection. Self-abjection is the fundamental principle of our lives. Without this gladly accepted, peace is impossible.

The third is of vital importance. What is the action of self-love on the soul? To look into itself, to grope about, to speculate about God's thoughts of my soul. Am I pleasing Him? Shall I make progress? Have I fallen back? So many reasons

for dejection and sadness. We spend our lives in moony, dreamy considerations of ourselves. This is a most abominable gratification of morbid self-love in a soul consecrated to God. This perpetual pondering on self—groping, moaning, thinking about self—is diametrically opposed to true simplicity of soul ; it is the great enemy of interior peace.

God wishes our lives to be extremely simple. Those who begin to be simple serve Him each day, and each hour, in each action. If, when we commit a fault, we frankly and cheerfully accept the humiliation, then we derive profit from it ; if we yield to the habit of looking into self, like a child always pulling up a plant to see if it has grown, we shall be always unhappy. We are each on our own step, and God means us to be happy and bright, and not spend our time in crying and moping because we are not on the next step. When we are contented to labour where we are, then we are lifted up higher ; but it is no use groaning and moaning because we are not three steps higher. Try to apply this principle of common sense, to that which is most simple, and yet high spirituality. God has led us to cast away the pleasures of the world, and in their place promises His peace.

*“My peace I give unto you, not as the world giveth do I give unto you.”* We are blind and foolish if we do not value this peace above all else. It is our one end in life. Let us, then, be simple, and believe that what is good for God is good for me. I must have this before me in the work I have to do. I must come to the smallest action with all the



faculties God has given me, not thinking about other things. I must be content to suffer from many faults without losing peace. If these disturb my peace I shall never possess it. I must never doubt God's pardon; and I must abominate, as destructive of simplicity, the habit of looking into myself.

Let me, then, embrace the things that are for my peace, and thus fulfil the words, "In all things I sought rest."

THIRD MEDITATION.

*The Night before the Crucifixion.*

*St. Luke xxii. 54—65.*

I. There is no self in the words of our Lord in the Passion. He spoke to Judas from zeal for his soul, and to the soldiers who struck Him from zeal for His Father's glory. "Answerest Thou the High Priest so?"

We may apply these words in many different senses,—the way in which our Lord has answered His Father, the great High Priest; the way in which we answer our Lord, who has so many titles, who is our great Pontiff; the way in which we answer Superiors, who are God's representatives.

To expiate our disrespectful answers, our Lord allowed Himself to be charged with want of submission.

Dwell on the *look* He gave to St. Peter.

When we have been humbled, outraged, denied, what sort of looks do we give? Are they such as to

convert souls, or do they tempt them to discouragement and drive them to despair?

See the effects of passion and jealousy in the Jewish priests—see what they lead to. Those same lines are in us. We are faint images of the original. These same passions work in us, in miniature, the same effects. The more our hearts are filled with shame and humility, the more clearly we recognize that spite, aversion, falseness, condemnation of others, come from our own passions, and not from the faults of others. How vague are the accusations brought against our Lord!

2. “What evil hath He done?” What do we say against another? Oh, she is such a torment! she disturbs the peace of the community!

They bring false witnesses against *Him*, and these are believed in spite of their glaring contradictions.

We are glad to believe complaints when they agree with our own opinion, though we suspect they may be false.

See how patient our Lord is. And can we not have patience with each other? Patience is a God-like virtue. Let us then strive to follow the footsteps of our patient Lord—patient amidst the outrages of His Passion—patient with us to the end.

3. Let us strive to enter into our Lord’s Sacred Heart early in the morning after that night of shame and ignominy in the guard-room.

He is completely forgetful of Himself. Perhaps He is thinking of the fall of His favourite Apostle. His Passion is but beginning. He is ready to accept

it all. How do we feel when, after a night of pain, or after we have gone through some trouble or humiliation, we are asked to suffer more? Are we full of self-pity, expecting comfort and consideration from others? Our Lord felt the treatment He received from Annas and Caiphas very much. They were Jews like Himself, invested with high religious dignity, and had many graces. Do we not act their part when we are ready to rise up against God's providence and His representatives?

## EIGHTH DAY.

### FIRST MEDITATION.

#### *The Passion.*

#### *St. Luke xxiii.*

I. We should go through the different circumstances of the Passion, and compare them with the occasions of suffering we meet with in religious life. They are drops of the Chalice which our Lord asks us to drink with Him. Can you not drink of the Chalice I have drunk for the love of God? His bonds are our vows; the sufferings of the scourging, our physical pain. He is treated by Herod, who held authority from God, as a fool. He was rejected for Barabbas; are we not sometimes rejected for another—set aside for some one who is certainly more worthy than ourselves? Is not the gall they gave Him like the bitterness we receive when we are longing for consolation?

The accusers of our Lord were offended, because

they were not believed ; they thought superiors ought to take their word. “ If He were not a malefactor we would not have delivered Him up to thee.”

See our Lord again at the mercy of a mob, and though we did not hurl our execrations against Him, perhaps by mortal sins, were we not at least among the weak who joined the rest ? Pilate expostulates with the Jews, pleading with them for our Lord, “ Shall I crucify your King ? ” What a reproach it is to Religious, when seculars, perhaps, can plead our Lord’s cause with them, and (if they dared) say, What worldliness there is in your conversation, and in your manner ; how can you, a Religious, thus treat our Lord ? Expostulation always brings out the good or evil disposition in those to whom it is addressed. What did it do in the Jews ? It caused them to bring down a heavy curse on their own heads, when they said those terrible words, “ We have no King but Cæsar.” They had before this rejected God for Saul, now they rejected Him again for their unbridled passion. There is deep meaning in these words, Pilate *delivered Jesus up to their will.*

2. Dwell on our Lord’s bodily suffering in the scourging—how real and practical was His love—see what we have *cost* Him. He was scourged with ropes, thorns, and iron chains, and Mary felt all with her Mother’s heart.

There was no kind hand to dress His wounds ; and we expect so much solace, such kindness in our sickness and suffering. They added cruelty to pain and insult ; they crowned Him with thorns ; Pilate brought Him forth clothed in a purple garment, and said :

“Behold the Man, what will you that I do unto Him?”

The Jews who had followed our Lord closely, and are now so changed, are instances of the evil brought about by listening to bad counsel. It is truly said that *they*, not Pilate, condemned our Lord.

“*I am innocent of the blood of this just man. Look you to it.*” What awful results have bad words said in passion! “*His blood be upon us and upon our children.*” What fearful words, written for ever in the Book of eternal decrees! But we may say them in a different sense, and ask that this Most Precious Blood may fall on our souls, and wash them clean from sin.

3. Simon of Cyrene was changed by bearing the Cross; first, he was unwilling; at last, his heart was filled with the love of our Lord.

Our Lord stretched out His hands to be nailed to the Cross, completing the offering He made of Himself, when Mary laid Him in the manger, when He stretched out His hands, and said, “Behold, I come to do Thy will, O God!”

As we look at the dead Body of our Lord hanging on the Cross, we see that His Passion was one long act of submission, “Obedient unto death.” Every wound preaches the same lesson. When the dead Body of her only and beloved Son lay in the arms of our Lady at the foot of the Cross, her will was in perfect conformity with the will of God. It is the resistance of our wills that makes suffering unbearable; and in proportion as we imitate her by resignation to the hand of God,

who strikes us, and by the union of our wills with His will, shall be our share in our Lady's endless joys.

Beg Mary to look at us, and say she forgives our work.

SECOND MEDITATION.

*Our Blessed Lady.*

*St. John xix. 26, 27.*

1. One of the sweetest graces our Lord gave us was at the close of His life, when, in the person of St. John, He made His Mother ours, she, who had stood by the Cross and *willed* the death of her Son because it was God's will. God's interests and hers were one. After the long training of the thirty years she had lived with Jesus, she had no self left. Imagine what it must have been to have lived with and watched our Lord for thirty years; how she had imbibed His spirit, and when the time of parting came, as we look into those two human faces and human hearts, we understand that God does not want our human hearts to be crushed, but sanctified.

At some period of our life we have probably felt what it was to have a door close on us, which closed an epoch in our lives; as when that door of the cottage of Nazareth closed on Mary, at her parting with her Son. Some day the door must close on us for the last time—when we die; and we shall then certainly make a retrospect of our lives if we have time; and the only way in which that retrospect can give us joy is, if we can truly feel that we have *immolated self*. Mary felt as she looked back on

those thirty years that there had been no self,—all had been purely for God. After the death of our Lord He went to give joy to the souls in Limbo; but He left His Mother in desolation; and when He arose and came to His Mother, she revelled in *His* joy and glory, as only one divested of self could. In proportion as she had shared His sorrow, and sufferings, and labours, she partook of His joy. It was on *His* account that she rejoiced.

2. And what has Mary done for us? She has loved us, taken joy in us, and interest in our work. From our very birth she has had her arms round us. What have we done for her? Can we look up and say sincerely, Yes, I have done something for her in my life; I have always been glad to do or say whatever could promote her honour? Still, with all this we have many times given her pain. But there is this about wrongs done to Mary—we may have pained her, but we have never made her angry. God created her without anger. She is a reproduction of His kindness, His mercy, His love, His compassion; but not of His justice. Even with the cruel executioners, she was not angry; and when we do things that would make another mother angry, the pain we cause her only makes her turn her eyes in pity to our Lord with a prayer for us. As she is never angry, never resents our injuries, it is a deeper motive of shame and sorrow to us, if we have ever dishonoured her by our thoughts, words, or actions—that is, if our heart is in the right place. A saint calls her “prayerfully omnipotent,” because God never refuses the prayer she makes.

3. What an inducement this is for you to go to your work with courage; if you can succeed in making one soul love her more, if you can teach it to trust her, to lean on her, to have recourse to her, what a great thing you have done! A soul which loves Mary will love chastity, and its guardian, modesty. It will lead a holy life and die a happy death. How great must be the power of Mary, when she seems able to use her omnipotence to turn even the free-will of man! If not, how could she promise that those who die wearing her scapular should never see eternal fire? If she had not in her hands the means of changing hearts, she would never have promised this grace—for salvation means dying with contrition. God will do anything to save a soul that loves His Mother, or that has loved her. Ask her to obtain for you the grace never to do anything unworthy of your high calling—never to degenerate from the high thoughts of the children of God.

#### CONSIDERATION.

##### *On Longanimity.*

I have just been looking at a picture of St. Francis Xavier. You know this most successful of apostles had also his days of desolation. He saw souls, over whom his sweat was poured out, remain insensible and obdurate: but, instead of being surprised or discouraged at his want of success, he laid it all down to his little love for Jesus and Mary. He felt that if he only could get that, then success was certain.



Hence his continual cry, "O Jesus, O Mary, when shall I love you truly?" We must think, as St. Francis Xavier did, that discouragement is out of place, that what we ought to aim at is an increase of love, and we should exclaim often after his example, "O Jesus, O Mary, when shall I love you truly?" All this happens to fall in well with my subject.

The Patriarchs, who so often are brought forward in the Church Offices, were models of this virtue. They saved and sanctified themselves by long, long waiting, always hoping for a blessing, which, as far as this life went, never was given them. Bad as the Jews were, there was always a certain number of them called to perfection,—the Saints of the Old Testament, men whose lives were full of the thought of God and His coming, and what virtue they must have had to have lived on in this constant expectation, without ever realizing their wish! After all, we are not required to practise longanimity to the heroic degree as the old Patriarchs were; we *have* what they sighed for—our Lord—His blessing, His sight, His very presence. We do not enjoy His sight; but faith teaches us we possess Him; and how often have we not felt the strength which comes along with His sacramental presence within us! So that longanimity for us is an easier virtue; still we cannot get on without it. We especially need it in *prayer*, in *work*, in striving after *perfection*.

Here are three points for you, solid as a rock.

(a) You are women of work, intelligent *work*; and if your parsnips do not turn into lilies straight off, you think it is a failure. You must wait God's time

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when He sees fit to let you see results, and be always waiting, always hoping, always expecting.

(b) If we want to succeed in *prayer*, we must be prepared for longanimity and perseverance. During our moments of reflection at the close of each meditation, we see the fruit gathered is but small; nevertheless, we face the difficulty, and intend to do so over and over again. To-day's was a poor affair; but God will give me to-morrow, and I'll try again. At last comes a day when, oftentimes unknown to ourselves, we receive a spirit of prayer—feel a peace we cannot account for. This spirit of prayer, like so many other graces of our lives, has come so noiselessly that we are not aware of it; one by one inordinate affections have been given up, the soul is now free to listen to God, and in union with Him the trials of life pass almost unheeded; at any rate, suffering borne with Him and for His sake is not able to disturb our peace. The precious fruit of longanimity in prayer is ours.

(c) Striving after *perfection* is another way of saying "*self-conquest*." Now we require indeed the virtue of longanimity. Faith must be called in here. It was a principle of faith which enabled us to quit the world, and enter Religion; this same principle of faith keeps us in it: it is faith joined to longanimity, the cream of humility, which will make us die in joy, faithful children of the Institute to which our Lord has deigned to call us.

## THIRD MEDITATION.

*The Resurrection.**St. Matt. xxviii. 1—15.*

1. Let us ask for joy with Jesus Christ, risen from the dead. We do not need a sensible or animal joy, but a supernatural one—such as one might have at the ordination to the priesthood of a dear brother—joy in *his* joy.

When life is monotonous, or our work not to our liking, or we are weighed down by other troubles, then let us remember that as our Lord's sufferings were changed into the Resurrection joys, so will our sufferings speedily be over, and the happiness will last for ever. Our Lord's Soul re-entered that Body, which was covered with the marks of our sins; and then He hastens to console His Mother, so desolate and overwhelmed in a sea of suffering at the fresh memory of His Passion. And see how prompt He was to console those who had suffered with Him—His Magdalen, the holy women, the Apostles.

2. The Lord has risen, and hath appeared to Simon.

Look at St. Peter at the foot of the Cross on that Sunday morning. He is a picture of true shame and abiding sorrow for sin. His bitterest thought was, that his fall had been necessary for him. He had been so full of vanity, presumption, contempt of others. He had been constantly wounding our Lord by his arrogance; his only redeeming quality was his love for our Lord, which could never suffer him to

leave his Master, in spite of so many reproofs and humiliations. And what a fall had been his! On the day of his Ordination and his First Communion to deny, with oaths and curses, that he knew our Lord! What an apostasy! But now he is full of shame, yet sure that he is forgiven; never doubting our Lord's love for him; not discouraged; full of true, unselfish joy for his Master in His Resurrection. Those penitent tears will continue to flow to the end of his life. His only cross will be the veneration of the faithful. Our Lord comes to comfort him. He "appeared to Simon." See the delicate consideration of our Lord in appearing to St. Peter when he was alone.

3. Never doubt our Lord's perfect forgiveness. Study the *Imitation* well—it will help you to keep up the spirit of the Retreat; and be sure to pray before and after reading it. *The truth will set you free.* Free from all false principles and judgments. *All that is not born of God shall perish.* This teaches us only to value what is supernatural, and to walk towards God in simplicity, without anxiety, and without attachments. In chap. xxxvii. of book iii. we are told to expect a change of dispositions—to be now up, and now down; but, through all these variations, we must keep the eye of our intention pure, single, and fixed on God. Do not expect to keep the lights you have had during the Retreat; *they will die out*, and we must not mind as long as we let them do their present work. Our Lord is there still; and He can, and will give us others when He chooses, which will take us on still further in our spiritual life, and unite us more closely to Him.

## LAST MEDITATION.

*Our Risen Lord.**St. Luke xxiv. 13—35.*

1. *And Jesus drew near, and their eyes were held.* They did not recognize our Lord under the form of a creature. It is so difficult when we are out of Retreat to see Him in our daily life.

*Art thou a stranger?* Good inspirations when they come are so often strangers. Our Lord drew out their thoughts so mildly, and so patiently. He spent time with these poor simple, stupid folk. Teaching pious fashionable people is often not our best work; but rather when we are labouring over some poor ignorant child, perhaps rather repulsive.

*Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet.* They do not think so now. They have allowed their faith and trust in Him to be shaken, because things have gone so contrary to what they expected, and they think God has been making a mistake. This is not at all as He should have acted. Just like ourselves—we expect after Retreat all will go well—we make a plan of particular examination, and think we are going to do a great deal; then a temptation comes, we fall down with a bump.

“*We had hoped* He would have redeemed Israel; but this is the third day, and it is all over.”

Then comes discouragement. No; the year will be planted with crosses, and the progress will consist in falls and risings; but there will be much greater submission to authority.

There was so much love and good-will in these disciples, in spite of their weakness. "*Stay with us, Lord, for the day is far spent.*" What a beautiful prayer, and especially when we are growing old!

2. "*And He went in with them.*" Our Lord likes to be pressed; He took bread, and their eyes were opened. Holy Communion brings light. Some foolishly stop away, dreading the responsibility of going; it is a far greater responsibility to stop away.

If, in our Communion, we do nothing else than sit down beside our Lord, feeling that He knows us, and loves us, even though we do not say a word, and are as dry as a stick, our Communions are profitable, and we shall draw from them a real good. It is as if, when dispirited, dry, and tired, we were to sit down by some one who loves and understands us without saying a word, and were to rise up refreshed and strengthened by the inter-communion between the two souls. Then, how much more shall we be refreshed and strengthened by our Lord's visit!

"*And rising up the same hour they went back to Jerusalem.*" They did not stay to enjoy contemplation, but went in charity to others.

*St. John xxi. 24—30.*

3. We should pray for docile minds and willing hearts, ready to believe and put in practice all the Retreat has taught us.

St. Thomas was for eight days separated from his community, and in a state of insubordination and pride. He would not believe with the others, or be

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happy with them. He gave our Lord pain; but Jesus was watching over him, and was determined to bring him back. Thus does our Lord ever deal with us—the experience of the year has taught it. He appeared in the midst of them, as He does to us in Retreat; and though the first glance at our Lord's eyes has taught Thomas that indeed "*it is the Lord,*" He makes him go through that humiliation, which was so good for him and for us. Firmly and gently our Lord insists on his putting his finger into the Wounds, and his hand into the Sacred Side.

In that prayer of St. Thomas, "*My Lord and my God,*" is included all we have to say to our Lord at the end of the Retreat—all the trust and faith we have in Him, that He will help us to keep our resolutions. Our Lord's words are, "Because thou hast seen Me, Thomas, thou hast believed; but *blessed are they that have not seen, and have believed.*"

## Second Retreat.

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### FIRST DAY.

#### FIRST MEDITATION.

#### *On Divine Light.*

1. The *Imitation* says, "There is but little light in us, and this we quickly lose through negligence." Our greatest need is want of light. The want of light is the great obstacle to progress in the interior life, and our own ignorance of our darkness is one of the greatest.

Few care to pray for light. We do not think it worth our while; yet light is what we want. Light in the brain trickles down into the will, and the act follows. Reproach yourselves, not with having done your work badly during the past year—that would be folly,—but with having done far less good than you might have effected if you had had more light. Want of light tells upon our work for souls. We cannot counsel and instruct them properly; our words have no force, because "conviction" is wanting; it also lowers the motives of our actions.

2. Want of light makes us ask for wrong things— not bad things, but those which are not the best for us.



We are perpetually worried and anxious about our little needs, to the exclusion of God's greater glory; whereas, if we begged for the extension of His Kingdom and the good of souls, He would look after our own interest. If we made our principal prayer consist of the three first petitions of the Our Father (which are, no doubt, the chief prayer of the angels), our Lord would be sure to see we had all we wanted.

The more we give way to inordinateness the less light we have; our reason is dimmed, and our judgment also. Besides which, the wear and tear of life and its constant drudgery diminish light; therefore, Retreats are recognized as essential helps in the pursuit of perfection.

3. Place yourself during these coming eight days specially under our Lady's protection; invoke St. Teresa, the great teacher of practical prayer; forget not our good and kind father, St. Joseph. During Retreat keep perfect solitude, thinking only of "my soul and God," and the work of God in my soul.

Do not begin with any fixed determination—that is a mistake; but simply resolve to be *perfectly docile* in the hands of God, and determined to be generous with Him.

We are all perfectly sincere in our morning oblation, but the bustle of daily life and its duties destroys that purity of intention, and so we lose much merit; but if we had light to see things at their true value, we should not so easily forget. Pray, therefore, earnestly for light. God is passing by now, as He did by the blind man, Bartimæus; and if we only cry aloud, no matter how feebly, He will stop and listen.

Ask, then, with great confidence. He and all His angels are watching us with special interest and longing. If we spend the whole meditation making this petition it will be well spent. Ask that He may flood your souls with light; not the light which will inflate, but light that will make us ashamed, that will make us see ourselves as He sees us, and lead us straight to Him alone.

#### SECOND MEDITATION.

##### *God our Creator.*

1. "Man was created." These are the first words of the fundamental meditation, and they contain sufficient food for reflection. Created out of nothing by God, so we have a claim upon Him. He is bound to help us, no matter how bad, how miserable, how unfaithful we are. Let no one say, "I can't expect help, I am too bad." This is a trick of the devil, and very untrue to God. Our confidence in Him should be unbounded. Oh, if we only knew the wonderful happiness of *perfect* trust in Him! Consider the love of a mother: no son, however wicked, ungrateful and selfish he may have been, but knows that, as soon as he chooses to return, even after years of wandering, he will be most freely pardoned, and fully restored to favour, after the first few words of even slight affection. All the mother's yearning love will overflow her heart once more, and she will restore him to his former favour. Now, our Lord cannot give to others what He Himself does not possess; and as He has implanted this devoted

love in the heart of a mother, therefore He must possess it Himself in a supereminent degree, together with the wise tenderness of a father.

2. Let us try to realize this, and understand our relations to Him as our Creator, casting aside all fear, approaching Him with loving confidence: the more complete our misery, the more entire should be our trust. By one great wave of His grace, He has, as it were, swept us into Religion—silly, foolish, vain as we were. The discipline of religious life has done something to train us; nevertheless, after years spent in Religion, we are bound to confess how little progress we have made.

3. Consider two Religious who do the same work, and bear the same fatigue—how different is their merit before God because of their different intentions! Let us go back to our last meditation, and pray for light, pray for one abiding intention, which will form a spiritual backbone in our lives. Let us ask to be penetrated through and through with one idea; as St. Stanislaus said, “I was not born for trifles,” or St. Aloysius, “How will this affect my eternity?” We confess that we come from God—that we live by Him, that we go to Him—but are we *penetrated* with this idea?

No one ever despises his own work—an author loves his book, an artist his picture. God is our Author, our Artist, and He cannot bear to see anything done to spoil us. If we realized how sensitive He is about us, how great would be our confidence in Him; like children we should place our hand in His, and walk forward where He leads.

## CONSIDERATION.

*On our Judgments of Others.*

We have considered that our God formed us, that He made us, and that He knows us intimately, our constitution both of body and soul; that He knows perfectly well the organization of our bodies, from the smallest fibre within them, and the most hidden operations that are passing in our souls. He knows all, makes allowances for all, and bears with all, in His infinite loving considerateness. He is patient with all, and that patience is one of His attributes for which He is so little thanked. We should, with humble, loving, grateful hearts, constantly thank Him for His infinite patience in bearing with us.

Now He made us, and knows us; but we did not create each other, consequently do not know each other. How can we presume to pass judgment on or criticize others, when we are what we are? If we know so little of ourselves, if we cannot even understand the ailment and infirmities to which our bodies are subject, if we are ignorant even of the meaning of those things that are passing in our souls, how can we dare to judge or to pretend to know about others? We presume to arrogate to ourselves the power of deciding what we will tolerate, and what we will not. "I can stand this, but I can't stand that." Some cannot bear this defect, and some cannot bear that; some can't stand meanness, some can't stand untruths, some can't stand rudeness; and so on. But, if we look within ourselves, we shall find very

often that the faults we condemn so in others are either fully developed, or, at the least, latent in our hearts. I remember one of our Fathers once saying, that what he condemned in other priests, he was certain to find sooner or later in himself; he said, "There were three things I was terribly down upon, and all three of them I have had to acknowledge, and bear in myself." I remember the story about some negroes; when they quarrel they always finish by calling each other, "Oh, you black nigger!"

This is the way with us—we are severe, and down upon others for faults and defects, hardly more glaring than our own. Who are we that we should dare to make laws as to what is to be tolerated, and what punished? Poor, weak, miserable, little, wretched creatures, hanging by the thread of God's infinite, loving, patient, tender compassion! We have two lives to lead—our inner spiritual life, hidden with God, and our community life.

In time of Retreat, or in those moments when Almighty God lets in upon our poor souls one ray of His light, to enable us to see something of our own utter misery, we may acknowledge our deep abasement; but often after a generous self-humiliation, we come into contact with something unpleasant to our nature, and we are up in arms again at once.

We say, "It is our nature, we can't help it;" but we can, and we must.

We must have the large-hearted, large-minded, tender, compassionate, patient liberty of spirit, that characterized our Lord; or what shall we say when called on to give an account of our stewardship?

There is not one of us that is not capable of committing any fault, no matter how serious or grave. If we have true humility, we shall never fail in charity; for charity and humility are twin sisters, they go hand in hand—where one is, the other is sure to follow, one cannot live without the other. True genuine charity is founded on humility—that humble self-knowledge which is so conscious of its own defects. The virtues of charity and chastity also are closely entwined; the perfection of the latter is a reward for the exercise of the former. Let us have a horror of intolerance. “*Chaste and gentle make us.*” The Church herself, in her beautiful hymn to our Lady, unites these two virtues together, and bids us ask our Lady, their great model, to help us in our trial and struggle to gain the grace to preserve these two beautiful virtues in all their shining and transcendent lustre.

### THIRD MEDITATION.

#### *Praise and Reverence.*

1. “Man was created to praise God.”

What a noble end, and so easy! The world says, “We can’t, we are too much occupied; we have no time to sing God’s praises.” But the Church, never blind to the wants of her children, says, “I will see to that; I will set apart some of my creatures for that special service, which shall be their chief occupation.” And so Religious are publicly set apart for that great purpose. How do we fulfil it?

Do we praise Him at our meditation and prayers? Praise and blame are two opposite things, and we cannot be doing both at the same time.

Every time we blame any one, no matter in how slight a degree, we are taking away from our capacity for praising. St. John Berchmans made a list of all the Fathers of the Society he knew, and opposite each name he put the characteristic good quality of each. No one, even the worst sinner on the earth, is wholly bad,—every one has some good quality. The Church commands a priest after Mass to say the *Benedicite* as his thanksgiving, as if to say he had received a gift of such infinite price he could not return enough thanks for it, but invited all creatures to join him in thanking God. What a beautiful life is the life of one who constantly praises God! She is as a living sunbeam in the community.

2. Man was created to reverence God. Reverence follows praise, and is a most essential duty. We acknowledge that we should praise God; but do we under all circumstances praise Him? It is easy when under consolation and joy, but do we in desolation and affliction? No; then we grumble. And grumbling easily leads to murmuring against God's providence, instead of showing Him reverence. Let us imagine ourselves, as St. Teresa was so fond of doing, alone on the earth, face to face with God, with His beauty, His love, His goodness beaming forth from His Divine eyes. Alone as we shall be at the Judgment, so let us imagine ourselves alone now. Our life is but a series of steps leading us on to the feet of Jesus. Let us try to realize the

reverence due to Him, by *calling to mind His Infinite Perfections*.

3. And we may also learn to reverence Him, by the reverence *He* shows His creatures. Holy Scripture says, He treats us with "great reverence." He respects our free-will; He will not coerce us, nor can all the devils in Hell hurt us against our free-will; even poor sinners He treats with respect. How then should *we* treat each other, spouses elect of God, chosen out of thousands? If we walk in this spirit of reverence, what a pure atmosphere we shall diffuse around us! what grace and dignity we shall possess! how we shall excel in modesty! what real love and obedience towards Superiors! recognizing God in all His creatures, what a perfectly religious life we shall lead! It will give to our lives calmness of spirit, and save us from many sins. Let us contemplate this beautiful picture until we are enamoured of it; we shall find therein ample food for meditation.

## SECOND DAY.

### FIRST MEDITATION.

*On the use of Creatures in God's Service.*

1. "All other creatures."

If we praise God and reverence God, service is sure to follow. God watches us amidst His creatures. What pain we give Him when we prefer them to His will! They are all made for our use and benefit.

Let us divide creatures into three categories, the



better to help us. The first to contain all the creatures we can see or touch—such as food, clothing, implements of work. The second, all that come to us direct from God—as weather, or health. The third, those that come to us from creatures, independently of our free-will. How do we receive all these?

2. It is easy to recognize the first and second classes as coming direct from the hand of God, and to kiss the hand that sends them; but the third we are apt to repine at; we do not see God's hand in them at all. We grumble and are discontented, without reflecting that *all* is ordained by God for *me*, for *my* welfare. He will not let anything happen that can do me the least injury; even things that seem the most opposed to my welfare are all intended for my good. And, if we look back on our lives, we shall find that the heaviest cross that was ever laid upon us, which seemed at the time to crush us to the very earth, was, in reality, the beginning of God's mercy for us, the turning-point in our lives.

3. Let us, then, determine to use creatures in as far as they help us to our last end. All creatures contain the germs of good and evil; all may help us or mar the attainment of our end. It is an heretical doctrine to say we cannot help our likes and dislikes; we can and must; and in this, wisdom and light will help us. The two extremes we must avoid are, repugnances and inordinate affections towards any creature, using them only as a workman uses his tools—not out of particular affection for a saw or hammer, but as a means to an end.