

Works by Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer

The Way

Furrow

The Forge

Christ is Passing By

Friends of God

In Love with the Church

Holy Rosary

The Way of the Cross

The Way

By Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer

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Read these counsels slowly. Pause to meditate their meaning. They are things that I whisper in your ear — as a friend, as a brother, as a father. We shall speak intimately; and God will be listening to us. I am going to tell you nothing new. I shall only stir your memory so that some thought may arise and strike you: and so your life will improve and you will set out along the way of prayer and of Love. And in the end you will become a soul of worth.

CHARACTER

1 Don't let your life be barren. Be useful. Make yourself felt. Shine forth with the torch of your faith and your love.

With your apostolic life, wipe out the trail of filth and slime left by the corrupt sowers of hatred. And set aflame all the ways of the earth with the fire of Christ that you bear in your heart.

2 How I wish your bearing and conversation were such that, on seeing or hearing you, people would say, "This man reads the life of Jesus Christ."

3 Maturity. Stop acting the child; drop that affectation that only suits a silly girl. Let your outward conduct reflect the peace and order of your soul.

4 Don't say: 'That's the way I'm made... it's my character.' It's your lack of character: Be a man.

5 Get used to saying "No".

6 Turn your back on the tempter when he whispers in your ear: 'Why make life difficult for yourself?'

7 Get rid of that 'small-town' outlook. Enlarge your heart till it becomes universal, 'Catholic.'

Don't flutter about like a hen, when you can soar to the heights of an eagle.

8 Serenity. Why lose your temper if by doing so you offend God, annoy other people, upset yourself... and have to find it again in the end?

9 Say what you have just said, but in a different tone, without anger, and your argument will gain in strength and, above all, you won't offend God.

10 Never correct anyone while you are still indignant about a fault committed. Wait until the next day, or even longer. And then, calmly, and with a purer intention, make your reprimand. You will gain more by one friendly word than by a three-hour quarrel. Control your temper.

11 Will power. Energy. Example. What has to be done, is done... without hesitation, without more worrying.

Otherwise, Teresa of Avila would not have been Saint Teresa: nor Iñigo of Loyola, Saint Ignatius.

God and daring! 'We want Christ to reign!'

12 Let those very obstacles give you strength. God's grace will not fail you: "'Inter medium montium pertransibunt aquae!" You shall pass through the mountains!'

Does it matter that you have to curtail your activity for the moment if afterwards, like a spring, which has been compressed, you will reach incomparably farther than you ever dreamed?

13 Get rid of those useless thoughts which, at best, are but a waste of time.

14 Don't waste your time and your energy — which belong to God — throwing stones at the dogs that bark at you on your way. Ignore them.

15 Don't put off your work until tomorrow.

16 You a drifter? You... one of the crowd? You, who were born to be a leader!

There is no room among us for the lukewarm. Humble yourself and Christ will set you aflame again with the fire of Love.

17 Don't succumb to that disease of character whose symptoms are inconstancy in everything, thoughtlessness in action and speech scatter-brained ideas: superficiality, in short.

Mark this well: unless you react in time — not tomorrow: "now!" — that superficiality which each day leads you to form those empty plans (plans 'so full of emptiness') will make of your life a dead and useless puppet.

18 You persist in being worldly, superficial, scatter-brained, because you are a coward. What is it but cowardice not to want to face yourself?

19 Will power. A very important quality. Don't despise little things, for by the continual practice of denying yourself again and again in such things — which are never futile or trivial — with God's grace you will add strength and resilience to your character. In that way you will first become master of yourself, and then a guide, a chief, a leader: to compel and to urge and to inspire others, with your word, with your example, with your knowledge and with your power.

20 It is inevitable that you should feel the rub of other people's characters against your own. After all, you are not a gold coin that everyone likes.

Besides, without that friction produced by contact with others, how would you ever lose those corners, those edges and projections — the imperfections and defects — of your character, and acquire the smooth and regular finish, the firm flexibility of charity, of perfection?

If your character and the characters of those who live with you were soft and sweet like sponge cake you would never become a saint.

21 Excuses. You will always find plenty if you want to avoid your obligations. What a profusion of well-thought-out nonsense!

Don't stop to consider it. Dismiss it and do your duty.

22 Be firm. Be virile. Be a man. And then... be a saint.

23 You say that you can't do more? Could it not be that... you can't do less?

24 You are ambitious: for knowledge, for leadership, for great ventures.

Good. Very good. But let it be for Christ, for Love.

25 Don't argue. Arguing seldom brings light, for the light is quenched by passion.

26 Matrimony is a holy sacrament. When the time comes for you to receive it, ask your spiritual adviser or your confessor to suggest a suitable book. And you will be better prepared to bear worthily the burdens of the home.

27 You laugh because I tell you that you have a 'vocation for marriage'? Well, you have just that: a vocation.

Commend yourself to the Archangel Raphael that he may keep you pure, as he did Tobias, until the end of the way.

28 Marriage is for the soldiers and not for the General Staff of Christ's army. For, whereas food is a necessity for each individual, procreation is a necessity for the species only, not for the individual.

Longing for children? Children, many children, and a lasting trail of light we shall leave behind us if we sacrifice the selfishness of the flesh.

29 The limited, miserable happiness of the egoist — who withdraws into his ivory tower, into his shell — is not difficult to attain in this world. But the happiness of the egoist is not lasting.

For this false semblance of heaven, are you going to forsake the happiness, which will have no end?

30 You are too calculating. Don't tell me you are young. Youth gives all it can: it gives itself without reserve.

31 Selfish. Always looking after yourself. You seem incapable of feeling the fraternity of Christ. In those around you, you do not see brothers: you see stepping-stones.

I can foresee your complete failure. And when you have fallen, you will want others to treat you with the charity you are not willing to show towards them.

32 You will never be a leader if you see others only as stepping stones to get ahead. You will be a leader if you are ambitious for the salvation of all mankind.

You can't turn your back on your fellow men: you have to be anxious to make them happy.

33 You never want to get to the heart of the matter. Sometimes, through politeness. Other times, most times, through fear of hurting yourself. Sometimes again, through fear of hurting others. And, always, through fear!

As long as you are so afraid of the truth you will never be a man of sound judgment, a man of worth.

34 Don't be afraid of the truth, even though the truth may mean your death.

35 I don't like your euphemistic habit of calling cowardice prudence.

For, as a result, God's enemies, with minds empty of ideas, will take advantage of your 'prudence' to acquire the name of learning and so reach positions that they never should attain.

36 Yes, that abuse can be eradicated. It shows lack of character to let it continue as something hopeless, with no possible remedy.

Don't shirk your duty. Carry it out conscientiously, even though others neglect theirs.

37 You have a persuasive tongue. But in spite of all your talk, you cannot justify — by saying it was 'providential' — what has no justification.

38 Could it be true — no, no, I can't believe it — that in the world there are not men but bellies?

39 'Pray that I may never be satisfied with what is easy.' I have prayed. Now it is up to you to carry out that fine resolution.

40 Faith, cheerfulness, optimism. But not the idiocy of closing one's eyes to reality.

41 What a 'profound' way of living a life of empty follies, of getting somewhere in the world: rising, always rising, simply by 'weighing little,' having nothing inside, either in your head or in your heart.

42 Why that fitful character? When are you going to apply your will to something definite? Drop that craze for foundation stones, and put the finishing touch to just one of your projects.

43 Don't be so touchy. The least thing offends you. It's necessary to weigh one's words well before speaking to you even on the most trivial matter.

Don't be annoyed if I tell you that you are... unbearable. Unless you change, you will never be of any use.

44 Give the polite excuse which Christian charity and social convention demand. And then... on your way again! With holy shamelessness, without stopping until you have finally scaled the heights of duty.

45 Why are you hurt by what people say about you? How much worse you would be if God were to leave you. Persevere in doing good, and shrug your shoulders.

46 Don't you think that equality, as some people understand it, is synonymous with injustice?

47 That pose and that self-satisfied manner don't suit you at all: they are easily seen to be affected. Try, at least, to use them neither with God, nor with your Director, nor with your brothers: and between them and you there will be one barrier less.

48 You lack strength of character: what insistence on having a hand in everything! You are bent on being the salt of every dish. And — you won't be annoyed if I speak clearly — you have little aptitude for being salt: in particular, you lack its capacity to dissolve and pass unnoticed.

You have too little spirit of sacrifice and too great a spirit of curiosity and ostentation.

49 Hold your tongue! Don't be childish, the caricature of a child: telltale, mischief-maker, little sneak! With your stories and tales you have chilled the glow of charity: you couldn't have done more harm, and if by any chance that wagging tongue of yours has shaken the walls of other people's perseverance, your own perseverance ceases to be a grace from God, for it has become a treacherous instrument of the enemy.

50 You are curious and inquisitive, prying and nosey. Are you not ashamed that even in your defects you are not much of a man? Be a man. And instead of poking into other people's lives, seek to acquire a true knowledge of your own.

51 Your manly character — simple and straightforward — is oppressed when you find yourself entangled in gossip and mischievous talk, which you cannot understand and in which you never wished to be involved. Undergo the humiliation that such talk causes you and let the experience teach you greater discretion.

52 When judging other people, why do you put into your criticism the bitterness of your own failures?

53 That critical spirit — I admit that there are no unworthy motives behind it — should not be exercised upon your apostolate, nor upon your brothers. I will speak plainly: that critical spirit is a great hindrance to the supernatural undertaking in which you are all engaged, for while you examine the work of the others — with the highest possible motives, I admit — without there being any reason why you should

do so, you are not doing anything constructive, and furthermore by being negative you are holding up the progress of all.

'Then,' you ask uneasily, 'that critical spirit which is the keynote my character...?'

Listen, I'll set your mind at ease. Take a pen and a sheet of paper. Write down simply and frankly — ah, and briefly — what is worrying you, hand the note to the person in charge, and think no more about it. He has the grace of state. He will file the note or he will throw it into the wastepaper basket. And, since the motives behind your criticism are not unworthy, since they are of the highest, it is all the same to you.

54 'One must compromise.' Compromise is a word found only in the vocabulary of those who have no will to fight — the lazy, the cunning, the cowardly — for they consider themselves defeated before they start.

55 My dear man: though you feel very much a child, and though you are one before God, don't be so simple as to put your brother 'on the spot' before strangers.

DIRECTION

56 'They have the stuff of saints in them.' At times you hear this said of some people. Apart from the fact that the saints were not made of 'stuff', to have stuff is not sufficient.

A great spirit of obedience to your Director and great readiness to respond to grace are essential. For, if you don't allow God's grace and your Director to do their work, there will never appear the finished sculpture, Christ's image, into which the saintly man is fashioned.

And the 'stuff' of which we were speaking will be no more than a heap of shapeless matter, fit only for the fire... for a good fire if it was good stuff!

57 Get to know the Holy Spirit, the great Stranger, on whom depends your sanctification.

Don't forget that you are God's temple. The Advocate is in the center of your soul: listen to him and be docile to his inspirations.

58 Don't hinder the work of the Paraclete: seek union with Christ so as to be purified, and feel with him the insults, the spits, and the blows, and the thorns, and the weight of the Cross... and the nails tearing through your flesh, and the agony of a forsaken death.

And enter through our Lord's open side until you find sure refuge there in his wounded Heart.

59 Here is a safe doctrine that I want you to know: one's own mind is a bad adviser, a poor pilot to steer the soul through the storms and tempests and among the reefs of the interior life.

That is why it is the will of God that the command of the ship be entrusted to a Master who, with his light and his knowledge, can guide us to a safe harbor.

60 Without an architect you wouldn't build a good house for your life on earth. How then, without a Director, can you hope to build the palace of your sanctification for your eternity in heaven?

61 When a layman sets himself up as an expert on morals he often goes astray: laymen can only be disciples.

62 A Director. You need one. So that you can give yourself to God, and give yourself fully... by obedience. A Director who understands your apostolate, who knows what God wants, who can effectively second the work of the holy Spirit in your soul, without taking you from your place, filling you with peace, and teaching you how to make your work fruitful.

63 You think you are quite important: your studies, your research work, your publications, your social standing, your name, your political activities, the positions you hold, your wealth... your age: you're no longer a child!

Just because of all that, you, more than others, need a Director for your soul.

64 Don't hide from your Director those insinuations of the enemy. Your victory, on taking him into your confidence, brings you more grace from God. And moreover you now have what will help you to keep on conquering, your spiritual father's prayers and his gift of counsel.

65 Why are you so reluctant to see yourself and to let your Director see you as you really are?

You will have won a great battle if you lose that fear of letting yourself be known.

66 A priest — whoever he may be — is always another Christ.

67 Though you well know it, I shall remind you again that a priest is 'another Christ.' And that the Holy Spirit has said: 'Nolite tangere Christos meos — do not touch my Christs.'

68 Presbyter — priest — means, literally, an elderly man. If old age deserves veneration, think how much more you ought to venerate the priesthood.

69 It shows very little refinement — and great lack of respect — to make fun of a priest, whoever he is, and whatever the pretext!

70 I repeat: to make fun of a priest — no matter what the circumstances — is always, at best, a sign of coarseness and poor taste.

71 How we should admire sacerdotal purity! It is their treasure. No tyrant can ever wrest this crown from the Church.

72 Don't place a priest in peril of losing his dignity. It is a virtue which, without being pompous, he simply must have.

How that young cleric — a friend of ours — prayed for it: 'Lord, grant me... eighty years of dignity!'

Pray for it for the whole priesthood, and you will have done a good thing.

73 It cut you to the heart to hear people say that you had spoken badly of those priests. And I am glad that it hurt: for now I am sure you have the right spirit!

74 To love God and not venerate his priests... is not possible.

75 Like the good sons of Noah, throw the mantle of charity over the defects you see in your father, the priest.

76 Without a plan of life you will never have order.

77 This tying of one's life to a plan, to a timetable, you tell me, is so monotonous! And I answer: there is monotony because there is little Love.

78 If you don't get up at a fixed time you will never carry out your plan of life.

79 Virtue without order? Strange virtue!

80 When you bring order into your life your time will multiply, and then you will be able to give God more glory, by working more in his service.

PRAYER

81 Action is worth nothing without prayer: prayer grows in value with sacrifice.

82 First, prayer; then, atonement; in the third place, very much 'in the third place,' action.

83 Prayer is the foundation of the spiritual edifice. Prayer is all-powerful.

84 'Lord, teach us to pray!' — And our Lord replied: 'When you pray, say: Pater noster, qui es in coelis... Our Father who art in heaven...'

What importance we must attach to vocal prayer!

85 Slowly. Consider what you are saying, to whom it is being said and by whom. For that hurried talk, without time for reflection, is just empty noise.

And with Saint Teresa, I will tell you that, however much you work your lips, I do not call it prayer.

86 Your prayer should be liturgical. How I would like to see you using the psalms and prayers from the missal, rather than private prayers of your own choice.

87 'Not by bread alone does man live, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God,' said our Lord. Bread and word! Host and prayer.

Otherwise, you will not live a supernatural life.

88 You seek the company of friends who, with their conversation and affection, with their friendship, make the exile of this world more bearable for you. There is nothing wrong with that, although friends sometimes let you down.

But how is it you don't frequent daily with greater intensity the company, the conversation, of the great Friend, who never lets you down?

89 'Mary chose the better part,' we read in the holy Gospel. There she is, drinking in the words of the Master. Apparently idle, she is praying and loving. Then she accompanies Jesus in his preaching through towns and villages.

Without prayer, how difficult it is to accompany him!

90 You say that you don't know how to pray? Put yourself in the presence of God, and once you have said, 'Lord, I don't know how to pray!' rest assured that you have begun to do so.

91 You write: 'To pray is to talk with God. But about what?' About what? About Him, about yourself: joys, sorrows, successes and failures, noble ambitions, daily worries, weaknesses! And acts of thanksgiving and petitions: and Love and reparation.

In a word: to get to know him and to get to know yourself: 'to get acquainted!'

92 'Et in meditatione mea exardescit ignis. And in my meditation a fire shall flame out.' That is why you go to pray: to become a bonfire, a living flame giving heat and light.

So, when you are not able to go on, when you feel that your fire is dying out, if you cannot throw on it sweet- smelling logs, throw on the branches and twigs of short vocal prayers and ejaculations, to keep the bonfire burning. And you will not have wasted your time.

93 You are so conscious of your misery that you acknowledge yourself unworthy to be heard by God. But, what about the merits of Mary? And the wounds of your Lord? And... are you not a son of God?

Besides, he listens to you quoniam bonus... because he is good, because his mercy endures forever.

94 He has become so small — you see: a Child — so that you can approach him with confidence.

95 'In te, Domine, speravi: in thee, Lord, have I hoped.' And, with my human resources, I threw my prayer and my cross into the balance. And my hope was not vain, nor ever will be: 'Non confundar in aeternum! I shall never be disappointed!'

96 It is Jesus who speaks: 'Amen I say to you: ask and you shall receive; seek and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened to you.'

Pray. In what human venture could you have greater guarantees of success?

97 You don't know what to say to our Lord in your prayer. You can't think of anything, and yet you would like to consult him on many things. Look: make some notes during the day of whatever you want to consider in the presence of God. And then take these notes with you to pray.

98 Next to the prayer of priests and of dedicated virgins, the prayer most pleasing to God is the prayer of children and that of the sick.

99 When you go to pray, let this be a firm resolution: Don't prolong your prayer because you find consolation in it or shorten it because you find it dry.

100 Don't tell Jesus that you want consolation in prayer. If he gives it to you, thank him. Tell him always that you want perseverance.

101 Persevere in prayer. Persevere, even when your efforts seem barren. Prayer is always fruitful.

102 Your mind is sluggish: you try to collect your thoughts in God's presence, but it's useless: there's a complete blank.

Don't try to force yourself, and don't worry. Look: such moments are for your heart.

103 Engrave in your memory those words which struck you while praying, and repeat them slowly many times throughout the day.

104 'He spent the whole night in prayer to God.' So Saint Luke tells of our Lord.

And you? How often have you persevered like that? Well, then...

105 If you don't keep in touch with Christ in prayer and in the Bread, how can you make him known to others?

106 I well understand you when you write: 'Every day I do my "few minutes" of prayer; if it weren't for that!...'

107 A saint, without prayer? I don't believe in such sanctity.

108 Plagiarizing the words of another writer, I will tell you that your apostolic life is worth what your prayer is worth.

109 If you are not a man of prayer, I don't believe in the sincerity of your intentions when you say that you work for Christ.

110 You have told me sometimes that you are like a clock out of order, which strikes at the wrong moment: you feel cold, dry and arid at the time of your prayer, and on the other hand, when it is least to be expected, in the street, in the midst of your daily activities, in the bustle and hubbub of the city, or in the concentrated calm of your professional work, you find yourself praying... at the wrong moment? Possibly; but don't waste those chimes of your clock. The Spirit breathes where he will.

111 I had to smile at the impatience of your prayer. You were telling him: 'I don't want to grow old, Jesus... To have to wait so long to see you! Then, perhaps I won't have a heart as inflamed as mine is now. "Then" seems too late. Now, my union would be more ardent for I love you now with the pure Love of youth.'

112 I like to see you living that 'ambitious reparation.' The world! you say. Very good, but first of all, the members of your supernatural family, your own relations, the people of your country.

113 You were saying to him: 'you mustn't trust me. But I..., I do trust you, Jesus. I abandon myself in your arms: there I leave all that is mine, my weaknesses!' And I think it is a good prayer.

114 The prayer of a Christian is never a monologue.

115 'Minutes of silence.' Leave silence for those whose hearts are dry.

We Catholics, children of God, speak with our Father who is in heaven.

116 Don't neglect your spiritual reading. Reading has made many saints.

117 You write. 'In my spiritual reading I build up a store of fuel. It looks like a lifeless heap, but I often find that my memory, of its own accord, will draw from it material that fills my prayer with life and inflames my thanksgiving after Communion.'

HOLY PURITY

118 Holy purity is given by God when it is asked for with humility.

119 How beautiful is holy purity! But it is not holy, nor pleasing to God, if we separate it from charity.

Charity is the seed that will grow and yield rich fruit under the fertile rain of purity.

Without charity, purity is barren, and its sterile waters turn the soul into a swamp, into a cesspool from which rises the stench of pride.

120 'Purity?' they ask. And they smile. They are the very people who approach marriage with worn-out bodies and disillusioned minds.

I promise you a book — if God helps me — which perhaps I will call: 'Celibacy, Marriage and Purity.'

121 There is need for a crusade of manliness and purity to counteract and undo the savage work of those who think that man is a beast.

And that crusade is a matter for you.

122 Many live like angels in the midst of the world. Why not you...?

123 When you resolve firmly to lead a clean life, chastity will not be a burden for you: it will be a triumphal crown.

124 You, a doctor, an apostle, write to me: 'We all know by experience that we can be chaste, living vigilantly, frequenting the sacraments and stamping out the first sparks of passion before the fire can spread. And it so happens that among the chaste are found the finest men in every way. And among the lustful predominate the timid, the selfish, the treacherous and the cruel — characters of little manliness.'

125 How I would like — you told me — the young apostle, John would take me into his confidence and give me advice: and encourage me to acquire purity of heart.

If you really would like it, tell him so: and you will feel encouraged, and you will receive advice.

126 Overeating is the forerunner of impurity.

127 Don't try to reason with concupiscence: scorn it.

128 Decorum and modesty are younger brothers of purity.

129 Without holy purity one cannot persevere in the apostolate.

130 Remove, Jesus, that filthy crust of sensual corruption that covers my heart, so that I can feel and readily follow the touches of the Paraclete on my soul.

131 Never speak of impure things or events, not even to lament them. Remember that such matter is stickier than pitch. Change the subject or, if that is not possible, continue with it, speaking of the need and the beauty of purity — a virtue of men who know the value of their souls.

132 Don't show the cowardice of being 'brave'; take to your heels!

133 The saints were not abnormal beings: cases to be studied by a 'modernistic' doctor. They were — they are — normal: of flesh, like yours. And they won.

134 'The flesh though dressed in silk.'... This is my only comment when I see you waver before the temptation that hides its impurity under pretexts of art, of science... of charity!

This is my only comment set in the words of an old proverb: 'The flesh is flesh though dressed in silk.'

135 If you only knew what you are worth!... It is Saint Paul who tells you: you have been bought 'at a great price.' And he adds: 'That is why you should use your body for the glory of God.'

136 When you have sought the company of a sensual satisfaction, what loneliness afterwards!

137 And to think that for the satisfaction of a moment, which left in you dregs of bitterness, you have lost 'the way'!

138 'What a wretched man am I! Who will rescue me from this body doomed to death?' The cry is Saint Paul's. Courage: he too had to fight.

139 At the time of temptation think of the Love that awaits you in heaven: foster the virtue of hope — this is not a lack of generosity.

140 Whatever happens, there is no need to worry as long as you don't consent. For only the will can open the door of the heart and let that corruption in.

141 You seem to hear a voice within you saying. 'That religious prejudice!' And then the eloquent defense of all the weaknesses of our poor fallen flesh: 'Its rights!'

When this happens, tell the enemy that there is a natural law and a law of God... and God! And also hell.

142 'Domine! Lord — si vis, potes me mundare — if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.'

What a beautiful prayer for you to say often, with the faith of the poor leper, when there happens to you what God and you and I know! You will not have to wait long to hear the Master's reply: 'Volo, mundare! I will: be thou made clean!'

143 To defend his purity, Saint Francis of Assisi rolled in the snow, Saint Benedict threw himself into a thorn bush, Saint Bernard plunged into an icy pond... You..., what have you done?

144 The spotless purity of John's whole life makes him strong before the Cross. The other apostles fly from Golgotha: he, with the Mother of Christ, remains.

Don't forget that purity strengthens and invigorates the character.

145 The battle front. A group of some twenty officers, singing together in gay and noble comradeship. The songs come quickly, one after another.

That young lieutenant with the brown moustache only heard the first:

'I have no use

for divided hearts.

I give mine whole,

and not in parts.'

'What reluctance to give my whole heart!' And his prayer rose up in a broad and peaceful flow.

HEART

146 You give me the impression that you are carrying your heart in your hands, as if you were offering goods for sale. Who wants it? If it takes no creature's fancy, you will come and give it to God.

Do you think that is how the saints acted?

147 Creatures for you? Creatures for God: if for you, then let it be for God's sake.

148 Why stoop to drink in the pools of worldly consolation when you can quench your thirst in waters that spring up into life everlasting.

149 Detach yourself from people and things until you are stripped of them. For, says Pope Saint Gregory, the devil has nothing of his own in this world, and naked he comes to battle. If you go clothed to fight him, you will soon be pulled to the ground: for he will have something to catch you by.

150 It's as if your guardian Angel were saying to you: 'You fill your heart with so much human attachment!... And that, then, is what you want your Guardian to guard!'

151 Detachment. How hard it is! Oh, to be fastened by nothing but three nails and to have no more feeling in my flesh than the Cross I

152 Don't you feel that greater peace and closer union await you when you respond to that extraordinary grace which demands your total detachment?

Struggle for him, to please him: but strengthen your hope.

153 Go, generously and like a child ask him: 'What can you mean to give me when you ask me for "this"?''

154 You are afraid of becoming cold and distant towards everyone. For you want to be so detached!

There is no need to worry: if you belong to Christ — completely to Christ! — from him you will get fire, light and warmth for all men.

155 Jesus isn't satisfied 'going halves:' he wants the lot.

156 You won't submit to the will of God... and yet you fall in with the will of the most insignificant creature!

157 Surely there must be something wrong somewhere! If God gives himself to you, why are you so attached to creatures?

158 So now it's tears! It hurts, doesn't it? Of course, man! It was meant to.

159 Your heart weakens and you clutch at an earthly support. Very good: but take care that what you grasp to stop you from falling doesn't become a dead weight dragging you down, a chain enslaving you.

160 Tell me: is that... a friendship, or is it a fetter?

161 You are a squanderer of tenderness. And I tell you: charity towards your neighbor — yes, always. But — listen to me, apostolic soul — from Christ and for him alone is that other feeling which God himself has placed in your heart. Besides, isn't it a fact that the drawing back of any one of the bolts of your heart — and it needs seven of them — has more than once left a cloud of doubt floating on your supernatural horizon... and, tormented in spite of the purity of your intentions, you asked yourself: haven't I perhaps gone too far in my outward show of affection?

162 Put your heart aside. Duty comes first. But, when fulfilling your duty, put your heart into it. It helps.

163 If thy right eye scandalize thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee! Your poor heart, that's what scandalizes you!

Press it, squeeze it tight in your hands: give it no consolations. And when it asks for them, say to it slowly and with a noble compassion — in confidence, as it were: 'Heart, heart on the Cross, heart on the Cross!'

164 How is that heart of yours getting along? Don't worry: the saints — who were perfectly ordinary, normal beings like you and me — also felt those 'natural' inclinations. And if they had not felt them, their 'supernatural' reaction of keeping their heart — soul and body — for God, instead of giving it to creatures, would have had little merit.

That's why, once the way is seen, I think that the heart's weaknesses need be no obstacle for a determined soul, for a soul in love.

165 You who for an earthly love have gone through so much, do you really believe that you love Christ when you are not willing — for him! — to suffer that humiliation?

166 You write: 'Father, I have a... toothache in my heart.' I won't laugh, because I realize that you need a good dentist to do a few 'extractions' for you.

If only you were willing!...

167 'If only I had broken it off at the start!' you said. Let us hope you haven't to repeat that tardy complaint.

168 'I was amused to hear you speak of the "account" that our Lord will demand of you. No, for none of you will he be a judge — in the harsh sense of the word; he will simply be Jesus.' These lines, written by a good bishop, have consoled more than one troubled heart, and could well console yours.

169 Suffering overwhelms you because you take it like a coward. Meet it bravely, with a Christian spirit: and you will regard it as a treasure.

170 How clear the way! How easily seen the obstacles! What good weapons to overcome them! And nevertheless, what side-tracking and what stumbling! Isn't it true?

That fine thread — that chain: that chain of wrought iron — of which you and I are conscious and which you don't want to break, that is what draws you from your way and makes you stumble and even fall.

Why do you hesitate? Cut it... and advance!

171 Surely God's Love is worth any love.

MORTIFICATION

172 If you don't deny yourself you will never be a soul of prayer.

173 That joke, that witty remark held on the tip of your tongue; the cheerful smile for those who annoy you; that silence when you're unjustly accused; your friendly conversation with people whom you find boring and tactless; the daily effort to overlook one irritating detail or another in the persons who live with you... this, with perseverance, is indeed solid interior mortification.

174 Don't say: 'That person gets on my nerves.' Think: 'That person sanctifies me.'

175 No ideal becomes a reality without sacrifice. Deny yourself. It's so beautiful to be a victim!

176 How often you resolve to serve God in something, and you have to content yourself — you are so weak — with offering him the frustrated feeling of having failed to keep such a simple resolution!

177 Don't waste the opportunity of yielding your own judgment. It's hard, but how pleasing it is in the eyes of God!

178 When you see a poor wooden Cross, alone, uncared-for, and of no value... and without its Crucified, don't forget that that Cross is your Cross: the Cross of each day, the hidden Cross, without splendor or consolation, the Cross which is awaiting the Crucified it lacks: and that Crucified must be you.

179 Choose mortifications that don't mortify others.

180 Where there is no self-denial, there is no virtue.

181 Interior mortification. I don't believe in your interior self-denial if I see that you despise, that you do not practice, mortification of the senses.

182 Let us drink to the last drop the chalice of pain in this poor present life. What does it matter to suffer for ten years, twenty, fifty... if afterwards there is heaven for ever, for ever... for ever?

And, above all — rather than because of the reward, propter retributionem — what does suffering matter if we suffer to console, to please God our Lord, in a spirit of reparation, united to him on his Cross; in a word: if we suffer for Love?

183 The eyes! Through them many iniquities enter the soul. What experiences like David's! If you guard your sight you have assured the guard of your heart.

184 Why look around if you carry 'your world' within you?

185 The world admires only spectacular sacrifice, because it does not realize the value of sacrifice that is hidden and silent.

186 We must give ourselves in everything, we must deny ourselves in everything: the sacrifice must be a holocaust.

187 Paradox: to live we must die.

188 Remember that the heart is a traitor. Keep it locked with seven locks.

189 Anything that does not lead you to God is a hindrance. Root it out and throw it far from you.

190 A soul whose immediate superior was a rough and irritable type was moved by God to say: 'Thank you, my God, for this truly divine treasure: where could I find another who gives a kick for every kindness?'

191 Conquer yourself each day from the very first moment, getting up on the dot, at a fixed time, without yielding a single minute to laziness.

If, with God's help, you conquer yourself, you will be well ahead for the rest of the day.

It's so discouraging to find oneself beaten at the first skirmish!

192 You always come out beaten. Propose to yourself, each time, the salvation of a particular soul, or its sanctification, or its vocation to the apostolate. If you do so, you are certain of victory.

193 Tender, soft, flabby: that's not the way I want you. It's about time you got rid of that peculiar pity you feel for yourself.

194 I will tell you which are man's treasures on earth so that you will appreciate them: hunger, thirst, heat, cold, pain, dishonor, poverty, loneliness, betrayal, slander, prison...

195 It has been well said that the soul and the body are two enemies who can't get away from one another, and two friends who cannot get along.

196 One has to give the body a little less than its due. Otherwise it turns traitor.

197 If they have witnessed your faults and weaknesses, will it matter if they witness your penance?

198 These are the ripe fruits of the mortified soul: tolerance and understanding for the defects of others, and intolerance for one's own.

199 If the grain of wheat does not die, it remains unfruitful. Don't you want to be a grain of wheat, to die through mortification, and to yield a rich harvest? May Jesus bless your wheat field!

200 You don't conquer yourself, you don't practice self-denial, because you are proud. You lead a life of penance? Don't forget that pride is compatible with penance... Furthermore: your sorrow, after your falls, after your failures in generosity — is it true sorrow or is it the petty disappointment of seeing yourself so small and helpless? How far you are from Jesus if you are not humble, even though your disciplines each day bring forth fresh roses!

201 What a taste of gall and vinegar, of ash and aloes! What a dry and coated palate! And this physical feeling seems as nothing compared with that other bad taste, the one in your soul.

The fact is that 'more is being asked of you,' and you can't bring yourself to give it. Humble yourself. Would that bitter taste still remain in your flesh and your spirit if you did all that you could?

202 You are going to punish yourself voluntarily for your weakness and lack of generosity? Very good: but let it be a reasonable penance, imposed as it were, on an enemy who is at the same time your brother?

203 The joy of us poor men, even when it has supernatural motives, always leaves behind some taste of bitterness. What did you expect? Here on earth, suffering is the salt of life.

204 Many who would willingly let themselves be nailed to a Cross before the astonished gaze of a thousand onlookers cannot bear with a Christian spirit the pinpricks of each day! Think, then, which is the more heroic.

205 We were reading — you and I — the heroically ordinary life of that man of God. And we saw him fight whole months and years (what 'accounts' he kept in his particular examination!) at breakfast time: today he won, tomorrow he was beaten... He noted: 'Didn't take sugar; did take sugar!'

May you and I too live our 'sugar tragedy.'

206 The heroic minute. It is the time fixed for getting up. Without hesitation: a supernatural reflection and... up! The heroic minute: here you have a mortification that strengthens your will and does no harm to your body.

207 Give thanks, as for a very special favor, for that holy abhorrence you feel for yourself.

PENANCE

208 Let us bless pain. Love pain. Sanctify pain... Glorify pain!

209 A whole program for a good course in the 'subject' of suffering is given to us by the Apostle: in spe gaudentes — rejoicing in hope, in tribulatione patientes — patient in troubles, orationi instantes — persevering in prayer.

210 Atonement: this is the path that leads to Life.

211 In the deep pit opened by your humility, let penance bury your negligences, offences and sins. Just as the gardener buries rotten fruit, dried twigs and fallen leaves at the foot of the very trees which produced them. And so what was useless, what was even harmful, can make a real contribution to a new fruitfulness.

From the falls learn to draw strength: from death, life.

212 That Christ you see is not Jesus. It is only the pitiful image that your blurred eyes are able to form... Purify yourself. Clarify your sight with humility and penance. Then... the pure light of Love will not be denied you. And you will have perfect vision. The image you see will be really his: his!

213 Jesus suffers to carry out the will of the Father. And you, who also want to carry out the most holy Will of God, following the steps of the Master, can you complain if you meet suffering on your way?

214 Say to your body: I would rather keep you in slavery than be myself a slave of yours.

215 How afraid people are of atonement! If all that they do for appearance's sake, to please the world, were done with purified intention for God... what saints many would be!

216 You are crying? Don't be ashamed of it. Yes, cry; men also cry like you, when they are alone and before God. Each night, says King David, I soak my bed with tears. With those tears, those burning, manly tears, you can purify your past and supernaturalize your present life.

217 I want you to be happy on earth. And you will not be happy if you don't lose that fear of suffering. For, as long as we are 'wayfarers,' it is precisely in suffering that our happiness lies.

218 How beautiful it is to give up this life for that Life!

219 If you realize that those sufferings — of body or soul — mean purification and merit, bless them.

220 'God give you health.' Doesn't this wish for mere physical well being, with which some beggars demand or acknowledge alms, leave a bad taste in your mouth?

221 If we are generous in voluntary atonement Jesus will fill us with grace to love the trials he sends us.

222 Let your will exact from your senses, by means of atonement, what your other faculties deny your will in prayer.

223 Of how little value is penance without constant self- denial!

224 You are afraid of penance? Of penance, which will help you to obtain Life everlasting. And yet, in order to preserve this poor present life, don't you see how men will submit to all the cruel torture of a surgical operation?

225 Your greatest enemy is your own self.

226 Treat your body with charity, but with no more charity than you would show towards a treacherous enemy.

227 If you realize that your body is your enemy, and an enemy of God's glory, since it is an enemy of your sanctification, why do you treat it so softly?

228 'Have a good time tonight,' they said, as usual. And the comment of a soul very close to God was, 'What a limited wish!'

229 With you, Jesus, what joy in suffering, what light in darkness!

230 You are suffering! Listen: 'His' Heart is not smaller than ours. You are suffering? There is good in suffering.

231 A strict fast is a penance most pleasing to God. But, what with one thing and another, we have become a bit too easy-going. There is no objection — on the contrary — if you, with the approval of your Director, fast frequently.

232 Motives for penance? Atonement, reparation, petition, thanksgiving: means to progress: for you, for me, for others, for your family, for your country, for the Church... And a thousand motives more.

233 Don't do more penance than your Director allows you.

234 How we ennoble suffering, giving it its right place (atonement) in the spiritual order!

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

235 Examination of conscience: a daily task. Bookkeeping is never neglected by anyone in business.

And is there any business worth more than the business of eternal life?

236 At the time of examination beware of the devil that ties your tongue.

237 Examine yourself: slowly, courageously. Is it not true that your bad humor and your gloominess, both without cause — without apparent cause — are due to your lack of determination in breaking the subtle but real snares laid for you — cunningly and attractively — by your concupiscence?

238 The general examination implies defense. The particular, attack. The first is your armor. The second, your sword.

239 Looking back on the past. To bewail it? No: that would be useless. To learn: that is fruitful.

240 Ask for light. Keep on asking, until the root is laid bare and you can get at it with your battle-axe, the particular examination.

241 Your particular examination should be directed towards the acquisition of a definite virtue or the rooting out of your predominant defect.

242 'What I owe to God as a Christian! My failure to respond to God's grace, in the face of that debt, has made me weep with sorrow, with Love-sorrow. Mea culpa!

It is good that you acknowledge your debts; but don't forget how they are paid: with tears... and with deeds.

243 'He who is faithful in little things is faithful also in big things.' Words from Saint Luke that show you — examine yourself — why you have so often gone astray.

244 React. Listen to what the Holy Spirit tells you: 'If it were an enemy who insulted me, I could put up with that. But you... tu vero homo unanimes, dux meus, et notus meus — you, my friend, my apostle, who sit at my table and take sweet food with me!

245 On days of recollection your examination of conscience should be more searching than the usual nightly moment. Otherwise you miss a great chance to put things right.

246 Always end your examination with an act of Love — of Love-sorrow: for yourself, for all the sins of men. And consider the fatherly care of God in removing the obstacles in your way lest you stumble.

RESOLUTIONS

247 Be definite. Don't let your resolutions be like fireworks that sparkle for a moment, to leave behind as hard reality a blackened, useless stub that one throws disgustedly away.

248 You are so young! To me you are like a ship setting out on its voyage. If that slight deviation of today is left uncorrected, you will never reach port in the end.

249 Make few resolutions. Make them definite. And fulfil them with the help of God.

250 I listened in silence as you said, 'Yes, I want to be a saint.' Though usually such a vague and general statement seems nonsense to me.

251 'Tomorrow:' sometimes it is prudence; very often it is the adverb of the defeated.

252 Make this firm and determined resolution: to recall, when you receive honors and praise, all that brings a blush of shame to your cheek.

The shame is yours; the praise and glory, God's.

253 Do your duty 'now,' without looking back on 'yesterday,' which has already passed, or worrying over 'tomorrow,' which may never come for you.

254 Now! Return to your noble life now. Don't be a fool: 'now' is not too soon... nor too late.

255 You want to hear all that I think of 'your way'? Very well, then, listen: if you respond to the call, you will do your utmost in your work for Christ: if you become a man of prayer, you will be granted the grace necessary to respond and, hungry for sacrifice, you will seek out the hardest tasks...

And you will be happy here, and unspeakably happy hereafter.

256 That is a painful wound. But it is well on its way to being healed. Stick to your resolutions. And the pain will soon turn into joyful peace.

257 You drag along like deadweight, as if you had no part to play. No wonder you are beginning to feel the symptoms of lukewarmness. Wake up!

SCRUPLES

258 Get rid of those scruples that deprive you of peace. What takes away your peace of soul cannot come from God.

When God comes to you, you will feel the truth of those greetings: My peace I give to you..., peace I leave you..., peace be with you..., and you will feel it even in the midst of troubles.

259 Those scruples still! Speak simply and clearly to your Director.

Obey... and don't underestimate the most loving Heart of our Lord.

260 Gloominess, depression. I am not surprised: it is the cloud of dust raised by your fall. But... that's enough! Can't you see that the cloud has been borne far away by the breath of grace?

Moreover, your gloominess, if you don't fight it, could very well be the cloak of your pride. Did you really think yourself perfect and incapable of sinning?

261 I forbid you to think any more about it. Instead, bless God, who has given back life to your soul.

262 Stop thinking of your fall. That thought, besides overwhelming and crushing you under its weight, may easily be an occasion of further temptations. Christ has forgiven you: forget the 'old self.'

263 Don't lose heart. I have seen you struggle: today's defeat is training for the final victory.

264 You've done well... even though you have fallen so low. You have done well, because you humbled yourself, because you put things right, because you filled yourself with hope, and that hope brought you back again to his Love. Don't look

so amazed: you have done well! You rose up from the ground: 'Surge — arise,' the mighty voice cried anew, 'et ambula! — and walk!' Now — to work!

PRESENCE OF GOD

265 Children... How they seek to behave worthily in the presence of their parents.

And the children of kings, in the presence of their father the king, how they seek to uphold the royal dignity!

And you? Don't you realize that you are always in the presence of the great King, God, your Father?

266 Never make a decision without stopping to consider the matter in the presence of God.

267 We've got to be convinced that God is always near us. We live as though he were far away, in the heavens high above, and we forget that he is also continually by our side.

He is there like a loving Father. He loves each one of us more than all the mothers in the world can love their children — helping us, inspiring us, blessing... and forgiving.

How often we have misbehaved and then cleared the frowns from our parents' brows, telling them: I won't do it any more! That same day, perhaps, we fall again... And our father, with feigned harshness in his voice and serious face, reprimands us, while in his heart he is moved, realizing our weakness and thinking: poor child, how hard he tries to behave well!

We've got to be filled, to be imbued with the idea that our Father, and very much our Father, is God who is both near us and in heaven.

268 Get used to lifting your heart to God, in acts of thanksgiving, many times a day. Because he gives you this and that. Because you have been despised. Because you haven't what you need or because you have.

Because he made his Mother so beautiful, his Mother who is also your Mother. Because he created the sun and the moon and this animal and that plant. Because he made that man eloquent and you he left tongue-tied...

Thank him for everything, because everything is good.

269 Don't be so blind or so thoughtless as not to enter inside each Tabernacle when you glimpse the walls or spires of the houses of God. He is waiting for you.

Don't be so blind or so thoughtless as not to invoke Mary Immaculate with an ejaculation at least, whenever you pass near those places where you know that Christ is offended.

270 As you make your way through the familiar streets of the city, have you never had the joy of discovering... another Tabernacle?

271 A saying of a soul of prayer: in intentions, may Jesus be our aim; in affections, our Love; in conversation, our theme; in actions, our model.

272 Make use of those holy 'human devices' that I suggested to help you keep presence of God: ejaculations, acts of love and reparation, spiritual Communions, 'glances' at a picture of our Lady.

273 Alone! You are not alone. We are keeping you close company from afar. Besides..., the holy Spirit, living in your soul in grace — God with you — is giving a supernatural tone to all your thoughts, desires and actions.

274 'Father,' said that big fellow, a good student at the university (I wonder what has become of him), 'I was thinking of what you told me — that I'm a son of God! — and I found myself walking along the street, head up, chin out, and a proud feeling inside... a son of God!'

With sure conscience I advised him to encourage that 'pride.'

275 I don't doubt your good intentions. I know that you act in the presence of God. But (and there is a 'but'), your actions are witnessed or may be witnessed by men who judge by human standards... And you must give them good example.

276 If you accustom yourself, even only once a week, to see union with Mary in order to go to Jesus, you will see how you have more presence of God.

277 You ask me: why that wooden Cross? And I copy from a letter: 'As I look up from the microscope, my sight comes to rest on the cross — black and empty. That Cross without its Crucified is a symbol. It has a meaning which others cannot see. And though I am tired out and on the point of abandoning the job, I once again bring my eyes to the lens and continue: for the lonely Cross is calling for a pair of shoulders to bear it.'

278 Live in the presence of God and you will have supernatural life.

SUPERNATURAL LIFE

279 Most people have a plane-like vision, stuck to the earth, of two dimensions. When you live a supernatural life, God will give you the third dimension: height, and with it, perspective, weight and volume.

280 If you lose the supernatural meaning of your life, your charity will be philanthropy; your purity, decency; your mortification, stupidity; your discipline, a whip; and all your works, fruitless.

281 Silence is the doorkeeper of the interior life.

282 Paradox: sanctity is more attainable than learning, but it is easier to be learned than to be a saint.

283 A change! You say you need a change!... opening your eyes wide so as to take in better the images of things, or almost closing them because you are short-sighted.

Close them altogether! Have interior life, and you will see, in undreamt-of colour and relief, the wonders of a better world, of a new world: and you will draw close to God..., and know your weakness..., and be deified... with a deification which, by bringing you nearer to your Father, will make you more a brother of your fellow men.

284 Ambition: to be good myself, and to see everyone else better than I.

285 Conversion is the matter of a moment. Sanctification is the work of a lifetime.

286 There is nothing better in the world than to be in the grace of God.

287 Purity of intention. You will have it always if, always and in everything, you seek only to please God.

288 Enter into the wounds of Christ Crucified. There you will learn to guard your senses, you will have interior life, and you will continually offer to the Father the sufferings of our Lord and those of Mary, in payment of your debts and the debts of all men.

289 Your holy impatience to serve him does not displease God. But it will be fruitless if it is not accompanied by a real improvement in your daily conduct.

290 To rectify. A little each day. This must be your constant concern if you really want to become a saint.

291 Your duty is to sanctify yourself. Yes, even you. Who thinks that this task is only for priests and religious?

To everyone, without exception, our Lord said: 'Be ye perfect, as my heavenly Father is perfect.'

292 Your interior life has to be just that: to begin... and to begin again.

293 In your interior life, have you slowly considered the beauty of 'serving' with ever-renewed willingness?

294 The plants lay hidden under the snow. And the farmer, the owner of the land, observed with satisfaction: 'Now they are growing on the inside.'

I thought of you: of your forced inactivity...

Tell me: are you too growing 'on the inside'?

295 If you are not master of yourself — though you may be powerful — your air of mastery moves me to pity and laughter.

296 It is hard to read that question of Pilate's in the holy Gospel: 'Whom do you wish me to release to you, Barabbas, or Jesus, who is called Christ?' It is more painful to hear the answer: 'Barabbas!'

And more terrible still when I realize that very often by going astray I too have said 'Barabbas!' and added 'Christ?... Crucify him!'

297 All that, which worries you for the moment, is of relative importance. What is of absolute importance is that you be happy, that you be saved.

298 New lights! What joy you feel that God has let you 'discover' an old discovery!

Make the most of the occasion: it is the moment to break into a hymn of thanksgiving: it is also the moment to clean up odd corners of your soul, to get out of some rut, to act more supernaturally, to avoid giving bad example to your neighbour.

In a word: let your gratitude show itself in some concrete resolution.

299 Christ has died for you. You... what ought you do for Christ?...

300 Your personal experience — those feelings of restlessness, despondency and bitterness — makes you realise the truth of those words of Jesus: no one can serve two masters!

MORE ABOUT INTERIOR LIFE

301 A secret, an open secret: these world crises are crises of saints.

God wants a handful of men 'of his own' in every human activity. And then... 'pax Christi in regno Christi — the peace of Christ in the kingdom of Christ.'

302 Your Crucifix. As a Christian, you should always carry your Crucifix with you. And place it on your desk. And kiss it before going to bed and when you wake up: and when your poor body rebels against your soul, kiss it again.

303 Don't be afraid to call our Lord by his name — Jesus — and to tell him that you love him.

304 Each day try to find a few minutes of that blessed solitude which you so much need to keep your interior life going.

305 You write: 'Simplicity is the salt of perfection. And that's what I lack. I want to acquire it, with his help and with yours.'

Neither his nor mine will fail you. Use the means.

306 'Man's life on earth is a warfare:' so said Job many centuries ago.

There are still some easy-going individuals who are not aware of the fact.

307 That supernatural mode of conduct is a truly military tactic.

You carry on the war — the daily struggles of your interior — far from the main walls of your fortress.

And the enemy meets you there: in your small mortifications, your customary prayer, your methodical work, your plan of life: and with difficulty will he come close to the easily-scaled battlements of your castle. And if he does come, he comes exhausted.

308 You write: 'My joy and my peace. I will never have real happiness if I have not peace. And what is peace? Peace is something closely

related to war. Peace is a consequence of victory. Peace demands of me a continual struggle. Without a struggle I will never have peace.'

309 What depths of mercy there are in God's justice! For, in the judgments of men, he who confesses his fault is punished: and in the Judgment of God, he is pardoned.

Blessed be the holy Sacrament of Penance!

310 'Put on the Lord Jesus Christ,' says Saint Paul to the Romans. It is in the Sacrament of Penance that you and I put on Jesus Christ and his merits.

311 War! 'War,' you tell me, 'has a supernatural end that the world is unaware of: war has been for us...'

War is the greatest obstacle to the easy way. But in the end we will have to love it, as the religious should love his disciplines.

312 The power of your name, Lord! As a heading to my letter I had written, as always, 'May Jesus watch over you.'

And he replies: 'The "May Jesus watch over you" of your letter has already helped me out of more than one tight corner. May he also watch over all of you.'

313 'Now that our Lord is helping me with his usual generosity, I will try to respond by being even more "considerate" in my ways.

So you told me. And I had nothing to add.

314 I wrote to you and said: I'm relying on you: you'll see what we can do...!' What could we do, except rely on Him!

315 A missionary. You dream of being a missionary. Another Francis Xavier... And you long to conquer an empire for Christ. Japan, China, India, Russia... the peoples of the North of Europe, or America, or Africa, or Australia?

Stir up that fire in your heart, that hunger for souls. But don't forget that you are more of a missionary 'obeying.' Geographically distant from those apostolic fields, you work both 'here' and 'there:' don't you — like Xavier — feel your arm tired after administering baptism to so many?

316 You tell me, yes, that you want to. Very good: but do you want to as a miser longs for gold, as a mother loves her child, as a wordling craves for honours, or as a wretched sensualist seeks his pleasure ?

No? Then, you don't want to.

317 What zeal people put into their earthly affairs: dreaming of honours, striving for riches, bent on sensuality. Men and women, rich and poor, old and middle-aged and young and even children: all of them the same.

When you and I put the same zeal into the affairs of our souls, we will have a living and operative faith: and there will be no obstacle that we cannot overcome in our apostolic undertakings.

318 To you, who like sports, the Apostle's argument should appeal: 'All the runners at the stadium are trying to win, but only one of them gets the prize. You must run in the same way, meaning to win.'

319 Recollection. Seek God within you and listen to him.

320 Encourage those noble thoughts, those holy desires which are awakening in you... A single spark may start a conflagration.

321 Apostolic soul: Jesus' intimacy with you — so close to him for so many years! — doesn't it mean anything to you?

322 It's true that I always call our Tabernacle Bethany... Become a friend of the Master's friends: Lazarus, Martha, Mary. And then you won't ask me any more why I call our Tabernacle Bethany.

323 You know that there are 'evangelical counsels.' To follow them is a refinement of Love. It is said to be the way of few. At times I feel it could be the way of many.

324 'Here is a man who started to build and was unable to finish!'

A sad commentary which, if you don't want, need never be made about you: for you possess everything necessary to crown the edifice of your sanctification: the grace of God and your own will.

LUKEWARMNESS

325 Fight against that weakness which makes you lazy and careless in your spiritual life. Remember that it might well be the beginning of lukewarmness... and, in the words of the Scripture, God will vomit the lukewarm out of his mouth.

326 It hurts me to see the danger of lukewarmness in which you place yourself when you do not strive seriously for perfection in your state in life.

Say with me: I don't want to be lukewarm! Confige timore tuo carnes meas, pierce thou my flesh with thy fear: grant me, my God, a filial fear that will make me react!

327 I already know that you avoid mortal sins. You want to be saved! But you are not worried by that constant and deliberate falling into venial sins, even though in each case you feel God's call to conquer yourself.

It is your lukewarmness that gives you this bad will.

328 How little Love of God you have when you yield without a fight because it is not a grave sin!

329 Venial sins do great harm to the soul. Therefore God says in the Song of Songs: 'Catch the little foxes that make havoc of the vineyards.'

330 How sad you make me feel when you are not sorry for your venial sins! For, until you are, you will not begin to live real interior life.

331 You are lukewarm if you carry out lazily and reluctantly those things that have to do with our Lord; if deliberately or 'shrewdly' you look for some way of cutting down your duties; if you think only of yourself and of your comfort; if your conversations are idle and vain; if you do not abhor venial sin; if you act from human motives.

STUDY

332 There is no excuse for those who could be scholars and are not.

333 Study. Obedience: non multa, sed multum — not many things, but well.

334 You pray, you deny yourself, you work in a thousand apostolic activities, but you don't study. You are useless then unless you change.

Study — professional training of whatever type it be — is a grave obligation for us.

335 An hour of study, for a modern apostle, is an hour of prayer.

336 If you are to serve God with your mind, to study is a grave obligation for you.

337 You frequent the Sacraments, you pray, you are chaste, but you do not study. Don't tell me you're good: you're only 'goodish.'

338 Formerly, since human knowledge — science — was very limited, it seemed quite feasible for a single learned individual to undertake the defence and vindication of our holy Faith.

Today, with the extension and the intensity of modern science, the apologists have to divide the work among themselves, if they want to defend the Church scientifically in all fields.

You... cannot shirk this responsibility.

339 Books: don't buy them without advice from a Christian who is learned and prudent. It's so easy to buy something useless or harmful.

How often a man thinks he is carrying a book under his arm, and it turns out to be a load of rubbish!

340 Study. Study in earnest. If you are to be salt and light, you need knowledge, ability.

Or do you imagine that an idle and lazy life will entitle you to receive infused knowledge?

341 It is good to see you put such determination into your study provided, of course, you put the same determination into acquiring interior life.

342 Don't forget that before teaching one must act. 'Coepit facere et docere,' the holy scripture says of Jesus Christ: 'He began to do and to teach.'

First, action: so that you and I may learn.

343 Work! When you feel the responsibility of professional work, the life of your soul will improve: and you will become more of a man, for you will lose your habit of 'picking holes' in everything.

344 Teacher: your keenness to know and practise the best method of helping your students to acquire earthly knowledge is undeniable. But don't forget that you must have the same keenness to know and practise the christian spiritual life, which is the only method of helping them and you to be better.

345 Culture, culture! Very good: let us be second to none in striving for and possessing it.

But, culture is a means and not an end.

346 Student: form yourself in a solid and active piety, be outstanding in study, have a strong desire for the 'professional' apostolate. And with that vigour of your religious and professional training, I promise you rapid and far-reaching developments.

347 You worry only about building up your knowledge. And what you have to build up is your soul. Then you will work as you ought — for Christ. In order that he may reign in the world, there must be some people who, with their eyes fixed on heaven, seek to acquire prestige in all human activities, so that they can carry out quietly — and effectively — an apostolate within their professions.

348 Your indolence, your carelessness, your laziness, are easygoing cowardice — so your conscience tells you continually — but they are not 'the way.'

349 As long as the opinion you expressed was orthodox there is no reason to be upset, even though the malice of whoever heard you caused him to be scandalized. For his scandal is pharisaical.

350 It's not enough to be learned, in addition to being a good Christian. If you don't correct the brusqueness of your character, if you make your zeal and your

knowledge incompatible with good manners, I can't see you ever becoming a saint. And despite your learning — because of it — you should be tied in a stall, like a mule.

351 With that self-satisfied air you are becoming an objectionable and repellent type, you are making a fool of yourself, and, what is worse, you are harming your apostolic work.

Don't forget that even mediocrities can sin by being pompous.

352 Your very inexperience leads you to that presumption, to that vanity, to all that you imagine gives you an air of importance.

Correct yourself, please. Foolish and all, you might come to occupy a position of responsibility (it has happened more than once) and, if you are not convinced of your lack of ability, you will refuse to listen to those who have the gift of counsel. And it frightens me to think of the harm your mismanagement will do.

353 Nonsectarianism. Neutrality. Old myths that always try to seem new.

Have you ever stopped to think how absurd it is to leave one's Catholicism aside on entering a university, a professional association, a cultural society, or Parliament, like a man leaving his hat at the door?

354 Make good use of your time. Don't forget the fig tree cursed by our Lord. And it was doing something: sprouting leaves. Like you...

Don't tell me you have excuses. It availed the fig tree little, relates the Evangelist. that it was not the season for figs when our Lord came to it to look for them.

And barren it remained for ever.

355 Those who are engaged in business say that time is money. That seems little to me: for us who are engaged in affairs of souls, time is... glory!

356 I don't understand how you can call yourself a Christian and lead such an idle, useless life. Have you forgotten Christ's life of toil?

357 'It seems' — so you say — 'as if every imaginable sin were awaiting the first idle moment. Why, idleness itself must be a sin!'

He who pledges himself to work for Christ should never have a free moment, because to rest is not to do nothing: it is to relax in activities which demand less effort.

358 Idleness is something inconceivable in a man who has the soul of an apostle.

359 Add a supernatural motive to your ordinary work and you will have sanctified it.

FORMING THE SPIRIT

360 How frankly you laughed when I advised you to put the years of your youth under the protection of Saint Raphael: 'so that he'll lead you, like young Tobias, to a holy marriage, with a girl who is good and pretty and rich,' I told you, jokingly.

And then, how thoughtful you became!... when I went on to advise you to put yourself also under the patronage of that young apostle John; in case God were to ask more of you.

361 For you, who complain to yourself because you are treated severely and feel the contrast between this harshness and the conduct of those back home, I copy these lines from the letter of an army doctor: 'There are two ways of approaching each case: the conscientious professional attitude — cold and calculating, but objective and useful to the patient: or the tearful fussing of the family. At the height of a battle, when the stream of casualties begins to arrive and to accumulate because they can't be dealt with fast enough, what would become of a first-aid post if a family stood around each stretcher? One might just as well go over to the enemy.'

362 I have no need of miracles: there are more than enough for me in the Gospel. But I do need to see you fulfilling your duty and responding to grace.

363 Disappointment. You're downhearted. Men have just taught you a lesson! As long as they thought you did not need them, offers came pouring in. The possibility that they might have to help you with hard cash — a few miserable pennies — turned their friendship into indifference.

Trust only in God and in those who, through him, are united with you.

364 Ah, if you would only resolve to serve God 'seriously,' with the same zeal with which you serve your ambition, your vanity, your sensuality!...

365 If you feel the urge to be a leader, let this be your aim: to be last among your brothers; and among others, the first.

366 Let's see: do you feel slighted in any way because 'So- and-so' is more friendly with certain persons whom he knew before or to whom he feels more attracted by temperament, profession, or character ?

Nevertheless, among yourselves, carefully avoid even the appearance of a particular friendship.

367 The choicest morsel, if eaten by a pig, is turned (to put it bluntly), into pigflesh!

Let us be angels, so as to dignify the ideas we assimilate.

Let us at least be men, so as to convert our food into strong and noble muscles, or perhaps into a powerful brain capable of understanding and adoring God.

But let us not be beasts, like so many, so very many!

368 So you are bored? Naturally, if you keep your senses awake and your soul asleep.

369 The charity of Jesus Christ will often lead you to make concessions. That is very noble. And the charity of Jesus Christ will often lead you to stand your ground. That too is very noble.

370 If you're not bad, and yet appear to be bad, then you are stupid. And that stupidity — source of scandal — is worse than being bad.

371 When you see people of uncertain professional standing acting as leaders at public functions of a religious nature, don't you feel the urge to whisper in their ears: Please, would you mind being just a little less Catholic?

372 If you have an official position, you have also certain rights which arise from the practice of that office, and certain duties.

You stray from your apostolic way if you use the opportunity — or the excuse — offered by a work of zeal to leave the duties of your position unfulfilled. For you will lose that professional prestige which is your 'bait' as a 'fisher of men.'

373 I like your apostolic motto: 'To work without rest.'

374 Why that rushing around? Don't tell me that it is activity: it is thoughtlessness.

375 Dissipation. You slake your senses and faculties in whatever pool you meet on the way. And you can feel the results: unsettled purpose, scattered attention, deadened will and quickened concupiscence.

Subject yourself once again to a serious plan that will make you lead a christian life: or you'll never do anything worth while.

376 'There's no denying the influence of environment,' you've told me. And I have to answer: Quite. That is why you have to be formed in such a way that you can carry your own environment about with you in a natural manner, and so give your own 'tone' to the society in which you live.

And then, if you have acquired this spirit, I am sure you will tell me with the amazement of the disciples as they contemplated the first fruits of the miracles being worked by their hands in Christ's name: 'There's no denying our influence on environment!'

377 And how shall I acquire 'our formation,' how shall I keep 'our spirit'? By being faithful to the specific norms your Director gave you and explained to you, and made you love: be faithful to them and you will be an apostle.

378 Don't be a pessimist. Don't you realise that all that happens or can happen is for the best?

Your optimism will be a necessary consequence of your faith.

379 Naturalness. Let your lives as christian men, as christian women — your salt and your light — flow spontaneously, without anything odd or silly: always carry with you our spirit of simplicity.

380 'And in a paganised or pagan environment when my life clashes with its surroundings, won't my naturalness seem artificial?' you ask me.

And I reply: Undoubtedly your life will clash with theirs; and that contrast — faith confirmed by works! — is exactly the naturalness I ask of you.

381 Don't worry if people say you have esprit de corps. What do they want? A brittle instrument, that falls to pieces the moment it is grasped?

382 When I made you a present of that Life of Jesus, I wrote as an inscription. May you seek Christ: may you find Christ: may you love Christ.

Three perfectly clear stages. Have you tried, at least, to live the first?

383 If they see you weaken... and you are the leader, it is no wonder their obedience falters.

384 Confused. I knew you were in danger of making the wrong decision. And so that you could understand me, I wrote: The devil has a very ugly face, and since he is so clever, he won't risk our seeing his horns. He never makes a direct attack. That is why he so often comes in the disguise of nobleness and even of spirituality!

385 Our Lord says: 'I give you a new commandment: Love one another. By this love everyone will know that you are my disciples.'

And Saint Paul: 'Carry each other's troubles and you fulfil the law of Christ.'

I have nothing to add.

386 Don't forget, my son, that for you on earth there is but one evil, which you must fear and avoid with the grace of God: sin.

YOUR SANCTITY

387 The standard of holiness that God asks of us is determined by these three points:

Holy intransigence, holy coercion and holy shamelessness.

388 Holy shamelessness is one thing: plain cheekiness, quite another.

389 Holy shamelessness is a characteristic of the 'life of childhood.' A little child worries about nothing. He makes no effort to hide his weaknesses, his natural miseries, not even when everyone is watching him.

This shamelessness applied to the supernatural life, brings with it the following train of thought: praise, contempt; esteem, ridicule; honour, dishonour; health, sickness; riches, poverty; beauty, ugliness...

All right... so what?

390 Laugh at ridicule. Despise the bogey of what people will say. See and feel God in yourself and in your surroundings. And you will acquire the holy shamelessness that you need — what a paradox! — in order to live with the refinement of a christian gentleman.

391 If you have holy shamelessness, you won't be worried by the thought of 'what will people say?' or 'what can they have said?'

392 Convince yourself that there is no such thing as ridicule for whoever is doing what is best.

393 A man, a 'gentleman,' ready to compromise would condemn Jesus to death again.

394 To compromise is a sure sign of not possessing the truth. When a man gives way in matters of ideals, of honour or of Faith, that man is a man without ideals, without honour and without Faith.

395 Listen to a man of God, an old campaigner, as he argues: 'So I won't yield an inch? And why should I, if I am convinced of the truth of my ideals? You, on the other hand, are very ready to compromise... Would you agree that two and two are three and a half? You wouldn't? Surely for friendship's sake you will yield in such a little thing?'

And why won't you? Simply because, for the first time, you feel convinced that you possess the truth, and you have come over to my way of thinking!

396 Holy intransigence is not bigotry.

397 Be uncompromising in doctrine and conduct. But be yielding in manner. A mace of tempered steel, wrapped in a quilted covering.

Be uncompromising, but don't be obstinate.

398 Intransigence is not just simply intransigence: it is 'holy intransigence.'

Don't forget that there also exists a 'holy coercion.'

399 If in order to save an earthly life it is praiseworthy to use force to stop a man from committing suicide, are we not to be allowed use the same force — holy coercion — to save the Life (with a capital) of many who are stupidly bent on killing their souls?

400 What crimes are committed in the name of justice!

If you were a dealer in firearms and someone offered to buy a gun from you, so that he might use the weapon to kill your mother, would you sell it to him? Yet, wasn't he ready to pay you a just price for it?

University professor, journalist, politician, diplomat: reflect.

401 God and daring! Daring is not imprudence. Daring is not recklessness.

402 Don't be content to ask Jesus pardon just for your own faults: don't love him just with your own heart...

Console him for every offence that has been, is, or will be done to him. Love him with all the strength of all the hearts of all those who have most loved him.

Be daring: tell him that you are crazier about him than Mary Magdalen, than either of his two Teresas, that you love him madly, more than Augustine and Dominic and Francis, more than Ignatius and Xavier.

403 Be more daring still, and, when you need something, don't ask, but — always mindful of the Fiat — say, 'Jesus, I want that... and that... and that,' for this is the way children ask.

404 You say you've failed! We never fail. You placed your confidence wholly in God. Nor did you neglect any human means.

Convince yourself of this truth: your success — this time, in this — was to fail. Give thanks to our Lord... and try again!

405 So you have failed? You — be convinced of it — cannot fail. You haven't failed; you have gained experience. On you go!

406 That was a failure, a disaster: because you lost our spirit. You well know that, as long as we act from supernatural motives, the outcome (victory? defeat? bah!) has only one name: success.

407 Let's not confuse the rights of the office you hold with your rights as a person. The former can never be waived.

408 Sanctimony is to sanctity what 'piosity' is to piety: its caricature.

409 Remember that your virtue may seem to be that of a saint and yet be worth nothing if it is not joined to the ordinary virtues of a Christian.

That would be like adorning yourself with magnificent jewels over your underwear.

410 Let yours not be a noisy virtue.

411 Many false apostles, in spite of themselves, do good to the crowd, to the people, through the very power of the doctrine of Jesus that they preach but do not practise.

But this good does not make up the incalculable harm that they do by killing the souls of leaders, of apostles, who turn away in disgust from those who don't practise what they preach.

That is why, if such men and women are not willing to live a consistent life, they should never offer themselves as frontline leaders.

412 May the fire of your love not be a will-o'-the-wisp: an illusion, a dying fire, that neither sets ablaze what it touches nor gives off any heat.

413 The non serviam of Satan has been too fruitful. Don't you feel the generous urge to express your daily desire for prayer and work with a serviam — I will serve you, I will be faithful! — which will surpass in fruitfulness that cry of revolt?

414 How pathetic — a 'man of God' who has fallen away! But, how much more pathetic, a 'man of God' who is lukewarm and worldly!

415 Pay little heed to what the world calls victories or defeats. How often the victor comes out defeated!

416 'Sine me nihil potestis facere! Without me you can do nothing!' New light, new splendour for my eyes, from that Eternal Light, the holy Gospel.

Should I be surprised at all 'my' foolishness?

I will put Jesus into everything that is mine. And then there will be no foolishness in my conduct: and, if I would speak correctly, I should talk no more of what is 'mine,' but of what is 'ours.'

LOVE OF GOD

417 The only real love is God's Love!

418 The secret that ennobles the humblest, even the most humiliating thing, is Love.

419 Children. The Sick. As you write these words, don't you feel tempted to use capitals?

The reason is that in children and in the sick a soul in love sees Him.

420 How little a life is to offer to God!

421 A friend is a treasure. But what about the Friend?... For where your treasure is, there is your heart.

422 Jesus is your friend. The Friend. With a human heart, like yours. With loving eyes that wept for Lazarus.

And he loves you as much as he loved Lazarus.

423 My God, I love you, but... oh teach me to love!

424 To punish out of Love: this is the secret that raises to a supernatural plane the punishment of those who deserve it.

For the love of God, who has been offended, let punishment serve as reparation. For the love of our neighbour and for the sake of God, let it be imposed, never as revenge, but as health-giving medicine.

425 To know that you love me so much, my God, and yet... I haven't lost my mind!

426 In Christ we have every ideal: for he is King, he is Love, he is God.

427 Lord: may I have due measure in everything... except in Love.

428 If Love, even human love, gives so much consolation here, what will Love not be in heaven ?

429 Everything that is done out of Love acquires greatness and beauty.

430 Jesus, may I be last in everything... and first in Love.

431 Do not fear God's Justice. God's justice is no less admirable and no less lovable than his mercy: both are proofs of his Love.

432 Consider what is most beautiful and most noble on earth, what pleases the mind and the other faculties, and what delights the flesh and the senses.

And the world, and the other worlds that shine in the night: the whole universe. Well this, along with all the follies of the heart satisfied, is worth nothing, is nothing and less than nothing compared... with this God of mine! of yours! Infinite treasure, pearl of great price, humbled, become a slave, reduced to the form of a servant in the stable where he chose to be born, in Joseph's workshop, in his passion and in his ignominious death... and in the madness of Love which is the blessed Eucharist.

433 Live by Love and you'll conquer always even when you are defeated in the battles of your interior struggle.

434 Let your heart overflow in effusions of Love and gratitude as you consider how God's grace each day saves you from the snares that the enemy has set in your path.

435 'Timor Domini sanctus. The fear of God is holy.' Fear which is the veneration of a son for his Father; never a servile fear, for your Father God is not a tyrant.

436 Love and sorrow. Because he is good. Because he is your friend, who gave his life for you. Because every good thing you have is his. Because you have offended him so much... Because he has forgiven you... He!... you!

Weep, my son, with Love-sorrow.

437 If a man had died to save me from death!... God died, And I remain indifferent.

438 Crazy! Yes, I saw you in the bishop's chapel alone, so you thought as you left a kiss on each newly-consecrated chalice and paten: so that he might find them there, when he came for the first time to those eucharistic vessels.

439 Don't forget that Sorrow is the touchstone of Love.

CHARITY

440 When you have finished your work, do your brother's, helping him, for Christ's sake, so tactfully and so naturally that no one not even he will realise that you are doing more than what in justice you ought.

This, indeed, is virtue befitting a son of God!

441 You are hurt by your neighbour's lack of charity towards you. Think how God must be hurt by your lack of charity of Love towards him!

442 Never think badly of anyone, not even if the words or conduct of the person in question give you good grounds for doing so.

443 Don't make negative criticism: if you can't praise, say nothing.

444 Never speak badly of your brother, not even when you have plenty of reasons. Go first to the Tabernacle, and then go to the priest your father, and tell him also what is worrying you.

And no one else.

445 Gossip is a disease that infects and poisons the apostolate. It goes against charity, means a waste of energy, takes away peace and destroys one's union with God.

446 If you are so weak, is it surprising that others too have their weaknesses?

447 After seeing how many people waste their lives, their whole lives (tongues wagging, wagging, wagging, and all the inevitable consequences), silence seems preferable to me, and more necessary than ever.

And I well understand, Lord, why we have to give an account of all our idle words.

448 It's easier said than done. With that cutting, hatchet-like tongue, have you ever tried, even by chance, to do 'well' what, according to your 'considered' opinion, others do less well?

449 Call it by its name: grumbling, gossiping, back-biting, mischief making, tale-bearing, scandal-mongering, intrigue..., slander..., treachery?

Self-appointed critics sitting in judgment easily end up as 'gossiping old maids'!

450 What great offence is given to God, and what great injury done to many souls and what means of sanctification provided for others by the injustice of the 'just'!

451 Let us be slow to judge. Each one sees things from his own point of view, as his mind, with all its limitations, tells him, and through eyes that are often dimmed and clouded by passion.

Moreover, as happens with those modernist painters, the outlook of certain people is so unhealthily subjective that they dash off a few random strokes and assure us that they represent our portrait, our conduct.

Of what little worth are the judgments of men! Don't judge without sifting your judgment in prayer.

452 Force yourself, if necessary, always to forgive those who offend you, from the very first moment. For the greatest injury or offence that you can suffer from them is as nothing compared with what God has pardoned you.

453 Do you speak badly of others? Then you are losing the right spirit and, if you do not learn to check your tongue, each word will take you one step nearer the exit from that apostolic undertaking in which you work.

454 Don't judge without having heard both sides. Even people who think themselves virtuous very easily forget this elementary rule of prudence.

455 Do you know what damage you may cause by throwing stones with your eyes blindfold?

Neither do you know the harm you may cause — and at times it is very great — by letting drop uncharitable remarks that to you seem trifling, because your eyes are blinded by thoughtlessness or passion.

456 To criticize, to destroy, is not difficult; any unskilled labourer knows how to drive his pick into the noble and finely-hewn stone of a cathedral.

To construct: that is what requires the skill of a master.

457 Who are you to pass judgment on the decision of a superior? Don't you see that he is better fitted to judge than you? He has more experience; he has more capable, impartial and trustworthy advisers; and, above all, he has more grace, a special grace, the grace of state — God's light and his powerful aid.

458 Those clashes with the world's selfishness will make you appreciate all the more the fraternal charity of your brother apostles.

459 Your charity is ostentatious. From afar, you attract; you have light. From near by, you repel; you lack warmth. What a pity!

460 'Frater qui adiuvatur a fratre quasi civitas firma. Brother helped by brother is a fortress.'

Think for a moment and make up your mind to live the fraternal spirit that I have always asked of you.

461 If I don't see you practise that fraternal spirit that I preach to you constantly, I shall remind you of those affectionate words of Saint John: 'My children, our love is not to be just words or mere talk, but something real and active.'

462 The power of charity! If you live that blessed fraternal spirit your mutual weakness will also be a support to keep you upright in the fulfilment of duty: just as in a house of cards, one card supports another.

463 Charity does not consist so much in 'giving' as in 'understanding.' Therefore, seek an excuse for your neighbour — there is always one to be found — if it is your duty to judge.

464 You know of someone whose soul is in danger? From afar, with your life of union, you can give him effective help. Help him then, and don't worry.

465 I am glad that you feel concern for your brothers: there is no better proof of your mutual charity. Take care, however, that your concern does not degenerate into anxiety.

466 'Generally,' you write, 'people are anything but generous with their money. Plenty of talk, of loud enthusiasm, of promises and plans. But at the moment of sacrifice few come forward to lend a hand. And if they do give, it has to be with "trimmings" attached: a dance, a raffle, a cinema or theatre show, or an announcement and subscription list in the newspapers.'

It's a sad state of affairs, but it has its exceptions. May you also be one of those who, when they give alms, don't let their left hand know what their right hand is doing.

467 Books. I put out my hand, like one of Christ's beggars, and I asked for books. Books, that are nourishment for the Catholic, apostolic and Roman minds of many young students.

I put out my hand, like one of Christ's beggars, and each time had it brushed heedlessly aside! Why, Jesus, can people not understand the profound christian charity of this alms, more effective than a gift of the finest bread.

468 You were too naive: you tell me that there are very few who really practise charity, and that to be charitable does not mean to give away old clothes or coppers...

And you tell me your tale of woe and your disillusionment.

Only one thing will I say: let you and me give and give ourselves unstintingly. And we will spare others your sad experience.

469 'Salute all the saints. All the saints send you greetings. To all the saints who are at Ephesus. To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi.' — What a moving name — saints! — the early Christians used to address to each other!...

Learn to be a brother to your brothers.

THE MEANS

470 And what of the means? They are the same as those of Peter and of Paul, of Dominic and Francis, of Ignatius and Xavier: the Cross and the Gospel...

Don't they satisfy you?

471 In your apostolic undertakings you are right — it's your duty — to consider what means the world can offer you ($2+2=4$), but don't forget — ever! — that, fortunately, your calculations must include another term: $\text{God}+2+2\dots$

472 Serve your God unwaveringly, be faithful to him, and worry about nothing else. For it is indeed true that 'if you set your hearts on the kingdom of God and on his righteousness, he will give you all these other things — material necessities, the means — as well.'

473 Forget that despair produced by the realization of your weakness. True: financially you are a zero, in social standing another zero, and another in virtues, and another in talent.

But to the left of these noughts, stands Christ. And what an incalculable figure we get!

474 So you are a nobody. And others have done wonders, are still doing them, in organisation, in publicity, in the press. And they have all the means, while you have none? Well then, Just remember Ignatius.

Ignorant, among the doctors of Alcalá; penniless, among the students of Paris, persecuted, slandered...

That is the way: to love and to believe and... to suffer! Your Love and your Faith and your Cross are the infallible means to give effect — eternal effect — to the longing for apostolate that you bear in your heart.

475 You realise you are weak. And so indeed you are. In spite of that — rather, Just because of that — God has chosen you.

He always uses inadequate instruments, so that the 'work' will be seen to be his.

Of you, he only asks docility.

476 When you really 'give yourself' to God, there will be no difficulty that can shake your optimism.

477 Why do you overlook those corners of your heart? As long as you don't 'give yourself' completely, you can't expect to win over others.

What a poor instrument you are!

478 But, surely — at this stage — you don't mean to tell me that you need the approval, the favour the encouragement of the powerful, to go on doing what God wants?

The powerful often change, and you have to be constant. Be grateful if they help you. But go ahead, unperturbed, if they treat you with contempt.

479 Take no notice. Madness has always been the term that 'prudent' people apply to God's works.

Forward! Without fear!

480 Do you see? One strand of wire entwined with another, many woven tightly together, form that cable strong enough to lift huge weights.

You and your brothers, with wills united to carry out God's will can overcome all obstacles.

481 When we seek God only, we need not be afraid to promote works of zeal, by putting into practice the principle laid down by a good friend of ours: 'Spend all that you ought, though you owe all that you spend.'

482 What does it matter if you have the whole world against you, with all its power? You... keep going!

Repeat the words of the psalm: 'The Lord is my light and my salvation: whom need I fear? Si consistant adversum me castra, non timebit cor meum. Though an army pitched camp against me, my heart shall not be afraid.'

483 Courage! You... can! Don't you see what God's grace did with sleepy-headed Peter, the coward who had denied him..., and with Paul, his fierce and relentless persecutor?

484 Be an instrument of gold or steel, or iron or platinum,... big or small, rough or delicate.

All are useful; each one serves its own purpose. As in material things: would anyone dare assert that the carpenter's saw is less useful than the surgeon's scalpel?

Your duty is to be an instrument.

485 Well, so what? I can't understand how you want to give up that apostolic work unless your motive is hidden pride: you think yourself perfect just because God's fire that attracted you and so often gives the light and warmth that arouse your enthusiasm, should also at times produce the smoke due to the weakness of the instrument.

486 There is work in plenty. The instruments cannot be left to grow rusty. There are also norms to avoid the mildew and the rust. Just put them into practice.

487 Don't worry over the financial difficulties which threaten your apostolic undertaking. Have greater confidence in God, do all that your human means permit, and you'll see how soon money ceases to be a difficulty

488 Don't let the lack of instruments stop your work: begin by making the best of what you have. As time passes, the function will create the organ. Some, who had seemed useless, turn out to be useful. The rest have to undergo a surgical operation, a painful one perhaps there were no better 'surgeons' than the saints! and so the work goes on.

489 A keen and living faith. Like Peter's. When you have it our Lord has said so you will move the mountains, the humanly insuperable obstacles that rise up against your apostolic undertakings.

490 An upright heart and good will. With these, and with your mind intent on carrying out what God wants, you will see your dreams of Love come true and your hunger for souls satisfied.

491 'This is the carpenter's son, surely? This is the carpenter, surely, the son of Mary?'

This, which was said of Jesus, may very well be said of you, in a tone half of astonishment, half of mockery, when you really decide to carry out God's will, to be an instrument: 'But, isn't this "So-and-so"...?'

Say nothing. And let your works confirm your mission.

OUR LADY

492 Love for our Mother will be the breath that kindles into a living flame the embers of virtue hidden in the ashes of your indifference.

493 Love our Lady. And she will obtain for you abundant grace to conquer in your daily struggle. And the enemy will gain nothing by those foul things that continually seem to boil and rise within you, trying to engulf in their fragrant corruption the high ideals, the sublime determination that Christ himself has set in your heart. Serviam, I will serve!

494 Be Mary's and you will be ours.

495 We go to Jesus and we 'return' to him through Mary.

496 How people like to be reminded of their relationship with distinguished figures in literature, in politics, in the army, in the Church!... Sing to the Immaculate Virgin, reminding her: Hail Mary, daughter of God the Father: Hail Mary, Mother of God the Son: Hail Mary, Spouse of God the holy Spirit...

Greater than you, none but God!

497 Say to her: Mother, my Mother yours, because you are hers on many counts may your love bind me to your Son's Cross: may I not lack the Faith, nor the courage, nor the daring, to carry out the will of our Jesus.

498 All the sins of your life seem to rise up against you. Don't lose confidence. Rather, call on your holy Mother Mary, with the faith and abandonment of a child. She will bring peace to your soul.

499 Mary, the most holy Mother of God, passes unnoticed, as just one more among the women of her town.

Learn from her how to live with 'naturalness.'

500 Wear on your breast the holy scapular of Carmel. There are many excellent Marian devotions, but few are so deep- rooted among the faithful, and have received so many blessings from the Popes. Besides, how maternal this sabbatine privilege is!

501 When you were asked which picture of our Lady aroused your devotion most, and you answered with the air of long experience 'all of them,' I realized that you were a good son: that is why you are equally moved — 'they make me fall in love,' you said — by all the pictures of your Mother.

502 Mary, teacher of prayer. See how she asks her Son, at Cana. And how she insists, confidently, with perseverance. And how she succeeds.

Learn from her.

503 Mary's loneliness. Alone! She weeps, forsakenly.

You and I should keep our Lady company, and weep also, for Jesus has been fixed to the wood, with nails — our sins.

504 The holy Virgin Mary, Mother of Fair Love, will bring relief to your heart, when it makes you feel that it is of flesh, if you turn to her with confidence.

505 Love for our Lady is proof of good spirit, in organizations and in individuals.

Distrust the undertaking that lacks this characteristic.

506 The Virgin of Sorrows. When you contemplate her, look into her Heart; she is a Mother with two sons, face to face: He... and you.

507 The humility of my holy Mother Mary! She is not to be seen amid the palms of Jerusalem, nor at the hour of the great miracles — except at that first one at Cana.

But she doesn't escape from the contempt at Golgotha; there she stands, juxta crucem Jesu, the Mother of Jesus, beside his Cross.

508 Marvel at Mary's courage: at the foot of the Cross, with the greatest of human sorrows — there is no sorrow like her sorrow — filled with fortitude.

And ask her for that same strength, so that you too can remain beside the Cross.

509 Mary, teacher of the sacrifice that is hidden and silent!

See her, nearly always in the background, cooperating with her Son; she knows, yet says nothing.

510 You see how simply she said it? Ecce ancilla, 'I am the handmaid of the Lord!' And the Word became flesh.

That is how the saints worked: without any outward show. What there was, was in spite of them.

511 Ne timeas, Maria.' Do not be afraid, Mary!' Our Lady was troubled at the presence of the Archangel.

And to think that I want to throw away those details of modesty, that are the safeguard of my purity!

512 Mother, Oh Mother! With that word of yours — fiat, 'be it done' — you have made us brothers of God and heirs to his Glory.

Blessed art thou!

513 Before, by yourself, you couldn't. Now, you have turned to our Lady, and, with her, how easy it is!

514 Have confidence. Return, call on our Lady and you will be faithful.

515 So your strength is fast failing you? Why don't you say to your Mother, 'comforter of the afflicted, help of Christians... our hope, queen of apostles' ?

516 Mother! Call her again and again. She is listening, she sees you in danger perhaps, and with her Son's grace she, your holy Mother Mary, offers you the refuge of her arms, the tenderness of her embrace. Call her, and you will find yourself with added strength for the new struggle.

THE CHURCH

517 Et unam, sanctam, catholicam et apostolicam Ecclesiam! I can understand why you pause to relish your prayer: I believe in the Church, one, holy, Catholic and apostolic...

518 What joy to be able to say with all the fervour of my soul: I love my Mother the holy Church!

519 In that cry serviam! you express your determination to 'serve' the Church of God most faithfully, even at the cost of fortune, of reputation and of life.

520 Catholic, apostolic, Roman! I want you to be very Roman. And to be anxious to make your 'path to Rome,' videre Petrum — to see Peter.

521 How good Christ was to leave the Sacraments to his Church! They are the remedy for all our needs. Venerate them and be very grateful both to God and to his Church.

522 Have veneration and respect for the holy Liturgy of the Church and for its ceremonies. Observe them faithfully. Don't you see that, for us poor men, even what is greatest and most noble must enter through the senses?

523 The Church sings, it has been said, because merely to speak would not satisfy its desire for prayer. You, as a Christian — and a chosen Christian — should learn to sing liturgically.

524 'I just can't help singing,' said a soul in love, when he saw the wonders that our Lord was working through him

And that is the advice I give to you: sing! Let your grateful enthusiasm for your God overflow into song.

525 To be 'Catholic' means to love your country and to be second to no one in that love. And at the same time, to hold as your own the noble aspirations of other lands. So many glories of France are glories of mine! And in the same way, much that makes Germans proud, and the peoples of Italy and of England..., and Americans and Asians and Africans, is a source of pride to me also.

Catholic: big heart, broad mind.

526 If you have not the highest reverence for the priesthood and for the religious state, it is not true that you love God's Church.

527 That woman in the house of Simon the leper in Bethany, who anoints the Master's head with precious ointment, reminds us of our duty to be generous in the worship of God.

All beauty, richness and majesty seem little to me.

And against those who attack the richness of sacred vessels, of vestments and altars, stands the praise given by Jesus: 'opus enim bonum operata est in me — she has acted well towards me.'

HOLY MASS

528 A very important characteristic of the apostolic man is his love for the Mass.

529 'The Mass is long,' you say, and I add: 'Because your love is short.'

530 Isn't it strange how many Christians, who take their time and have leisure enough in their social life (they are in no hurry), in following the sleepy rhythm of their professional affairs, in eating and recreation (no hurry here either), find themselves rushed and want to rush the priest, in their anxiety to shorten the time devoted to the most holy Sacrifice of the Altar?

531 'Treat him well for me, treat him well!' Words, mingled with tears, of a certain venerable bishop to the priests he had just ordained.

Would that I had the power, Lord, and the authority to repeat that same cry in the ears and in the hearts of many, many Christians!

532 How that saintly young priest, who was found worthy of martyrdom, wept at the foot of the altar as he thought of a soul who had come to receive Christ in the state of mortal sin!

Is that how you offer him reparation?

533 The humility of Jesus: in Bethlehem, in Nazareth, on Calvary. But more humiliation and more self-abasement still in the Sacred Host: more than in the stable, more than in Nazareth, more than on the Cross.

That is why I must love the Mass so much I ('Our' Mass, Jesus...)

534 Going to Communion every day for so many years! Anybody else would be a saint by now, you told me, and I... I'm always the same!

Son, I replied, keep up your daily Communion, and think: what would I be if I had not gone?

535 Communion, union, conversation, confidence: word, bread, love.

536 Go to Communion. It doesn't show lack of respect. Go this very day when you have just got over that 'spot of trouble.'

Have you forgotten that Jesus said: It is not by those who are well, but by those who are sick, that the physician is needed?

537 When you approach the Tabernacle remember that he has been awaiting you for twenty centuries.

538 There he is: King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, hidden in the Bread.

To this extreme has he humbled himself through love for you.

539 He has stayed here for you. It is not reverence to omit going to Communion when well disposed. It's irreverence only when you receive him unworthily.

540 What a source of grace there is in spiritual Communion! Practise it frequently and you'll have more presence of God and closer union with him in your life.

541 Piety has its own good manners. Learn them. It's a shame to see those 'pious' people who don't know how to attend Mass — even though they go daily — nor how to bless themselves (they throw their hands about in the weirdest fashion), nor how to bend the knee before the Tabernacle (their ridiculous genuflections seem a mockery), nor how to bow their heads reverently before a picture of our Lady.

542 Don't buy those 'mass-produced' statues. I prefer a rough wrought-iron figure of Christ to those coloured plaster Crucifixes that look as if they were made of sugar candy.

543 You saw me celebrate the holy Mass on a plain altar — table and stone, without a reredos. Both Crucifix and candlesticks were large and solid, with wax candles of graded height, sloping up towards the Cross. The frontal, of the liturgical colour of the day. A sweeping chasuble. The chalice, rich, simple in line, with a broad cup. No electric light, nor did we miss it.

And you found it difficult to leave the oratory: you felt at home there. Do you see how we are led to God, brought closer to him, by the rigour of the liturgy?

COMMUNION OF THE SAINTS

544 Communion of Saints. How shall I explain it? You know what blood transfusions do for the body? Well that is more or less what the Communion of Saints does for the soul.

545 Live a special Communion of Saints: and, in the moments of interior struggle just as in the hours of professional work, each of you will feel the joy and the strength of not being alone.

546 Son, how well you lived the Communion of Saints when you wrote: 'Yesterday I felt that you were praying for me'!

547 Someone else who knows of this 'pool' of supernatural riches, tells me: 'That last letter did me a world of good: I could feel everyone's prayers behind it... and I need their prayers very much!'

548 If you feel the Communion of Saints — if you live it — you will gladly be a man of penance. And you will realize that penance is gaudium, etsi laboriosum, joy, in spite of its hardship. And you will feel yourself 'allied' to all the penitent souls that have been, that are, and that ever will be.

549 You will find it easier to do your duty if you think of how your brothers are helping you, and of the help you fail to give them if you are not faithful.

550 'So I bear it all for the sake of those who are chosen, so that in the end they may have the salvation that is in Christ Jesus.'

What a way to live the Communion of Saints!

Ask our Lord to give you this spirit of Saint Paul.

DEVOTIONS

551 Let us flee from 'routine' as from the devil himself. The great means to avoid falling into this abyss, the grave of true piety, is constant presence of God.

552 Have only a few private devotions, but be constant in them.

553 Don't forget your childhood prayers, learned perhaps from your mother's lips. Say them each day with simplicity, as you did then.

554 Don't omit the visit to the Blessed Sacrament. After your usual vocal prayer, tell Jesus, really present in the Tabernacle, of the cares and worries of your day. And you will receive light and strength for your life as a Christian.

555 How truly lovable is the sacred Humanity of our God! You 'crept' into the most holy Wound of your Lord's right hand, and you asked me: 'If one of Christ's Wounds cleans, heals, soothes, strengthens, kindles and enraptures..., what will the five not do as they lie open on the wood?'

556 The Way of the Cross. Here indeed you have a sturdy and fruitful devotion! Spend a few moments each Friday going over those fourteen points of our Lord's Passion and Death. I assure you that you will gain strength for the whole of the week.

557 Christmas devotion. I don't smile when I see you making cardboard mountains around the crib and placing simple clay figures near the manger. You have never seemed more a man to me than now, when you seem to be a child.

558 The holy Rosary is a powerful weapon. Use it with confidence and you will be amazed at the results;

559 Saint Joseph, father of Christ, is also your father and your lord. Ask him to help you.

560 Saint Joseph, our father and lord, is a teacher of the interior life. Place yourself under his patronage and you'll feel the effectiveness of his power.

561 Speaking of Saint Joseph in the book of her life, Saint Teresa says: 'Whoever fails to find a Master to teach him how to pray, should choose this glorious Saint, and he will not go astray.' This advice comes from an experienced soul. Follow it.

562 Have confidence in your guardian Angel. Treat him as a lifelong friend — that is what he is — and he will render you a thousand services in the ordinary affairs of each day.

563 Win over the guardian Angel of that person whom you wish to draw to your apostolate. He is always a great 'accomplice.'

564 If you remembered the presence of your own Angel and the angels of your neighbours, you would avoid many of the foolish things which slip into your conversations.

565 You are amazed that your guardian Angel has done you such obvious favours. And you should not be amazed: that's why our Lord has placed him beside you.

566 You say that in such surroundings there are many occasions of going astray? That's true, but is there not also the presence of the guardian Angels?...

567 If you call upon your guardian Angel at the moment of trial, he will protect you from the devil and will bring you holy inspirations.

568 How joyfully the holy guardian Angels must have obeyed that soul who said to them: 'Holy Angels, I call on you, like the Spouse of the Song of Songs, ut nuntietis ei quia amore langueo, to tell him that I languish with love.'

569 I know you will be glad to have this prayer to the holy guardian Angels of our Tabernacles:

O Angelic Spirits that guard our Tabernacles, wherein lies the adorable treasure of the holy Eucharist, defend it from profanation and preserve it for our love.

570 Drink at the clear fountain of the Acts of the Apostles. In the twelfth chapter, Peter, freed from prison by the ministry of Angels, comes to the house of the mother of Mark. Those inside will not believe the girl, who says that Peter is at the door. Angelus ejus est! It must be his Angel!' they said.

See on what intimate terms the early Christians were with their guardian Angels.

571 The holy souls in purgatory. Out of charity, out of justice, and out of excusable selfishness — they have such power with God! — remember them often in your sacrifices and in your prayers.

May you be able to say when you speak of them, 'My good friends the souls in purgatory.'

572 You ask me why I always recommend, with such insistence, the daily use of holy water. I could give you many reasons. But none better than that of the Saint of Avila: 'From nothing do evil spirits flee more, never to return, than from holy water.'

573 Thank you, my God, for that love for the Pope you have placed in my heart.

574 Who told you that it is not manly to make novenas? These devotions are manly, when it is a man who performs them in a spirit of prayer and penance.

FAITH

575 There are some who pass through life as through a tunnel, without ever understanding the splendour, the security and the warmth of the sun of faith.

576 With what infamous lucidity does Satan storm against our Catholic faith!

But, let us tell him always, without stopping to argue: I am a son of the Church.

577 You feel a gigantic faith. He who gives you that faith, will give you the means.

578 It is Saint Paul who tells you, apostolic soul: 'The just man lives by faith.'

How is it that you are letting your fire die out?

579 Faith — It is a pity to see how abundantly many Christians have it on their lips, and how sparingly they put it into their actions.

One would think it a virtue to be preached only, and not one to be practised.

580 Humbly ask God to increase your faith. And then, with new lights, you will fully appreciate the difference between the paths of the world and your way as an apostle.

581 How humbly and simply the Gospels relate incidents that show up the weak and wavering faith of the apostles!

So that you and I won't lose hope of some day achieving the strong unshakable faith those first few afterwards had.

582 How beautiful is our Catholic faith! It provides a solution for all our anxieties, calms our minds and fills our hearts with hope.

583 I'm not one for miracles. I have told you that in the holy Gospel I can find more than enough to confirm my faith. But I can't help pitying those Christians — pious people, 'apostles' many of them — who smile at the idea of extraordinary ways, of supernatural events. I feel the urge to tell them: Yes, this is still the age of miracles: we too would work them if we had faith!

584 Stir up that fire of faith. Christ is not a figure that has passed. He is not a memory that is lost in history.

He lives! 'Jesus Christus heri et hodie, ipse et in saecula,' says Saint Paul. 'Jesus Christ is the same today as he was yesterday and as he will be for ever.'

585 If your faith were the size of a mustard seed!

What promises are contained in this exclamation of the Master!

586 God is the same as always. It is men of faith that are needed: and then, there will be a renewal of the wonders we read of in the Gospel.

Ecce non est abbreviata manus Domini, God's arm, his power, has not grown weaker!

587 They have no faith. But they have plenty of superstitions. We laughed and at the same time felt sorry when that 'strong character' became alarmed on hearing a particular word — which, of itself, meant nothing, but for him was unlucky — or on seeing someone break a mirror!

588 Omnia possibilia sunt credenti. Everything is possible for anyone who has faith. The words are Christ's.

How is it that you don't say to him with the Apostles: 'Increase my faith'?

HUMILITY

589 When you hear your success being applauded, let there also sound in your ears the laughter you provoked with your failures.

590 Don't wish to be like the gilded weathercock on top of a great building: however much it shines, and however high it stands, it adds nothing to the solidity of the building.

Rather be like an old stone block hidden in the foundations, underground, where no one can see you: because of you the house will not fall.

591 The more I am exalted, Jesus, the more I want you to humble me in my heart, showing me what I have been, and what I will be if you leave me.

592 Don't forget that you are a... dustbin. That's why if by any chance the divine Gardener lays his hands on you, and scrubs and cleans you, and fills you with

magnificent flowers, neither the scent nor the colour that embellish your ugliness should make you proud.

Humble yourself: don't you know that you are the rubbish bin?

593 The day you see yourself as you are, you will think it natural to be despised by others.

594 You are humble not when you humble yourself, but when you are humbled by others and you bear it for Christ.

595 If you knew yourself, you would find joy in being despised and your heart would weep before honours and praise.

596 Don't worry if they see your defects; the offence against God and the scandal you may give; that is what should worry you.

Apart from this, may you be known for what you are and be despised. Don't be sorry to be nothing, since then Jesus will have to be everything for you.

597 If you were to obey the impulses of your heart and the dictates of reason, you would always be flat on the ground, prostrate, like a

filthy worm, ugly and miserable, before that God who puts up with so much from you.

598 How great the value of humility! Quia respexit humilitatem... It is not of her faith, nor of her charity, nor of her immaculate purity that our Mother speaks in the house of Zachary. Her joyful hymn sings:

'Since he has looked on my humility, all generations will call me blessed.'

599 You are dust — fallen and dirty. Even though the breath of the holy Spirit should lift you above all the things of the earth and make you shine like gold, as your misery reflects in those heights the sovereign rays of the Sun of Justice, do not forget the lowliness of your state.

An instant of pride would cast you back to the ground; and, having been light, you would again become dirt.

600 You... pride? About what?

601 Pride? Why Before long — years, days — you will be a heap of rotting flesh: worms, foul-smelling liquids, filthy shreds of cloth, and no one, on earth, will remember you.

602 For all your learning, for all your fame, your eloquence and power, if you are not humble, you are worth nothing. Cut out, root out that self-complacency which dominates you so completely. God will help you and then you will be able to begin working for Christ, in the lowest place in his army of apostles.

603 That false humility is laziness. Such humbleness is a handy way of giving up rights that are really duties.

604 Humbly acknowledge your weakness so that, with the Apostle, you can say: 'It is when I am weak that I am strong.'

605 'Father, how can you listen to such filth?' you asked me, after a contrite confession.

I said nothing, and thought that if your humility makes you feel like that — filth: a heap of filth! — we may yet turn all your weakness into something really great.

606 See how humble Jesus is: a donkey was his throne in Jerusalem!

607 Humility is another good way to arrive at interior peace. He has said so: 'Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart: and you will find rest for your souls.'

608 It is not a lack of humility to be aware of the progress of your soul. Then you can thank God for it.

But don't forget that you are a poor beggar, wearing a good suit... on loan.

609 Self-knowledge leads us by the hand, as it were, to humility.

610 Your firm defence of the spirit and norms of the apostolate in which you work should never falter through false humility. That firmness is not pride: it is the cardinal virtue of fortitude.

611 Because of pride. You were already becoming convinced that you, by yourself, were equal to anything. He left you for a moment, and you fell headlong. Be humble and his extraordinary aid will not fail you.

612 Get rid of those proud thoughts: you are but the brush in the hand of the artist. And nothing more.

Tell me: of what use is a brush, if it won't let the painter do his work?

613 If you wish to be humble — you, who are so empty and self-satisfied — just consider these words of Isaias: you are 'a drop of water or dew that falls on the ground and is scarcely seen.'

OBEDIENCE

614 In apostolic work there is no such thing as a trifling disobedience.

615 Temper your will, strengthen your will: with God's grace, let it be like a sword of steel.

Only by being strong-willed can you know how not to be so in order to obey.

616 With that slowness, with that passivity, with that reluctance to obey, what damage you cause to the apostolate and what satisfaction you give to the enemy!

617 Obey, as an instrument obeys in the hands of an artist, not stopping to consider the reasons for what it is doing, being sure that you will never be directed to do anything that is not good and for the glory of God.'

618 The enemy: Will you obey... even in this 'ridiculous' little detail? You, with God's grace: I will obey... even in this 'heroic' little detail.

619 Initiative. You must have it in your apostolate, within the terms of your instructions.

If it exceeds those limits or if you are in doubt, consult whoever is in charge, without telling anyone else of what you are thinking.

Never forget that you are only an agent.

620 If obedience does not give you peace, it is because you are proud.

621 What a pity that whoever is in charge doesn't give you good example! But, is it for his personal qualities that you obey him? Or do you conveniently interpret Saint Paul's 'obey your leaders' with a qualification of your own..., 'always provided they have virtues to my taste'?

622 How well you understand obedience, when you write: 'To obey always is to be a martyr without dying'!

623 You've been told to do something which seems useless and difficult. Do it. And you will see that it is easy and fruitful.

624 Priority, order. Everything in its place. What would be left of a Velasquez painting if each colour were to mingle with the next, if each thread of the canvas were to break apart, if each piece of the wooden frame were to separate itself from the others?

625 Your obedience is not worthy of the name unless you are ready to abandon your most flourishing personal work, whenever someone with authority so commands.

626 Isn't it true, Lord, that you were greatly consoled by the childlike remark of that man who, when he felt the disconcerting effect of obedience in something unpleasant, whispered to you: 'Jesus, keep me smiling!'?

627 Yours should be a silent obedience. That tongue!

628 Now, when you find it hard to obey, remember your Lord: 'obedient even to accepting death, death on a cross!'

629 The power of obedience! The lake of Genesareth had denied its fishes to Peter's nets. A whole night in vain.

Then, obedient, he lowered his net again to the water and they caught 'a huge number of fish.'

Believe me: the miracle is repeated each day.

POVERTY

630 Don't forget it: he has most who needs least. Don't create needs for yourself.

631 Detach yourself from the goods of the world. Love and practise poverty of spirit: be content with what enables you to live a simple and sober life.

Otherwise, you will never be an apostle.

632 Rather than in not having, true poverty consists in being detached, in voluntarily renouncing one's dominion over things.

That is why there are poor who are really rich. And vice-versa.

633 If you are a man of God, you will seek to despise riches as intensely as men of the world seek to possess them.

634 What attachment to the things of the earth! Soon they will slip from your grasp, for the rich man cannot take his riches with him to the grave.

635 You haven't got the spirit of poverty if, when you are able to choose in such a way that your choice is not noticed, you do not select for yourself what is worst.

636 'Divitiae, si affluent, nolite cor apponere, though riches may increase keep your heart detached.' Strive to use them generously. And, if necessary, heroically.

Be poor of spirit.

637 You don't love poverty if you don't love what poverty brings with it.

638 What holy resources poverty has! Do you remember? It was a time of financial distress for that apostolic undertaking and you had given without stint down to your last penny.

And he, a priest of God, said to you: 'I too will give you all that I have,' You knelt, and heard: 'May the blessing of almighty God, the Father, the Son and the holy Spirit, descend upon you and remain with you for ever.'

You are still convinced that you were well paid.

DISCRETION

639 Remain silent, and you will never regret it: speak, and you often will.

640 How can you dare ask others to keep your secret, when that very request is a sign that you have not been able to keep it yourself?

641 Discretion is not secrecy, nor mystery-making. It is simply naturalness.

642 Discretion is... refinement of spirit. Do you not feel annoyed, uncomfortable deep down inside, when intimate and everyday details of your family life emerge from the warmth of the home to the indifference or curiosity of the public gaze?

643 Be slow to reveal the intimate details of your apostolate: don't you see that the world in its selfishness will fail to understand?

644 Say nothing! Don't forget that your ideal is like a newly-lit flame. A single breath might suffice to quench it in your heart.

645 The fruitfulness of silence! All the energy I see you waste with those repeated indiscretions is energy taken from the effectiveness of your work.

Be discreet.

646 If you were more discreet, you would not be troubled by the bad aftertaste left by so many of your conversations.

647 Don't seek to be 'understood.' That lack of understanding is providential: so that your sacrifice may pass unnoticed.

648 If you keep a check on your tongue, you will work more effectively in your apostolic undertakings so many people let their 'strength' slip through their mouths! and you will avoid many dangers of vainglory.

649 Results! Always looking for 'results'! You ask me for photographs, for facts and figures.

I won't send you what you ask, because (though I respect the opposite opinion), I would then think I had acted with a view to making good on earth, and where I want to make good is in heaven.

650 There are many people, holy people, who don't understand your way. Don't insist on making them understand: you would be wasting your time and you would give rise to indiscretions.

651 'What shapes and gives life to the roots and branches is the sap, which always works on the inside.'

Your friend who wrote these words knew that you were nobly ambitious. And he showed you the way: discretion and sacrifice 'working on the inside'!

652 Discretion, virtue of the few. Who slandered women by saying that discretion is not a woman's virtue?

There are many men yes, full-grown men who have yet to learn!

653 What an example of discretion is given us by the Mother of God! Not even to Saint Joseph does she communicate the mystery.

Ask our Lady for the discretion you lack.

654 Bitterness has sharpened your tongue. Be quiet!

655 I could never overemphasize the importance of discretion.

It may not be the blade of your sword, but I would certainly describe it as the hilt.

656 Always remain silent when you feel the upsurge of indignation within you. And do so, even when you have good reason to be angry.

For, in spite of your discretion, in such moments you always say more than you wish.

JOY

657 True virtue is not sad or disagreeable, but pleasantly cheerful.

658 If things go well, let us rejoice, blessing God who makes them prosper. And if they go badly? Let us rejoice, blessing God who allows us to share in the sweetness of his Cross.

659 The cheerfulness you should have is not the kind we might call physiological good spirits the happiness of a healthy animal. You must seek something more: the supernatural happiness that comes from the abandonment of everything and the abandonment of yourself into the loving arms of our Father God.

660 Never lose heart if you are an apostle. There is no obstacle that you cannot overcome.

Why are you sad?

661 Long face, rough manner, ridiculous appearance, unfriendly attitude. Is that how you hope to inspire others to follow Christ?

662 You are unhappy? Think: there must be an obstacle between God and me. You will seldom be wrong.

663 You ask me to suggest a cure for your sadness. I'll give you a prescription from an expert adviser, the Apostle Saint James:

Tristatur aliquis vestrum, are you sad, my son? Oret! Pray! Try it and you will see.

664 Don't be gloomy. Let your outlook be more 'ours,' more christian.

665 I want you to be happy always, for cheerfulness is an essential part of your way.

Pray that the same supernatural joy may be granted to us all.

666 'Laetetur cor quaerentium Dominum. Let the hearts that seek Yahweh rejoice.'

There you have light, to help you discover the reasons for your gloominess.

OTHER VIRTUES

667 Acts of Faith, Hope and Love are valves which provide an outlet for the fire of those souls that live the life of God.

668 Do everything unselfishly, for pure Love, as if there were neither reward nor punishment. But in your heart foster the glorious hope of heaven.

669 It is good that you serve God as a son, without payment, generously. But don't worry if at times you think of the reward.

670 Jesus says: 'And anyone who has left houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, wife, children or land for the sake of my name will be repaid a hundred times over, and also inherit eternal life.'

Try to find on earth anyone who repays so generously!

671 Jesus remains silent. *Jesus autem tacebat*. Why do you speak, to console yourself, or to excuse yourself?

Say nothing. Seek joy in contempt: you will always receive less than you deserve.

Can you, by any chance, ask: *Quid enim mali feci*, what evil have I done?

672 You can be sure that you are a man of God if you suffer injustice gladly and in silence.

673 What a fine reply was given by that venerable man to his young friend who complained of the unjust treatment he had suffered: 'So you don't like it?' he said, 'Then, give up trying to be good!'

674 Never give your opinion if you are not asked for it, even if you think that your view is the best.

675 It's true that he was a sinner. But don't pass so final a judgment on him. Have pity in your heart, and don't forget that he may yet be an Augustine, while you remain just another mediocrity.

676 All the things of this world are no more than earth. Place them in a heap under your feet and you will be so much the nearer to heaven.

677 Gold, silver, jewels: dust, heaps of manure. Gratification, sensual pleasures, satisfaction of the appetites: like a beast, like a mule, like a cock, like a pig, like a bull.

Honours, distinctions, titles: things of air, puffs of pride, lies, nothingness.

678 Don't give your heart to the things of this world. Such love is selfish... A few short hours after God calls you into his presence, those whom you love will recoil from you in horror and disgust. Elsewhere you will find the Love that lasts.

679 Gluttony is an ugly vice. Don't you feel a bit amused and even disgusted, when you see a group of dignified gentlemen, seated solemnly around a table, stuffing

fatty substances into their stomachs, with an air of ritual, as if that were an end in itself?

680 At meals don't speak about food: that's vulgar and unworthy of you. Speak about something noble — of the soul or of the mind — and you will have dignified this physical duty.

681 The day you leave the table without having done some small mortification you have eaten like a pagan.

682 You generally eat more than you need. And that fullness, which often causes you physical heaviness and discomfort, benumbs your mind and renders you unfit to taste supernatural treasures.

What a fine virtue, even for this earth, temperance is!

683 I see you, christian gentleman — that is what you say you are — kissing an image, mumbling a vocal prayer, crying out against those who attack the Church of God..., and even frequenting the holy Sacraments.

But I don't see you making any sacrifice, or avoiding certain conversations of a 'worldly' nature (I could with justice use another term), or being generous towards those in need or towards that Church of Christ, or putting up with a failing in one of your brothers, or checking your pride for the sake of the common good, or getting rid of your tight cloak of selfishness, or... so many things more!

I see you... I don't see you... And yet you say that you are a christian gentleman? What a poor idea you have of Christ!

684 Your talents, your personality, your opportunities... are being wasted: you are not allowed to make full use of them.

Meditate well these words of a spiritual writer: 'The incense offered to God is not wasted. Our Lord is more honoured by the immolation of your talents than by the vain use of them.'

TRIBULATIONS

685 The storm of persecution is good. What is the loss? What is already lost cannot be lost. When the tree is not torn up by the roots — and there is no wind or hurricane that can uproot the tree of the Church — only the dry branches fall. And they... are well fallen.

686 All right: that person has behaved badly towards you. But, haven't you behaved worse towards God?

687 Jesus: wherever you have passed no heart remains indifferent. You are either loved or hated.

When an apostle follows you, carrying out his duty, is it surprising that — if he is another Christ — he should arouse similar murmurs of aversion or of love?

688 Once again they have spoken, they have written: in favour, against; with good and with not so good will; faint praise and slander; panegyrics and plaudits; hits and misses...

Don't be a fool! As long as you are making straight for your goal, head and heart intoxicated with God, why worry about the voice of the wind, or the chirp of the cricket, or the mooing or the grunting or the braying?

Besides, it's inevitable; don't waste time answering back.

689 Tongues have been wagging and you have suffered rebuffs that hurt you all the more because you were not expecting them.

Your supernatural reaction should be to pardon — and even to ask pardon — and to take advantage of the experience to detach yourself from creatures.

690 When you meet with suffering, contempt, the Cross, your thought should be: what is this compared with what I deserve?

691 Are things going against you? Are you going through a rough time? Say very slowly, as if relishing it, this powerful and manly prayer:

'May the most just and most lovable will of God be done, be fulfilled be praised and eternally exalted above all things. Amen, Amen.'

I assure you that you will find peace.

692 You suffer in this present life, which is a dream, a short dream. Rejoice, because your Father God loves you so much, and if you put no obstacles in his way, after this bad dream he will give you a good awakening.

693 It hurt you not to have been thanked for that favour. Answer me these two questions: Are you so grateful towards Christ Jesus? Did you actually do that favour in the hope of being thanked for it on earth?

694 I don't know why you're amazed: Christ's enemies were never very reasonable.

When Lazarus was raised from the dead, they might have been expected to give in and confess the divinity of Jesus. But no! 'Let us kill him who gives life,' they said!

And now, as then.

695 In the moments of struggle and opposition, when perhaps 'the good' fill your way with obstacles, lift up your apostolic heart: listen to Jesus as he speaks of the grain of mustard seed and of the leaven. And say to him: 'Explain the parable to me.'

And you will feel the joy of contemplating the victory to come: the birds of the air lodging in the branches of your apostolate, now only in its beginnings, and the whole of the meal leavened.

696 If you accept difficulties with a faint heart you lose your joy and your peace, and you run the risk of not deriving spiritual profit from the trial.

697 Outside events have placed you in voluntary confinement, worse perhaps, because of its circumstances, than the confinement of a prison. You have suffered an eclipse of your personality.

On all sides you feel yourself hemmed in: selfishness, curiosity, misunderstanding, people talking behind your back. All right: so what? Have you forgotten your free will and that power of yours as a 'child'? The absence of flowers and leaves (external action) does not exclude the growth and activity of the roots (interior life).

Work: things will change, and you will yield more fruit than before, and sweeter too.

698 So you have been hauled over the coals? Don't follow the advice of pride and lose your temper. Say to yourself: how charitable they are towards me! When I think of all they must have left unsaid!...

699 Cross, toil, anguish: such will be your lot as long as you live. That was the way Christ went, and the disciple is not above his Master.

700 Agreed: there is a lot of pressure from outside and that excuses you in part. But there is also complicity within — take a good look — and there I see no excuse.

701 Have you not heard the Master himself tell the parable of the vine and the branches? Here you can find consolation. He demands much of you, for you are the branch that bears fruit. And he must prune you 'to make you bear more fruit.'

Of course: that cutting, that pruning hurts. But, afterwards, what richness in your fruits, what maturity in your actions.

702 You are worried. Listen: happen what may in your interior life or in the world that surrounds you, never forget that the importance of events or of people is very relative. Take things calmly; let time pass; and then, as you view persons and happenings dispassionately and from afar, you will acquire the perspective that will enable you to see each thing in its proper place and in its true size.

If you do this, you will be more objective and you will spare yourself many causes of anxiety.

703 A bad night, in a bad inn. That is how Saint Teresa of Jesus is said to have defined this earthly life. It's a good comparison, isn't it?

704 A visit to a well-known monastery. That foreign lady was moved to pity as she considered the poverty of the building: 'You lead a very hard life, don't you?' The monk's satisfaction was as obvious as his

reply was short! He seemed to be speaking to himself. 'You wanted it, brother, and you got it. Now it's up to you to keep it.'

These words, which I joyously heard that holy man say, I can only repeat to you with sorrow when you tell me that you are not happy.

705 Worry? Never! For to do so is to lose one's peace.

706 Physical collapse. You are worn out. Rest. Stop that exterior activity. Consult a doctor. Obey, and don't worry.

You will soon return to your normal life and, if you are faithful, to new intensity in your apostolate.

INTERIOR STRUGGLE

707 Don't be troubled if, as you consider the wonders of the supernatural world, you hear that other voice, the intimate, insinuating voice of your 'old self.'

It is 'the body of death' crying out for its lost rights. 'His' grace is sufficient for you: be faithful and you will conquer.

708 The world, the flesh and the devil are a band of adventurers who take advantage of the weakness of that savage you bear within you, and want you to hand over to them, in exchange for the glittering tinsel of a pleasure — which is worth nothing — the pure gold and the pearls and the diamonds and rubies drenched in the life- blood of your GodRedeemer, which are the price and the treasure of your eternity.

709 Do you hear? Somewhere else, in another state, in another position, you would do much more good. Talent isn't needed to do what you are doing.

Listen to me: wherever you have been placed you please God,... and what you have just been thinking is clearly a suggestion from the devil.

710 You worry and are saddened because your Communions are cold and dry. Tell me: when you approach the Sacrament, is it yourself you seek or is it Jesus? If you seek yourself, you have reason indeed to be sad. But if — as you ought — you seek Christ, could you ask for a clearer sign than the Cross to know that you have found him?

711 Another fall, and what a fall! Must you give up hope? No. Humble yourself and, through Mary, your Mother, have recourse to the merciful Love of Jesus. A miserere, and lift up your heart! And now begin again.

712 How low you have fallen this time! Begin the foundations from down there. Be humble. Cor contritum et humiliatum, Deus, non despicias, God will not despise a contrite and humble heart.

713 You have not set yourself against God. Your falls are due to weakness. All right; but those weaknesses are so frequent — you aren't able to avoid them — that, if you don't want me to think you bad, I shall have to think you both bad and stupid.

714 Wanting, without really wanting: that is your attitude as long as you don't put the occasion firmly aside. Don't try to fool yourself telling me you are weak. You are... a coward, which is not the same thing.

715 That disturbance in your spirit, the temptation which envelops you, seems to blindfold the eyes of your soul.

You are in darkness. Don't insist on walking by yourself, for, by yourself you will fall. Go to your Director — to the person in charge — and he will remind you of those words of Raphael the Archangel to Tobias:

'Take comfort; before long God will heal you.' Be obedient and the scales will fall from your eyes, and God will fill you with grace and with peace.

716 I am not able to conquer myself, you write despondently. And I answer: But, have you really tried to use the means?

717 Blessed misfortunes of the earth! Poverty, tears, hatred, injustice, dishonour. You can endure all things in him who strengthens you.

718 You are suffering, and you want to bear it in silence. It does not matter if you complain — it is the natural reaction of our poor flesh — as long as your will, now and always, wants for yourself only what God wants.

719 Never despair. Lazarus was dead and decaying: 'By now he will smell; this is the fourth day,' says Martha to Jesus.

If you hear God's inspiration and follow it — 'Lazarus, come out!' — you will return to Life.

720 It's hard! Yes, I know. But, forward! No one will be rewarded — and what a reward! — except those who fight bravely.

721 If everything seems to be fading away, if your spiritual edifice totters, find your support in that filial confidence in Jesus and Mary the sure and steady rock on which you should have built from the beginning.

722 It has been a long trial this time. Perhaps — and without the perhaps — you haven't borne it well so far, for you were still seeking human consolations. And your Father God tore them out by the roots so as to leave you nothing to cling to but him.

723 So you couldn't care less? Don't try to fool yourself. This very moment, if I were to ask you about certain people and undertakings in which for God's love you put your soul, I know that you would answer me eagerly, with the interest of one speaking of what is his own.

It's not true that you don't care. It's just that you're not tireless, and that you need more time for yourself: time that will also be for your activities since, after all, you are the instrument.

724 You tell me that in your breast you have fire and water, cold and heat, empty passions and God... one candle lit to Saint Michael and another to the devil.

Don't worry: as long as you want to fight there are not two candles burning in your breast. There is only one: the Archangel's.

725 That is nearly always the way the devil tackles souls who are going to resist him: hypocritically, quietly, with motives... of a spiritual nature! Trying not to attract attention. And then, when there seems to be no way out (though there is), he comes brazenly trying to gain another Judas-like success — despair without repentance.

726 After losing those human consolations you have been left with a feeling of loneliness, as if you were suspended by a mere thread over the black emptiness of the abyss. And your cries, your shouts for help seem to be heard by nobody.

You really deserve to be forlorn. Be humble, don't seek yourself don't seek consolation. Love the Cross — to bear it is little — and our Lord will hear your prayer. And calm will be restored to your senses. And your wounded heart will heal. And you will have peace.

727 Everything seems to touch you on the raw..., to make you suffer in your mind and in your senses. And everything is temptation to you...

Be humble — I insist. You will see how quickly all this passes; and the pain will be turned into joy: and the temptation, into firm purpose.

But meanwhile, strengthen your faith; fill yourself with hope; and make constant acts of Love, even though you can feel them only on your lips.

728 All our fortitude is on loan.

729 Each day, my God, I am less sure of myself and more sure of you!

730 If you don't leave him, he won't leave you.

p class="MsoPlainText" style="margin-top:12.0pt;margin-right:0in;margin-bottom:6.0pt;margin-left:0in">731 Depend on Jesus for everything. You have nothing, are worth nothing, are capable of nothing. He will act, if you abandon yourself to him.

732 Oh, Jesus! I rest in you.

733 Trust always in your God. He does not lose battles.

LAST THINGS

734 'This is your hour; this is the reign of darkness.' So the sinful man has his hour? Yes... and God his eternity!

735 If you are an apostle, death for you will be a good friend who helps you on your way.

736 Have you seen the dead leaves fall in the sad autumn twilight? Thus souls fall each day into eternity. One day, the falling leaf will be you.

737 Have you never heard the worldly-minded sadly complain that 'each day that passes is a step nearer death'?

It is. And I tell you: rejoice, apostolic soul, for each day that pass brings you closer to Life.

738 For 'others,' death is a stumbling block, a source of terror. For us, death — Life — is an encouragement and a stimulus.

For them it is the end: for us, the beginning.

739 Don't be afraid of death. Accept it from now on, generously... when God wills it, where God wills it, as God wills it. Don't doubt what I say: it will come in the moment, in the place and in the way that are best: sent by your Father God. Welcome be our sister death!

740 What part of the world would collapse if I were missing, if I were to die?

741 Do you see how the corpse of the loved one disintegrates in foul and reeking liquids? That, then, is the body beautiful! Contemplate it and draw your own conclusions.

742 Those paintings by Valdes Leal, with their distinguished heaps of decaying flesh — bishops, noblemen, all in rank corruption — surely they must move you.

What then do you say of the Duke of Gandja's cry: 'No more will I serve a lord whom I can lose through death'?

743 You talk of dying 'heroically.' Do you not think that it is more 'heroic' to die a bourgeois death, in a good bed, unnoticed... but to die of love-sickness.

744 You — if you are an apostle — will not have to die. You will move to a new house: that is all.

745 'He shall come to judge the living and the dead.' So we pray in the Creed. God grant that you never lose sight of that judgment and of that justice and... of that Judge.

746 Does your soul not burn with the desire to make your Father God happy when he has to judge you?

747 Worldly souls are very fond of thinking of God's mercy. And so they are encouraged to persist in their follies.

It is true that God our Lord is infinitely merciful, but he is also infinitely just: and there is a judgment, and he is the Judge.

748 Courage. Don't you know that Saint Paul tells the Corinthians that each will duly be paid according to his share in the work?

749 There is a hell. Not a very original statement, you think. I will repeat it, then: there is a hell!

Echo it for me, at the right moment, in the ear of one friend, and of another, and another.

750 Listen to me, you who are absorbed in science: your science cannot deny the reality of diabolic activities. My Mother, the holy Church, for many years required her priests each day at the foot of the altar to invoke Saint Michael, 'against the wickedness and snares of the devil.'

751 Heaven: 'the eye has not seen, nor the ear heard⁷ neither has it entered into the heart of man to conceive the things that God has prepared for those who love him.

Don't these revelations of the Apostle spur you on to fight?

752 Always. For ever! Words brought to our lips by our human desire to prolong — to make eternal — what is pleasant.

Lying words, on earth, where everything must end.

753 All that this earth can offer us is continually passing away: hardly has pleasure begun than it is already ended.

THE WILL OF GOD

754 This is the key to open the door and enter the Kingdom of Heaven: qui facit voluntatem Patris mei qui in coelis est, ipse intrabit in regnum coelorum — he who does the will of my Father... he shall enter!

755 Many great things depend — don't forget it — on whether you and I live our lives as God wants.

756 We are blocks of stone that can move and feel, that have a perfectly free will.

God himself is the stone cutter who works on us, chipping off the rough edges, shaping us as he desires, with blows of the hammer and chisel.

Don't let us try to draw aside, don't let us want to escape his will, for in any case we won't be able to avoid the blows. We will suffer all the more, and uselessly, and instead of polished stone, ready for the work of building, we will be a shapeless heap of gravel that people will trample contemptuously under foot.

757 Resignation?... Conformity? Love for the will of God!

758 Accepting the will of God wholeheartedly is a sure way of finding joy and peace: happiness in the Cross. Then we realize that Christ's yoke is sweet and that his burden is not heavy.

759 Peace, peace, you tell me. Peace is... for men of 'good' will.

760 A thought which brings peace to the heart and which the holy Spirit suggests to those who seek the will of God: The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

What can worry the soul that sincerely repeats these words?

761 Free man, subject yourself to a voluntary servitude, so that Jesus won't have to say of you what we are told he said of others to Saint Teresa: 'Teresa, I wanted it... But men did not.'

762 An act of complete acceptance of the will of God: 'Is that what you want, Lord?... Then, it's what I want also!'

763 Don't hesitate: let your lips pronounce a heartfelt Fiat, 'be it done!,' which will be the crown of your sacrifice.

764 The closer an apostle is to God, the more universal his desires. His heart expands and takes in everybody and everything in its longing to lay the universe at the feet of Jesus.

765 So much do I love your will, my God, that heaven itself, without your will — if such an absurdity could be — I would not accept.

766 Abandonment to the will of God is the secret of happiness on earth. Say, then: *meus cibus est, ut faciam voluntatem ejus*, my food is to do his will.

767 This abandonment is exactly what you need so as never again to lose your peace.

768 The *gaudium cum pace* — joy and peace — is the sweet and unfailing fruit of abandonment.

769 Indifference is not dryness of heart, as the heart of Jesus was not dry.

770 You are not less happy with too little than with too much.

771 God exalts those who carry out his will in the very things in which he humbled them.

772 Ask yourself many times during the day: Am I doing at this moment what I ought to be doing?

773 Jesus, whatever you 'want,' I love!

774 Stages: to be resigned to the will of God; to conform to the will of God, to want the will of God; to love the will of God.

775 Lord, if it is your will, turn my poor flesh into a Crucifix.

776 Don't fall into a vicious circle. You are thinking: when this is settled one way or another, I'll be very generous with my God.

Can't you see that Jesus is waiting for you to be generous without reserve, so that he can settle things far better than you imagine?

A firm resolution, as logical consequence: in each moment of each day I will try generously to carry out the will of God.

777 Your own will, your own judgment: that is what worries you.

778 It only takes a second. Before setting about anything, ask yourself: What does God want of me in this?

Then, with divine grace,... do it!

THE GLORY OF GOD

779 It is good to give glory to God, without seeking foretastes (wife children, honours...) of that glory, which we will enjoy fully with him in the next Life.

Besides, he is generous. He returns a hundredfold; and he does so even in children. Many give them up for the sake of his glory, and they have thousands of children of their spirit. Children, as we are children of our Father who is in heaven.

780 Deo omnis gloria. All glory to God. It is an emphatic confession of our nothingness. He, Jesus, is everything. We, without him, are worth nothing: nothing. Our vainglory would be just that: vain glory; it would be sacrilegious robbery. There should be no room for that 'I' anywhere.

781 Without me, you can do nothing, our Lord has told us. And he has said it so that you and I won't credit ourselves with successes that are his. Sine me, nihil!...

782 How can you dare use that spark of divine intelligence — your mind — in anything but in giving glory to your Lord?

783 If life's purpose were not to give glory to God, how contemptible, how hateful it would be.

784 Give 'all' the glory to God. 'Squeeze' out each one of your actions with your will aided by grace, so that there remains in them nothing that smacks of human pride, of self-complacency.

785 'You are my God, I give you thanks, I extol you, my God.' Beautiful aims for an apostle such as you.

786 May no other attachment bind you to earth than the divine desire of giving glory to Christ and, through him and with him and in him, to the Father and the holy Spirit.

787 Rectify, purify your intention! How tragic if your victory were to be rendered worthless by your having acted for human motives!

788 Purity of intention. The suggestions of pride and the impulses of the flesh are not difficult to recognize... and you fight and, with grace, you conquer.

But the motives that inspire you, even in the holiest actions, do not seem clear; and deep down inside you hear a voice which makes you see human reasons in such a

subtle way that your soul is invaded by the disturbing thought that you don't act as you should — for pure Love, solely and exclusively to give God all his glory.

React at once each time and say: 'Lord, for myself I want nothing. All for your glory and for Love.'

789 You must indeed have purified your intention well when you said: from this moment on I renounce all human gratitude and reward.

WINNING NEW APOSTLES

790 Don't you long to shout to those young men and women all around you: Fools, leave those worldly things that shackle the heart and very often degrade it..., leave all that and come with us in search of Love?

791 You lack drive. That's why you sway so few. You don't seem very convinced of what you gain by giving up those things of the earth for Christ.

Just compare: a hundredfold and life everlasting! Would you call that a poor bargain?

792 'Duc in altum. Put out into deep water!' Throw aside the pessimism that makes a coward of you. And pay out your nets for a catch!

Don't you see that you, like Peter, can say: 'In nomine tuo, laxabo rete:' Jesus, if you say so, I will search for souls?

793 The search for fellow apostles. It is the unmistakable sign of true zeal.

794 To sow. The sower went out... Scatter your seed, apostolic soul. The wind of grace will bear it away if the furrow where it falls is not worthy... Sow, and be certain that the seed will take root and

bear fruit.

795 By good example good seed is sown; and charity compels us all to sow.

796 You have but little love if you are not zealous for the salvation of all souls. You have but poor love if you are not eager to inspire other apostles with your craziness.

797 You realize that your way is not clear. And that it is not clear because by not following Jesus closely you remain in darkness. What keeps you from making up your mind?

798 Reasons?... What reasons could the poor Ignatius give to his brilliant companion Xavier?

799 What amazes you seems natural to me — that God has sought you out in the practice of your profession!

That is how he sought the first, Peter and Andrew, James and John, beside their nets, and Matthew, sitting in the custom house.

And — wonder of wonders! — Paul, in his eagerness to destroy the seed of the Christians.

800 The harvest is great and the labourers few. Rogate ergo! Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.

Prayer is the most effective means of winning new apostles.

801 Through the world still echoes that divine cry: 'I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were blazing already!' And you see: it has nearly all died out...

Will you not help to spread the blaze?

802 There is a brilliant man whom you long to attract to your apostolate; there is another, a man of great influence; and a third, full of prudence and virtues...

Pray, offer up sacrifices, and work on them with your word and example. They don't want to come! Don't lose your peace; it's because they are not needed.

Do you think there were no brilliant and influential and prudent and virtuous contemporaries of Peter outside the apostolate of the first twelve?

803 I've been told that you have the 'knack' of drawing souls to your way.

It's a gift to thank God for; to be an instrument for seeking instruments!

804 Help me to cry: Jesus, souls! Apostolic souls! They are for you, for your glory.

You'll see how in the end he will hear us.

805 Tell me: there, where you are... mightn't there be one... or two, who could understand us well?

806 Tell him — yes, him — that I need fifty men who love Jesus Christ above all things.

807 You say of that friend of yours that he frequents the sacraments, that he is clean-living and a good student. But that he won't 'respond'; if you speak to him of sacrifice and apostolate, he becomes sad and goes away.

Don't worry. It's not a failure of your zeal. It is, to the letter, the scene related by the Evangelist: 'If you wish to be perfect, go and sell what you own and give the money to the poor' (sacrifice), 'and then come, follow me' (apostolate).

The young man also abiit tristis, went away sad; he was not willing to respond to grace.

808 'Good news: another "crazy" fellow for the asylum'!... And all is excitement in the fisherman's letter.

May God make your nets effective.

809 Winning new apostles. Who does not hunger to perpetuate his apostolate?

810 That burning desire to win fellow apostles is a sure sign that you have really 'given yourself' to God.

811 Do you remember? Night was falling as you and I began our prayer. From close by came the murmur of water. And, through the stillness of the city, we also seemed to hear voices from many lands crying to us in anguish that they do not yet know Christ.

Unashamedly you kissed your Crucifix and asked him to make you an apostle of apostles.

812 I can understand how you love your country and your people so much, and that, in spite of these ties, you long for the moment when you will cross lands and seas — far away — for your heart is consumed by the thought of the harvest.

LITTLE THINGS

813 Do everything for Love. Thus there will be no little things: everything will be big. Perseverance in little things for Love is heroism.

814 A little act, done for Love, is worth so much!

815 Do you really want to be a saint? Carry out the little duty of each moment: do what you ought and concentrate on what you are doing.

816 You have mistaken the way if you despise the little things.

817 'Great' holiness consists in carrying out the 'little duties' of each moment.

818 Great souls pay much attention to little things.

819 Because you have been *In pauca fidelis*, faithful in small things, come and join in your master's happiness. The words are Christ's. *In pauca fidelis!*... Now will you neglect little things, if heaven itself is promised to those who mind them?

820 Don't judge by the smallness of the beginnings. My attention was once drawn to the fact that there is no difference in size between seeds that give annual plants and those that will grow into ageless trees.

821 Don't forget that, on earth, every big thing has had a small beginning. What is born big is monstrous and dies.

822 You tell me: when the chance comes to do something big, then!... Then? Are you seriously trying to convince me — and to convince yourself — that you will be able to win in the supernatural Olympics without daily preparation, without training?

823 Have you seen how that imposing building was built? One brick upon another. Thousands. But, one by one. And bags of cement, one by one. And blocks of stone, each of them insignificant compared with the massive whole. And beams of steel. And men working, the same hours, day after day...

Have you seen how that imposing building was built?... By dint of little things!

824 Have you noticed how human love consists of little things? Well, divine Love also consists of little things.

825 Persevere in the exact fulfilment of the obligations of the moment. That work — humble, monotonous, small — is prayer expressed in action that prepares you to receive the grace of the other work — great and wide and deep — of which you dream.

826 Everything in which we poor men have a part — even holiness — is a fabric of small trifles which, depending upon one's intention, can form a magnificent tapestry of heroism or of degradation, of virtues or of sins.

The epic legends always relate extraordinary adventures, but never fail to mix them with homely details about the hero. May you always attach great importance to the little things. This is the way!

827 Have you ever stopped to consider the enormous sum that many 'littles' can come to?

828 It has been a hard experience: don't forget the lesson. Your big cowardices of the moment correspond — clearly — to your little cowardices of each day.

You 'have not been able' to conquer in big things, because you 'did not want' to conquer in little ones.

829 Didn't you see the light in Jesus' eyes as the poor widow left her little alms in the temple? Give him what you can: the merit is not in whether it is big or small, but in the intention with which you give it.

830 Don't be a fool! It's true that at most you play the part of a little bolt in that great undertaking of Christ's.

But do you know what happens when a bolt is not tight enough or when it works itself out of place? Bigger parts also work loose or the gears get damaged and broken.

The work is slowed up. Perhaps the whole machine will be rendered useless.

What a big thing it is to be a little bolt!

TACTICS

831 Among those around you — apostolic soul — you are the stone fallen into the lake. With your word and your example you produce a first circle... and it another... and another, and another... Wider each time.

Now do you understand the greatness of your mission?

832 How anxious people are to get out of place! Think what would happen if each bone and each muscle of the human body wanted to occupy some position other than that proper to it.

There is no other reason for the world's discontent. Persevere in your place, my son; there... what work you can do to establish our Lord's true kingdom!

833 Leaders!... Strengthen your will so that God can make a leader of you. Consider the tactics of those infamous secret societies. They don't try to win over the masses. In their dens they form a number of demon-men who set to work stirring up the multitudes to madness, so that they will follow them to the precipice of all excess... and to hell. They spread an accursed seed.

If you wish, you will spread God's word, which is a thousand times blessed and can never fail. If you are generous..., if you respond, with your personal sanctification you will help to bring about the sanctification of others; the kingdom of Christ: omnes cum Petro ad Jesum per Mariam — 'all with Peter to Jesus through Mary.'

834 Is there any greater folly than to scatter the golden wheat on the ground to let it rot? Without that generous folly there would be no harvest.

Son, how do we stand as regards generosity?

835 You long to shine like a star, to shed your light from high in the heavens?

Better to burn like a hidden torch, setting your fire to all that you touch. That's your apostolate: that's why you are on earth.

836 To serve as a loudspeaker for the enemy is the height of idiocy; and if the enemy is God's enemy, it is a great sin. That is why, in the professional field, I never praise the knowledge of those who use it as rostrum from which to attack the Church.

837 Hurrying, hurrying! Working, working! Feverish activity, anxiety to be up and doing. Marvellous material structures...

Where spiritual things are concerned: broken up boxes, cheap cotton, painted cardboard, hurrying, working! And many people running here and there.

It is because in their work they think only of 'today'; their vision is limited to what is 'present.' You must see things with the eyes of eternity, 'keeping present' what has passed and what has yet to come...

Calmness. Peace. Intense life within you. Without that wild hurry, without that frenzy for change, you can work from your proper place in life. And, like a powerful generator of spiritual electricity, you will give light and energy to very many, without losing your own vigour and light.

838 Have no enemies. Have only friends: friends on the right — if they have done or have wished to do you good; and on the left — if they have harmed or tried to harm you.

839 Never go into details of 'your' apostolate unless it be for someone else's benefit.

840 May your dedication pass unnoticed as, for thirty years, did that of Jesus.

841 Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus visit Jesus privately when things are normal and also in the hour of triumph.

But they are courageous in the face of authority, declaring their love for Christ audacter, boldly, in the hour of cowardice. Learn from them.

842 Don't worry if by your deeds 'they know you.' It is the good odour of Christ. Besides, since you always work exclusively for him, you can rejoice that the words of Scripture are being fulfilled: 'May they see your good works and give praise to your Father in heaven.'

843 'Non manifeste, sed quasi in occulto, quite privately, without drawing attention to himself.' So Jesus goes up to the feast of Tabernacles. So will he go, on the way to Emmaus, with Cleophas and his companion. So is he seen, after his Resurrection, by Mary Magdalen.

And so will he appear — 'the disciples did not realise that it was Jesus' — at the miraculous catch of fishes, as Saint John tells us.

And more hidden still, through Love for men, is he in the Host.

844 Raise magnificent buildings? Build sumptuous palaces? Let others raise them! Let others build them!...

Souls! Let us give life to souls, for those buildings and palaces!

What fine houses are being prepared for us!

845 How you made me laugh and how you made me think with that trite remark of yours: I'm all for first things first.

846 Agreed: you do better work with that friendly chat or that heart-to-heart conversation than making speeches — 'spectacular' speeches — in public before thousands of people.

Nevertheless, when speeches have to be made, make them.

847 The isolated efforts of each one of you have little effect. Let the charity of Christ unite you, and you will be amazed at their effectiveness.

848 You want to be a martyr. I will place a martyrdom within your reach: to be an apostle and not to call yourself an apostle, to be a missionary — with a mission — and not to call yourself a missionary, to be a man of God and to seem a man of the world: to pass unnoticed!

849 Laugh at him! Tell him he is behind the times: it's incredible that some people still want to regard the stage-coach as a good means of transport. This is how I feel about those who persist in unearthing musty and periwigged 'Voltaireisms' or discredited liberalism of the nineteenth century.

850 What conversations! What vulgarity and what dirt! And you have to associate with them, in the office, in the university, in the operating theatre..., in the world.

Ask them if they wouldn't mind stopping, and they laugh at you. Look annoyed, and they get worse. Leave them, and they continue.

This is the solution: first pray for them, and offer up some sacrifice; then face them like a man and make use of the 'strong language apostolate.' The next time we meet I'll tell you — in a whisper — a few useful words.

851 Let us make use of the 'providential imprudences' of youth.

SPIRITUAL CHILDHOOD

852 Try to know the 'way of spiritual childhood' without forcing yourself to follow this path. Let the holy Spirit work in you.

853 Way of childhood. Abandonment. Spiritual infancy. All this is not utter nonsense, but a sturdy and solid Christian life.

854 In the spiritual life of childhood the things 'children' say or do are never puerile or childish.

855 Spiritual childhood is not spiritual foolishness or flabbiness; it is a sane and forceful way which, due to its difficult easiness, the soul must begin and continue, led by the hand of God.

856 Spiritual childhood demands submission of the mind, more difficult than submission of the will. In order to subject our mind we need not only God's grace, but also the continual exercise of our will, which says 'no' again and again, just as it says 'no' to the flesh. And so we get the paradox that whoever wants to follow this 'little' way in order to become a child, needs to add strength and virility to his will.

857 Be a little child; the greatest daring is always that of children Who cries for... the moon? Who is blind to dangers in getting what he wants?

To such a child add much grace from God, the desire to do his Will, great love for Jesus, all the human knowledge he is capable of acquiring, and you will have a likeness of the apostles of today such as God undoubtedly wants them.

858 Be a child. Even more so. But don't stop at the show-off stage: have you ever seen anything sillier than the little fellow playing the man, or a grown man acting like a baby?

A child, with God: and just because of that, very much a man in everything else. Ah! and drop those lap-dog manners.

859 Sometimes we feel inclined to act as little children. What we do then has a wonderful value in God's eyes and, so long as we don't let routine creep in, our 'little' actions will indeed be fruitful with the unfailing fruitfulness of Love.

860 Before God, who is eternal, you are much more a child than, before you, the tiniest toddler.

And besides being a child, you are a child of God. Don't forget it.

861 Child, enkindle in your heart an ardent desire to make up for the excesses of your grown-up life.

862 Silly child, the day you hide some part of your soul from your Director, you will cease to be a child, for you will have lost your simplicity.

863 Child, when you really are one, you will be all-powerful.

864 Being children you will have no cares: children quickly forget what troubles them and return to their games. With abandonment, therefore, you will not have to worry, since you will rest in the Father.

865 Child, each day offer him... even your frailties.

866 Good child: offer him the work of those labourers who do not know him; offer him the natural joy of those poor little ones who are brought up in pagan schools.

867 Children have nothing of their own, everything belongs to their father..., and your Father always knows best how to manage your affairs.

868 Be small, very small. No more than two years old, three at the most. For older children are little rascals who already want to deceive their parents with bare-faced lies.

It is because they have the inclination to sin — fomes peccati — but they lack the experience of evil, which will teach them the science of sinning and show them how to lend an appearance of truth to the falseness of their deceits.

They have lost their simplicity, and without simplicity it is impossible to be a child before God.

869 But child, why do you insist on walking on stilts?

870 Don't try to be grown-up. A child, always a child, even when you are dying of old age. When a child stumbles and falls, nobody is surprised; his father promptly lifts him up.

When the person who stumbles and falls is older, the immediate reaction is one of laughter. Sometimes this first impulse passes and the laughter gives way to pity. But older people have to get up by themselves.

Your sad experience of each day is full of stumbles and falls. What would become of you if you were not continually more of a child?

Don't want to be grown-up. Be a child; and when you stumble, may you be lifted by the hand of your Father God.

871 Child, abandonment demands docility.

872 Don't forget that our Lord has a special love for little children and those who become as little children.

873 Paradoxes of a little soul. When Jesus sends you what people call 'good luck,' feel sorrow in your heart at the thought of his goodness and your wickedness. When Jesus sends you what people call 'bad luck,' be glad in your heart, for he always gives you what is best and then is the beautiful moment to love the Cross.

874 Daring child, cry out: What love was Teresa's! What zeal was Xavier's! What a wonderful man was Saint Paul! Ah, Jesus, well I... I love you more than Paul, Xavier and Teresa!

LIFE OF CHILDHOOD

875 Don't forget, silly child, that Love has made you all-powerful.

876 Child, don't lose your loving habit of 'storming' Tabernacles.

877 When I call you 'good child' don't think I imagine you timid or bashful. If you are not manly and normal, instead of being an apostle you will be a caricature that causes laughter.

878 Good child, say to Jesus many times each day: I love you, I love you, I love you...

879 When you feel oppressed by your weaknesses don't let yourself be sad. Glory in your infirmities, like Saint Paul, for children need not fear being laughed at when they imitate great men.

880 Don't let your imperfections and defects, nor even your more serious falls, separate you from God. A weak child, if he is wise, tries to keep near his Father.

881 Don't worry if you become annoyed when you do those little things he asks of you. Eventually you will smile...

Have you never seen how reluctantly a little child gives his father — who is only teasing him — the sweet which he has in his hand? But he gives it: love has conquered.

882 When you want to do things well, really well, it's then you do them worst. Humble yourself before Jesus, saying to him: don't you see how I do everything badly? Well, if you don't help me very much, I'll do it all even worse I

Take pity on your child: you see, I want to write a big page each day in the book of my life. But, I'm so clumsy!; and if the Master doesn't guide my hand, instead of graceful strokes my pen leaves behind blots and scrawls that can't be shown to anyone.

From now on, Jesus, we'll always do the writing together.

883 My clumsiness, Beloved, is so great, so very great that even when I wish to caress I cause pain. Refine the manners of my soul: within the sturdy manliness of this life of childhood, give me — I want you to give me — the gentleness and affection that children show towards their parents in their intimate outpourings of love.

884 You are full of weaknesses. Each day you see them more clearly. But don't let them frighten you. He well knows you can't yield more fruit.

Your involuntary falls — a child's falls — show your Father God that he must take more care and your Mother Mary that she must never let you go from her loving hand. Each day as our Lord picks you up from the ground, take advantage of it, embrace him with all your strength and lay your wearied head on his open breast so that you will be carried away by the beating of his most lovable Heart.

885 One pinprick. And another. And another. Suffer them! Don't you see you are so small that in your life — in your way — you can only offer him those little crosses?

Besides, just think: one pinprick and another, one cross on top of another,... what a huge pile!

When all is said and done, child, you have learned to do one really big thing: to Love.

886 When a child-like soul tells our Lord of its desires to be forgiven, it can be sure that it will soon see those desires fulfilled: Jesus will free the soul from the filthy tail that it drags in punishment for its past miseries. He will remove the deadweight which still remains from all its impurities and drags it down to the ground. He will free the child from all the earthly ballast in its heart so that it can rise up towards God's Majesty, and be enveloped in the living flame of his Love.

887 The discouragement produced by your repeated lack of generosity, your lapses, your falls — which perhaps are only apparent — often makes you feel as if you had broken something of exceptional value (your sanctification).

Don't be worried: apply to your supernatural life the wise way simple children have of solving such a conflict.

They have broken — nearly always because of its fragility — something their father values greatly. They are sorry, perhaps they shed tears, but... they go to seek consolation from the owner of what has been damaged by their awkwardness, and their father forgets the value — great though it may be — of the broken object and, filled with tenderness, he not only pardons, but consoles and encourages the little one. Learn.

888 Let your prayer be manly. To be a child does not mean to be effeminate.

889 For the person who loves Jesus, prayer, even prayer without consolation, is the sweetness that puts an end to all sorrow: he goes to pray, eagerly, like a child going to the sugar bowl after a bitter dose of medicine.

890 You are distracted in prayer. Try to avoid distractions, but don't worry if in spite of everything your mind still wanders.

Don't you see how in ordinary life even the most considerate children play with the things about them, and often pay no attention to what their father is saying? This does not imply a lack of love or respect: it is the weakness and littleness peculiar to a child.

Then, look: you are a child before God.

891 When you pray keep the distracting ideas moving, just as if you were a policeman on traffic duty: that is why you have the energetic will-power your life of childhood has given you. Now and then keep a thought for a while and commend to God those who caused the inopportune reflection.

And then, off again, and so on until the time is up. When you pray like this, though you may feel you are wasting time, rejoice and believe that you have succeeded in pleasing Jesus.

892 What a wonderful thing it is to be a child! When a man asks a favour, his request must be backed by a list of his qualifications.

When it is a child who asks — since children haven't any qualifications — it's enough for him to say: I'm a son of So-and-so.

Ah, Lord — say it to him with all your heart! — I am a son of God!

893 Perseverance. A child who knocks at a door, knocks once and again, and many times..., and loud and long; shamelessly! And the anger of whoever comes to open is dispelled by the simplicity of the disturbing little creature. So you with God.

894 Have you seen the gratitude of little children? Imitate them, saying to Jesus, when things are favourable and when they are adverse: 'How good you are! How good!...'

These words, if you mean them, are the way of childhood, and will bring you peace, with due measure of tears and laughter, and without measure of Love.

895 Work tires you out and leaves you unable to pray. You are always in the presence of your Father. If you can't speak to him, look at him every now and then like a little child... and he'll smile at you.

896 You think there is something wrong because, in your thanksgiving after Communion, the first thing you find yourself doing, without being able to help it, is asking: Jesus, give me this: Jesus, that soul: Jesus, that undertaking...

Don't worry, and don't try to force yourself: when the father is good and the child simple and daring, don't you see how the little lad puts his hand into his father's pocket, looking for sweets, before greeting him with a kiss? Well then...

897 Our will, strengthened by grace, is all-powerful before God. If, for instance, as we travel in a bus, we are struck by the thought of so many offences against God and say to Jesus, backing our words with our will 'My God, i wish I could make an act of love and reparation for every turn of the wheels carrying me,' in that very instant, in the eyes of Jesus, we really have loved him and atoned just as we desired.

Such 'nonsense' is not pushing spiritual childhood too far: it is the eternal dialogue between the innocent child and the father doting on his son:

'Tell me, how much do you love me?..' And the little lad pipes out: 'A million million times!'

898 If you live the 'life of childhood,' you should have the sweet tooth of a child, a 'spiritual sweet tooth!' Like those 'of your age,' think of the good things your Mother keeps.

And do so many times a day. It just takes a moment... Mary... Jesus... the Tabernacle... Communion... Love... suffering... the blessed souls in purgatory... those who are fighting: the Pope, the priests... the faithful... your soul... the souls of your people... the guardian Angels... sinners...

899 That little mortification costs you so much! You're in two minds. It's as if some one were saying: why must you be so faithful to your plan of life, to the clock? Listen: have you noticed how easily little children are taken in? They don't want to swallow their medicine, but 'Come,' they are told, 'this one spoonful for Daddy, and this one for Granny.' And so on, until they have finished the lot.

Do the same; fifteen minutes more mortification for the souls in purgatory; five more for your parents; another five for your brothers in the apostolate... Until, in the end, the allotted time is up.

Your mortification done in this way... is worth so much!

900 You are not alone. Suffer that tribulation joyfully. It's true, poor child, that you don't feel your Mother's hand in yours. But... have you never seen the mothers of this earth, with arms outstretched, following their little ones when, without anyone's help, they venture to take their first shaky steps? You are not alone: Mary is close beside you.

901 Jesus, I could never repay you, even if I died of Love, for the grace you have spent in me in making me little.

CALLING

902 Why don't you give yourself to God once and for all... really..., now?

903 If you see your way clearly, follow it. Why don't you shake off the cowardice that holds you back?

904 'Proclaim the Good News. .. I shall be with you...' It is Jesus who has said this... and he has said it to you.

905 Patriotic fervour — which is praiseworthy — leads many men to turn their lives into a 'service,' a 'crusade.' Do not forget that Christ too has his 'crusaders' and people chosen for his service.

906 Et regni ejus non erit finis. His kingdom will have no end.

Doesn't it fill you with joy to work for such a kingdom?

907 'Did you not know that I must be busy with my Father's affairs?'

The reply of Jesus the youth. And a reply made to a mother like his Mother, who had been seeking him for three days, believing him to be lost. A reply which has as complement those words of Christ that Saint Matthew records: 'Any who prefers father or mother to me is not worthy of me.'

908 It is childish of you to judge the value of apostolic undertakings by what you can see of them. With that standard you would have to prefer a ton of coal to a handful of diamonds.

909 Now that you have given yourself to him, ask him for a new life, a 'seal,' to guarantee that your mission as a man of God is authentic.

910 That — your ideal, your vocation — is madness. And the others — your friends, your brothers — are crazy. Have you never heard that cry deep down inside?

Answer, firmly, that you thank God for the honour of being one of those 'lunatics.'

911 You write: 'Our longing to see it all going ahead and spreading seems about to turn into impatience. When will things get under way, when will the breakthrough come,... when will we see the world ours?'

And you add: 'It won't be a useless longing if we seek an outlet for it in "coercing", in "pestering" God: then we will have made excellent use of our time.'

912 I can understand how you are suffering when, in the midst of that enforced inactivity, you consider the work still to be done. Your heart would break the bounds of the universe, and it has to adapt itself to... an insignificant routine job.

But, tell me, for when do we keep our fiat, 'Thy will be done'?...

913 Don't doubt it: your vocation is the greatest grace God could have given you. Thank him for it.

914 How pitiful are those crowds — high and low and middle class — who live without ideals! They give the impression that they do not know they have souls: they are a drove, a flock, a herd.

Jesus, with the help of your merciful Love, we will turn the drove into a levy, the flock into an army, and from the herd we will draw, purified, those who no longer wish to be unclean.

915 God's works are not a lever, nor a stepping stone.

916 Lord, make us crazy, with that infectious craziness that will draw many to your apostolate.

917 'Did our hearts not burn within us as he talked to us on the road?'

If you are an apostle, these words of the disciples of Emmaus should rise spontaneously to the lips of your professional companions when they meet you along the ways of their lives.

918 Go to apostolate to give everything, and not to seek any earthly reward.

919 By calling you to be an apostle, our Lord has reminded you, so that you will never forget it, that you are a 'son of God.'

920 Each one of you must try to be an apostle of apostles.

921 You are salt, apostolic soul. 'Salt is a useful thing,' we read in the holy Gospel; but if the salt loses its taste, it is good for nothing, neither for the land nor for the manure heap; it is thrown out as useless.

You are salt, apostolic soul. But if you lose your taste...

922 My son, if you love your apostolate, be certain that you love God.

923 The day you really 'get the feel' of your apostolate, that apostolate will serve you as a shield with which to resist all the attacks of your enemies of this earth and of hell.

924 Pray always for perseverance for yourself and your companions in the apostolate. Our adversary, the devil, knows only too well that you are his great enemies,... and when he sees a fall in your ranks how pleased he is!

925 Just as observant religious are eager to know how the first of their order or congregation lived, so as to have their model to follow you too, christian gentleman, should also seek to know and imitate the lives of the disciples of Jesus, who knew Peter and Paul and John, and all but witnessed the Death and Resurrection of the Master.

926 You ask me, and I answer: your perfection consists in living perfectly in the place, occupation and position that God, through those in authority, has assigned to you.

927 Pray for each other. One is wavering?... And another?...

Keep on praying, without losing your peace. Some are going? Some are being lost?... God has you all numbered from eternity!

928 You are right. 'The peak' — you told me — 'dominates the country for miles around, and yet there is not a single plain to be seen: just one mountain after another. At times the landscape seems to level out, but then the mist rises and reveals another range that had been hidden.'

So it is, so it must be with the horizon of your apostolate: the world has to be crossed. But there are no ways made for you. You yourselves will make them through the mountains with the impact of your feet.

THE APOSTLE

929 The Cross on your breast?... Very good. But the Cross on your shoulders, the Cross in your flesh, the Cross in your mind. Only then will you live for Christ, with Christ and in Christ; only then will you be an apostle.

930 Apostolic soul: first of all, yourself. Our Lord has said, through Saint Matthew: 'When the day of Judgment comes, many will say to me: "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, work many miracles in your name?" Then I shall tell them to their faces: "I have never known you; away from me, you evil men".'

God forbid — says Saint Paul — that I, who have preached to others should myself be rejected.

931 The military mind of Saint Ignatius has left us a picture of the devil calling up innumerable demons and scattering them through nations, provinces, towns and villages, after a 'sermon' in which he exhorts them to fasten their chains and fetters on the world, leaving not a single person unbound...

You have told me that you want to be a leader; and what good is a leader in chains?

932 Look: the apostles, for all their evident and undeniable defects, were sincere, simple... transparent.

You too have evident and undeniable defects. May you not lack simplicity.

933 There is a story of a soul who, on saying to our Lord in prayer, 'Jesus, I love you,' heard this reply from heaven: 'Love means deeds, not sweet words.'

Think if you also could deserve this gentle reproach.

934 Apostolic zeal is a divine craziness I want you to have. Its symptoms are: hunger to know the Master; constant concern for souls; perseverance that nothing can shake.

935 Don't rest on your laurels. If, humanly speaking, that attitude is neither comfortable nor becoming, what will it be when — as now — the laurels are not really yours, but God's?

936 You have come to the apostolate to submit, to annihilate yourself: not to impose your own personal viewpoints.

937 Never be men or women of long action and short prayer.

938 Try to live in such a way that you can voluntarily deprive yourself of the comfort and ease you wouldn't like to see in the life of another man of God.

Remember that you are the grain of wheat the Gospel speaks of. If you don't bury yourself and die, there will be no harvest.

939 Be men and women of the world, but don't be worldly men and women.

940 Don't forget that unity is a sign of life: to disunite means putrefaction — a clear sign of being a corpse.

941 Obedience, the sure way. Unreserved obedience to whoever is in charge, the way of sanctity. Obedience in your apostolate, the only way: for, in a work of God, the spirit must be to obey or to leave.

942 Bear in mind, son, that you are not just a soul who has joined other souls in order to do a good thing.

That is a lot, but it's still little. You are the Apostle who is carrying out an imperative command from Christ.

943 Be careful that contact with you doesn't make people feel like that person who once exclaimed (and not without reason): 'I'm sick of these righteous types!...'

944 You must inspire others with love of God and zeal for souls, so that they in turn will set on fire many more who are on a third plane and each of these latter spread the flame to their professional companions.

What a lot of spiritual calories you need! And what a tremendous responsibility if you let yourself grow cold! And — I don't even want to think of it — what a terrible crime if you were to give bad example!

945 It shows a bad disposition if you listen to God's word with a critical spirit.

946 If you want to give yourself to God in the world, rather than being scholarly (women needn't be scholars: it's enough for them to be prudent) you must be spiritual, closely united to our Lord by prayer: you must wear an invisible cloak that will cover each and every one of your senses and faculties: praying, praying, praying; atoning, atoning, atoning.

947 You were amazed to hear me approve of the lack of 'uniformity' in that apostolate in which you work. And I told you:

Unity and variety. You have to be different from one another, as the saints in heaven are different, each having his own personal and special characteristics. But also as alike one another as the saints, who would not be saints if each of them had not identified himself with Christ.

948 You, favourite son of God, should live and feel our fraternal spirit, but without familiarities.

949 To aspire to positions in any apostolic undertaking is a useless thing in this life, and a danger for the next.

If it's what God wants, you will be called. And then you ought to accept. But don't forget that wherever you are you can and you must become a saint, for that is why you are there.

950 If you are working for Christ and imagine that a position of responsibility is anything but a burden, what disillusionment awaits you!

951 To be in charge of an apostolic undertaking demands readiness to suffer everything, from everybody, with infinite charity.

952 In apostolic work there can be no excuse for disobedience, nor for insincerity. Remember that simplicity is not imprudence, nor indiscretion.

953 You are under an obligation to pray and sacrifice yourself for the person and intentions of whoever is 'in charge' of your apostolic undertaking. If you are careless in fulfilling this duty, you make me think that you lack enthusiasm for your way.

954 Be particularly respectful to whoever is in charge, whenever he consults you and you have to contradict his opinions. And never contradict him in the presence of those who are subject to him, even if he is in the wrong.

955 In your apostolic undertaking don't fear the enemies 'outside,' however great their power. This is the enemy most to be feared: your lack of 'filiation' and your lack of 'fraternal' spirit.

956 I well understand your being amused by the slights you receive — even though they come from influential enemies — as long as you can feel united to your God and to your brothers in the apostolate. Slighted ? So what!

957 I frequently compare our apostolic work to an engine: gears, pistons, valves, bolts.

Well, charity — your charity — is the lubricant.

958 Get rid of that 'self-satisfied air' which isolates your soul from the souls that approach you. Listen to them. And speak with simplicity; only thus will your work as an apostle grow in extent and fruitfulness.

959 Contempt and persecution are blessed signs of divine predilection, but there is no proof and sign of predilection more beautiful than this: to pass unnoticed.

THE APOSTOLATE

960 Just as the clamour of the ocean is made up of the noise of each one of its waves, so the sanctity of your apostolate is made up of the personal virtues of each one of you.

961 You have got to be a 'man of God,' a man of interior life, a man of prayer and sacrifice. Your apostolate must be the overflow of your life 'within.'

962 Unity. Unity and subjection. What good to me are the loose parts of a clock — even though they are finely- wrought — if they cannot tell me the time?

963 May I never see 'cliques' developing in your work. It would make a mockery of the apostolate: for if, in the end, the 'clique' got control of a universal undertaking, how quickly that universal undertaking would be reduced to a clique itself!

964 'There are so many ways,' you told me dejectedly. There need to be many; so that each soul can find its own in that wonderful variety.

Bewildered? Make your choice once and for all: and the bewilderment will turn into certainty.

965 Rejoice, when you see others working in good apostolic activities. And ask God to grant them abundant grace and that they may respond to that grace.

Then, you, on your way: convince yourself that it's the only way for you.

966 You show bad spirit if it hurts you to see others work for Christ without regard for what you are doing. Remember this passage in Saint Mark: 'Master, we saw a man who is not one of us casting out devils in your name; and because he was not one of us we tried to stop him.' But Jesus said, 'You must not stop him: no one who works a miracle in my name is likely to speak evil of me. Anyone who is not against us is for us.'

967 All that exterior activity is a waste of time, if you lack Love. It's like sewing with a needle and no thread.

What a pity if in the end you had carried out 'your' apostolate and not 'his' apostolate!

968 Joyfully I bless you, son, for that faith in your mission as an apostle which inspired you to write: 'There's no doubt about it: the future is certain, perhaps in spite of us. But it's essential that we should be one with the Head — 'ut omnes unum sint, that all be one!' — through prayer and sacrifice.

969 Those who, leaving action for others, pray and suffer, will not be noticed here; but what a radiant crown will be theirs, in the kingdom of Life! Blessed be the 'apostolate of suffering'!

970 It is true that I have called your discreet apostolate a 'silent and effective mission.' And I won't go back on what I said.

971 I think so highly of your devotion to the early Christians that I will do all I can to encourage it, so that you — like them — will put more enthusiasm each day into that effective apostolate of discretion and friendship.

972 When you carry out your 'apostolate of discretion and friendship,' do not tell me you don't know what to say. For, with the psalmist, I will remind you: Dominus dabit verbum evangelizantibus virtute multa — the Lord places on his apostles' lips words filled with efficacy.

973 Those well-timed words, whispered into the ear of your wavering friend; the helpful conversation that you managed to start at the right moment; the ready professional advice that improves his university work; the discreet indiscretion by which you open up unexpected horizons for his zeal. This all forms part of the 'apostolate of friendship.'

974 'The dinner-table apostolate:' it is the old hospitality of the Patriarchs, together with the fraternal warmth of Bethany. When we practise it, we seem to glimpse Jesus there, presiding, as in the house of Lazarus.

975 It is urgent that we strive to rechristianise popular celebrations and customs. It is urgent that public amusements should no longer be left to face the dilemma of being either overpious or pagan.

Ask God to provide labourers for this much-needed work which could be called the 'entertainment apostolate.'

976 You praised the 'letter-writing apostolate' very highly when you wrote: 'I just can't manage to fill the pages with stuff likely to help the friend I'm writing to. When I begin, I tell my guardian Angel that all I want is that my letter may do some good. And even if I only write nonsense, no one can deprive me — or my friend — of these moments spent praying for what I know he needs most.'

977 'Before their letter arrived I had been feeling in low spirits — for no particular reason — and I was immensely cheered as I read it and saw what the others are doing.' And another: 'Your letters and the news of my brothers help me like a happy dream in the midst of the reality around us!'. And another: 'It's so wonderful to receive those letters and to realize that I'm a friend of such friends!' And another, and a thousand others: 'I had a letter from "X" and was ashamed to think of my lack of spirit compared with his.'

Now don't you agree that the 'letter-writing apostolate' is effective?

978 'Follow me, and I will make you into fishers of men.' Not without reason does our Lord use these words: men — like fish — have to be caught by the head.

What evangelical depth there is in the 'intellectual apostolate'!

979 It's human nature to have little respect for what costs but little. That is why I recommend to you the 'apostolate of not giving.'

Never fail to claim what is fairly and justly due to you from the practice of your profession, since your profession is the instrument of your apostolate.

980 'Have we not the right to take a christian woman round with us, like all the other apostles do and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?'

Words of Saint Paul in his first Epistle to the Corinthians. We cannot underestimate the cooperation of women in the apostolate.

981 'Now after this' — we read in the eighth chapter of Saint Luke — 'he made his way through towns and villages preaching, and proclaiming the Good News of the kingdom of God. With him went the Twelve, as well as certain women who had been cured of evil spirits and ailments: Mary surnamed the Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, Joanna the wife of Herod's steward Chusa, Susanna, and several others who provided for them out of their own resources.'

I copy. And I pray God that if some woman reads this, she may be filled with a holy and fruitful envy.

982 Woman is stronger than man, and more faithful, in the hour of suffering: Mary of Magdala and Mary Cleophas and Salome!

With a group of valiant women like these, closely united to our Lady of Sorrows, what work for souls could be done in the world!

PERSEVERANCE

983 To begin is easy; to persevere is sanctity. Let your perseverance not be a blind consequence of the first impulse, the work of inertia: let it be a reflective perseverance.

984 Say to him: ecce ego quia vocasti me! Here I am, for you have called me!

985 You went astray, and did not come back because you were ashamed to. It would be more logical if you were ashamed not to return.

986 'The truth is that there is no need to be a hero,' you confess, 'to know how to isolate oneself as far as circumstances demand — without going to ridiculous extremes — and to persevere.' And you add: 'So long as I carry out the norms you gave me, the snares and pitfalls of my surroundings don't worry me: to fear such trifles — that is what I would be afraid of.'

Wonderful!

987 Foster and preserve that noblest of ideals just born within you. Consider how many flowers blossom in the spring and how few are those that grow into fruit.

988 Discouragement is an enemy of your perseverance. If you don't fight against discouragement you will become pessimistic first, and lukewarm afterwards. Be an optimist.

989 Come now I After so much of 'the Cross, Lord, the Cross!' it is obvious that it is a cross to your own taste that you wanted.

990 Constancy, that nothing can shake. That is what you need. Ask it of God and do what you can to obtain it: for it is a great safeguard against your ever turning from the fruitful way you have chosen.

991 You cannot 'rise.' It's not surprising: that fall!

Persevere and you will 'rise.' Remember what a spiritual writer has said: your poor soul is like a bird whose wings are caked with mud.

Suns of heaven are needed and personal efforts, small and constant, to shake off those inclinations, those vain fancies, that depression: that mud clinging to your wings.

And you will see yourself free. If you persevere, you will 'rise.'

992 Give thanks to God who helped you, and rejoice in your victory. What deep joy you feel in your soul, after responding to grace!

993 You reason... well, coldly; one motive after another for abandoning the task! And some of them are, it would seem, conclusive.

No doubt you have reasons. But you are not right.

994 'My enthusiasm is gone,' you write. You have to work not out of enthusiasm but out of Love: conscious of duty, which means self-denial.

995 Unshakable: that is what you must be. If your perseverance is disturbed by other people's weaknesses or by your own, I cannot but form a poor opinion of your ideal.

Make up your mind once and for all.

996 You have a poor idea of your way, if lack of enthusiasm makes you think you have lost it. Can't you see that it is the moment of trial? That is why you have been deprived of sensible consolations.

997 Absence, isolation: trials for your perseverance. Holy Mass, prayer, sacraments, sacrifices, Communion of Saints: weapons to conquer in the trial.

998 Oh blessed perseverance of the donkey that turns the waterwheel! Always the same pace. Always the same circles. One day after another: everyday the same.

Without that, there would be no ripeness in the fruit, nor blossom in the orchard, nor scent of flowers in the garden.

Carry this thought to your interior life.

999 And what is the secret of perseverance? Love. Fall in Love, and you will not leave him.

Furrow

By Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer

GENEROSITY

HUMAN RESPECT

CHEERFULNESS

DARING

THE STRUGGLE

FISHERS OF MEN

SUFFERING

HUMILITY

CITIZENSHIP

SINCERITY

LOYALTY

DISCIPLINE

PERSONALITY

PRAYER

WORK

FRIVOLITY

NATURALNESS

TRUTHFULNESS

AMBITION

HYPOCRISY

INTERIOR LIFE

PRIDE

FRIENDSHIP

THE WILL

THE HEART

PURITY

PEACE

BEYOND DEATH

THE TONGUE

SPREADING THE FAITH

RESPONSIBILITY

PENANCE

My reader and friend, let me help your soul contemplate the virtues of man, for grace works upon nature. But do not forget that these considerations of mine, though they may seem very human to you, must be priestly as well, since I have written them for you and for myself — and I have put them into practice, too — before God. I ask our Lord that these pages may be of use to us. May we profit by them and be moved by them so that in our lives our deeds may leave behind a deep and fertile furrow.

GENEROSITY

1 There are many Christians who are persuaded that the Redemption will be completed in all environments of the world, and that there have to be some souls — they do not know which ones — who will contribute to carrying it out with Christ. But they see this in terms of centuries, many centuries. It would be an eternity, if it were to take place at the rate of their self-giving.

That was the way you thought, until they came to "wake you up."

2 Self-giving is the first step along the road of sacrifice, joy, love, union with God. And thus, a whole life is filled with a holy madness which makes us encounter happiness where human logic would only see denial, suffering, pain.

3 "Pray," you said, "that I may be generous, that I may progress, and be able to change in such a way that one day I may be useful in something."

Good. But what means are you using so that these resolutions can be effective?

4 You often ask yourself why souls who have had the great fortune of knowing the true Jesus ever since their childhood, hesitate so much in responding with the best they have: their life, their family, their ideals.

Look: you are bound to show yourself very grateful to the Lord, precisely because you have received it "all" in one go. Just as it would strike a blind man if he suddenly recovered his sight, while it does not even occur to others to give thanks because they see.

But that is not enough. You have to help those around you, daily, to behave with gratitude for their being sons of God. If you don't, don't tell me you are grateful.

5 Meditate upon this slowly: I am asked for very little compared to how much I am being given.

6 As you never seem to manage to set off, consider what a brother of yours wrote to me: "It takes an effort, but once you have 'made up your mind', how you gasp with happiness when you find yourself firmly on your way!"

7 "These days," you were saying, "have been the happiest in my life." And I answered you without hesitation: that is because you "have lived" with a little more self-giving than usual.

8 The Lord's calling — vocation — always presents itself like this: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."

Yes, a vocation demands self-denial, sacrifice. But how pleasant that sacrifice turns out to be — "gaudium cum pace," joy and peace — if that self-giving is complete.

9 When they talked to him about committing himself personally, his reaction was to reason in the following manner: "If I did, I could do that ..., I would have to do this other ... "

The answer he got was: "Here, we don't bargain with the Lord. The law of God, the invitation of the Lord, is something you either take or leave, just as it is. You need to make up your mind: go forward, fully decided and without holding back; otherwise, go away. "Qui non est mecum ..." — whoever is not with Me, is against Me."

10 There is only one step between lack of generosity and lukewarmness.

11 I am copying this example of cowardice from a letter so that you will not imitate it: "I am certainly very grateful to you for keeping me in mind, because I need many prayers. But I would also be grateful if, when you ask Our Lord to make me an "apostle," you would not insist on asking him to make me surrender my freedom."

12 That acquaintance of yours, very intelligent, well off, a good man, used to say: "You have to do what the law says, but within limits, doing what is strictly necessary, without going too far."

And he would add: "You shouldn't sin, of course, but there is no need to give up everything."

How sad it is to see men who are mean, calculating, incapable of making any sacrifice, of giving themselves wholeheartedly to a noble ideal.

13 More should be asked of you, because you can give more and you should give more. Think about it.

14 "It's very difficult," you exclaim, disheartened.

Listen, if you make an effort, with the grace of God that is enough. Put your own interests to one side, you will serve others for God, and you will come to the aid of the Church in the field where the battles are being fought today: in the street, in the factory, in the workshop, in the university, in the office, in your own surroundings, amongst your family and friends.

15 You wrote to me saying: "In the end, it's the same as ever, a great lack of generosity. What a pity, what a shame, to find the way and then allow a few — inevitable — clouds of dust to obscure the goal!"

Don't be annoyed if I tell you that you are the only one to blame: struggle courageously against yourself. The means you have are more than enough.

16 If your selfishness leads you away from the ordinary desire for the holy and healthy well-being of mankind, if you count the cost or if you are not moved by the wretched material or moral condition of your neighbour, you force me to reproach you strongly, so that you can do something about it. If you do not feel a holy fraternity with your fellow men, and you live on the margin of the great Christian family, you are just a poor foundling.

17 The summit? For a soul which has surrendered itself, everything becomes a summit to conquer. Every day it discovers new goals, because it does not know how, or want, to limit the love of God.

18 The more generous you are for God, the happier you will be.

19 One often feels tempted to reserve a bit of time for oneself alone.

Learn once and for all to remedy such meanness, by putting things right immediately.

20 You were one of those "all or nothing" types. And as you could do nothing ... , what a disgrace!

Begin to fight with humility, to light up that poor self-giving of yours, which is so mean, until it becomes "all" effective.

21 Those of us who have dedicated ourselves to God, have lost nothing.

22 I would like to speak into the ear of so many men and women: giving up one's children to the service of God is not a sacrifice: it is an honour and a joy.

23 A time of hard trial arrived and he came to you grief-stricken.

Do you remember? For him — the friend who used to give you his "prudent" advice — your behaviour was only a utopia, the result of deformed ideas, manipulation of wills, and ... other "cleverness" of that type.

"This self-giving to the Lord," he would assert, "is an abnormal excitement of the religious sentiment." And with his faulty reasoning, he thought that between your family and you a stranger had entered: Christ.

Now he has understood what you told him so often: Christ never separates souls.

24 Here is an urgent task: to stir up the consciences of believers and non-believers, to gather together men of good will, who are willing to help and to provide the material instruments which are needed for the work with souls.

25 He shows a great deal of enthusiasm and understanding. But when he realises that it refers to him, and that it is he who has to contribute in earnest, he slinks away like a coward.

It reminds me of those who, during moments of grave danger, used to shout with false courage: War! War! But they did not want to give any money or to enrol to defend their country.

26 It is sad to see what some people understand by almsgiving: a few pennies or some old clothes. They seem not to have read the Gospel.

Don't be over-cautious: help people to acquire sufficient faith and fortitude to be ready to deny themselves generously, in this life, what they need.

To those who lag behind, explain that it is neither very noble nor very agreeable, even from an earthly point of view, to wait for the last moment, when they will be obliged to take nothing with them.

27 "Whoever lends anything, never gets it back; if he does get it back, it will never be the full amount; and if so, it won't be exactly right; but if it is exactly right, he'll be an enemy for life."

Well then? ... Give, without counting the cost, and always for God. In this way you will live, even humanly speaking, closer to the rest of humanity, and you will make your contribution and the number of the ungrateful will be less.

28 I saw a blush on the face of that simple man; he was almost in tears. He had contributed generously to good works, giving honest money that he himself had earned, and then he heard that "good people" had called his actions dishonest.

With the candidness of a beginner in these battles of God, he murmured: "They see that I make a sacrifice ... and they still sacrifice me!"

I talked to him slowly: he kissed my crucifix, and his natural indignation was changed into peace and joy.

29 Don't you have that mad desire to give yourself more completely, more irrevocably?

30 How ridiculous is the attitude of us poor little human beings when we deny the Lord such trifles again and again! As time goes by, and we begin to see things in their true perspective, then shame and sorrow are born.

31 *Aure audietis, et non intelligetis: et videntes videbitis, et non perspicietis.* These are the clear words of the Holy Spirit: they hear with their own ears, and they do not understand; they see with their own eyes, but they do not perceive.

Why worry if some, although they see the apostolate and they know how great it is, still do not give themselves to it? Pray in peace, and persevere along your way. If they don't want to set out, there will be others!

32 Ever since you said Yes, time has broadened your horizons, giving them new and brighter colours and making them more beautiful every day. But you have to continue saying Yes.

33 The Blessed Virgin Mary, Teacher of unlimited self-giving. Do you remember? It was in praise of her that Jesus Christ said: "Whoever fulfils the Will of my Father, he — she — is my mother! ..."

Ask of this good Mother that her answer, with the generosity it shows, may grow stronger in your soul — with the strength of love and liberation. *Ecce ancilla Domini* — behold the handmaid of the Lord.

HUMAN RESPECT

34 When the defence of truth is at stake, how can one desire neither to displease God nor to clash with one's surroundings? These two things are opposed: it is either the one or the other! The sacrifice has to be a holocaust where everything is burned up, even the thought: "what will they say?," even what we call our reputation.

35 How clearly I see now that "holy shamelessness" is rooted, very deeply, in the Gospel. Fulfil the Will of God, mindful of Jesus falsely accused, Jesus spat upon and buffeted, Jesus brought before the shabby courts of men ... , Jesus silent! A resolution: bow your head when insulted, and persevere in the godly undertaking with which the merciful Love of Our Lord has wished to entrust us, even though you know that humiliations will no doubt follow.

36 It is terrible how much harm we can do if we allow ourselves to be carried away by the fear or the shame of being seen as Christians in ordinary life.

37 There are some people who, when they speak about God or the apostolate, seem to feel the need to apologise. Perhaps it is because they have not discovered the value of human virtues, but, on the other hand, have been greatly deformed spiritually, and are too cowardly.

38 It is no use trying to please everyone. There will always be people who disagree, who complain. The way popular wisdom sums it up is: "What is good for the sheep is bad for the wolves."

39 Don't behave like someone frightened by an enemy whose only strength is his aggressive voice.

40 You understand the work that is being carried out ..., you have nothing against it (!). But you are very careful not to take part in it, and even more careful to ensure that others do not see or suspect you are lending a hand.

You told me that you were afraid that people might think you are better than you are! Is it not rather that you are afraid God and men might ask you to be more consistent?

41 He seemed to be totally determined. But, when he took up his pen to break with his girl friend, his indecision and lack of courage got the better of him: it was all very human and understandable, people said. According to some, it seems human love is not among the things which one has to leave behind in order to follow Jesus Christ totally, when He asks you.

42 Some people make mistakes through weakness — on account of the fragile clay we are all made of — but retain the Church's doctrine in its integrity.

They are the ones who, with the grace of God, display heroic courage and humility in acknowledging their mistakes and defending the truth firmly.

43 Some call faith and trust in God being imprudent and rash.

44 It is madness to trust in God ... ! And is it not greater madness to trust in oneself, or in other men?

45 You wrote to tell me that you have at last gone to confession and that you experienced the humiliation of having to open the sewer — that is what you say — of your life to "a man."

When will you get rid of that feeling of vain self-esteem? You will then go to confession happy to show yourself as you are to "that man," who, being anointed, is another Christ — Christ himself — and gives you absolution, God's forgiveness.

46 May we have the courage always to act in public in accordance with our holy faith.

47 "We cannot be sectarian," they told me with an air of reasonableness, referring to the way the Church's doctrine remains firm.

Afterwards, when I let them see that whoever is in possession of the truth cannot be sectarian, they realised their mistake.

48 If you want to see how ridiculous it is to take fashion as the way to behave, just look at old portraits.

49 I am glad that you love processions, and all the external practices of our Holy Mother the Church, so as to render God the worship due to him ... , and that you really put yourself into them!

50 Ego palam locutus sum mundo. I have preached openly before the whole world, was the answer Jesus gave to Caiphaz when the time had come for him to give his Life for us.

And yet there are Christians who are afraid to show palam — openly — veneration for Our Lord.

51 When the apostles fled, and the enraged mob made themselves hoarse shouting angrily at Jesus, the Holy Virgin Mary followed close behind her Son through the streets of Jerusalem. She did not draw back when the crowd cried out, nor did she leave Our Redeemer alone when each person, anonymous in that crowd, was in his cowardice emboldened to ill-treat Christ.

Call upon her with all your strength: Virgo fidelis!, Virgin most faithful!, and ask her that those of us who call ourselves God's friends may truly be so at all times.

CHEERFULNESS

52 Nobody is happy on earth until he decides not to be. This is the way the path goes: suffering — in Christian terms — the Cross; God's Will, Love; happiness here and, afterwards, eternally.

53 Servite Domino in laetitia! — I will serve God cheerfully. With a cheerfulness that is a consequence of my Faith, of my Hope and of my Love — and that will last for ever. For, as the Apostle assures us, Dominus prope est! — the Lord follows me closely. I shall walk with Him, therefore, quite confidently, for the Lord is my Father, and with his help I shall fulfil his most lovable Will, even if I find it hard.

54 A piece of advice on which I have insisted repeatedly: be cheerful, always cheerful. It is for those to be sad who do not consider themselves to be sons of God.

55 I am trying to do everything to help my younger brothers find the way easy as you asked us. There are so many joys to be found in "having it tough."

56 Another man of faith wrote to me: "When you have to be on your own, you can notice clearly the help of your brothers. Now, when it comes to my mind that I have to put up with everything 'all alone', I often think that, if it weren't for that 'company we keep from afar' — the holy Communion of Saints — I would not be able to preserve this optimism which fills my heart."

57 Don't forget that sometimes one needs to have smiling faces around.

58 "You are all so cheerful, and one doesn't expect that," I heard someone comment.

Christ's enemies never tire of using the diabolical ploy of spreading the rumour that the people who give themselves to God are all wrapped up in themselves. And,

unfortunately, some of those who wish to be good, echo those words, with their sad virtues.

We give you thanks, Lord, because you have chosen to count on our cheerful, happy lives to erase that false caricature.

I also ask You that we may not forget it.

59 May no one read sadness or sorrow in your face, when you spread in the world around you the sweet smell of your sacrifice: the children of God should always be sowers of peace and joy.

60 The cheerfulness of a man of God, of a woman of God, has to overflow: it has to be calm, contagious, attractive ... ; in a few words, it has to be so supernatural, and natural, so infectious that it may bring others to follow Christian ways.

61 "Happy?" — The question made me think.

Words have not yet been invented to express all that one feels — in the heart and in the will — when one knows oneself to be a son of God.

62 Christmas time. You write: "Together with the holy expectation of Mary and Joseph, I also await the Child, impatiently. How happy I shall feel at Bethlehem! I have a feeling that I won't be able to contain this joy without bounds. Yes! but, with Him, I also want to be born anew."

I hope you really mean what you say!

63 A sincere resolution: to make the way lovable for others and easy, since life brings enough bitterness with it already.

64 What a wonderful thing to convert unbelievers, to gain souls! ...

Well, it is as pleasing, and even more pleasing to God, to avoid their being lost.

65 Once again you had gone back to your old follies! And afterwards, when you returned, you didn't feel very cheerful, because you lacked humility.

It seems as if you obstinately refuse to learn from the second part of the parable of the prodigal son, and you still feel attached to the wretched happiness of the pigswill. With your pride wounded by your weakness, you have not made up your mind to ask for pardon, and you have not realised that, if you humble yourself, the joyful welcome of your Father God awaits you, with a feast to mark your return and your new beginning.

66 It is true: we are worth nothing, we are nothing, we can do nothing, we have nothing. And, at the same time, in the midst of our daily struggle, obstacles and temptations are not lacking. But the joy of your brothers will banish all difficulties, as soon as you are back with them, because you will see them firmly relying on Him: Quia tu es Deus fortitudo mea — because you, Lord, are our strength.

67 The scene of the parable is being repeated: it is the same as with those people who were invited to the wedding feast. Some are afraid, others have their own concerns, many ... make up stories or give silly excuses.

They put up resistance. That is why they feel the way they do: fed up, all in a muddle, listless, bored, bitter. And yet how easy it is to accept the divine invitation at every moment, and live a happy life, full of joy!

68 It is all too easy to say: "I'm useless; nothing turns out right for me — for us." Apart from not being true, that pessimism masks a great deal of laziness. There are things you do well, and things you do badly. Fill yourself with joy and with hope on account of the former; and face up to the latter — without losing heart — in order to put things right; and they will work out.

69 "Father, following your advice, I laugh at my weaknesses — without forgetting that I can't give in — and then I feel much happier.

But when I am silly enough to become sad, it seems to me that I am losing the way."

70 You asked me if I had a cross to bear. And I answered, "Yes, we always have to bear the Cross." But it is a glorious Cross, a divine seal, the authentic guarantee of our being children of God. That is why, with the Cross, we always travel happily on our way.

71 You feel happier. But this time it is a fidgety sort of happiness, a bit impatient. With it comes the clear feeling that something is being wrested from you as a sacrifice.

Listen to me carefully: here on earth there is no perfect happiness. That is why, now, immediately, without complaining or feeling a victim, you should offer yourself as an oblation to God, with total and absolute self-surrender.

72 You are enjoying a few days of great happiness, and your soul seems to be filled with light and colour. And, funnily enough, the motives for your joy, are the same ones that at other times disheartened you!

It is always the same: it all depends on the point of view. *Laetetur cor quaerentium Dominum!* — when you seek the Lord, your heart always overflows with happiness.

73 There are men who have no faith, who are sad and hesitant because of the emptiness of their existence, and exposed like weathercocks to "changeable" circumstances. How different that is from our trusting life as Christians, which is cheerful, firm and solid, because we know and are absolutely convinced of our supernatural destiny!

74 You are not happy because you make everything revolve around yourself as if you were always the centre: you have a stomach-ache, or you are tired, or they have said this or that ...

Have you ever tried thinking about Him, and through Him, about others?

75 The Apostle calls a Christian, miles — a soldier.

Thus it is that in this holy and Christian war of love and peace for the happiness of all souls, there are, in God's ranks, tired, hungry soldiers, covered in wounds ... but happy. For they bear in their hearts the sure light of victory.

76 "I am sending you, Father, the resolution always to smile: with a heart that is happy even if it is wounded."

I think it is a splendid resolution. I pray that you may keep it.

77 Sometimes you feel that you are beginning to lose heart and that everything is getting on top of you. This kills your good desires, and you can hardly manage to overcome this feeling even by making acts of hope. Never mind: this is a good time to ask God for more grace. Then, go on! Renew your joy for the struggle, even though you might lose the odd skirmish.

78 You don't feel like doing anything and there is nothing you look forward to. It is like a dark cloud. Showers of sadness fell, and you experienced a strong sensation of being hemmed in. And, to crown it all, a despondency set in, which grew out of a more or less objective fact: you have been struggling for so many years ... , and you are still so far behind, so far.

All this is necessary, and God has things in hand. In order to attain gaudium cum pace — true peace and joy, we have to add to the conviction of our divine filiation, which fills us with optimism, the acknowledgment of our own personal weakness.

79 You have become younger! You notice, in fact, that getting to know God better has made you regain in a short time the simple and happy age of your youth, including the security and joy — without any childishness — of spiritual childhood ... You look around, and you realise that the same thing has happened to others: the years since they met with the Lord have gone by and, having reached maturity, they are strengthened with a permanent youth and happiness. Although they are no longer young, they are youthful and happy!

This reality of the interior life, attracts, confirms and wins over souls. Give thanks for it daily ad Deum qui laetificat iuventutem — to God who fills your youth with joy.

80 You will not lack the grace of God. Therefore, if you respond to it, you will be sure to win.

Victory depends on you: your strength and drive — together with that grace — are reason enough for you to have the optimism of one who knows victory is assured.

81 Perhaps yesterday you were one of those people whose ideals have gone sour, who are defrauded in their human ambitions. Today, now that God has entered into your life — thank you, my God! — you laugh and sing and carry your smile, your Love and your happiness wherever you go.

82 There are many who feel unhappy, just because they have too much of everything. Christians, if they really behave as God's children, will suffer discomfort, heat, tiredness, cold ... But they will never lack joy, because that — all that — is ordained or permitted by Him who is the source of true happiness.

83 Faced by all those men without faith, without hope; by minds desperately near the borders of anguish, seeking for a meaning in their life, you found your purpose: Him!

This discovery will permanently inject a new happiness into your existence, it will transform you, and present you with an immense daily hoard of beautiful things of which you were unaware, and which show you the joyful expanse of that broad path that leads you to God.

84 Your steadfastness in faith, purity and the way God has marked out for you is the measure of your happiness on earth.

85 Give thanks to God that you are happy, with a deep joy which has no need to be expressed aloud.

86 With God, I thought, every day seems more attractive. I can see "little bits" at a time. One day I notice some wonderful detail; on another, I discover a sight I had not seen before ... At this rate, it is impossible to say what will happen next.

Then, I noticed that He was reassuring me: "Your happiness will grow greater every day, for you will be drawn deeper and deeper into that divine adventure, into that great complication with which you have become involved. And you will realise that I will never abandon you."

87 Happiness is a consequence of self-surrender. It is re-affirmed every time you turn the water-wheel.

88 Now that you have given yourself to God your happiness cannot be taken away. But you must feel a great concern and desire for everyone to share in your joy!

89 All the things that are now worrying you can be put into a smile which shows your love of God.

90 Optimism? Yes, always! Even when things seem to turn out badly: perhaps that is the time to break into a song, with a Gloria, because you have sought refuge in Him, and nothing but good can come to you from Him.

91 Hope does not mean beginning to see the light, but trusting with one's eyes closed that the Lord possesses the light fully, and lives in its clarity. He is the Light.

92 Every Christian has the duty to bring peace and joy to his own surroundings on earth. This cheerful crusade of manliness will move even shrivelled or rotten hearts, and raise them to God.

93 If you cut any hint of envy out at the roots, and if you sincerely rejoice in other people's success, you will not lose your cheerfulness.

94 That friend of mine came up to me: "They tell me you are in love." I was very surprised and the only thing I could think to ask was where he got that news.

He said that he could read it in my eyes, which shone with joy.

95 What must the cheerful way that Jesus looked upon people have been like? It must have been the same which shone from the eyes of his Mother who could not contain her joy — Magnificat anima mea Dominum! — and her soul glorified the Lord while she carried Him within her and by her side.

Oh, Mother!: May we, like you, rejoice to be with Him and to hold Him.

DARING

96 Don't be narrow-minded men or women who are immature, short-sighted and incapable of embracing our supernatural Christian outlook as children of God. God and daring!

97 Daring is not imprudence, or unreflective bravado, or simple pluck.

Daring is fortitude, a cardinal virtue, a requirement of the soul's life.

98 You made up your mind after reflection, rather than with any burning enthusiasm. Although you would have very much liked to feel it, there was no room for sentiment: you gave yourself to God when you were convinced that He wanted you.

And, since then, you have felt no serious doubts; rather you experience a calm and peaceful joy, which sometimes overflows. It is thus that God rewards the daring feats of Love.

99 I read a proverb which is very popular in some countries: "God owns the world, but he rents it out to the brave," and it made me think.

What are you waiting for?

100 I am not the apostle I should be. I am ... too timid.

Could it not be that you are fainthearted, because your love is so small? It is time to change!

101 The difficulties you have met have made you shrink back, and you have become "prudent, moderate and objective."

Remember that you have always despised those terms, when they became synonyms for cowardly, fainthearted and comfort-seeking.

102 Fear? That is only for those who know they are acting badly. For you, never.

103 There are a great number of Christians who would be apostles ... , if they were not afraid.

They are the same people who then complain, because the Lord — they say! — has abandoned them. How do they treat God?

104 There are many of us; with the help of God, we can reach everywhere, they exclaim enthusiastically.

Why does fear hold you back then? With divine grace, you can become a saint, which is what matters.

105 When you feel your conscience gnawing at you for not having carried out something good, it is a sign that the Lord did not want it to be omitted.

Just so. Moreover, you can be sure that you could have done it, with the grace of God.

106 Let us not forget it: when fulfilling the divine Will, you can get over obstacles, or under them ... , or you can go round them. But ... , they can be overcome!

107 When one is working to extend an apostolic undertaking, "no" must never be taken for a final answer: you have to try again!

108 You are too "cautious" and not very "supernatural" and that is why you are a bit too clever: don't start inventing your own "snags" and trying to solve them all.

Perhaps the person you speak to is less "clever" or maybe more generous than you are, and as he can count on God, he won't raise so many objections.

109 There are some ways of acting that are so careful that, in a word, they are just pusillanimous.

110 Rest assured: when you work for God, there are no difficulties that cannot be overcome, nor discouragements that will make you abandon the task, nor failures worthy of the name, however unfruitful the results may seem.

111 Your faith is not operative enough; it seems that you are over-pious, rather than a man who is struggling to be a saint.

112 Be calm! Be daring!

With these virtues you must rout the fifth column of people who are lukewarm, who are cowards or traitors.

113 You assured me that you wanted to fight without respite, and now you come to me with a long face.

Look, even humanly speaking, it is good not to find it all done for you, with no hitches. Something — a lot! — depends on you. Otherwise, how could you become a saint?

114 You won't commit yourself to working in that supernatural enterprise, because — you say — you are afraid of not knowing how to please, or of making some

unfortunate mistake. If you thought more about God, those excuses would disappear.

115 Sometimes I think that a few enemies of God and his Church live off the fear of many good people, and I am filled with shame.

116 As we talked, he assured me that he never wanted to leave the hut where he lived, because he preferred to count the beams of "his" shack rather than the stars in heaven.

There are many like him who are incapable of leaving their own petty things so as to raise their eyes to heaven: it is time they acquired a loftier vision!

117 I understand the supernatural and human joy of one man who had the good fortune of being in the vanguard of the divine sowing.

"It is wonderful to be the only one, to stir up a whole city and its surroundings," he would often say, fully convinced.

Don't wait until you can count on more means, or until others come: souls have need of you today, now.

118 Be daring in your prayer, and the Lord will turn you from a pessimist into an optimist; from being timid, to being daring, from being feeble-spirited to being a man of faith, an apostle!

119 Those problems which used to overwhelm you and seemed like enormous mountains disappeared completely. They were solved in a divine way, as when Our Lord commanded the winds and the waters to be calm.

And to think that you still doubted!

120 "Don't help the Holy Spirit so much!," a friend of mine said, jokingly, but sounding very scared.

I answered: I think we "help him" very little.

121 When I see so much cowardice, so much false prudence ..., in both men and women, I burn with the desire to ask them: Are faith and trust only to be preached, then? Not practised?

122 You find yourself in a position which seems rather strange: on the one hand, you feel fainthearted, as you look inward; on the other, sure, encouraged, as you look upwards.

Don't worry: it is a sign that you are beginning to know yourself better and — more importantly! — that you are beginning to know Him better.

123 Do you see? With Him you could do it. Why are you surprised?

Be convinced: there is nothing to be surprised about. If you trust in God — really trust — things work out easily. And, what is more, you always go further than you imagined you could.

124 Do you want to be daring in a holy way, so that God may act through you? Have recourse to Mary, and she will accompany you along the path of humility, so that, when faced by what to the human mind is impossible, you may be able to answer with a fiat! — be it done!, which unites the earth to Heaven.

THE STRUGGLE

125 Not all of us can become rich, wise, famous ... Yet, all of us — yes, all of us — are called to be saints.

126 Being faithful to God demands a struggle. And it means close combat, man to man — the old man against the man of God — in one small thing after another, without giving in.

127 The test, I don't deny it, proves to be very hard: you have to go uphill, "against the grain."

What is my advice? That you must say: omnia in bonum, everything that happens, "everything that happens to me," is for my own good ... Therefore the right conclusion is to accept, as a pleasant reality, what seems so hard to you.

128 Today it is not enough for men and women to be good. Moreover, whoever is content to be nearly good, is not good enough. It is necessary to be "revolutionary."

Faced by hedonism, faced by the pagan and materialistic wares that we are being offered, Christ wants objectors! — rebels of Love!

129 Whoever really wants to achieve sanctity, takes no breaks or holidays.

130 Some behave, throughout their lives, as though Our Lord had only talked of self-giving and upright behaviour to those who did not find it hard — they don't exist! — or to those who don't need to fight.

They forget that Jesus said, for all: the Kingdom of heaven is won by violence, by the holy battle of every moment.

131 What eagerness many show for reform!

Would it not be better for us all to reform ourselves, each one of us, so as to fulfil faithfully what is laid down?

132 You wade into temptations, you put yourself in danger, you fool around with your sight and with your imagination, you chat about ... stupidities. And then you are anxious that doubts, scruples, confusion, sadness and discouragement might assail you.

You must admit that you are not very consistent.

133 After initial enthusiasm, the doubts, hesitations and anxieties have begun. You are worried about your studies, your family, your financial situation, and, above all, the thought that you are not up to it, that perhaps you are of no use, that you lack experience in life.

I will give you a sure means of overcoming such fears, which are temptations coming from the devil or from your lack of generosity! Despise them: remove those recollections from your memory. The Master already poignantly preached this twenty centuries ago: "No one who looks behind him ... "

134 We have to instil in our souls a true horror for sin. Lord — say it with a contrite heart — may I never offend you again!

But don't be frightened when you become aware of the burden of your poor body and of human passions: it would be silly and childishly naive to find out now that "this" exists. Your wretchedness is not an obstacle but a spur for you to become more united to God and seek him constantly, because He purifies us.

135 If your imagination bubbles over with thoughts about yourself and creates fanciful situations and circumstances which would not normally find a place in your way, then these will foolishly distract you. They will dampen your ardour and separate you from the presence of God. This is vanity.

If your imagination revolves around others, you will easily fall into the defect of passing judgement when this is not your responsibility. You will interpret their behaviour not at all objectively but in a mean way. This is rash judgement.

If your imagination concerns itself with your own talents and ways of speaking, or with the general admiration that you inspire in others, then you will be in danger of losing your rectitude of intention, and of providing fodder for your pride.

Generally, letting your imagination loose is a waste of time, and, if it is not controlled, it opens the door to a whole string of voluntary temptations.

Do not leave off the practice of interior mortification for even a single day!

136 Do not be so stupidly naive as to think you have to go through temptations, to be sure that you are firm in your vocation. It would be like asking someone to stop your heart, to prove that you want to live.

137 Do not enter into dialogue with temptation. Allow me to repeat it: have the courage to run away and the moral strength not to dally with your weakness or wonder how far you can go. Break off, with no concessions!

138 You have no excuse whatsoever. You have only yourself to blame. If you are aware — and you know it well enough — that going along that path, reading those things, keeping that company, can bring you to a precipice, why do you persist in thinking that perhaps it is a short cut which will help you to develop or which makes your personality more mature?

You must change your plan radically, even though it demands an effort and means fewer amusements at your disposal. It is high time you behaved as a responsible person.

139 The irresponsibility of so many men and women, who make no effort to avoid deliberate venial sins, pains Our Lord very much. It's normal, they think, and they seek to excuse themselves by saying that we all fall at those stumbling blocks!

Listen carefully: most of that mob, which condemned Christ and put him to death, also began by shouting — just as the others did — by going to the Garden of Olives — just like the rest of them.

In the end, still carried along by what "everyone" was doing, they did not know how to draw back or did not want to ... , and they crucified Jesus!

Now, after twenty centuries, we still have not learned.

140 Ups and downs. You have many, too many, ups and downs.

The reason is clear: till now, you have led an easy life, and you are reluctant to admit that there is an obvious gap between "wanting" and "giving oneself."

141 As, sooner or later, you are surely bound to stumble upon the evidence of your own personal wretchedness, I wish to forewarn you about some of the temptations which the devil will suggest to you and which you should reject straight away. These include the thought that God has forgotten about you, that your call to the apostolate is in vain, and that the weight of sorrow and of the sins of the world are greater than your strength as an apostle.

None of this is true!

142 If you are really fighting, you need to make an examination of conscience.

Take care of the daily examination: find out if you feel the sorrow of Love, for not getting to know Our Lord as you should.

143 In the same way that many go to see first stones being laid, without bothering about whether the works then begun will ever be finished, sinners deceive themselves with their "last times."

144 When it is a matter of "breaking off" — never forget it — the "last time" has to be the one before, the one that has already happened ...

145 I advise you to try to return sometime ... to the beginning of your first conversion, which, if it is not becoming like children, is very much like it. In the spiritual life you have to let yourself be led with complete trust, single-mindedly and without fear. You have to speak with absolute clarity about what you have in your mind and in your soul.

146 How are you going to get out of that state of lukewarmness and lamentable languor if you do not make use of the means? You struggle very little, and when

you make an effort, you do so as if annoyed and uneasy. You even hope that your feeble efforts will produce no results, so that you can then justify yourself and you will not have to make demands on yourself and others will not ask any more of you.

It is your own will you are following, not God's. If you don't change in earnest you will neither be happy nor be able to obtain the peace you now lack.

Humble yourself before God, and try really to want to.

147 It is such a waste of time and such a human way of looking at things, when everything is reduced to tactics, as if the secret of being effective lay there.

They forget that God's tactics are charity, the Love without limits: thus it was that He bridged the unbridgeable gap that man, through sin, opens up between Heaven and earth.

148 Apply a savage sincerity to your examination of conscience; that is to say, be courageous. It is the same as when you look at yourself in the mirror to know where you have hurt yourself or where the dirt is or where your blemishes are, so that you can get rid of them.

149 I must warn you against a ploy of satan — yes, without a capital, because he deserves no more — who tries to make use of the most ordinary circumstances, to turn us away, slightly or greatly, from the way that leads us to God.

If you are struggling, and even more if you are really struggling, you should not be surprised at feeling tired or at having sometimes to "go against the grain," without any spiritual or human consolation. See what someone wrote to me some time ago, and which I kept for those who naively consider that grace does away with nature: "Father, for a few days now I have been feeling tremendously lazy and lacking in enthusiasm for fulfilling the plan of life. I have to force myself to do everything, and I have very little taste for it. Pray for me so that this crisis may soon pass, for it makes me suffer a lot to think it could make me turn from my way."

I answered only: did you not know that Love demands sacrifice? Read the words of the Master slowly: "Whoever does not take up his Cross quotidie — every day — is not worthy of Me." And further on: "I will not leave you orphans ... " Our Lord allows that dryness of yours, which you find so hard, so that you may love Him more, so that you may trust only in Him, so that you may co-redeem with the Cross, so that you may meet Him.

150 "The devil doesn't seem to be very clever," you told me. "I can't understand how he can be so stupid: he always uses the same deceits, the same falsehoods ... "

You are absolutely right. But we men are less clever, and we do not learn from the experience of others ... And satan counts on all that in order to tempt us.

151 I once heard of a curious thing that happens in great battles. Although victory may be certain beforehand, because of the superiority in numbers and equipment, later, in the heat of combat, there are times when defeat threatens through the

weakness of one flank. Then peremptory orders come from the high command, and where the flank was in difficulties the breach is stemmed.

I thought about you and me. With God, who does not lose battles, we will always be the victors. That is why in the struggle for sanctity, if you feel lacking in strength, you should listen to the commands, do what you are told, let yourself be helped — for He does not fail.

152 You opened your heart sincerely to your Director, speaking in the presence of God ... , and it was marvellous to see how you yourself were finding the proper answers to your evasive attempts. Let us love spiritual direction.

153 I will grant that you behave properly ... But, allow me to speak sincerely. You must admit that you are doing things in such a leisurely way that, apart from not being entirely happy, you remain very far from holiness.

That is why I ask: Do you really behave properly? Could it be that you have a mistaken idea of what is proper?

154 If you fool around, are inwardly frivolous and outwardly hesitant when faced with temptation, wanting and not wanting, it will be impossible for you to advance in the interior life.

155 I have always thought that many mean by "tomorrow" or "later," a resistance to grace.

156 Another paradox of the spiritual way: the soul which has less need to reform its behaviour is the more anxious to do so, and does not stop until it has succeeded. And the contrary is also true.

157 You sometimes invent "problems," because you do not go to the root of your behaviour.

All you need is a determined change of attack: to fulfil your duty loyally and be faithful to the indications that you have been given in spiritual direction.

158 You have become more keenly aware of the urgency, of the single ideal of being a saint; and you have gone into battle daily with no hesitation, convinced that you have to root out bravely any symptom of being fond of comfort.

Later, while talking to Our Lord in your prayer you understood that fighting is a synonym for Love, and you asked for a greater Love, with no fear of the struggle awaiting you, since you would be fighting for Him, with Him and in Him.

159 Complications? ... Be sincere, and acknowledge that you prefer to be the slave of some selfish whim of yours, rather than serve God or that soul. Admit it!

160 *Beatus vir qui suffert tentationem* ... Blessed is the man who suffers temptation because, after he has been tested, he will receive the crown of Life.

Is your heart filled with joy when you realise that this interior sport is a source of peace which can never be exhausted?

161 Nunc coepi! — now I begin! This is the cry of a soul in love which, at every moment, whether it has been faithful or lacking in generosity, renews its desire to serve — to love! — God with a wholehearted loyalty.

162 It really did hurt you deeply when you were told that what you were looking for was not your conversion, but a container for your wretchedness. In that way you would be able to carry on comfortably — but with a taste of bitterness — bearing that sorry load.

163 You don't know whether it is physical depression or a sort of interior tiredness that has come over you, or both at the same time. You fight without fighting, without the desire of an authentic positive improvement, to transmit the joy and love of Christ to souls.

I wish to remind you of the clear words of the Holy Spirit: only those who fight legitime, genuinely, in spite of everything, will be crowned.

164 I could behave better, show more decision and spread around more enthusiasm ... Why don't I?

Because — forgive my frankness — you are a fool. The devil knows full well that one of the worst-guarded doors of the soul is that of human foolishness: vanity. That is where he attacks with all his might: pseudo-sentimental memories, the hysterical form of a black-sheep complex, the unfounded impression of a lack of freedom ...

What are you waiting for in order to follow the Master's injunction: Watch and pray, for you know not the day nor the hour?

165 You told me with a boasting but uncertain swagger that some go up and others go down ... And others, like yourself!, are just idling.

Your indolence saddened me, and I added: idlers are made to shift by those going up; and — normally with greater vigour — also by those going down. Consider what an uncomfortable attitude you are adopting!

The holy bishop of Hippo already pointed it out: not to go forward is to go back.

166 In your life, there are two things that do not fit together: your head and your heart.

Your intelligence — enlightened by faith — shows you the way clearly. It can also point out the difference between following that way heroically or stupidly. Above all, it places before you the divine greatness and beauty of the undertakings the Trinity leaves in our hands.

Your feelings, on the other hand, become attached to everything you despise, even while you consider it despicable. It seems as if a thousand trifles were awaiting the

least opportunity, and as soon as your poor will is weakened, through physical tiredness or lack of supernatural outlook, those little things flock together and pile up in your imagination, until they form a mountain that oppresses and discourages you. Things such as the rough edges of your work, your resistance to obedience; the lack of proper means; the false attractions of an easy life; greater or smaller but repugnant temptations; bouts of sensuality; tiredness; the bitter taste of spiritual mediocrity ... And sometimes also fear; fear because you know God wants you to be a saint, and you are not a saint.

Allow me to talk to you bluntly. You have more than enough "reasons" to turn back, and you lack the resolution to correspond to the grace that He grants you, since He has called you to be another Christ, ipse Christus! — Christ himself. You have forgotten the Lord's admonition to the Apostle: "My grace is enough for you," which is confirmation that, if you want to, you can.

167 Make up the time you have lost resting on the laurels of your self-complacency, and thinking what a good person you are, as if it were enough just to keep going, without stealing or killing.

Speed up the pace of your piety and your work: you still have such a long way to go: Live happily with everyone, even with those who annoy you, and make an effort to love — to serve! — those whom you despised before.

168 You revealed your past wounds — full of pus — in Confession. And the priest dealt with your soul like a good doctor, like a conscientious doctor. He made an incision where he had to, and would not let the wound heal over until everything had been cleaned out. Be grateful.

169 Tackling serious matters with a sporting spirit gives very good results. Perhaps I have lost several games? Very well, but — if I persevere — in the end I shall win.

170 Change now, when you still feel young. How difficult it is to put things right when the soul has aged.

171 Felix culpa!, sings the Church. Blessed be your mistake — I whisper in your ear — if it has prompted you not to sin again, and if it has also made you understand and help your neighbour better, for he is of no worse mettle than you.

172 "Is it possible," you ask after having rejected the temptation, "is it possible, Lord, that I could be ... so bad?"

173 I am going to summarise your clinical history: here I fall and there I get up. The latter is what matters. So continue with that interior struggle, even though you go at the pace of the tortoise. Forward!

You know well, my son, where you can end up, if you don't fight: one depth leads to another and another.

174 You are ashamed, before God, and before the others. You have discovered filth within yourself both old and renewed: there is no evil instinct or tendency that you

do not feel under your skin. And you also carry a cloud of uncertainty in your heart. Furthermore, temptation arises when you least want it or expect it, when your will is weakened by tiredness.

You no longer know whether it humiliates you, although it hurts you to see yourself like this. But let it hurt you because of Him, and for Love of Him. This contrition of love will help you to remain vigilant, for the fight will last as long as we live.

175 You are consumed by the desire to confirm once more the self-dedication you made some time ago: remembering that you are a son of God and living like one too.

Put your many weaknesses and infidelities in the Lord's hands. For that is also the only way to lessen their weight.

176 Renewal is not relaxation.

177 Days on retreat. Recollection in order to know God, to know yourself and thus to make progress. A necessary time for discovering where and how you should change your life. What should I do? What should I avoid?

178 There should be no repetition of what happened last year.

"How did the retreat go?" you were asked. And you answered: "We had a very good rest" ...

179 Days of silence and of intense grace ... Prayer face to face with God ...

I broke out into thanksgiving, on seeing those people, mature in years and experience, who opened out to the touch of grace. They responded like children, eagerly grasping the chance to convert their lives, even now, into something useful, which would make up for all the times they have gone astray and for all their lost opportunities.

Recalling that scene, I put it to you: do not neglect your struggle in the interior life.

180 Auxilium christianorum! Help of Christians, says the litany of Loreto with confidence. Have you tried to repeat that aspiration in time of difficulty? If you do it with faith, with the tenderness of a daughter or a son, you will discover the power of the intercession of your Holy Mother Mary, who will lead you to victory.

FISHERS OF MEN

181 We could see, while we talked, the lands of that continent. A light was enkindled in your eyes, your soul was filled with impatience, and, thinking about those peoples, you said: Could it be possible that on the other side of those seas, the grace of God is rendered ineffective?

You then answered your own question: In his infinite goodness, He wishes to use docile instruments.

182 What compassion you feel for them! ... You would like to cry out to them that they are wasting their time ... Why are they so blind, and why can't they perceive what you — a miserable creature — have seen? Why don't they go for the best?

Pray and mortify yourself. Then you have the duty to wake them up, one by one, explaining to them — also one by one — that they, like you, can find a divine way, without leaving the place they occupy in society.

183 You began in good heart. But little by little your spirit has shrunk ... And you are going to end up in your own poor shell, if you continue to let your horizons become smaller and smaller.

You have to allow your heart to expand more and more, with real hunger for the apostolate. Out of a hundred souls we are interested in a hundred.

184 Thank the Lord for the paternal and maternal tenderness he continues to show for you.

You always had those dreams of great adventures, and you have committed yourself to a wonderful enterprise ... , which leads you to holiness.

I repeat: thank God for this by leading an apostolic life.

185 When you launch out into the apostolate, be convinced that it is always a question of making people happy, very happy: Truth is inseparable from true joy.

186 People from different countries, different races, and very different backgrounds and professions ... When you speak to them about God, you become aware of the human and supernatural value of your vocation as an apostle. It is as if you are re-living, in its total reality, the miracle of the first preaching of Our Lord's disciples. Each person hears in his own language phrases spoken in a strange tongue which open up new ways. And in your mind you can see that scene, taking on a new life, in which "Parthians, Medes and Elamites" have come to God joyfully.

187 Listen to me carefully and echo my words: Christianity is Love; getting to know God is a most positive experience; concern for others — the apostolate — is not an extra luxury, the task of a few.

Now that you know this, fill yourself with joy, because your life has acquired a completely different meaning; and act in consequence.

188 Naturalness, sincerity and cheerfulness are indispensable conditions for the apostle to attract people.

189 The way Jesus called the first twelve could not have been simpler: "Come and follow me."

There is one consideration that fits you like a glove, since you are always looking for excuses not to keep on with your task. The human knowledge of those first apostles was very poor, and yet what an impact they made on those who listened to them!

Never forget this: it is He who continues to do the work through each one of us.

190 Vocations to the apostolate are sent by God. But you must not cease to make use of the means: prayer, mortification, study or work, friendship, supernatural outlook ... , interior life!

191 When I speak to you about "apostolate of friendship," I mean a personal friendship, self-sacrificing and sincere: face to face, heart to heart.

192 In the apostolate of friendship and trust, the first step has to be understanding, service, — and holy intransigence in doctrine.

193 Those who have met Christ cannot shut themselves in their own little world: how sad such a limitation would be! They must open out like a fan in order to reach all souls. Each one has to create — and widen — a circle of friends, whom he can influence with his professional prestige, with his behaviour, with his friendship, so that Christ may exercise his influence by means of that professional prestige, that behaviour, that friendship.

194 You have to be a live ember that sets fire to whatever it touches. And, when your surroundings are incapable of catching fire, you have to raise their spiritual temperature.

If not, you are wasting time miserably, and wasting the time of those around you.

195 When there is zeal for souls, good people can always be found, fertile soil can always be discovered. There is no excuse!

196 Rest assured, there are many people there who can understand your way. There are also souls who, whether they know it or not, are looking for Christ and have not found Him. But "How can they hear about Him, if nobody tells them?"

197 Don't tell me that you care for your interior life, if you are not carrying out an intense and ceaseless apostolate. The Lord — whom you assure me you are close to — wishes all men to be saved.

198 He told you that this way is very hard. And, on hearing it, you heartily agreed, remembering that bit about the Cross being a sure sign of the true way ... But your friend noticed only the rough part of the road, without bringing to mind Jesus' promise: "My yoke is sweet."

Remind him about it, because — perhaps when he realises it — he will give himself.

199 He hasn't got the time? — So much the better. Christ is interested precisely in those who do not have the time.

200 When you consider how many people do not take advantage of a wonderful opportunity, but allow Jesus to pass by, think: where does this clear calling which was so providential, and showed me my way, come from?

Meditate upon this every day: an apostle has always to be another Christ, Christ himself.

201 Don't be surprised and don't be cowed because he has reproached you with having placed him face to face with Christ, nor because he may have added, indignantly: "Now I can't live in peace unless I make up my mind."

Pray for him. — It would be useless to try to calm him down. What may have happened is that some previous cause for concern, the voice of his own conscience, has now come to the fore.

202 Are they scandalized because you have talked about their giving themselves to God to people who had never thought about that problem? — Well, what does it matter, if you have the vocation of being an apostle of apostles?

203 You don't get through to people because you speak a different "language." I advise you to be natural.

The trouble is that artificial formation of yours!

204 Do you hesitate to launch yourself into speaking about God, about a Christian life, about vocation, ... because you do not want to cause suffering? You forget that it is not you who are doing the calling, it is He: *Ego scio quos elegerim* — I know well those I have chosen.

Moreover, I should not like to think that behind this false respect lurked a spirit of comfort or lukewarmness. At this stage, do you still prefer poor human friendship to the friendship of God?

205 You have spoken to one person and another, and yet another, because you are consumed by zeal for souls.

One took fright; another consulted a "prudent" man, who guided him badly ... You must persevere, and no one afterwards will be able to excuse himself by saying *Quia nemo nos conduxit* — nobody has called us.

206 I understand your holy impatience, but at the same time you must realise that there are some who need to think things over and others who will respond all in good time. Wait for them with open arms. Add the spice of abundant prayer and mortification to your holy impatience. They will be more youthful and generous when they come. They will have got rid of their bourgeois approach, and they will be all the more courageous.

Think how God is waiting for them!

207 An indispensable requirement in the apostolate is faith, which is often shown by constancy in speaking about God, even though the fruits are slow to appear.

If we persevere and carry on in the firm conviction that the Lord wills it, signs of a Christian revolution will appear around you, everywhere. Some will follow the call,

others will take their interior life seriously, and others — the weakest — will at least be forewarned.

208 Days of real excitement: three more people!

The words of Jesus are being fulfilled: "My Father's name has been glorified if you yield abundant fruit and prove yourselves my disciples."

209 You made me smile, because I know what you meant when you said: I am enthusiastic about the possibility of going to new lands and opening a breach there, perhaps very far away ... I would like to find out if there are men on the moon ...

Ask the Lord to increase that apostolic zeal of yours.

210 At times, seeing those souls asleep, one feels an enormous desire to shout at them, to make them take notice, to wake them up from that terrible torpor they have fallen into. It is so sad to see them walk like a blind man hitting out with his stick, without finding the way!

I can well understand how the tears of Jesus over Jerusalem sprang from his perfect charity.

211 Dig further every day into the apostolic depths of your Christian vocation. He unfurled a banner to be followed twenty centuries ago, for you and me to proclaim aloud to men. It is indeed meant for all those who have a sincere heart and are capable of loving ... What clearer invitations do you need than these: Ignem veni mittere in terram — I have come to bring fire to the earth, and the thought of those two thousand five hundred million souls who still do not know Christ!

212 Hominem non habeo — I have no one to help me. This, unfortunately, could be said by many who are spiritually sick and paralytic, who could be useful — and should be useful.

Lord: may I never remain indifferent to souls.

213 Ask with me for a new Pentecost, which will once again set the world alight.

214 "If any man comes to me without hating his father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life too, he can be no disciple of mine."

Every day I see more clearly, Lord, that family ties, if they do not pass through your most lovable Heart, are, for some, a permanent source of the cross; for others they are a cause of more or less direct temptation against perseverance; for others again, the reason why they are totally ineffective; and, for all, a dead weight which impedes their total surrender.

215 The ploughshare that breaks up the earth and opens up the furrow sees neither the seed nor the harvest.

216 When you made up your mind, you would discover something new every day. Do you remember how it used to be when you constantly asked yourself: "How should this be done?" ... But you then kept on experiencing doubts or disappointments ...

Now you always find an exact answer which is clear and fully reasoned. And, when you listen to the answers you get to your often childish questions, you think: "Jesus must have looked after the first Twelve like this."

217 Vocations, Lord, more vocations! It doesn't matter whether I did the sowing or someone else — it was You, Jesus, who sowed the seed with our hands. All I know is that you have promised that the fruit will ripen; *et fructus vester maneat* — and your fruit will endure.

218 Be honest. If there are people who tell you that you have been trying "to catch them," admit that this is what you want to do. But there is no need for them to worry! Because, if they haven't got a vocation — if He does not call them — they won't come; and if they have, what a shame for them to end up like the rich young man in the Gospel: alone and sad.

219 As an apostle you have a great and beautiful task. You find yourself at the place where grace and the freedom of each soul meet. You are also present at that most solemn occasion in the life of some men: their encounter with Christ!

220 It seems as if you have been individually picked, he said.

And that is right!

221 Be sure of this: you need to be fully formed to face the rush of people that is going to press upon us with a specific and urgent question: "Well then, what must I do?"

222 Here is a recipe to make your apostolic spirit effective: make definite plans, not for the whole week but for the day ahead, for this moment and the next.

223 Christ expects a lot from your work. But you will have to look for souls, as the Good Shepherd went after the hundredth sheep: without waiting to be called. Then make use of your friends to do good to others. Tell each one of them that nobody can feel at ease with a spiritual life which, after filling him, does not overflow with apostolic zeal.

224 It is no use wasting your time with "your own silly little concerns" when there are so many souls awaiting you.

225 Doctrinal apostolate: that will always be your apostolate.

226 The marvel of Pentecost consecrates all the different ways: it can never be understood as monopoly or the appreciation of only one way to the detriment of the others.

Pentecost provides an unlimited variety of tongues, of methods, of forms of meeting God: not violent uniformity.

227 You wrote: A young fellow, who was going North, joined our group. He was a miner. He sang well and joined in with us. I prayed for him until he arrived at his station. When he got off, he said: "I'd have loved to continue the journey with you!"

I was immediately reminded of that *mane nobiscum* — stay with us, Lord! And I asked him again with faith that others might "see Him" in each one of us, as companions along "His way."

228 The masses have been going off down "the road of a justified discontentment" and continue to do so.

It hurts ... but, how many we have caused to be disaffected among those who are spiritually or materially in need!

Christ may once more be set among the poor and the humble: it is precisely with them that he prefers to be!

229 Teacher: may you be eager to make your pupils understand quickly what has cost you hours of study to see clearly.

230 The wish to teach and to teach from the heart creates in pupils a gratitude which is a suitable soil for the apostolate.

231 I like the motto: "Let each wayfarer follow his way," the road God has marked out for him, to be followed faithfully, lovingly, even though it is hard.

232 What an extraordinary lesson each one of the teachings of the New Testament contains. The Master, before ascending to the right hand of the Father, told the disciples: "Go and preach to all nations," and they had remained full of peace. But they still had doubts: they did not know what to do, and they gathered around Mary, Queen of Apostles, so as to become zealous preachers of the Truth which will save the world.

SUFFERING

233 You spoke about the scenes in the life of Jesus which moved you most: when he met men in the flesh..., when he brought peace and health to those whose bodies and souls were racked with pain ... You were inspired — you went on — seeing him cure leprosy, restore sight to the blind, heal the paralytic at the pool: the poor beggar forgotten by everybody. You are able to contemplate Him as He was, so profoundly human, so close at hand!

Well..., Jesus continues being the same as then.

234 You asked Our Lord to let you suffer a little for Him. But when suffering comes in such a normal, human form — family difficulties and problems ... or those thousand awkward things of ordinary life — you find it hard to see Christ behind it. Open your hands willingly to those nails ... and your sorrow will be turned into joy.

235 Don't complain if you suffer. It is the prized and valued stone that is polished.

Does it hurt? Allow yourself to be cut, gratefully, because God has taken you in his hands as if you were a diamond. An ordinary pebble is not worked on like that.

236 Those who flee like cowards from suffering have something to meditate upon when they see the enthusiasm with which other souls embrace pain.

There are many men and women who know how to suffer in a Christian way. Let us follow their example.

237 You complain? — And you tell me you have reason to complain: One pinprick after another! ...

But do you not realise that it is silly to be surprised at finding thorns among roses?

238 Let me continue, as I have always done, to speak to you confidentially. For not to have the heart to talk about my own sufferings it is enough to have a Crucifix in front of me ... And I don't mind adding that I have suffered a lot, though always cheerfully.

239 Are you misunderstood? He was the Truth and the Light, but not even those close to him understood him. As I have asked you so often before, remember Our Lord's words: "The disciple is not greater than his Master."

240 For a son of God, contradictions and calumnies are what wounds received on the battlefield are for a soldier.

241 They say this and that about you ... But what does your good name matter?

In any case don't feel ashamed or sorry for yourself, but for them: for those who ill-treat you.

242 Sometimes they didn't want to understand: it is as if they were blind ... But sometimes it has been you who did not manage to be understood properly. You must change that.

243 It is not enough to be right. You have to know how to prove it so that others should be willing to recognise the truth.

However, state the truth whenever necessary, without bothering about "what they will say."

244 If you frequent the Master's school, you will not be surprised at also having to put up with the misunderstandings of so very many people who could help you a great deal if only they made the effort to be a bit more understanding.

245 You have not ill-treated him physically ... But you have ignored him so often; you have looked at him with indifference, as if he were a stranger.

Isn't that harm enough!

246 Without wanting to, persecutors sanctify ... But woe to these "sanctifiers"!

247 On earth, one is very often rewarded with calumny.

248 There are souls who seem bent on inventing sufferings, on torturing themselves with their imagination.

Afterwards, when objective sorrows and contradictions come their way, they do not know how to be like the Most Holy Virgin at the foot of the Cross with her eyes fixed on her Son.

249 Sacrifice, sacrifice! It is true that to follow Jesus Christ is to carry the Cross — He has said so. But I do not like to hear souls who love Our Lord speak so much about crosses and renunciations, because where there is Love, it is a willing sacrifice — though it remains hard — and the cross is the Holy Cross.

A soul which knows how to love and give itself in this way, is filled with peace and joy. Therefore, why insist on "sacrifice," as if you were seeking consolation, if Christ's Cross — which is your life — makes you happy?

250 One could get rid of so much neurosis and hysteria if people were taught — together with Christian doctrine — really to live as Christians: loving God and knowing how to accept contradictions as a blessing from His hand!

251 Do not pass by a neighbour's affliction with indifference. That person — a relative, a friend, a colleague ... someone you don't know — is your brother.

Remember the Gospel story you have heard so often with sadness: not even the relatives of Jesus trusted Him. — Make sure the scene is not repeated.

252 Imagine that on earth there was only God and you.

Thus it will be easier to suffer humiliations. And, in the end, you will do the things God wants and in the way He wants.

253 That sick person, consumed by a zeal for souls, said: sometimes the body protests and complains, but I also try to transform "those moans" into smiles, because then they become very effective.

254 An incurable illness restricted his movements. And yet he cheerfully assured me: "The illness suits me well and I love it more all the time. If they gave me the choice, I would be born again this way a hundred times!"

255 Jesus came to the Cross, after having prepared himself for thirty three years, all his life!

His disciples, if they really want to imitate him, have to convert their existence into a co-redemption of Love, with their own active and passive self-denial.

256 The Cross is present in everything, and it comes when one least expects it. But don't forget that, normally, the Cross comes when you start to be effective.

257 The Lord, the Eternal Priest, always blesses with the Cross.

258 Cor Mariae perdolentis, miserere nobis! — Invoke the Heart of Holy Mary, with the purpose and determination of uniting yourself to her sorrow, in reparation for your sins and the sins of men of all times.

And pray to her — for every soul — that her sorrow may increase in us our aversion from sin, and that we may be able to love the physical or moral contradictions of each day as a means of expiation.

HUMILITY

259 Prayer is the humility of the man who acknowledges his profound wretchedness and the greatness of God. He addresses and adores God as one who expects everything from Him and nothing from himself.

Faith is the humility of the mind which renounces its own judgement and surrenders to the verdict and authority of the Church.

Obedience is the humility of the will which subjects itself to the will of another, for God's sake.

Chastity is the humility of the flesh, which subjects itself to the spirit.

Exterior mortification is the humility of the senses.

Penance is the humility of all the passions, immolated to the Lord.

Humility is truth on the road of the ascetic struggle.

260 It is a great thing to know oneself to be nothing before God, because that is how things are.

261 "Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart ... " The humility of Jesus! ... What a lesson for you who are a poor earthenware vessel. He — always merciful — has raised you up, and made the light of the sun of grace shine upon your baseness, which has now been freely exalted. And you, how often you have covered your pride under a cloak of dignity or justice ... ! And how many chances to learn from the Master you have wasted by not knowing how to supernaturalise them!

262 Those periods of depression, because you see your defects or because others discover them, have no foundation ...

Ask for true humility.

263 Allow me to remind you that among other evident signs of a lack of humility are:

- Thinking that what you do or say is better than what others do or say;
- Always wanting to get your own way;

- Arguing when you are not right or — when you are — insisting stubbornly or with bad manners;
- Giving your opinion without being asked for it, when charity does not demand you to do so;
- Despising the point of view of others;
- Not being aware that all the gifts and qualities you have are on loan;
- Not acknowledging that you are unworthy of all honour or esteem, even the ground you are treading on or the things you own;
- Mentioning yourself as an example in conversation;
- Speaking badly about yourself, so that they may form a good opinion of you, or contradict you;
- Making excuses when rebuked;
- Hiding some humiliating faults from your director, so that he may not lose the good opinion he has of you;
- Hearing praise with satisfaction, or being glad that others have spoken well of you;
- Being hurt that others are held in greater esteem than you;
- Refusing to carry out menial tasks;
- Seeking or wanting to be singled out;
- Letting drop words of self-praise in conversation, or words that might show your honesty, your wit or skill, your professional prestige ... ;
- Being ashamed of not having certain possessions ...

264 To be humble does not mean to feel anxiety or fear.

265 Let us flee from the false humility which is called comfort-seeking.

266 It is Peter who speaks: Lord, do You wash my feet? Jesus answers: You do not understand what I am doing now; you will understand it later. Peter insists: You will never wash my feet. And Jesus explains: If I do not wash your feet, you will have no part with me. Simon Peter surrenders: Lord, not only my feet, but also my hands and my head.

Faced by the call to total self-giving, complete and without any hesitation, we often oppose it with false modesty like Peter's ... May we also be men with a heart like the Apostle's! Peter allows no one to love Jesus more than he does. That love leads us to reply thus: Here I am! Wash me, head, hands and feet! Purify me completely, for I want to give myself to You without holding anything back.

267 I copy for you from a letter: "I am enchanted by evangelical humility. But I rebel against the timid and thoughtless way some Christians shrink away. They discredit the Church. That atheist author must have had them in mind when he wrote that Christian morality is the morality of slaves." In fact we are servants : servants raised to the rank of children of God, who do not wish to behave as if enslaved by their passions.

268 If you are convinced of your "poor quality" — if you know yourself — you will react to events supernaturally. Joy and peace will take a firmer root in your soul, in the face of humiliations, being despised, calumnies ...

In these cases, after saying fiat — Lord, whatever you want — you should think: "Is that all he said? He obviously does not know me, otherwise he wouldn't have left it at that."

Being convinced that you deserve worse treatment, you will feel grateful to that person, and rejoice at what might have made somebody else suffer.

269 The higher a statue is raised, the harder and more dangerous the impact when it falls.

270 Go to spiritual direction with greater humility each time. And go punctually, for that is also humility.

See yourself — and you will not be mistaken, because God speaks to you there — as a very sincere little child who is being taught to speak, to read, to know the names of flowers and birds, to experience joys and sorrows, to notice the ground he is treading on.

271 "I am still a poor creature," you tell me.

But once, when you realised it, you felt very bad about it! Now, without getting used to it or giving in to it, you are starting to make a habit of smiling, and of beginning your fight again with growing joy.

272 If you are sensible and humble, you will have realised that one never stops learning. This happens in every field; even the wisest will always have something to learn, until the end of their lives; if they don't, they cease to be wise.

273 Dear Jesus: if I have to be an apostle, you will need to make me very humble.

Everything the sun touches is bathed in light. Lord, fill me with your clarity, make me share in your divinity so that I may identify my will with your adorable Will and become the instrument you wish me to be. Give me the madness of the humiliation you underwent, which led you to be born poor, to work in obscurity, to the shame of dying sewn with nails to a piece of wood, to your self-effacement in the Blessed Sacrament.

May I know myself: may I know myself and know you. I will then never lose sight of my nothingness.

274 Only the stupid are obstinate: the very stupid are very obstinate.

275 Do not forget that in human affairs other people may also be right: they see the same question as you, but from a different point of view, under another light, with other shades, with other contours.

Only in faith and morals is there an indisputable standard: that of our Mother the Church.

276 How good it is to know how to put things right with yourself. And, how few people learn that art!

277 Rather than commit a fault against charity, give in, offer no resistance, whenever you have the chance. Show the humility of the grass, which yields without needing to know whose foot is stepping on it.

278 To be converted you must climb via humility, along the path of self-abasement.

279 You said: "the self has to be decapitated" But it's hard, isn't it?

280 One often has to force oneself, to humble oneself and say repeatedly to the Lord in earnest, *Serviam!* — I will serve you.

281 *Memento, homo, quia pulvis es ...* — remember, man, that you are dust ... If you are dust, why should you find it irksome to be trodden upon?

282 The path of humility takes you everywhere ... but above all to Heaven.

283 A sure way to be humble is to contemplate how, even without talents, fame or fortune, we can be effective instruments if we go to the Holy Spirit so that He may grant us his gifts.

The apostles, though they had been taught by Jesus for three years, fled in terror from the enemies of Christ. But after Pentecost they let themselves be flogged and imprisoned, and ended up giving their lives in witness to their faith.

284 It is true that nobody can be certain of his perseverance ... But that uncertainty is another reason for humility and an obvious proof of our freedom.

285 Although you don't amount to much, God has made use of you, and He continues to make use of you to perform fruitful works for his glory.

Don't put on airs. Think what would an instrument of iron or steel say about itself, when a craftsman uses it to set golden jewellery with precious stones?

286 What is of more value: a pound weight of gold or a pound of copper? ... And yet in many cases copper is more useful and better than gold.

287 Your vocation — God's calling — is to direct, to draw others, to serve, to lead. If through a false or ill-conceived humility you isolate yourself, all huddled up in a corner, you are failing in your duty to be a divine instrument.

288 When the Lord makes use of you to pour his grace into souls remember that you are only the wrapping round the gift, the paper that is torn up and thrown away.

289 Quia respexit humilitatem ancillae suae — because he has looked graciously upon the lowliness of his handmaid ...

I am more convinced every day that authentic humility is the supernatural basis for all virtues!

Talk to Our Lady, so that she may train us to walk along that path.

CITIZENSHIP

290 The world awaits us. Yes, we love the world passionately because God has taught us to: Sic Deus dilexit mundum ... — God so loved the world. And we love it because it is there that we fight our battles in a most beautiful war of charity, so that everyone may find the peace that Christ has come to establish.

291 The Lord has shown us this refinement of Love: he has let us conquer the world for him.

He is always so humble that he has wished to limit himself to making it possible ... To us He has granted the easiest and most agreeable part: taking action and gaining the victory.

292 The world ... "That is our field!" you said, after directing your eyes and thoughts to heaven, with all the assurance of the farmer who walks through his own ripe corn. Regnare Christum volumus! — we want Him to reign over this earth of his!

293 "It is a time of hope, and I live off this treasure. It is not just a phrase, Father," you tell me, "it is a reality."

Well then ... , bring the whole world, all the human values which attract you so very strongly — friendship, the arts, science, philosophy, theology, sport, nature, culture, souls — bring all of this within that hope: the hope of Christ.

294 That pleasant but insubstantial enchantment of the world is there all the time. You are attracted by the colour and smell of the flowers by the wayside, by the birds of the air; by all creatures.

My poor son: it is quite reasonable. For, if you were not fascinated by it all, what sacrifice would you be able to offer Our Lord?

295 Your Christian vocation requires you to be in God and, at the same time, to be concerned with the things of the earth, using them objectively, just as they are: to give them back to Him.

296 It seems incredible that one could be so happy in this world, where so many are bent on leading sad lives because they follow their own selfishness, as if everything came to an end down here.

Don't you be one of them, rectify your intention all the time.

297 The world is cold and seems to be asleep. You often look upon it, from your vantage point, with a glance that would set it on fire. Lord, may it awaken!

Channel your bursts of impatience and be sure that if we know how to keep our own lives well lit, we shall set every corner of the world alight, and the way it all looks will change.

298 When I ask you always to be faithful in the service of God and souls, it is not an easy enthusiasm I am looking for. It is the enthusiasm you can acquire in the world when you see how much there is to be done everywhere.

299 A good son of God has to be very human. But not to such an extent that he becomes uncouth and bad-mannered.

300 It is difficult to make one's mark through quiet work and the proper fulfilment of our duties as citizens, so that later one can demand one's rights and place them in the service of the Church and of society.

It is difficult, but it is very effective.

301 It is not true that there is opposition between being a good Catholic and serving civil society faithfully. In the same way there is no reason why the Church and the State should clash when they proceed with the lawful exercise of their respective authorities, in fulfilment of the mission God has entrusted to them.

Those who affirm the contrary are liars, yes, liars! They are the same people who honour a false liberty, and ask us Catholics "to do them the favour" of going back to the catacombs.

302 Your task as a Christian citizen is to help see Christ's love and freedom preside over all aspects of modern life: culture and the economy, work and rest, family life and social relations.

303 A son of God cannot entertain class prejudice, for he is interested in the problems of all men. And he tries to help solve them with the justice and charity of Our Redeemer.

The Apostle already pointed it out when he wrote that the Lord is no respecter of persons. I have not hesitated to translate his words thus: there is only one race of men, the race of the children of God.

304 Worldly men go out of their way to make souls lose God as soon as possible; and then, make them lose the world. They do not love this world of ours — they exploit it by trampling over others.

I hope you too do not fall victim to this double swindle.

305 Some people feel embittered all the time. Everything makes them uneasy. They go to sleep with a physical obsession: that this sleep, the only possible escape, is not going to last very long. They wake up with the unwelcome and disheartening feeling that they now have another day in front of them.

Many have forgotten that the Lord has placed us in the world on our way to eternal happiness. They do not realise that only those who walk on earth with the joy of the children of God will be able to attain it.

306 Show people through your behaviour as a Christian citizen the difference between living sadly and living cheerfully; between being timid and being daring; between acting cautiously, with duplicity — hypocritically — and acting as men of simplicity and integrity. In a word, between being worldly and being children of God.

307 A fundamental error against which you must be on guard is to think that the noble and just customs and needs of your times and environment cannot be directed and accommodated to the holiness of the moral teaching of Jesus Christ.

Notice that I have specified that the customs and needs should be "noble and just." If they are not, they lack the right to be adopted by citizens.

308 Religion cannot be separated from life, either in theory or in daily reality.

309 Far away on the horizon heaven seems to meet the earth. Do not forget that where heaven and earth really meet is in the heart of a child of God.

310 We cannot simply fold our arms when a subtle persecution condemns the Church to die of starvation, putting it outside the sphere of public life, and above all obstructing its part in education, culture and family life.

These are not our rights; they are God's rights. He has entrusted them to us Catholics so that we may exercise them!

311 Many things, whether they be material, technical, economic, social, political or cultural, when left to themselves, or left in the hands of those who lack the light of the faith, become formidable obstacles to the supernatural life. They form a sort of closed shop which is hostile to the Church.

You, as a Christian and, perhaps, as a research worker, writer, scientist, politician or labourer, have the duty to sanctify those things. Remember that the whole universe — as the Apostle says — is groaning as in the pangs of labour, awaiting the liberation of the children of God.

312 You should not want to make the world into a convent, because this would be a disorder. But don't convert the Church into some earthly faction either, because that would be tantamount to committing treason.

313 How sad it is to have the mentality of a Roman Emperor, and not to understand the freedom other citizens enjoy in the things God has left to the free choice of men.

314 "Who said that to reach sanctity, you need to seek refuge in a cell or on a solitary mountain?" That was what a good family man asked himself in amazement, and he added: "If that were so, it would not be the people who would be holy, but the cell, or the mountain. It seems they have forgotten that Our Lord expressly told each and every one of us: be holy as my heavenly Father is holy."

My only comment was: "Our Lord, besides wanting us to be saints, grants each one of us the relevant graces."

315 Love your own country: it is a Christian virtue to be patriotic. But if patriotism becomes nationalism, which leads you to look at other people, at other countries, with indifference, with scorn, without Christian charity and justice, then it is a sin.

316 It is not patriotism to justify crimes or to deny the rights of other peoples.

317 The Apostle wrote that "there is no more Gentile and Jew, no more circumcised and uncircumcised; no one is barbarian or Scythian, no one is a slave or a free man; there is nothing but Christ in any of us."

Those words are as valid today as they were then. Before the Lord there is no difference of nation, race, class, state ... Each one of us has been born in Christ to be a new creature, a son of God. We are all brothers, and we have to behave fraternally towards one another.

318 Many years ago now, I saw most clearly a truth which will always be valid: the whole web of society needs to live anew and spread the eternal truths of the Gospel, since it has departed from Christian faith and morals. Children of God at the very heart of that society, of the world, have to let their virtues shine out like lamps in the darkness — quasi lucernae lucentes in caliginoso loco.

319 The perennial vitality of the Catholic Church ensures that the truth and spirit of Christ do not become remote from the different needs of the times.

320 To follow in Christ's footsteps, today's apostle does not need to reform anything, but even less has he to take no part in the contemporary affairs going on around him. He has only to act as the first Christians did, and give life to his environment.

321 You live in the midst of the world and you are just another citizen living in contact with men who say they are good or bad. You must always want to give other people the happiness you enjoy as a Christian.

322 A decree went out from the Emperor Augustus, enjoining that all the inhabitants of Israel should be registered. Mary and Joseph made their way to Bethlehem. Has it ever occurred to you that the Lord made use of the prompt acceptance of a law to fulfil his prophecy?

Love and respect the ways of behaving by which you may live in amity with other people. Have no doubt, either, that your loyal submission to duty can be the means for others to discover Christian integrity, which is the fruit of divine love, and to find God.

SINCERITY

323 Anyone who hides a temptation from his director shares a secret with the devil. He has become a friend of the enemy.

324 The dust thrown up by your fall blinds and disorients you, and you have thoughts which rob you of your peace.

Have you sought relief in tears by the side of Our Lord, and in confident conversation with a brother?

325 If you are sincere with God, with your director and your fellow men, I shall be certain of your perseverance.

326 Do you want to know how to be frank and simple? Listen to these words of Peter and meditate upon them: Domine, Tu omnia nosti ... — Lord, You know all things!

327 "What shall I say?," you asked when you began to open up your soul. And with a sure conscience, I answered: "In the first place say what you would not like to be known."

328 The defects you see in others are perhaps your own. Si oculus tuus fuerit simplex ... — If your eye is clear, the whole of the body will be lit up; whereas if the eye is diseased, the whole of the body will be in darkness.

Moreover: "How is it that you can see the speck of dust in your brother's eye, and are not aware of the beam that is in your own?"

Examine yourself.

329 We all need to be aware of our lack of objectivity, whenever we judge our own conduct. You too.

330 I agree, you are saying nearly all the truth ... Therefore you are not truthful.

331 You complain ... , and I go on with holy intransigence: you complain ... , because this time I have put my finger where it hurts.

332 You understood what sincerity is when you wrote to me: "I am trying to form the habit of calling things by their proper names and, above all, of not looking for words for what does not exist."

333 Think about this carefully: being transparent lies more in not hiding things rather than in wanting things to be seen. It is a matter of allowing the objects lying at the bottom of a glass to be perceived, and not trying to make the air visible.

334 Let us always act in the presence of God in such a way that we never have to hide anything from men.

335 Your worries are at an end. You have discovered that being sincere with the your director sorts out all complications with admirable ease.

336 How mistaken parents, teachers, directors can be, when they demand absolute sincerity and then, when they are told the whole truth, are frightened.

337 You were reading in that dictionary the synonyms for insincere: "two-faced, surreptitious, evasive, disingenuous, sly." As you closed the book, you asked the Lord that nobody should ever be able to apply those adjectives to you, and you resolved to improve much more in this supernatural and human virtue of sincerity.

338 Abyssus, abyssum invocat ... — one depth makes answer to another, as I have already reminded you. It is the exact description of how liars, hypocrites, renegades, and traitors behave. As they are disgusted with their own behaviour, they hide their misdeeds from others and go from bad to worse, creating an abyss between themselves and their neighbour.

339 The liturgy rejoices with the song: Tota pulchra es Maria, et macula originalis non est in te! — You are all fair, O Mary, without original sin! In Her there is not the slightest shadow of duplicity. I pray daily to our Mother that we may be able to open our souls in spiritual direction and the light of grace may shine in all our behaviour.

Mary will obtain for us the courage to be sincere, if we ask her for it, so that we may come closer to the Most Blessed Trinity.

LOYALTY

340 A consequence of loyalty is your assurance that you are walking along the right road, without being unsettled or confused. You are also strengthened in this additional certainty: that good sense and happiness exist.

See whether this is fulfilled in every instant of your life.

341 You told me that God sometimes fills you with light for a while and sometimes does not.

I reminded you, firmly, that the Lord is always infinitely good. That is why those moments of light are enough to help you carry on; but the times when you see no light are good for you too, and make you more faithful.

342 The salt of the earth. Our Lord said that his disciples — you and I also — are the salt of the earth: to render immune to infection, to prevent corruption, to season the world.

But he also added: Quod si sal evanuerit ... — if the salt itself becomes tasteless, it will be cast out and trampled underfoot by men.

On seeing the many things happening which we lament, can you now find an explanation for what you could not explain before?

343 That passage of the Second Epistle to Timothy makes me shudder, when the Apostle laments that Demas has fallen in love with this present world and gone to Thessalonica. For a trifle, and for fear of persecution, this man, whom Saint Paul had quoted in other epistles as being among the saints, had betrayed the divine enterprise.

I shudder when I realise how little I am: and it leads me to demand from myself faithfulness to the Lord even in events that might seem to be indifferent — for if they do not help me to be more united to Him, I do not want them.

344 I thought the comment on loyalty you had written to me was very appropriate to all those moments in history which the devil makes it his business to repeat: "I carry with me every day in my heart, in my mind and on my lips, an aspiration: Rome."

345 What a great discovery! Something you barely half- understood turned out to be very clear when you had to explain it to others.

You had to speak very gently with someone, who was disheartened because he felt useless and did not want to be a burden to anyone. You understood then better than ever why I always talk to you about being little donkeys turning the water-wheel: carrying on faithfully, with large blinkers which prevent us personally seeing or tasting the results — the flowers, the fruit, the freshness of the garden — confident about the effectiveness of our fidelity.

346 Loyalty demands a real hunger for formation, because you are moved by a sincere love and you do not wish to run the risk of spreading or of defending, through ignorance, principles or attitudes which are very far from being in accordance with the truth.

347 "I would like," you write, "my loyalty and perseverance to be so solid and so eternal, and my service so vigilant and loving, that you could be pleased with me, and I could provide a bit of solace for you."

And I answer: may God confirm you in your resolution, so that we may provide help and solace for Him.

348 It is true that some who become enthusiastic leave later on. Don't worry: they are the needle God makes use of to draw the thread through the cloth.

Oh, and pray for them, because perhaps one can manage to get them to keep giving an impulse to others.

349 For you who are wavering, I copy from a letter: "From now on I may continue to be the same inept instrument as ever. But in spite of that, I have changed my way of defining and solving the problem of my life, because there is in me a firm desire to persevere ... for ever!"

You must never doubt that He never fails.

350 Your life is service, but always with stalwart loyalty, laying down no conditions. Only thus shall we be able to give the Lord what he expects.

351 I shall never share the idea, either in the ascetical or the juridical field, of those who think and live as if serving the Church were equivalent to climbing to the top.

352 It hurts you to see that some use the technique of speaking about the Cross of Christ, only so as to climb and obtain positions. They are the same people who consider nothing they see as clean if it does not coincide with their own particular standards.

All the more reason, then, for you to persevere in the rectitude of your intentions, and to ask the Master to grant you the strength to repeat: *Non mea voluntas, sed tua fiat!* — Lord, may I fulfil your Holy Will with love.

353 Every day you must grow in loyalty towards the Church, the Pope and the Holy See ... with a love that should be always more theological.

354 You have a great desire truly to love the Church: and all the greater, when you see that those who wish to make her appear ugly are more active. This seems very natural to me: because the Church is your Mother.

355 Sooner or later, those who do not wish to understand that the faith demands service to the Church and to souls, invert the terms, and end up by having the Church and souls serving their own personal ends.

356 May you never fall into the error of identifying the Mystical Body of Christ with a particular personal or public attitude of any of its members.

And may you never let other people with less formation fall into that error.

Now you realise the importance of your integrity, of your loyalty!

357 I cannot understand you when you talk about matters of morals and of faith and you tell me that you are an independent Catholic.

From whom are you independent? That false independence is equivalent to leaving the way of Christ.

358 You must never give in with regard to the doctrine of the Church. When an alloy is made, the better metal is debased.

Furthermore, that treasure is not yours, and — as the Gospel says — the Owner may ask you to render an account when you least expect it.

359 I have to agree with you that there are practising Catholics who even seem devout in the eyes of others and are perhaps sincerely convinced, yet are naively serving the enemies of the Church.

Into their very homes, under various names, invariably wrongly used — ecumenism, pluralism, democracy — has insinuated itself the worst adversary — ignorance.

360 Although it seems a paradox, those who call themselves sons of the Church may often be precisely those who sow greater confusion.

361 You are tired of fighting. You are weary of an environment characterised by lack of loyalty. Everyone rushes upon the man who has fallen, to trample on him!

I do not know why you are surprised. The same thing happened to Christ himself, but He did not pull back, because He had come precisely to save the sick and those who did not understand him.

362 The disloyal are eager that those who are loyal should remain inactive.

363 Flee from sectarianism, which is opposed to loyal collaboration.

364 True unity cannot be promoted by making new divisions. Even less can it come about when its promoters wish to gain control and take over from lawful authority.

365 You became very thoughtful when you heard me say: I want the blood of my Mother the Church to run in my veins; not Alexander's, or Charlemagne's, nor that of the Seven Sages of Greece.

366 To persevere is to persist in love, per Ipsum et cum Ipso et in Ipso ... Indeed we can also interpret this as: He himself, with me, for me and in me.

367 Among Catholics it might perhaps be that some have little Christian spirit; or so it might seem to those who have dealings with them at some particular moment.

But if you were to be scandalised by this fact, you would show that you knew very little about human wretchedness and ... about your own wretchedness.

Furthermore, it is neither just nor loyal to use the example of the weaknesses of a few to speak ill of Christ and his Church.

368 It is true that we, the children of God, ought not to serve the Lord in order to be noticed. But we should not mind being seen, much less should we cease to fulfil our duty because we are seen!

369 Twenty centuries have gone by, and every day the scene is repeated: they continue to judge, to scourge and crucify the Master ... And many Catholics, with their behaviour and with their words, continue to shout: Him? I don't know him!

I would like to go around everywhere, reminding many, confidentially, that God is merciful, but He is also very just! That is why He declared: "I too will disown whoever disowns me before men."

370 I have always thought that lack of loyalty out of human respect is lack of love — and a lack of personality.

371 Turn your eyes towards the Blessed Virgin and see how she practises the virtue of loyalty. When Elizabeth needs her, the Gospel says that she went cum festinatione, — joyfully making haste. Learn from her!

DISCIPLINE

372 Obey with docility — but intelligently too, with love and a sense of responsibility which has nothing to do with judging those who govern and direct you.

373 In the apostolate, obey without paying attention to the human qualities of whoever it is asks you to do something, or to the way he asks you. Otherwise it is no virtue at all.

There are many kinds of crosses: some have jewels or pearls or emeralds on them, some are lacquered or made of ivory. But some are made of wood like Our Lord's. All deserve the same veneration, for the Cross tells us about the sacrifice of God made Man. Apply this consideration to your obedience, without forgetting that He embraced the Wood of the Cross lovingly, without hesitation! There he obtained our Redemption.

Only after obeying, which is a sign of rectitude of intention, may you make fraternal correction with the required conditions, and reinforce unity by fulfilling the duty in question.

374 Obey with your lips, your heart and your mind. It is not a man who is being obeyed, but God.

375 You do not love obedience if you do not really love whatever you have been asked to do, or if you do not really love whoever has asked you.

376 Some worries can be remedied immediately. Others, not so quickly. But they all are solved if we are faithful, if we obey and carry out what has been proposed to us.

377 The Lord wants a definite apostolate from you, such as catching those one hundred and fifty-three big fish — not others — taken on the right-hand side of the boat.

And you ask me: How is it I know myself to be a fisher of men, can live in contact with many companions, and be able to distinguish towards whom I should direct my specific apostolate, but still catch nobody? Is it Love that is lacking? Do I lack interior life?

Listen to the answer from Peter's lips, on the occasion of that other miraculous draught: — "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets."

In the name of Jesus Christ, begin again. And being strengthened, rid yourself of that indolence!

378 Obey without so much useless brooding. Appearing sad or reluctant when asked to do something is a very considerable fault. But just to feel like this is not only no fault, but can in fact be the opportunity for a great victory, for crowning an act of heroic virtue.

I have not invented this. Remember the Gospel tells us that a father asked his two sons to do the same job. And Jesus rejoices in the one who, despite raising difficulties, does it! He rejoices because discipline is the fruit of Love.

379 Most acts of disobedience come from not knowing how to listen to what it is you are being asked to do, which in the end shows a lack of humility or of interest in serving.

380 Do you want to obey fully? Well then, listen carefully so that you may understand the extent and the spirit of what is being pointed out to you; and if you do not understand something, ask.

381 When will you be convinced that you have to obey? And you disobey if, instead of fulfilling your plan of life, you waste your time. You have to fill every minute, with work, study, proselytism, interior life.

382 The Church, through care of the liturgy, makes us intuitively aware of the beauty of the mysteries of Religion and leads us to love them better. In a similar way, without being theatrical, we should behave with a certain attitude of deep respect — it may appear worldly — which may even be external, towards our director, through whose lips the Will of God is made known to us.

383 In governing, after considering the common good, one must realise that both in spiritual and in civil affairs it will be very rare for a law to displease nobody.

There is a popular saying: The rain never pleases everybody. Yet you can be sure, that is not a defect of the law, but an unjustified rebelliousness of pride and selfishness by a few.

384 Order, authority, discipline ... They listen, if they do at all, with cynical smiles, claiming that they — both men and women — are defending their freedom.

They are the very people who later pretend that we should respect their erring ways or adapt to them; with their scurrilous protests, they do not understand that their behaviour is not — it cannot be — accepted by the authentic freedom of the rest.

385 Those who direct spiritual tasks have to be concerned with all things human, so as to raise them to the supernatural order and make them Godlike.

If they cannot be made Godlike, do not be deceived: such "human" things are not human, they are "brutish," inappropriate for a rational creature.

386 Authority. This does not consist in the one above yelling at the one below, and he in turn to the one further down.

In such a way of behaving — a caricature of authority — apart from an evident lack of charity and of decent human standards, all that is achieved is that the one at the top becomes isolated from those who are governed, because he does not serve them: rather could it be said that he uses them.

387 Don't be one of those who let their own homes be badly managed but attempt to meddle in the management of other people's.

388 But do you really think you know it all just because you have been placed in authority?

Listen carefully: the good ruler knows that he can, that he should, learn from others.

389 Freedom of conscience: no! How many evils this lamentable error, which permits actions against the dictates that lie deepest in oneself, has brought about in nations and individuals.

Freedom "of consciences," yes: for it means the duty to follow that interior command ... ah, but after receiving a serious formation!

390 To govern is not to mortify others.

391 Occupying as you do a post of government, I say, "Meditate on this: the strongest and most effective instruments, if they are not properly used, become dented, worn out and useless."

392 Decisions of governance taken lightly or by someone on his own are always, or nearly always, influenced by a one-sided view of the problems.

However good your training or talents might be, you must listen to those who share with you that task of direction.

393 Never listen to anonymous accusations: it is the way villains behave.

394 In governing, consider this: you must take human material as it is and help it to improve while never despising it.

395 I think it is very good that you should try daily to increase the depth of your concern for those under you, for to feel surrounded and protected by the affectionate understanding of the one in charge can be the effective help which is needed by the people you have to serve by means of your governance.

396 How sad it is to see some people in positions of authority speaking and making judgements lightly, without studying the matter in hand. They make hard statements about persons or matters they know nothing about, even permitting certain prejudices which are the result of disloyalty!

397 If authority becomes dictatorial authoritarianism, and this situation is extended in time, historical continuity is lost. People without experience in government reach the top and the inexperienced and excitable young want to grab

hold of the reins. How many evils and how many offences against God — their own and those of others — are to be blamed on the ones who abuse authority so badly!

398 When he who commands is negative and distrustful, he will easily become tyrannical.

399 Try to be properly objective in your work of governance. Avoid the inclination common to those who tend to see rather — and sometimes only — what is not going well, the mistakes.

Be filled with joy and be assured that the Lord has granted to all the capacity to become holy precisely by fighting against their own defects.

400 Eagerness for novelty can lead to mismanagement.

You say we need new rules. But do you think the human body would be better with a different system of nerves and arteries?

401 How determined some people are to concentrate on mass behaviour, to turn unity into amorphous uniformity and to drown freedom.

They seem to know nothing of the remarkable unity of the human body, which presents such a God-given variety in its members. Each one has its own function, yet contributes to the general health of the whole.

God does not want us all to be the same or to walk alike along exactly the same road.

402 People have to be taught how to work, but their preparation need not be overdone, for actually doing things is a way of learning too. They should accept in advance their unavoidable shortcomings — the best is the enemy of the good.

403 Never put your trust in organisation alone.

404 The good shepherd does not need to terrorise the sheep. Such behaviour befits bad rulers, and no one is very much surprised if they end up hated and alone.

405 Governing often consists in knowing how, with patience and affection, to draw good out of people.

406 Good governance knows how to be flexible when necessary, without falling into the mistake of not asking enough of people.

407 "As long as they don't make me sin!" said that poor man bravely when he had been almost ruined, in his private life and in his earthly and Christian ambitions, by powerful enemies.

Meditate upon this and learn to say: "As long as they don't make me sin!"

408 Not all citizens form part of the regular army. But in time of war everybody plays a part. And Our Lord said: "I have not come to bring peace, but war."

409 "I was a guerrilla fighter," he wrote, "and I moved around the hills, shooting whenever I wanted. But I thought I had better become a soldier, because I realised that wars are won more easily by organised armies and well-disciplined armies. A poor guerrilla fighter on his own cannot take whole cities, or conquer the world. I hung up my old musket — it was so out of date — and now I am better armed. At the same time, I know that I can no longer lie down in the hills, under the shade of a tree, and dream about winning the war all on my own."

Blessed be the discipline and blessed be the unity of our Holy Mother the Church!

410 I would say to many rebel Catholics that they fail in their duty if, instead of accepting the discipline and obedience due to lawful authority, they become a party, a small faction, sowers of discord, conspirators and gossips, promoters of stupid personal squabbles, weavers of a mesh of petty envies and difficulties.

411 A gentle wind is not the same as a hurricane. Anyone can resist the first: it is child's play, a parody of struggle.

Gladly you bore small contradictions, shortages and little worries. And you enjoyed the interior peace of thinking: now I am really working for God, because here we have the Cross ...

But now, my poor son, the hurricane has come, and you feel you are being shaken by a force that could uproot century-old trees. You feel this from without and within. But you must remain confident, for your Faith and your Love cannot be uprooted, nor can you be blown from your way, if you remain with the "head," if you maintain unity.

412 How easily you leave the plan of life unfinished, or do things so badly that it is worse than not doing them at all. Is that the way you mean to fall in love more each day with your way, and to pass on this love later to others?

413 Aspire to have no more than one right: that of fulfilling your duty.

414 Is the burden heavy? No, a thousand times no! Those obligations which you freely accepted are wings that raise you high above the vile mud of your passions.

Do the birds feel the weight of their wings? If you were to cut them off and put them on the scales you would see how heavy they are. But can a bird fly if they are taken away from it? It needs those wings and it does not notice their weight, for they lift it up above other creatures.

Your wings are heavy too. But if you did not have them you would fall into the filthiest mire.

415 "Mary kept all these things in her heart."

Discipline does not seem at all heavy when it goes together with a clean and sincere love. Even if it costs you a lot, it unites you to the Loved One.

PERSONALITY

416 The Lord needs strong and courageous souls who refuse to come to terms with mediocrity but will be able to enter all kinds of environments with a sure step.

417 A calm and balanced character, an inflexible will, deep faith and an ardent piety: these are the indispensable characteristics of a son of God.

418 The Lord can raise children of Abraham from the very stones. But we must make sure that the stone is not crumbly, for though hard rock may be shapeless, it is easier to hew good stone for building from it.

419 An apostle must not remain at the level of the mediocre. God calls him to be fully human in his actions, and at the same time to reflect the freshness of eternal things. That is why the apostle has to be a soul who has undergone a long, patient and heroic process of formation.

420 You say that you are discovering new things in yourself every day. I answer : you are now beginning to know yourself.

When you really love, you find new ways of loving even more.

421 It would be a very sad thing if anyone looking at the way Catholics in society behave, concluded that they were sheepish and easily imposed upon.

Never forget that our Master was, indeed is, perfectus Homo — perfect Man.

422 If the Lord has given you some natural quality or skill, you should not just enjoy it yourself or show off about it; you should use it charitably in the service of your neighbour.

And what better occasion than now will you find to serve, since you live with so many souls who share the same ideal as yourself?

423 Under the pressure and impact of a materialistic, pleasure-loving, faithless world, how can we demand and justify the freedom of not thinking as they do, and of not acting as they do?

A son of God has no need to ask for that freedom, because Christ won it for us once and for all. But he does need to defend it and practise it whatever the circumstance he finds himself in. Only thus will they understand that our freedom is not bound up in our surroundings.

424 Your relatives, colleagues and friends have noticed the change, and realised that it is not a temporary phase, but that you are no longer the same.

Don't worry, carry on. Vivit vero in me Christus — it is now Christ that lives in me — that's what is happening.

425 You should respect those who are capable of saying No to you. And you should also ask them to give you reasons for their refusal, so that you can learn — or put them right.

426 Once you were pessimistic, hesitant and apathetic. Now you are completely transformed: you feel courageous, optimistic and self-confident, because you have made up your mind, at last, to rely on God alone.

427 What a sorry state someone is in when he has marvellous human virtues but a total lack of supernatural outlook, because he will apply those virtues quite easily to his own selfish ends. Meditate upon this.

428 Since you want to acquire a Catholic or universal mentality, here are some characteristics you should aim at:

- a breadth of vision and a deepening insight into the things that remain alive and unchanged in Catholic orthodoxy;

- a proper and healthy desire, which should never be frivolous, to present anew the standard teachings of traditional thought in philosophy and the interpretation of history;

- a careful awareness of trends in science and contemporary thought;

- and a positive and open attitude towards the current changes in society and in ways of living.

429 You have to learn to disagree charitably with others — whenever the need arises — without becoming unpleasant.

430 With the grace of God and a solid formation you can make yourself understood in a backward environment. There, they would find it difficult to follow you if you lacked "the gift of tongues," the capacity to try and reach their understanding.

431 You should always be well-mannered towards everybody, especially towards those who present themselves as your adversaries (you should never have enemies) when you are trying to let them see their mistake.

432 You feel sorry for a spoilt child, don't you? Well then, don't look after yourself so well. Can't you see that you are going to get soft?

Moreover, you must know that the flowers with the sweetest scent are the wild flowers that have grown out in the open, through rain and drought.

433 He will go very far, they say. It is frightening to think of his future responsibility. He has never been known to perform an unselfish act or say a kind word or write anything fruitful. His life is entirely negative. He always gives the impression of being submerged in deep thought, although it is well known that he never cultivated any ideas worth thinking about. His face and manner have the gravity of a mule, and so he has the reputation of being prudent.

He will go very far; but, I ask myself, what will he be able to teach others? How and in what will he serve them if we do not help him to change?

434 The pedant interprets the simplicity and the humility of the wise man as ignorance.

435 Don't be one of those people who, when they receive an order, immediately begin to think about how to change it. They are said to have too much personality, but they cause disunity or ruin.

436 Experience, great knowledge of the world, being able to read between the lines, an exaggerated sharpness, a critical spirit. All those things, in your business and social relations, have led you too far, to such an extent that you have become a bit cynical. All that "excessive realism," which is a lack of supernatural spirit, has even invaded your interior life. Through failing to be simple, you have become cold and unfeeling.

437 At heart you are a good chap, but you fancy yourself as a Machiavelli. Remember that to enter into Heaven you have to be a good and honest man, not a tiresome intriguer.

438 That good humour of yours is admirable. But to take absolutely everything as a joke is, you must admit, going too far. But the real position is quite different. Since you do not have the will to take your own affairs seriously, you justify yourself by poking fun at others who are better than you.

439 I do not deny that you are clever. But your unreasonable vehemence leads you to act like a fool.

440 Yours is an unbalanced character. You are a broken keyboard. You play very well on the high notes and on the low notes, but no sound comes from the ones in the middle, the ones used in ordinary life, the ones people normally hear.

441 Take note from this: I told a certain learned, noble and upright man, on a memorable occasion, that by defending a holy cause, which "good people" were attacking, a high post in his field was at stake — he was going to lose it. With a voice full of human and supernatural seriousness, despising the honours of this earth, he answered: "It is my soul that is at stake."

442 Diamonds are polished with diamonds, and souls with souls.

443 "A great sign appeared in Heaven: a woman adorned with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and a crown of twelve stars about her head." From this, you and I and everyone may be sure that nothing perfects our personality so much as correspondence with grace.

Try to imitate the Virgin Mary and you will be a complete man or woman.

PRAYER

444 Conscious of our duties, can we let a whole day go past without remembering we have a soul?

In our daily meditation, we have always to put things right lest we depart from the way.

445 If you abandon prayer you may at first live on spiritual reserves, and after that, by cheating.

446 Practise meditation for a fixed period and at a fixed time. Otherwise we would be putting our own convenience first; that would be a lack of mortification. And prayer without mortification is not at all effective.

447 You lack interior life: that is because you do not consider in your prayer other people's concerns and proselytism; because you do not make an effort to see things clearly, to make definite resolutions and fulfil them; because you do not have a supernatural outlook in your study, in your work, in your conversations, and your dealings with others.

Are you living in the presence of God? For that is a consequence and a manifestation of your prayer.

448 You haven't been praying? Why, because you haven't had time? But you do have time. Furthermore, what sort of works will you be able to do if you have not meditated on them in the presence of the Lord, so as to put them in order? Without that conversation with God, how can you finish your daily work with perfection? Look, it is as if you claimed you had no time to study because you were too busy giving lessons. Without study you cannot teach well.

Prayer has to come before everything. If you do not understand this and put it into practice, don't tell me that you have no time: it's simply that you do not want to pray.

449 Pray, and pray more. It may seem odd to say that now when you are taking examinations and working harder. But you need prayer, and not only the habitual prayer as an exercise of devotion; you also need to pray during odd moments, to pray between times, instead of allowing your mind to wander on stupidities.

It does not matter if, in spite of your effort, you do not manage to concentrate and be recollected. That meditation may be of greater value than the one you made, with all ease, in the oratory.

450 Here is an effective custom for achieving presence of God: your first appointment every day should be with Jesus Christ.

451 Prayer is not the prerogative of monks; it is a Christian undertaking of men and women of the world who know themselves to be children of God.

452 Certainly, you have to follow your way: a man of action ... with a contemplative vocation.

453 A Catholic, without prayer? It is the same as a soldier without arms.

454 Thank the Lord for the enormous gift he has granted you by making you understand that "only one thing is necessary." And along with that thanksgiving may no day go past without your offering a prayer of petition for those who as yet have no idea of this duty or do not understand it.

455 When they were fishing for you, you would ask yourself where they got that strength and fire which burned everything in sight. Now as you pray you realise that this is the source that wells up within the true children of God.

456 You belittle meditation. Might you not be afraid, and so seek anonymity since you dare not speak with Christ face to face?

You must see that there are many ways of belittling meditation, even though you might say you are practising it.

457 Prayer is a time for holy intimacies and firm resolutions.

458 How much sense there was in the plea of a soul who said: "Lord, don't abandon me; can't you see that there is another person who is tugging at my feet?"

459 Will the Lord return and enkindle my soul? Your head assures you that He will come and so, deep down, does a faint sense of longing which is perhaps hope. On the other hand, your heart and will (too much of the former and too little of the latter) cast a paralysing and deadly melancholy over everything, like a sneer of bitter mockery.

Listen to the promise of the Holy Spirit: "Within a very short time, He who has to come will come and will not delay. In the meantime, the just man lives by faith."

460 True prayer which absorbs the whole individual benefits not so much from the solitude of the desert as from interior recollection.

461 We prayed that evening right out in the country as night was falling. We must have looked rather peculiar to anyone who saw us and did not know what we were up to: sitting on the ground in silence, which was interrupted only by the reading of some points for meditation.

That prayer under the open sky, hammering away for everyone there with us, for the Church, for souls, was fruitful and pleasing to Heaven. Any place is fitting for that encounter with God.

462 I am glad that in your prayer you tend to go far: you contemplate lands different from the one in which you find yourself; before your eyes pass people of other races; you hear different tongues. It is like an echo of that commandment of Jesus, *Euntes docete omnes gentes* — go, teach all nations.

To go ever further, you must enkindle that fire among those around you. Your dreams and ambitions will become reality: sooner, more and better!

463 Your prayer will sometimes be intellectual; less often, it may be full of fervour; and, perhaps often, dry, dry, dry. But what matters is that you, with the help of God, are not disheartened.

Consider the sentry on duty. He does not know if the King or the Head of State is in the palace: he is not told what he might be doing, and generally the public figure does not know who is on guard.

It is not at all like that with our God. He lives where you live, He cares for you and knows your inmost thoughts. Do not abandon the guard-duty of your prayer!

464 Look at the set of senseless reasons the enemy gives you for abandoning your prayer. "I have no time" — when you are constantly wasting it. "This is not for me." "My heart is dry ... "

Prayer is not a question of what you say or feel, but of love. And you love when you try hard to say something to the Lord, even though you might not actually say anything.

465 "Just one minute of intense prayer is enough." Someone who never prayed must have said that.

Would someone in love think it enough to contemplate intensely the person they love for just a minute?

466 That ideal of fighting — and winning — Christ's battles can become a reality only by prayer and sacrifice, by Faith and Love. Let us pray, then, and believe, and suffer, and Love!

467 Mortification is the drawbridge that enables us to enter the castle of prayer.

468 Do not be discouraged. However unworthy the person is, however imperfect the prayer turns out to be, if it is offered with humility and perseverance, God always hears it.

469 A penitent soul prayed: "Lord, I do not deserve to be heard, because I am wicked." But he added: "Yet ... listen to me quoniam bonus — because You are good."

470 Our Lord sent out his disciples to preach, and when they came back he gathered them together and invited them to go with him to a desert place where they could rest. What marvellous things Jesus would ask them and tell them! Well, the Gospel is always relevant to the present day.

471 I understand perfectly when you write to me about your apostolate: "I am going to pray for three hours, studying Physics. It will be a bombardment so that another position, which is on the other side of the library table, falls — you have met him already when he came round here."

I remember how happy you were when you heard me say that prayer and work can easily go together.

472 The Communion of Saints: that young engineer understood it well when he told me: "Father, on such a day, at such a time, you were praying for me."

This is and will always be the first and most fundamental help that we can provide for souls: prayer.

473 Acquire the habit of saying vocal prayers in the morning, while you are dressing, like little children. You will have greater presence of God later during the day.

474 For those who use their intelligence and their study as a weapon, the Rosary is most effective. Because that apparently monotonous way of beseeching Our Lady as children do their Mother, can destroy every seed of vainglory and pride.

475 "Immaculate Virgin, I know very well that I am only a miserable wretch, and all I do is increase each day the number of my sins ... " You told me the other day that was how you spoke to Our Mother.

And I was confident in advising you with assurance to pray the Holy Rosary. Blessed be that monotony of Hail Marys which purifies the monotony of your sins!

476 A sad way of not praying the Rosary is to leave it for the end of the day.

If you say it when going to bed, it will be done at best badly and with no meditation on the mysteries. It will be difficult then to avoid routine, which is what drowns true piety, the only piety worth the name.

477 The Rosary is said not with the lips alone, muttering Hail Marys one after the other. That is the way over-pious old men and women rattle them off. For a Christian, vocal prayer must spring from the heart, so that while the Rosary is said, the mind can enter into contemplation of each one of the mysteries.

478 You always leave the Rosary for later, and you end up not saying it at all because you are sleepy. If there is no other time, say it in the street without letting anybody notice it. It will, moreover, help you to have presence of God.

479 "Pray for me," I said as I always do. And he answered in amazement: "But is something the matter?"

I had to explain that something is the matter or happens to us all the time; and I added that when prayer is lacking, "more and more weighty things are the matter."

480 Renew your acts of contrition during the day. You must realise that Jesus is being offended constantly, and unfortunately, these offences are not being atoned for at the same rate.

That is why I have so often said: "Acts of contrition, the more the better!" Echo my words with your life and your advice.

481 The scene of the Annunciation is a very lovely one. How often we have meditated on this. Mary is recollected in prayer. She is using all her senses and her

faculties to speak to God. It is in prayer that she comes to know the divine Will. And with prayer she makes it the life of her life. Do not forget the example of the Virgin Mary.

WORK

482 Work is man's original vocation. It is a blessing from God, and those who consider it a punishment are sadly mistaken.

The Lord, who is the best of fathers, placed the first man in Paradise ut operaretur, so that he would work.

483 To study, to work: these are inescapable duties for all Christians. They are means of defending ourselves from the enemies of the Church and of attracting, with our professional prestige, so many souls who, being good, fight in isolation. They are the most fundamental weapons for whoever wants to be an apostle in the midst of the world.

484 I ask God that you may take as your model Jesus as an adolescent and as a young man, both when he disputed with the doctors in the Temple and when he worked in Joseph's workshop.

485 Of Jesus' thirty-three years, thirty were spent in silence and obscurity, submission and work.

486 That big young man wrote to me saying: "My ideal is so great that only the sea could contain it." I answered: "And what about the Tabernacle, which is so 'small'; and the 'common' workshop of Nazareth?"

It is in the greatness of ordinary things that He awaits us!

487 Before God, no occupation is in itself great or small. Everything gains the value of the Love with which it is done.

488 Heroism at work is to be found in finishing each task.

489 Let me stress this point: it is in the simplicity of your ordinary work, in the monotonous details of each day, that you have to find the secret, which is hidden from so many, of something great and new: Love.

490 You say it helps you a lot to wonder how many businessmen have become saints since the time of the early Christians.

And you want to show that it is also possible today. The Lord will not abandon you in that effort.

491 You too have a professional vocation which spurs you on. Well, that spur is the hook to fish for men.

Rectify your intention, then, and be sure you acquire all the professional prestige you can for the service of God and of souls. The Lord counts on this too.

492 To finish things you have to start them.

It seems a truism, but you so often lack that simple decision. And how satan rejoices in your ineffectiveness!

493 You cannot sanctify work which humanly speaking is slapdash, for we must not offer God badly-done jobs.

494 By neglecting small details you could work on and on without rest and yet live the life of a perfect idler.

495 You asked what you could offer the Lord. I don't have to think twice about the answer: offer the same things as before, but do them better, finishing them off with a loving touch that will lead you to think more about Him and less about yourself.

496 Here is a mission for ordinary Christians which is heroic and will always be relevant to the present day: to carry out in a holy way all different kinds of occupations even those that might seem least promising.

497 Let us work. Let us work a lot and work well, without forgetting that prayer is our best weapon. That is why I will never tire of repeating that we have to be contemplative souls in the midst of the world, who try to convert their work into prayer.

498 You are writing to me in the kitchen, by the stove. It is early afternoon. It is cold. By your side, your younger sister — the last one to discover the divine folly of living her Christian vocation to the full — is peeling potatoes. To all appearances — you think — her work is the same as before. And yet, what a difference there is!

It is true: before she only peeled potatoes, now, she is sanctifying herself peeling potatoes.

499 You say that you are now beginning to understand what a priestly soul means. Don't be annoyed with me if I tell you that the facts show that you only realise it in theory. Every day the same thing happens to you: at night time, during the examination, it is all desire and resolutions; during the morning and afternoon at work, it is all objections and excuses.

Are you in this way living a "holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ?"

500 When you started your ordinary work again, something like a groan of complaint escaped you: "It's always the same!"

And I told you: "Yes, it's always the same. But that ordinary job — which is the same one your fellow workers do — has to be a constant prayer for you. It has the same loveable words, but a different tune each day."

It is very much our mission to transform the prose of this life into poetry, into heroic verse.

501 We read in the Scriptures: *Stultorum infinitus est numerus*, the number of fools is infinite, and they seem to grow more every day. In all sorts of places, in the most unexpected situations, under the mantle of high office and respected positions — and even in the guise of virtue — you will have to put up with so much stupidity and so little good judgement.

But I do not understand how you can lose the supernatural view of life and give up caring. There is nothing you can do but put up with these situations, though your interior dispositions must be very poor if you put up with them for human motives.

If you do not help these people to find the right way by doing your work responsibly and finishing it well — by sanctifying it, that is — you will become like them, a fool. Either that or an accomplice.

502 You really do need to make an effort and put your shoulder to the wheel. For all that, you should put your professional interests in their place: they are only means to an end; they can never be regarded — in any way — as if they were the basic thing. These attacks of professionalitis stop you being united with God!

503 Forgive my insistence: the instrument, the means, must not be made into an end. If a spade were to weigh a hundredweight instead of what it should, the labourer would be unable to dig with it. He would use up all his energy humping it around, and the seed could not take root, for it would remain unused.

504 It has always been the same: however upright and blameless the behaviour of someone at work may be, it can easily arouse rivalry, suspicion and envy. If you occupy a position of authority, remember that some people may have prejudices against a particular colleague, but that is not sufficient reason for getting rid of "the accused." It could be a sign, rather, that he would be useful in a greater enterprise.

505 Obstacles? Sometimes they may be present, but at times you just invent them out of cowardice or love of comfort. How cleverly the devil makes those excuses for not working look plausible! He knows full well that sloth is the mother of all vices.

506 You are untiring in your activity. But you fail to put order into it, so you do not have as much effect as you should. It puts me in mind of something I heard once from a very authoritative source. I happened to praise a subordinate in front of his superior. I said, "How hard he works!" "You ought to say," I was told, "How much he rushes around!".

You are untiring in your activity, but it is all fruitless. How much you rush around ...

507 You tried to belittle somebody else's work by mumbling: "He has only done his duty."

And I said, "Does that seem so little to you?" The Lord gives us the happiness of Heaven for doing our duty: *Euge serve bone et fidelis ... intra in gaudium Domini tui* — Well done good and faithful servant, enter into eternal joy!

508 The Lord has the right to be glorified by us "at every moment" — it is an obligation for each one of us. So if we waste time we are robbing God of his glory.

509 You know that the task is urgent, and that one minute given to comfort is time taken from the glory of God. Why, then, do you hesitate to make conscientious use of every moment?

Moreover, I ask you to think whether the minutes you have to spare throughout the day, which taken together come to hours, might not be prompted by your disorder and laziness.

510 Sadness and uneasiness grow in proportion to the time you waste. When you feel a holy impatience to use every minute you will be filled with joy and peace, because you will not be thinking about yourself.

511 What was I concerned about? I replied that I felt no concern, for I had concerns enough to keep me busy.

512 You are going through a critical stage. You feel a certain vague fear and find it difficult to adapt your plan of life. Your work seems to weigh you down, since twenty-four hours are not enough to do everything you ought to each day.

Have you tried following the Apostle's advice: "let all things be done decently and according to order"? That means, in the presence of God, with Him, through Him, and only for Him.

513 When you parcel out your time, you need also to think how you can make use of the odd moments that become free at unforeseen times.

514 I have always seen rest as time set aside from daily tasks, never as days of idleness.

Rest means recuperation: to gain strength, form ideals and make plans. In other words it means a change of occupation, so that you can come back later with a new impetus to your daily job.

515 Now that you've got a lot to do, your "problems" have disappeared. Be honest: as you have made up your mind to work for Him, you no longer have time to think about your own selfish interests.

516 Ejaculatory prayers do not hinder your work, just as the beating of your heart does not impede the movements of the body.

517 Sanctifying one's work is no fantastic dream, but the mission of every Christian — yours and mine.

That is what that lathe-worker had discovered, when he said: "I am overwhelmed with happiness when I think how true it is that while I am working at the lathe and singing — singing all the time, on the outside and on the inside — I can become a saint. How good God is!"

518 Your work has become disagreeable, especially when you see how little your colleagues love God and at the same time flee from grace and the good services you want to render them.

You have to try to make up for all that they leave out. You must give yourself to God in work too, as you have done up to now, and convert it into prayer that rises to Heaven for all mankind.

519 Working with cheerfulness is not the same as "working away merrily" with no depth, as if you were getting rid of a troublesome burden.

You must try not to lessen the value of your efforts through lack of attention or superficiality, so that in the end you are in danger of coming to God empty-handed.

520 Some people act out of prejudice in their work: on principle they trust nobody, and it goes without saying that they do not understand the need to seek to sanctify their job. If you mention it to them they tell you not to add another burden to their own work, which they put up with reluctantly as if they were supporting a heavy weight.

That is one of the battles of peace we have to win: to find God in our work and, with Him and like Him, serve others.

521 You are put off by difficulties, and you shrink back. Do you know what characterises your behaviour? Nothing but comfort, comfort, and more comfort.

You had said that you were ready to wear yourself out, unstintingly, yet you still seem to be at the level of an apprentice to heroism. It is time to act with more maturity.

522 As a student, you should dedicate yourself to your books with an apostolic spirit, and be convinced in your heart that one hour added to another already make up — even now — a spiritual sacrifice offered to God and profitable for all mankind, your country and your soul.

523 You have a warhorse called study. You resolve a thousand times to make good use of your time, yet you are distracted by the merest thing. Sometimes you get annoyed at yourself, because of your lack of willpower, even though you begin again every day.

Have you tried offering up your study for specific apostolic intentions?

524 It is easier to bustle about than to study, but it is also less effective.

525 If you know that study is apostolate, but limit yourself to studying just enough to get by, it is clear that your interior life is going badly.

If you are so careless you will lose the right spirit. Just like the worker in the parable who cunningly hid the talent he had received, you may, if you do not put things right, exclude yourself from God's friendship, and be stuck in the mire of your comfort-seeking calculations.

526 You must study ... , but that is not enough.

What do those who kill themselves working to feed their self-esteem achieve? Or those who have nothing else in mind but assuring peace of mind for a few years ahead?

One has to study — to gain the world and conquer it for God. Then we can raise the level of our efforts: we can try to turn the work we do into an encounter with the Lord and the foundation to support those who will follow our way in the future.

In this way, study will become prayer.

527 I have seen many people live heroic lives for God without leaving their own place of work, and I have come to this conclusion: for a Catholic work is not just a matter of fulfilling a duty — it is to love, to excel oneself gladly in duty and in sacrifice.

528 When you come to understand that ideal of fraternal work for Christ, you will feel better, more secure, and as happy as one can be in this world, which so many are bent on making distorted and bitter by following their own selfish aims alone.

529 Sanctity is made up of heroic acts. Therefore, in our work we are asked for the heroism of finishing properly the tasks committed to us, day after day, even though they are the same tasks. If we don't, then we do not want to be saints.

530 I was convinced by that priest who is a friend of ours. He was talking about his apostolic work, and he assured me that there are no tasks of little importance. Hidden under this garden covered in roses, he said, is the silent effort of so many souls who with their work and prayer, their prayer and work, have won from Heaven abundant showers of grace, which makes everything fertile.

531 Place on your desk, in your room, in your wallet, a picture of Our Lady, and look at it when you begin your work, while you are doing it, and when you finish it. She will obtain, I can assure you, the strength for you to turn your task into a loving dialogue with God.

FRIVOLITY

532 When one thinks clearly about the poor things of this world, and compares them with the riches of life with Christ there is only one plain word, I can't help thinking, for the road that people choose: stupidity, stupidity, stupidity.

It is not just that most of us men make mistakes. There is something much worse about us: we are complete and utter fools.

533 It is sad that you do not want to remain hidden as a foundation stone and support the building. But to become a stumbling block for others? I think that is villainous!

534 Do not be scandalised because there are bad Christians who are active but do not practise. The Lord, says the Apostle, "will render to every man according to his works"; to you for yours, and to me, for mine.

If you and I make up our minds to behave well to begin with, there will be two fewer scoundrels in the world for a start.

535 If you do not fight against being frivolous, your head will be like a junk shop: you will only be storing up impossible ideals, false hopes, and ... old rubbish.

536 You are very independent-minded. If you made use of this in a supernatural way, it would help you to become a great Christian. But the way you use it just makes you very free and easy.

537 You take everything so lightly that I am reminded of the old story. The cry went up: "There is a lion coming!" And the naturalist answered: "Why tell me? I catch butterflies."

538 A terrible person is one who is ignorant but at the same time works tirelessly.

Take care that even when you are old and decrepit, you keep on wanting to be better trained.

539 This is the excuse of a frivolous and selfish man: "I don't want to commit myself to anything."

540 You neither want to be an evil man nor a good one. And so, limping on both legs, you will have mistaken your way and filled your life with emptiness.

541 In medio virtus — Virtue is to be found in the mean, the wise saying goes, warning us against extremism. But do not make the mistake of turning that advice into a euphemism for your own comfort, calculation, tepidity, easy-goingness, lack of idealism and mediocrity.

Meditate on these words of Sacred Scripture: "Would that you were cold or hot. But because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of my mouth."

542 You never reach the kernel of things. You always concern yourself with accidentals. Allow me to repeat what Sacred Scripture says: you have only "spoken in the wind."

543 Don't behave like those people who after hearing a sermon, instead of applying the doctrine to themselves, they think: that would suit So-and-so very well.

544 Sometimes people think there is no malice in slander. It is the hypothesis, they say, by which ignorance explains what it does not know or understand, so as to appear well-informed.

But it is doubly evil: as ignorance and as a lie.

545 Do not speak so irresponsibly. Don't you realise that as soon as you throw the first stone others — anonymously — will organise a full-scale stoning?

546 Is it you who are creating that atmosphere of discontent among those around you? Forgive me then for having to tell you that, apart from being bad, you are plain stupid.

547 When some misfortune or mistake occurs, it is poor satisfaction to be able to say: "I knew it would happen."

It would mean that you are unconcerned with the troubles of your neighbour, for you should have sought a remedy if it was in your power to do so.

548 There are many ways of sowing confusion. It is enough, for instance, to speak of the exception as if it were the general rule.

549 You say you are a Catholic. That is why I feel so sorry for you when I see that your convictions lack the solidity needed to let you practise Catholicism in action, without introducing reservations or compartmentalising your life.

550 It would be laughable, if it were not so sad, to see the naivety with which you accept — through superficiality, ignorance, or an inferiority complex — the most transparent nonsense.

551 People who are stupid, unscrupulous, or hypocritical, think that others are just the same. And — this is the real pity — they treat them as if they were.

552 It would be bad if you were to waste your time, which is not yours but God's and is meant for his glory. But if on top of that you make others waste it, you both diminish your own standing and defraud God of more of the glory you owe him.

553 You lack the maturity and composure appropriate for those who make their way through this life with the certainty of an ideal, of a goal. Ask the Blessed Virgin to teach you how to praise God with your whole heart, without distractions of any kind.

NATURALNESS

554 The risen Christ: the greatest of miracles was seen by only a few — by those who needed to see. Naturalness is the signature of divine enterprises.

555 When one works wholly and exclusively for the glory of God one does everything with naturalness, like someone who is in a hurry and will not be delayed by "making a great show of things." In this way one does not lose the unique and incomparable company of the Lord.

556 Why, you asked indignantly, should the surroundings in which the apostolate has to be carried out and the things used to do it be ugly, dirty — and complicated? And you added: "It would take no more effort to do it well!"

I thought your indignation very reasonable. And I pondered how Jesus talked to everyone and attracted them all: poor and rich, wise and ignorant, cheerful and sad, young and old. How lovable and natural — supernatural — is his figure.

557 To be effective you must be natural. What can one expect of a brush — even in the hands of a great painter — if it is wrapped in a silk cover?

558 Saints always make other people feel uncomfortable.

559 Saints, abnormal? The time has come to do away with that prejudice.

We have to teach, with the supernatural naturalness of Christian asceticism, that not even mystical phenomena mean abnormality. These phenomena have their own naturalness, just as other psychological or physiological things have theirs.

560 I talked to you about the horizon which opens up before our eyes and of the road we have to follow. "I have no objections," you said, as if surprised at not having any.

Engrave this deeply on your mind: there is no reason why there should be!

561 Avoid that ridiculous adulation which, perhaps unconsciously, you pay to the person in charge, so that you automatically echo his opinions on points of no consequence.

At the same time, you must be much more careful not to keep on showing up his defects as if they were amusing details or to become too familiar, detracting from his authority. Take care too not to render the sad service of letting the bad practice grow of turning something bad into a bit of a joke.

562 You are creating an artificial climate around yourself, characterised by suspicion and a lack of trust. For when you speak, you give the impression of someone playing chess: you say each word thinking four moves ahead.

Notice that the Gospel, when describing the wary and hypocritical character of the scribes and Pharisees, relates that they asked Jesus questions and put certain problems to him ut caperent eum in sermone — to twist his words. Flee from such behaviour.

563 Naturalness has nothing to do with rusticity, or being shabby or doing things poorly, or being bad-mannered.

Some people are determined to reduce the service of God to working in the world of miserable and — forgive the expression — lousy poverty. Such work is and will always be admirable; but if we stop there, apart from abandoning the vast majority of souls, what should we do when we have brought them out of their need — ignore them?

564 You are unworthy, are you? Well, try to become worthy. And let that be the end of it.

565 How you long to be extraordinary. The trouble with such an ambition is how very vulgar it is.

566 "Blessed are you for believing," said Elizabeth to our Mother. Union with God, supernatural virtue, always brings with it the attractive practice of human virtues: Mary brought joy to her cousin's home, because she brought Christ.

TRUTHFULNESS

567 You were praying before a crucifix, and you made this resolution: it is better to suffer for the truth, than for truth to suffer because of me.

568 So often it seems impossible for the truth to be true, above all because it always has to be lived consistently.

569 If you are annoyed at being told the truth, then ... why do you ask?

Is it perhaps that you want to be answered with your own "truth" so your errant ways can be justified?

570 You say that you have a great respect for the truth. Is that why you always place yourself at such a respectful distance from it?

571 Don't behave like a fool. No one is ever a fanatic for wanting to know better every day, and love more, and defend with greater conviction the truth he has to know, love and defend.

On the other hand — I say this without fear — those who oppose this reasonable behaviour in the name of a false liberty become sectarian.

572 It is as easy now as it was at the time of Jesus Christ to say No, to deny or to put to one side the truth of faith. You who call yourself a Catholic have to start from Yes.

Later, after some study, you will be able to explain the reasons for your certainty, and that there is no contradiction — there can be none — between Truth and science, between Truth and life.

573 Do not deviate from the way, even though you do have to live with people who are full of prejudices. Do not abandon the task as if you thought the basis of arguments or the meaning of words were fixed by their behaviour or by their assertions.

Do try to get them to understand you, but if you don't manage it carry on anyway.

574 You will find people who, because of their dull stubbornness, will be very difficult to convince. But, apart from those cases, it is worth while clearing up discrepancies, and clearing them up with all the patience that might be needed.

575 Some people listen — and want to listen — to nothing but the words they carry in their own heads.

576 The understanding that so many people demand of others is that everyone should join their party.

577 I cannot believe in your truthfulness if you feel no uneasiness — a disagreeable uneasiness too — when you countenance the smallest and most harmless lie. It is far from being small or harmless for it is an offence against God.

578 Why do you look about you and listen and read and talk with such a mean intention, and why do you try to gather up the "bad things" to be found, not in the intention of others, but only in your own soul?

579 For the reader who lacks an upright intention the honesty of the writer is hard to find.

580 The sectarian sees only sectarianism in all the activities of others. He measures his neighbour by the narrowness of his own mind.

581 I felt pity for that man in office. He suspected that there might have been some problems, which are, after all, to be expected in life, yet he was taken aback and annoyed when he was told about them. He preferred to remain ignorant of them, to live in the shadow or twilight of his own vision, so that he might remain at ease.

I advised him to face up to these things openly and clearly, so that in this very way they could be got rid of. I assured him that then he would truly live in peace.

You must not solve problems, your own or those of others, by ignoring them; this would be nothing short of laziness and comfort-seeking, which would open the door to the action of the devil.

582 Have you fulfilled your duty? Have you had a right intention? You have? Then do not worry if there are twisted people who discover evil which only exists in their own minds.

583 Inquisitive people asked you whether you judged that decision of yours, which they considered indifferent, to be good or bad.

And, with a sure conscience, you answered: "I know only two things: that my intention is honest and that I know how much it cost me." And you added: God is the reason and the purpose of my life, that is why I am convinced that nothing can be indifferent.

584 You explained your ideals and your sure, firm conduct as a Catholic, and he seemed to accept and understand your way. But afterwards you were left doubting whether he might not have smothered his understanding under his not very well-ordered habits.

Seek him out again, and explain to him that one accepts truth in order to live by it or try to live by it.

585 "Who are they to want to try things out first? Why do they have to be mistrustful?" you ask me. Look, tell them this from me: they should mistrust their own wretchedness. And then you must continue along your own way in peace.

586 You feel sorry for them. With a complete lack of honesty they throw stones and pretend they haven't done so.

Listen to what the Holy Spirit has to say about them: "The forgers of error shall be confused and put to shame; they will all be covered in ignominy." It is a judgement which will be inexorably fulfilled.

587 You say that many people libel and slander that apostolic enterprise? Well, as soon as you proclaim the truth, there will at least be one person who is not criticising.

588 In the most beautiful and promising field of wheat, it is easy to weed out cartloads of charlock, poppies and couch-grass.

Throughout history, the most upright and responsible people have been the object of volumes of malice. Think, too, how much has been said and written against Our Lord Jesus Christ.

I advise you — just as with the field of grain — to collect the golden ripe ears of wheat: the real truth.

589 You assured me that you want to have a clean conscience, so do not forget that to pick up a calumny without denying it is to become a refuse-collector.

590 You call it open-mindedness to admit easily any assertion against a person without hearing what he has to say. This propensity of yours is not precisely justice — even less is it charity.

591 A calumny sometimes causes harm to those who suffer it. But it truly dishonours those who invent it and spread it. And afterwards they carry a weight in the depth of their souls.

592 "Why do so many people spread slander?," you ask in distress. Some do so through error, fanaticism or malice. But most of them pass on the story through inertia, superficiality and ignorance.

That is why, I insist again: when you cannot praise, and there is no need to speak, keep quiet!

593 When the victim of the slander suffers in silence, "the executioners" are relentless in their bold cowardice.

Distrust those categorical assertions if those who utter them have made no attempt, or have preferred not to speak with the person concerned.

594 There are many ways of holding an investigation. With a bit of malice, by listening to slanders, ten large volumes can be compiled against any honest person

or worthy enterprise. There will be more if that person or enterprise works effectively. And even more if that effectiveness is apostolic.

It is sorry work for the investigators, but more pitiful still is the attitude adopted by those who are ready to echo such wicked and superficial assertions.

595 "These people," he said sadly, "do not have the mind of Christ, but the mask of Christ." That is why they lack Christian judgement, cannot grasp the truth, and yield no fruit.

We, the sons of God, must not forget that the Master said: "Whoever listens to you, listens to me ... " That is why we have to try to be Christ: never a caricature of him.

596 In this case, as in so many others, people are doing various things and all think they are right. But God is guiding them, that is to say, over and above their own particular ideas, God's inscrutable and most lovable Providence will win through in the end.

Allow yourself, therefore, to be guided by the Lord, without opposing his plans, even though they might go against your "basic assumptions."

597 It is painful to see that some people are less concerned with learning and taking possession of the treasures acquired by science than they are in spending their time tailoring them to their own taste through a more or less arbitrary process.

But being aware of this must lead you to redouble your effort to go more deeply into the truth.

598 It is easier to write against people carrying out research, or against those who make new discoveries in science or technology, than to do the research oneself. But we should not allow those "critics" to pretend at the same time to set themselves up as absolute lords of wisdom who can govern the opinions of the ignorant.

599 "I just don't see that, it is not at all obvious," he said in response to the certain statements of the others. And the obvious thing was his own ignorance.

600 You are afraid of hurting people, of creating divisions and appearing intolerant ... , and you are giving in on positions and points (though you assure me they are not serious) which have fateful consequences for many.

Forgive my sincerity: through your behaviour, you are falling into just the stupid and harmful intolerance that you were concerned to avoid: that of not allowing the truth to be proclaimed.

601 God in his infinite and perfect justice and mercy treats with the same love, but in an unequal way, his unequal children.

That is why equality does not mean using the same measure for everybody.

602 You speak a half-truth which is open to so many interpretations that it can really be called ... a lie.

603 Doubt, whether it concerns the field of knowledge or the good name of others, is a plant that is easily sown but very difficult to root out.

604 You remind me of Pilate: Quod scripsi, scripsi! — what I have written shall not be changed — after he had allowed the most horrible of crimes. You may be immovable, but you ought to have adopted that attitude before, not afterwards!

605 It is a virtue to act in accordance with one's resolutions. But, if in the course of time the facts change, one must also act accordingly by changing the way of looking at the problem and solving it.

606 Do not confuse holy intransigence with rude stubbornness.

"I'll break, but I won't give in," you said with a certain haughtiness.

Listen carefully: A broken instrument remains useless, and leaves the way open for those who, with apparent leniency, afterwards impose a damaging intransigence.

607 Sancta Maria, Sedes Sapientiae — Holy Mary, Seat of Wisdom. Invoke Our Mother often in that way, so that she may fill her children, in their study, work and social relations, with the Truth that Christ has brought to us.

AMBITION

608 Against those who reduce religion to a set of negative statements, or are happy to settle for a watered-down Catholicism; against those who wish to see the Lord with his face against the wall, or to put him in a corner of their souls, we have to affirm, with our words and with our deeds, that we aspire to make Christ the King reign indeed over all hearts, theirs included.

609 When you work in apostolic enterprises, do not build for the present alone. Dedicate yourself to these tasks with the hope that others — brothers of yours sharing the same spirit as you — may reap what you are now sowing abroad, and may crown the buildings for which you are now laying the foundations.

610 When you truly become filled with the Christian spirit your ambitions will be put right. You will feel no longer a hankering after celebrity, but a desire for passing on your ideal.

611 It would not be worth giving oneself unless it were to build up a great work which is very much for God — your own sanctity.

That is why the Church when canonising saints proclaims the heroism of their lives.

612 When you work in earnest for the Lord, your greatest satisfaction will be to discover that there are many others competing with you.

613 During the time that God has granted you in this world, make up your mind in earnest to do something worth-while; time is pressing and the mission of men — and women — on earth is most noble, heroic and glorious when it enkindles shrunken and dried-up hearts with the fire of Christ.

It is worth while taking peace and happiness to others through a strong and joyful crusade.

614 You are ready to give your life for your honour ... Be ready to give up your honour for your soul.

615 Through the Communion of Saints you should feel very closely united to your brothers. Defend that holy unity without fear.

If you were alone, your noble ambitions would be doomed to failure. A sheep on its own is nearly always a lost sheep.

616 I was amused by your vehemence. Faced by the lack of material resources to set to work, and with no one to help you, you said: "I have only two arms, but I sometimes feel impatient enough to become a monster with fifty arms to sow and reap the harvest."

Ask the Holy Spirit for that effectiveness, for he will grant it to you!

617 You found yourself with two books in Russian, and you felt an enormous desire to learn that language. You imagined the beauty of dying like a grain of wheat in that nation, now so arid, which in time will yield enormous crops of wheat.

I think that those ambitions are good. But, for now, dedicate yourself to the small task and great mission of every day, to your study, your work, your apostolate, and, above all, to your formation. This, since you still need to do so much pruning, is neither a less heroic nor a less beautiful task.

618 What use is a student who does not study?

619 When you find studying is an awfully uphill task offer that effort to Jesus. Tell him that you continue poring over your books, so that you may use your knowledge as a weapon to fight the enemy and so gain many souls. You can then be sure that your study is well on its way to becoming prayer.

620 If you waste hours and days, if you kill time, you are opening the doors of your soul to the devil. That way of behaving is equivalent to saying to him: "Make yourself at home."

621 I grant you it is difficult not to waste time. But notice that God's enemy, the other side, does not rest.

What is more, remember the truth that Paul, a champion of the love of God, proclaims, *Tempus breve est!* This life is slipping away through our fingers, and it is impossible to recover it.

622 Do you realise how much depends on whether you are soundly prepared or not? Many, many souls!

And now will you cease to study or work with perfection?

623 There are two ways of reaching the top: one — the Christian way — by the noble and gallant effort of serving others; the other — the pagan way — by the mean and ignoble effort of dragging down your neighbour.

624 Don't try to convince me that you live facing God, if you do not try always and in everything, to face men, any man, with sincere and open fraternity.

625 Those who are "ambitious," with small, personal, miserable ambitions, cannot understand that the friends of God should seek to achieve something through a spirit of service and without such "ambition."

626 You are anxious for one thing: to hurry and soon be forged, moulded, polished and hammered into the useful implement which will fulfil effectively the work it has been designed to do. This work is the mission it has been assigned to, in the vast field of Christ.

I pray a great deal that this desire of yours may spur you on when you are tired, when you fail and in the hour of darkness, for "the mission it has been assigned to in the vast field of Christ" cannot change.

627 Fight courageously against that false humility — you should call it spirit of comfort — which stops you from behaving like a good son of God. You have to grow out of it.

Are you not ashamed when you see that your elder brothers have spent years in dedicated work, and you are not yet able, or do not want to be able, to lift a finger to help them?

628 Allow your soul to be consumed by desires — desires for loving, for forgetting yourself, for sanctity, for Heaven. Do not stop to wonder whether the time will come to see them accomplished, as some pseudo-adviser might suggest. Make them more fervent every day, for the Holy Spirit says that he is pleased with men of desires.

Let your desires be operative and put them into practice in your daily tasks.

629 If the Lord has called you a friend you must respond to the call and walk with a hurried pace, with all the urgency needed, at God's pace. Otherwise you run the risk of becoming a simple spectator.

630 Forget about yourself. May your ambition be to live for your brothers alone, for souls, for the Church; in one word, for God.

631 In the middle of the rejoicing at the feast in Cana, only Mary notices that they are short of wine. A soul will notice even the smallest details of service if, like her, it is alive with a passion for helping its neighbour, for God.

HYPOCRISY

632 Hypocrisy always leads those who cultivate it to a life of bitter and grudging mortification.

633 Herod said: "Go and enquire carefully for the child, and when you have found him, bring me back word, so that I too may come and worship him." Faced by such a proposal, let us ask the Holy Spirit to keep us from the "protection" or the "promise of good things" of people who appear well-intentioned.

We will not lack the light of the Paraclete if, as the Wise Men did, we seek the truth and speak with sincerity.

634 Are there people who protest because you say things clearly?

Perhaps they live with a troubled conscience, and they need to cover it up in that way.

You should continue to behave in the same way, to help them to change.

635 While you continue to interpret in bad faith the intentions of your neighbour, you have no right to demand that people should be understanding with you.

636 You are constantly talking about the need to change and reform things. Good. Reform yourself, for you need it badly, and already you will have begun the great reform.

In the meantime, I shall not be putting too much faith in your proclamations of reform.

637 There are some who are so pharisaical that they are scandalized when others repeat precisely what their own lips have let fall.

638 You are such a busybody that it seems as if your only concern were to dive into the lives of your neighbours. And when, at last, you stumble upon an upright man of good will and energy who has stopped you in your tracks, you complain in public as if he had offended you.

Your shamelessness and deformed conscience ... , have led you thus far. And that goes for many others.

639 In one move, you have tried to appropriate the "honesty" of the true opinion and the ignoble "advantages" of the opposite opinion ...

In any language, that is called duplicity.

640 How good they are! They are ready to "excuse" what is only worthy of praise.

641 It is an old stratagem for the persecutor to say that he is being persecuted. Popular wisdom has seen right through this all along. In the words of the old Spanish saying: "They throw the stone and then bandage themselves up."

642 Is it not true, unfortunately, that many people spread calumnies unjustly and then make their appeal to charity and honesty so that their victims cannot defend themselves?

643 It is a sad ecumenism indeed when Catholics ill-treat other Catholics!

644 What a mistaken view of objectivity they have when they focus upon people or tasks through the deformed lenses of their own defects and then, with acid shamelessness, criticise or dare to offer their advice.

Let us make a firm resolution: when we correct or give advice, let us speak in the presence of God, and apply our words to our own behaviour.

645 Never have recourse to the always deplorable method of organising slanderous attacks on anyone. It is even worse if it is done through allegedly moral motives, which can never justify an immoral action.

646 You can never give advice dispassionately or with the right intention, if you get upset or think people show a lack of confidence in you when they also listen to the advice of other people of proven formation and good doctrine.

If you are really interested, as you claim, in the good of souls and in stating the truth, why are you offended?

647 Not even to Joseph does Mary communicate the mystery that God has wrought in her. This lesson teaches us not to become accustomed to speaking lightly but to channel our joys and our sorrows correctly without seeking praise or sympathy. Deo omnis gloria! — all for God!

INTERIOR LIFE

648 Those who are nearest are the first to be heard. That is why you must get close to God and be intent on becoming a saint.

649 I like to compare the interior life to clothing, to the wedding garment the Gospel speaks about. The cloth is woven from all the habits or acts of piety which, like threads, together give strength to the cloth. And so, just as a torn dress is rejected even though the rest of the material is in good condition, if you pray and work but are not penitent (or the other way round) your interior life is not (so to speak) complete.

650 When will you realise that your only possible way is to seek sanctity seriously.

Make up your mind — don't be offended — to take God seriously. That levity of yours, if you do not fight against it, could end up by becoming a sad and blasphemous mockery.

651 You sometimes allow the bad side of your character to come out, and it has shown itself, on more than one occasion, in an absurd harshness. At other times, you do not bother to prepare your heart and your head so that they may be a

worthy dwelling for the Most Holy Trinity. And you invariably end up by remaining rather distant from Jesus, whom you know so little.

Going on like this, you will never have interior life.

652 Iesus Christus, perfectus Deus, perfectus Homo- Jesus Christ, perfect God and perfect Man.

There are many Christians who follow Christ and are astonished by his divinity, but forget him as Man. And they fail in the practice of supernatural virtues, despite all the external paraphernalia of piety, because they do nothing to acquire human virtues.

653 Personal sanctity is a remedy for everything. That is why the saints have been full of peace, of fortitude, of joy, of security.

654 Until now you had not understood the message that we Christians bring to the rest of men: the hidden marvel of the interior life.

What a wonderful new world you are placing in front of them.

655 How many new things you have discovered! And yet you are sometimes rather naive and think you have seen everything, that you have found out everything already. As time goes by, you will be able to reach out and touch the unique and unfathomable treasures of the Lord, who will always show you new things, if you respond with love and sensitivity. Then you will realise that you are only beginning, because holiness consists in identifying oneself with God, with that God of ours who is infinite and inexhaustible.

656 It is through Love rather than study that one comes to understand the things of God.

That is why you have to work, you have to study, you have to accept illness, you have to be sober — lovingly.

657 Here is a point for your daily examination. Have I allowed an hour to pass, without talking with my Father God? Have I talked to him with the love of a son? You can!

658 We should make no mistake. God is no shadowy or distant being who created us then abandoned us; nor is he a master who goes away and does not return. Though we do not perceive him with our senses, his existence is far more true than any of the realities which we touch and see. God is here with us, really present, living. He sees and hears us, He guides us, and knows our smallest deeds, our most hidden intentions.

We believe this — but we live as if God did not exist. For we do not have a thought or a word for him; for we do not obey him, nor try to control our passions; for we do not show that we love him, and we do not atone ...

Are we going to continue living with a dead faith"?

659 If you had presence of God you would remedy many things that have apparently "no remedy."

660 How are you going to live in God's presence if you are only looking around everywhere? — It is as if you were drunk with novelties and futilities.

661 It is possible that you might be frightened by this word: meditation. It makes you think of books with old black covers, the sound of sighs and the irksome repetition of routine prayers. But that is not meditation.

To meditate is to consider, to contemplate God as your Father, and yourself as his son in need of help. And then to give him thanks for all that he has given you and for all that he will give you.

662 This is the only way to get to know Jesus: speak to him. You will always find in him a Father, a Friend, an Adviser, a Helper in all the noble deeds of your everyday life.

And getting to know Him will give rise to Love.

663 You go on attending some classes daily, merely because in them you acquire a certain rather limited knowledge. How is it then that you are not constant in going to the Master, who is always ready to teach you the science of interior life, with its eternal content and savour?

664 What is a man or the greatest reward on earth worth compared with Jesus Christ, who is always ready to be with you?

665 To meditate for a while each day and be united in friendship with God is something that makes sense to people who know how to make good use of their lives. It befits conscientious Christians who live up to their convictions.

666 Those in love do not know how to say good-bye: they are with one another all the time.

Do you and I know how to love the Lord like this?

667 Haven't you noticed how people in love dress to please one another by their appearance? Well that is how you should fit out and deck your soul.

668 Grace, like nature, normally acts gradually. We cannot, properly speaking, move ahead of grace. But in all that does depend on us we have to prepare the way and co-operate when God grants grace to us.

Souls have to be encouraged to aim very high; they have to be impelled towards Christ's ideal. Lead them to the highest goals which should not be reduced or made weaker in any way. But remember that sanctity is not primarily worked out with one's own hands. Grace normally takes its time, and is not inclined to act with violence.

Encourage your holy impatience, but do not lose your patience.

669 Is corresponding to divine grace, you ask, a matter of justice or generosity?

It is a matter of Love!

670 "My affairs buzz around in my head at the most inopportune moments," you say.

That is why I have recommended you to try to establish some times for interior silence, and to guard your external and internal senses.

671 "Stay with us, it is towards evening ... " The prayer of Cleophas and his companion was effective.

How sad it would be if you and I were not able to detain Jesus who is passing by. What a shame not to ask him to stay!

672 I advised you to read the New Testament and to enter into each scene and take part in it, as one more of the characters. The minutes you spend in this way each day enable you to incarnate the Gospel, reflect it in your life and help others to reflect it.

673 Once you used to "enjoy" yourself a lot. But now that you bear Christ within you, your whole life has been filled with a sincere and infectious joy. That is why you attract other people.

Get to know Him better, so that you can reach all people.

674 Be careful you don't get it wrong. While you raise the temperature of the atmosphere around you make sure you do not cool down.

675 Get accustomed to referring everything to God.

676 Have you noticed how many of your companions know how to be very kind and considerate when dealing with the people they love, whether it is their girl-friend, their wife, their children or their family?

Tell them that the Lord does not deserve less, and ask it of yourself too. May they treat him in that way. Tell them that if they continue being kind and considerate, but do it with him and for him, they will achieve, even here on earth, a happiness they had never dreamed of.

677 The Lord sowed good seed in your soul. And for that sowing of eternal life he used the powerful means of prayer. For you cannot deny that often while you were in front of the Tabernacle, face to face with him, he made you hear in the depths of your soul that he wanted you for himself, that you had to leave everything. If you denied it now you would be a miserable traitor. And if you have forgotten it you are ungrateful.

Do not doubt, for you have never doubted it up to now, that he has also used the supernatural advice and suggestions of your director, who has insistently repeated to you things that you cannot ignore. At the beginning, too, in order to deposit the

good seed in your soul He used that noble, sincere friend, who told you some home truths which were filled with the love of God.

But you have discovered with surprise that the enemy has sown cockle in your soul. And he will continue to sow it, as long as you are comfortably asleep and slacken off in your interior life. That, and no other, is the reason why you find clinging to your soul all sorts of worldly weeds, which sometimes seem as if they are going to choke the grain of the good wheat you received.

Uproot them once and for all. The grace of God is enough for you. Do not be afraid of leaving an empty space, a wound. The Lord will plant new seed of his there: love of God, fraternal charity, apostolic zeal. And after a certain time not the slightest sign will remain of that cockle. That is if, while there is still time, you pull it out by the roots, and better still, if you do not fall asleep, and watch your field overnight.

678 Jesus speaks to us all the time, and happy are those blessed souls who, when they hear Jesus being spoken about, recognise him immediately as the Way, the Truth and the Life.

You are well aware that when we do not enjoy that happiness it is because we have lacked the determination to follow him.

679 Once again you felt Christ was very near. And once again you realised that you have to do everything for him.

680 Come closer to the Lord. Closer! Until he becomes your Friend, your Guide, in whom you can trust.

681 Every day you notice that you are more rooted in God, you tell me. Every day, then, you will be closer to your brothers.

682 If until now, when you had not yet found Him, you wanted to run through life with your eyes wide open, to find out about everything, from this moment onwards you can run with a clear vision, to see with him what is really of abiding interest to you.

683 When there is interior life, you can have recourse to God in any contradiction, with the spontaneity with which blood rushes to a wound.

684 "This is my Body ... ," and the immolation of Jesus took place, hidden under the appearances of the bread. He is now there, with his Flesh and with his Blood, with his Soul and with his Divinity. He is the same as on the day that Thomas placed his fingers in His glorious Wounds.

And yet, on so many occasions, you saunter by, giving not even a hint of a greeting out of simple good manners that you would give to any person you knew when you met him.

You have much less faith than Thomas!

685 If, in order to gain for you your liberty, a close friend of yours had gone to prison, would you not try to visit him, to talk to him for a while, take him some present, console him and show him the warmth of your friendship? And, if that conversation with the prisoner were to save you from some evil and do you good, would you go without it? And if instead of a friend it were to be your father himself or your brother, what then?

686 Jesus has remained in the Sacred Host for us so as to stay by our side, to sustain us, to guide us. And love can only be repaid with love.

How could we not turn to the Blessed Sacrament each day, even if it is only for a few minutes, to bring him our greetings and our love as children and as brothers?

687 Imagine the scene. An old sergeant or a young lieutenant sees coming towards him a fine-looking recruit, of an incomparably better quality than the officer, but the salute and its return are still given.

Meditate on the contrast. From the tabernacle of that church, Christ, perfect God, perfect Man, who has died for you on the Cross and gives you everything that you need, approaches you. And you go by without paying any attention to him.

688 You have started to visit the Blessed Sacrament every day, and I am not surprised to hear you say, "I have come to love the sanctuary light madly."

689 Do not neglect to say, "Jesus, I love you," and make one spiritual communion, at least, each day, in atonement for all the profanations and sacrileges he suffers because he wants to be with us.

690 Do you not greet warmly all the people you love, and speak to them cordially? Well, you and I are going to greet Jesus, Mary and Joseph, and our Guardian Angels, many times a day.

691 Develop a lively devotion for Our Mother. She knows how to respond in a most sensitive way to the presents we give her.

What is more, if you say the Holy Rosary every day, with a spirit of faith and love, Our Lady will make sure she leads you very far along her Son's path.

692 Without Our Mother's aid, how can we manage to keep up our daily struggle? Do you seek it constantly?

693 The Guardian Angel always accompanies us as our principal witness. It is he who, at your particular judgement, will remember the kind deeds you performed for Our Lord throughout your life. Furthermore, when you feel lost, before the terrible accusations of the enemy, your Angel will present those intimations of your heart — which perhaps you yourself might have forgotten — those proofs of love which you might have had for God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit.

That is why you must never forget your Guardian Angel, and that Prince of Heaven shall not abandon you now, or at that decisive moment.

694 Your Communions were very cold: you paid little attention to the Lord: you were distracted by the smallest trifle. But ever since you began to realise during an intimate dialogue with God that the angels are present, your attitude has changed. You say to yourself: "Let them not see me like this."

And see how, as a result of thinking, "What will they say?" — this time, for a good motive — you have advanced a little towards Love.

695 When you see yourself with a dry heart, without knowing what to say, go with confidence to the Virgin Mary. Say to her, "My Mother Immaculate, intercede for me."

If you invoke her with faith, she will make you taste in the midst of your dryness the proximity of God.

PRIDE

696 Pull self-love out by the roots and plant in its place love for Jesus Christ. That is the secret of effectiveness and happiness.

697 Although you say you follow Him, in one way or another you always make sure that it is you who do things, according to your plans, relying on your strength alone. But the Lord said: Sine me nihil! — without Me you can do nothing.

698 They ignored what you call your "rights," which I translated for you as your "right to be proud." What a grotesque figure you cut. Because your attacker was powerful you could not defend yourself and you felt the pain of a hundred blows. And despite it all, you have not learned to humble yourself.

Now your conscience accuses you, calling you proud and cowardly. Give thanks to God because you are beginning to catch a glimpse of your "duty to be humble."

699 All the time it is you, you, you. And you will never be effective until it is him, him, him, so that you act in nomine Domini — in the name and with the strength of God.

700 How can you pretend to follow Christ, if you only revolve around yourself?

701 An impatient and disordered anxiousness to climb up the professional ladder can mask self-love under the appearances of "serving souls." It is a lie — and I really mean that — when we seek to justify our actions by saying that we must not miss certain opportunities, certain favourable chances.

Turn your eyes back to Jesus; he is "the Way." During his hidden years, there were also "very favourable" chances to advance his public life — when he was twelve years old, for instance, and the doctors of the law were in amazement at his questions and at the answers He gave. But Jesus Christ fulfilled the Will of his Father, and he waited. He obeyed.

Do not lose that holy ambition of yours to lead the whole world to God, but when certain possibilities present themselves (they might show perhaps a desire to

desert) remember that you too have to be obedient and work away at that obscure job, which does not seem at all brilliant, for as long as God asks nothing else of you. He has his own times and paths.

702 Those who enjoy privilege thanks to money, ancestry, rank, position or intelligence and abuse it by humiliating those who are less fortunate, show that they are fatuous and proud.

703 Pride sooner or later ends up humiliating a man in front of others, however much of "a man" he is, for he will have been acting like a vain and brainless puppet, moved by satan's strings.

704 Through presumption or simply through vanity, many people run a black market to raise their own personal worth artificially.

705 Positions. Who's in, who's out? What does it matter to you? You have come, you tell me, to be useful, to serve, with complete availability. Behave accordingly.

706 You comment and criticise. Without you, it seems, nothing is done properly.

Don't be angry if I tell you that you are behaving like an arrogant despot.

707 A friend of yours, loyally and charitably, points out to you, on your own, certain things which tend to mar your behaviour. You are convinced that he is mistaken: he does not understand you. If that false conviction, born of your pride, remains, you will never change.

I pity you: you lack the decision to seek holiness.

708 Malicious, suspicious, devious, mistrustful, grudging ... these are all adjectives which you deserve, even though they might annoy you.

You must put things right. Why is it others always have to be bad, and you good?

709 You feel lonely; everything annoys you, and you complain. That is because you are isolated from your brothers by your selfishness, and because you do not come closer to God.

710 You are always trying to be noticed publicly. Above all you want more notice to be taken of you than of others.

711 Why do you always think that everything they say has a hidden meaning? By being so touchy you are limiting the action of grace all the time. And do not doubt that grace comes to you by means of those who fight to match their deeds to Christ's ideal.

712 For as long as you are convinced that others should always live as if they depended on you, and for as long as you delay the decision to serve (to hide yourself and disappear from view), your dealings with your brothers, colleagues and friends will be a constant source of disappointment, ill-humour and pride.

713 Detest showing off. Reject vanity. Fight against pride, every day, at every moment.

714 The proud, poor creatures, have to suffer a thousand silly little things which their self-love makes out to be enormous but are unnoticed by others.

715 Do you think that no one else has ever been twenty years old? Do you think they were never restricted by their parents when they were under age? Do you think they avoided the problems, however great or small, that you come up against? No. They went through the same things that you are going through now, and they matured, with the help of grace. They trod down their selfishness with generous perseverance, gave in when they should, and remained loyal — with calm humility — without being arrogant or hurting anyone when they should not have done.

716 Ideologically you are very Catholic. You like the atmosphere of the hall of residence. A pity the Mass is not at twelve, and the classes are not in the afternoon, so you can study late in the evening after one or two drinks. That "Catholicism" of yours does not come up with the real thing: it remains simply bourgeois.

Don't you see that you can't think like that at your age? Leave behind your laziness and your self-worship, and adapt to the needs of others, to the reality around you, then you will be taking your Catholicism seriously.

717 A person who had donated a statue of a saint to a church said: "This saint owes everything that it is to me."

This is not just a caricature. You also think — at least that is how it looks from your behaviour — that you fulfil your duties towards God just by wearing some medals or practising certain pious customs, more or less as a routine.

718 "If only they could see the good things I do." But don't you realise that you are carrying them around like trinkets in a basket for people to see how fine they are?

Furthermore, you must not forget the second part of Jesus' command: "that they may glorify your Father who is in heaven."

719 "To me, with the admiration I owe myself," he wrote on the first page of a book. And many other miserable souls might easily print the same thing on the last page of their life.

How sad it would be if you and I were to live or end up like this. Let us make a serious examination of conscience.

720 Never adopt a superior air towards Church matters, or towards your fellow human beings — your brothers. On the other hand that attitude might be necessary in your social behaviour, when it is a matter of defending the interests of God and those of souls, for then you would not be acting out of superiority, but out of faith and fortitude, which we practise with a calm and humble confidence.

721 It is indiscreet, childish and silly to say nice things about others and praise their good qualities in front of them.

In this way vanity is encouraged, with the risk of stealing glory from God, to whom everything is due.

722 Make sure that your good intentions are always accompanied by humility. For good intentions often go together with harsh judgements, almost amounting to an incapacity to yield, and a certain personal, national or party pride.

723 Do not be disheartened when you become aware of your mistakes. React against them.

Sterility is not so much a consequence of one's faults, especially if one repents, as a consequence of pride.

724 If you fall, get up with greater hope. Self-love alone is incapable of understanding that an error, when put right, helps us to know and to humble ourselves.

725 "We are no use," is a pessimistic and false statement. If we want to, with the help of God, which is the first and fundamental requirement, we can become useful, as a good instrument, for many enterprises.

726 It made me think when I heard that hard but true saying from a man of God, when he observed the haughtiness of a miserable creature: "He wears the same skin as the devil — pride."

And there came to my mind, in contrast, a sincere desire to wrap myself in the virtue taught by Jesus Christ when he said, *Quia mitis sum et humilis corde* — I am meek and humble of heart. It was the virtue which attracted the gaze of the Most Holy Trinity to his Mother and our Mother: the humility of knowing and being aware of our nothingness.

FRIENDSHIP

727 When you find it difficult to do a favour or a service for someone, remember that he or she is a child of God, and that the Lord has asked us to love one another.

Furthermore, go deeper into that evangelical precept every day; do not remain on the surface. Draw the right conclusions from it — it is quite easy to do so. Then adapt your conduct, on every occasion, to those requirements.

728 "There is so much hurry in the way we live that Christian charity has become a rare phenomenon in this world of ours, even though, at least nominally, Christ is being preached."

I grant you that. But what are you doing about it? For, as a Catholic, you have to become united to him, and follow in his footsteps. For we have been told that we must go and teach his doctrine to all peoples — all peoples — throughout the ages.

729 Through all the course of history men have always sought to work together, to accomplish a collective mission and destiny.

Is the unique destiny of eternal life worth less to the men and women of today?

730 You understood the meaning of friendship when you began to feel that you were like the shepherd of a little flock which you had left abandoned, but were now trying to gather together again, taking it upon yourself to serve each one of them.

731 You cannot just be passive. You have to become a real friend of your friends. You can help them first with the example of your behaviour and then with your advice and with the influence that a close friendship provides.

732 The spirit of fraternity and companionship you discovered unexpectedly filled you with enthusiasm. That is natural, for it was something you had dreamed about longingly but had never experienced. You had not experienced it because men forget they are brothers of Christ, that lovable Brother of ours, who gave his life for us, for every single one of us, without reserve.

733 You have had the good fortune to find real teachers, authentic friends, who have taught you everything you wanted to know without holding back. You have had no need to employ any tricks to steal their knowledge, because they led you along the easiest path, even though it had cost them a lot of hard work and suffering to discover it. Now, it is your turn to do the same, with one person, and another — with everyone.

734 Meditate upon this carefully and act accordingly: people who think you are unpleasant will stop thinking that when they realise that you really like them. It is up to you.

735 It's not enough to be good; you need to show it. What would you say of a rose bush which produced only thorns?

736 To be warmed up, the tepid need to be surrounded by the fire of enthusiasm.

Many could say to us: "There is no point in your lamenting my situation. Teach me how to get out of this condition which saddens you so much."

737 Your duty to be a brother to all souls will lead you to practise the "apostolate of little things," without others noticing it. You will want to serve them so that their way becomes agreeable.

738 Those who zealously keep a list of grudges show themselves to be very narrow-minded souls. Such poor wretches are impossible to live with.

True charity neither keeps account of the necessary services it renders all the time, nor takes note of the effronteries it has to put up with. Omnia suffert — it endures all things.

739 You fulfil a demanding plan of life: you rise early, you pray, you frequent the sacraments, you work or study a lot, you are sober and mortified, but you are aware that something is missing.

Consider this in your conversation with God: since holiness, or the struggle to achieve it, is the fulness of charity, you must look again at your love of God and your love of others for his sake. Then you may discover, hidden in your soul, great defects that you have not even been fighting against. You may not be a good son, a good brother, a good companion, a good friend, a good colleague. And, if you love your "holiness" in a disordered manner, you are envious.

You sacrifice yourself in many small personal details, and so you are attached to yourself, to your own person. Deep down you do not live for God or for others, but only for yourself.

740 You consider yourself a friend because you say nothing bad. That is true, but I see in you no sign of giving good example or service.

This kind make the worst friends.

741 For a start, you treat people badly. Then, before anybody has time to react, you say: "Now, we must all be charitable."

If you began with the second point you would never come to the first.

742 Don't be someone who sows discord, like the person whose mother would say of him: "Introduce him to your friends, and he will make sure those friends quarrel with you."

743 I can see no Christian fraternity in a friend who warns you: "I've been told some terrible things about you. You shouldn't trust some of your friends."

I think it is not Christian because that brother has not taken the honest approach of silencing the slanderer first, and then telling you his name out of loyalty.

If that brother does not have the strength of character to demand such behaviour of himself, he will end up making you live on your own, driving you to distrust everyone and to be uncharitable towards everyone.

744 You don't have an ounce of supernatural vision and it is only their social standing that you notice. Souls mean nothing to you at all, nor do you serve them. That is why you are not generous but live far from God with your false piety, even though you may pray a lot.

The Master has said very clearly: "Depart from me ... into that eternal fire ... for I was hungry ... I was thirsty ... I was in prison ... and you did not care for me."

745 It is impossible to love God with perfection, and at the same time to let yourself be ruled by selfishness — or by apathy — in your dealings with your neighbour.

746 True friendship also means making a heartfelt effort to understand the convictions of our friends, even though we may never come to share them or accept them.

747 Never allow weeds to grow on the path of friendship. Be loyal.

748 Let us make a firm resolution about our friendships. In my thoughts, words and deeds towards my neighbour, whoever he may be, may I not behave as I have done up to now. That is to say, may I never cease to practise charity, or allow indifference to enter my soul.

749 Your charity must be adapted and tailored to the needs of others, not to yours.

750 Being children of God transforms us into something that goes far beyond our being people who merely put up with each other. Listen to what the Lord says: *Vos autem dixi amicos!* We are friends who, like him, give our lives for each other, when heroism is needed and throughout our ordinary lives.

751 How do we suppose that people who do not have our faith can come to the Holy Church if they see the unhandsome way in which those who call themselves followers of Christ treat each other?

752 Your agreeable behaviour should become more attractive by improving in kind and intensity. Otherwise, your apostolate will die out in closed and lifeless rooms.

753 Through your friendship and doctrine — or rather through charity and the message of Christ — you will move many non-Catholics to help in earnest and to do good to all men.

754 Take note of the words of that working man who commented so enthusiastically after he had attended a gathering you had organised: "I had never heard people speak as they do here, about being noble, honest, kind and generous." And he concluded in amazement: "Compared to the materialism of the Left or the Right, this is the true revolution."

Any soul can understand the fraternity Christ has established. Let us make a point of not adulterating that doctrine.

755 Sometimes you try to excuse yourself, saying that you are distracted or absent-minded, or that it is your character to be dry and reserved. That, you add, is why you don't even know very well the people you live with.

Listen, isn't it true that this excuse doesn't really satisfy you?

756 I advised you to inject a great deal of supernatural outlook into every detail of your ordinary life. And I added immediately that living with other people provided you with ample opportunity throughout the day.

757 Practising charity means respecting other people's way of thinking. It means rejoicing at their road to God, without trying to make them think like you or joining you.

It occurred to me to put this consideration to you. These other ways are different, but parallel; each person will reach God by following his own way. Don't get sidetracked in comparisons, or in wanting to know who is higher. That does not matter; what does matter is that we should all attain the end.

758 You say that he is full of defects. Very well ... but, apart from the fact that people who are perfect are found only in Heaven, you too have defects, yet others put up with you and, what is more, appreciate you. That is because they love you with the love Jesus Christ had for his own, and they had a fair number of shortcomings.

Learn from this.

759 You complain that he shows you no understanding. I am certain he does as much as he can to try to understand you. But what about you? When will you make a bit of an effort to understand him?

760 All right, I agree. That person has behaved badly; his behaviour has been reprehensible and unworthy; he shows no merit at all.

Humanly speaking he deserves to be utterly despised, you added.

I understand what you mean, I can assure you, but I do not share this concluding view of yours. That life which seems so mean is sacred. Christ has died to save it. If He did not despise it, how can you dare to?

761 If your friendship is brought down to such a level that you become an accomplice in the wretched behaviour of others, it will have been reduced to a sad confederacy which deserves no esteem whatsoever.

762 It is true that life, which by its nature is already rather narrow and uncertain, sometimes becomes difficult. But that will help you to become more supernatural and to see the hand of God. Then you will be more human and understanding with those around you.

763 Forbearance is proportional to authority. A simple judge has to condemn — even if he takes into account extenuating circumstances — the convicted criminal who has admitted being guilty. The sovereign power of the country may sometimes grant a pardon or amnesty. God always forgives a contrite soul.

764 "Through you I have seen God, who has forgotten my follies and my offences, and has welcomed me with the affection of a Father." This is what a contrite prodigal son of the twentieth century wrote to his family when he returned to his father's house.

765 It has cost you a lot to begin getting rid of those niggling worries and forgetting about those personal things you were looking forward to. They may have been few and not very splendid, but they were deeply rooted. In exchange, you are sure now that you are interested and concerned about your brothers, and only about them, for you have learned to discover Jesus Christ in your neighbour.

766 "A hundredfold!" You remembered a few days ago that promise of the Lord.

In the fraternity that is lived among your companions in the apostolate, I assure you, you will find that hundredfold.

767 How many fears and dangers can be allayed by the true love among brothers, which is not mentioned, for then it would seem to be profaned, but which shines in every little detail.

768 Have recourse to the Blessed Virgin every day with complete confidence. Your soul and your life will feel comforted at once. She will let you partake of the treasures she keeps in her heart, for "never has it been known that anyone who sought her protection was left unaided."

THE WILL

769 To advance in interior life and apostolate, you do not need devotion that you can feel, but a definite and generous disposition of the will to respond to what God asks of you.

770 Without the Lord you will not be able to take one sure step forward. This conviction that you need his help will lead you to be more united to him, with a strong, enduring confidence, accompanied by joy and peace, even though the road might become hard and steep.

771 Look at the great difference between the natural and the supernatural way of acting. The first begins well, but later ends up slackening. The latter begins equally well, and later struggles to become even better.

772 It is not at all bad to behave well for upright human reasons. But what a difference it makes when the supernatural ones rule.

773 When he saw the happiness with which that hard work was being done, that friend asked: "Is it through enthusiasm that you get these tasks done?" And they answered him happily and calmly: "Through enthusiasm? That would be the day! Per Dominum Nostrum Iesum Christum! — through Our Lord Jesus Christ, who is constantly awaiting us."

774 The world is waiting for us to wake up those who are asleep, to encourage the timid, to guide those who have lost their way; in other words, for us to enrol them in the ranks of Christ, so that all their energy is not lost.

775 Perhaps you too might find it helpful to make use of this reminder of supernatural things which shows all the sensitivity of willing love. It was what a soul very much given to God used to repeat when he was faced by the various demands made on him. "It is high time to make up your mind in earnest to do something worth while."

776 What sort of Christian perfection do you expect to achieve, if you are only following your whims and doing "what you like"? All your defects, unless you fight against them, will produce bad works as a natural consequence. And your will,

untempered by a persevering fight, will be of no use to you when a difficult occasion arises.

777 The facade appears full of strength and resilience. But how much softness and lack of willpower there is within!

You must hold to your determination not to let your virtues become fancy dress but clothes which define your character.

778 "I know some men and women who do not even have the strength to ask for help," you tell me with sorrow and disappointment. Don't leave them in the lurch. Your desire to save yourself and them can be the starting point for their conversion. Furthermore, if you think about it carefully you will realise that someone also had to lend you a hand.

779 Soft people who complain about a thousand silly trivialities are the ones who do not know how to sacrifice themselves for Jesus in those daily trifles — let alone sacrifice themselves for others.

What a shame if your behaviour, which is so hard and demanding with other people, should show the same softness in your daily life.

780 You suffer a lot because you realise that you don't make the grade. You would like to do more, and do it more effectively, but very often you do things in a complete daze, or you don't dare do them at all.

Contra spem, in spem! — live in certain hope, against all hope. Rely on that firm rock which will save you and help you on. It is a wonderful theological virtue, which will encourage you to press on, without being afraid of going too far, and will not let you stop.

Don't look so troubled. Yes, cultivating hope means strengthening the will.

781 Whenever your will weakens in your ordinary work, you must recall these thoughts: "Study, work, is an essential part of my way. If I were discredited professionally as a consequence of my laziness it would make my work as a Christian useless or impossible. To attract and to help others, I need the influence of my professional reputation, and that is what God wants."

Never doubt that if you abandon your task, you are going away from God's plans and leading others away from them.

782 You were scared of following the way of the children of God, for in the name of the Lord you were urged to undertake things, to deny yourself and climb down from your ivory tower. You excused yourself from taking part, and I admit that I do not find it at all strange that you should now feel that weight which is oppressing you: a set of complexes and hang-ups, of inhibitions and scruples, which leaves you useless.

Don't be annoyed with me if I tell you that you have behaved with less courage than depraved people, who boldly propagate evil, as if you were worse or lower than them.

Surge et ambula! — get up and walk. Make up your mind; you can still get rid of that evil dead weight if you listen with the grace of God to what he is asking, and, above all, if you do it fully and wholeheartedly.

783 It is good that your soul should be eaten up by that impatience. But don't be in a hurry. God wants you to prepare yourself seriously, taking all the months or years necessary, and is counting on your decision to do so. With good reason did that emperor say: "Time is my ally."

784 This is how a right-minded man summarised jealousy or envy: "They must be very ill-intentioned to want to stir up such clean waters."

785 You ask if you have to remain silent and inactive. In the face of unjust aggression against a just law, the answer is: No.

786 Every day you are becoming more exhilarated. It is noticeable in the wonderful self-assurance and confidence that knowing you are working for Christ has given you.

Sacred Scripture has already proclaimed it: *Vir fidelis multum laudabitur* — the faithful man merits praise from all.

787 You have never felt so absolutely free as you do now that your freedom is interwoven with love and detachment, with security and insecurity; for you do not trust yourself at all, but trust in God for everything.

788 Have you seen how water is stored in reservoirs against a time of drought? In the same way, to achieve the even character that you need in times of difficulty, you have to store up cheerfulness, clear insights and the light which the Lord sends you.

789 As the flames of your first enthusiasm die down, it becomes difficult to advance in the dark. But that progress is the more reliable for being hard. And then, when you least expect it, the darkness vanishes, and the enthusiasm and light return. Persevere.

790 God wants his children to be on the offensive. We cannot stay on the defensive. Our business is to fight, wherever we may be, as an army in battle array.

791 It is not a matter of fulfilling your obligations in a hurry, but of bringing them to a finish without a pause, at God's pace.

792 You have the agreeable manner of an intelligent conversationalist. But you are also very apathetic. "Nobody has come to look for me" is your excuse.

I'll point out what I mean: if you don't change and seek out those who are waiting for you, you will never be an effective apostle.

793 There are three important things you need to do to draw people to God. Forget yourself, and think only of the glory of your Father God. Subject your will filially to the Will of Heaven, as Jesus Christ taught you. Follow with docility the lights of the Holy Spirit.

794 Mary spent three days and three nights looking for the son who was lost. May you and I also be able to say that our willingness to find Jesus knows no rest.

THE HEART

795 You need a heart which is in love, not an easy life, to achieve happiness.

796 After twenty centuries, we have to proclaim with complete conviction that the spirit of Christ has not lost its redemptive force, which alone can satisfy the desires of the human heart. Begin by feeding that truth into your own heart, which will be perpetually restless, as Saint Augustine wrote, until it rests entirely in God.

797 To love is to cherish one thought, to live for the person loved, not to belong to oneself, happily and freely with one's heart and soul to be subjected to another will ... and at the same time to one's own.

798 You still do not love the Lord as a miser loves his riches, as a mother loves her child. You are still too concerned about yourself and about your petty affairs. And yet you have noticed that Jesus has already become indispensable in your life.

Well, as soon as you correspond completely to his call, he will also be indispensable in each one of your actions.

799 Cry aloud — for that cry is the folly of one in love: "Lord, even though I love you, don't trust me. Bind me to yourself, more closely every day."

800 The heart has been created to love, do not doubt it. Let us therefore bring Our Lord Jesus Christ into the love that we feel. Otherwise, the empty heart takes revenge and fills itself up with the most despicable vileness.

801 There is no heart more human than that of a person overflowing with supernatural sense. Think of Holy Mary, who is full of grace, Daughter of God the Father, Mother of God the Son, Spouse of God the Holy Spirit. Her Heart has room for all humanity and makes no distinction or discrimination. Every person is her son or her daughter.

802 When someone has a very small heart, it seems as if he keeps his desires in a narrow, neglected drawer.

803 Each day you must behave to those around you with great understanding, with great affection, together, of course, with all the energy needed. Otherwise understanding and affection become complicity and selfishness.

804 That friend of ours with no false humility used to say: "I haven't needed to learn how to forgive, because the Lord has taught me how to love."

805 Forgiveness. To forgive with one's whole heart and with no trace of a grudge will always be a wonderfully fruitful disposition to have.

That was Christ's attitude on being nailed to the Cross: "Father, forgive them, they know not what they are doing." From this came your salvation and mine.

806 You were very sorry to hear that most un-Christian comment, "Forgive your enemies: you can't imagine how it angers them!"

You could not keep quiet, and you replied calmly, "I don't want to cheapen love by humiliating my neighbour. I forgive, because I love, and I am hungry to imitate the Master."

807 Carefully avoid anything that can hurt other people's hearts.

808 Out of ten ways of saying No, why must you always choose the most disagreeable? Virtue has no wish to hurt.

809 Look: we have to love God not only with our heart, but with His, and with the hearts of all humanity throughout time. Otherwise, we should fall short of corresponding to his Love.

810 It distresses me to see those who have given themselves to God giving the impression that they are old bachelors, or allowing themselves to be taken for such, since they possess the Love beyond all loves. They would be old bachelors indeed if they did not know how to love the One who loves so much.

811 Someone has compared the heart to a windmill, moved by the wind of love and passion.

Indeed, that windmill can grind wheat, barley or dried dung. It is up to us.

812 The devil, father of lies and victim of his own pride, tries to imitate the Lord even in the way he seeks converts. Have you noticed that in the same way as God makes use of men to save souls and lead them to holiness, so does satan use other people to impede that work and even to bring them to ruin. And — don't be frightened — in the same way as Jesus sought those who were nearest, relatives, friends or colleagues to be instruments, the devil also often attempts to get the people we love most to lead us into evil.

That is why, if the bonds of blood-relationship tie us down and hinder us from following the ways of God, we should cut them promptly. And perhaps your resolve will also release others who were being caught up in the nets of Lucifer.

813 I give you thanks, my Jesus, for your decision to become perfect Man, with a Heart which loved and is most loveable; which loved unto death and suffered; which was filled with joy and sorrow; which delighted in the things of men and showed us the way to Heaven; which subjected itself heroically to duty and acted

with mercy; which watched over the poor and the rich and cared for sinners and the just.

I give you thanks, my Jesus. Give us hearts to measure up to Yours!

814 Ask Jesus to grant you a Love like a purifying furnace, where your poor flesh — your poor heart — may be consumed and cleansed of all earthly miseries. Pray that it may be emptied of self and filled with him. Ask him to grant you a deep-seated aversion to all that is worldly so that you may be sustained only by Love.

815 You have seen very clearly your vocation to love God, but only with your head. You assure me that you have put your heart into the way you are following. But you say that you are distracted at times, and even attempt to look back. That is a sign that you have not completely put your heart into it. You need to be more sensitive.

816 The Master said: "I have come to set a man at variance with his father, and the daughter with her mother, and the daughter-in-law with her mother-in-law." If you fulfil what he demands of you, you will show you really love your parents. That is why you must not use the whole-hearted affection you should have for them as a shield when the moment comes for personal sacrifice. Otherwise, believe me, you will be putting love for your parents before the love of God. And you will be putting your own self-love before love for your parents.

Do you now understand more deeply the relevance of those words of the Gospel?

817 The heart! From time to time, without your being able to help it, your all too human memory casts a crude, unhappy, "uncouth" shadow on your mind.

Go to the tabernacle immediately, at least in spirit, and you will return to light, happiness and Life.

818 The frequency of our visits to the Lord is in proportion to two factors: faith and the involvement of the heart; seeing the truth and loving it.

819 Love is strengthened by self-denial and mortification.

820 If you had a big heart and were a bit more sincere you would not be troubled by feelings of mortification over little things — nor would you use them to mortify other people.

821 Sometimes it is a duty to feel annoyed; sometimes it is a weakness. But let it last only for a few minutes. Moreover, make sure there is always charity and affection there.

822 You may often have to tell someone off. But you should be teaching him how to correct a defect, never merely demonstrating your bad temper.

823 When you need to correct someone, it should be done clearly and with kindness, even with a smile if that is suitable. It should never, or very seldom, be overpowering.

824 Do you feel as if goodness and absolute truth have been deposited with you, and therefore that you have been invested with a personal title or right to uproot evil at all costs?

You will never solve anything like that, but only through Love and with love, remembering that Love has forgiven you and still forgives you so much.

825 Love good people because they love Christ. Love those too who do not love him because of their misfortune, and especially because Christ loves both kinds of people.

826 The people of that land, so far away from God and lost, reminded you of the Master's words: "They are like sheep without a shepherd."

And you too were filled with a strong feeling of compassion deep within you. Make up your mind, where you are now, to give your life as a holocaust for all.

827 A friend of ours used to say: "The poor are my best spiritual book and the main motive of my prayers. It pains me to see them, and in each one of them, Christ. And because it hurts, I realise I love him and love them."

828 If the love of God is put into friendships, they are cleansed, reinforced and spiritualised, because all the dross, all the selfish points of view and excessively worldly considerations are burned away. Never forget that the love of God puts our affections in order, and purifies them without diminishing them.

829 The thought of what has happened to you burns within you. Christ came to you when you were only a miserable leper. Until then, you had developed only one good quality, a generous concern for others. After that encounter you were given the grace to see Jesus in them, you fell in love with him, and now you love him in them. Now the altruism that used to impel you to help your neighbour in certain ways seems very small. You are right to think so.

830 Get accustomed to entrusting your poor heart to the Sweet and Immaculate Heart of Mary, so that she may purify it from so much dross, and lead it to the Most Sacred and Most Merciful Heart of Jesus.

PURITY

831 For everyone, whatever his state — single, married, widowed or priest — chastity is a triumphant affirmation of love.

832 The miracle of purity has prayer and mortification as its two points of support.

833 A temptation against chastity is more dangerous the more concealed it is. When it comes insidiously, it is the more deceptive.

Do not give in, not even with the excuse of not wanting to "seem strange."

834 Holy Purity is the humility of the flesh. You asked the Lord for seven bolts on your heart. And I advised you to ask for seven bolts for your heart and eighty years of gravity as well, for your youth.

And be watchful, for a spark is much easier to extinguish than a fire. Take flight, for in this it is low cowardice to be "brave"; a roving eye does not mean a lively spirit, but turns out to be a snare of satan.

Yet human diligence, with mortification, the cilice, disciplines and fasting are all worthless without you, my God.

835 This is how a confessor killed concupiscence in a sensitive soul who confessed to a certain curiosity: "Nonsense, it is just a question of male and female instincts."

836 As soon as you wilfully allow a dialogue with temptation to begin, the soul is robbed of its peace, just as consent to impurity destroys grace.

837 He followed the way of impurity with all his body and soul. His faith became obscured even though he knew it is not a problem of faith.

838 "You told me, Father, that after my past life it is still possible to become another Saint Augustine. I do not doubt it, and today more than yesterday I want to try to prove it."

But you have to cut out sin courageously from the root, as the holy Bishop of Hippo did.

839 Yes, ask for pardon with contrition and do penance in abundance for the impure things that happened in your past life, but do not try to recall them.

840 That conversation was as dirty as a sewer.

It is not enough to take no part in it. You must show your repugnance for it strongly.

841 It seems as if your spirit were growing smaller, shrinking to a little point. And your body seems to grow and become gigantic, until it gains control. It was for you that Saint Paul wrote: "I buffet my own body, and make it my slave; or I, who have preached to others, may myself be rejected as worthless."

842 One feels sorry for people who say from their own sad experience that you cannot be chaste while living and working in the midst of the world.

If they accepted the consequences of their illogical reasoning, they ought not to feel hurt if others were to insult the memory of their parents, brothers or sisters, wife or husband.

843 That confessor was a bit rough, but he was experienced and managed to stop a soul talking nonsense. He brought him to his senses by saying: "The way you are now means you are acting like a goat; next you will be happy to behave like a pig;

and then what? You will always be acting like an animal which doesn't know how to look up to heaven."

844 Perhaps you are ... just what you are, a little animal. But you must admit that there are people of integrity who are chaste. Well, don't get upset then, if they leave you out of things. Those men and women include in their human plans people with a body and a soul, not animals.

845 Some people bring children into the world for their own benefit, to serve their own purposes, out of selfishness. They forget children are a wonderful gift from God for which they will have to render a very special account.

Do not be offended if I say that having offspring just to continue the species, is something that ... animals can do too.

846 No Christian married couple can want to block the well-springs of life. For their love is based on the Love of Christ, which entails dedication and sacrifice. Moreover, as Tobias reminded Sara, a husband and wife know that "we are children of saints, and we cannot come together in the way of the gentiles, who do not know God."

847 When we were little, we kept close to our mother in a dark alley or if dogs barked at us.

Now, when we feel temptations of the flesh, we should run to the side of Our Mother in Heaven, by realising how close she is to us, and by means of aspirations.

She will defend us and lead us to the light.

848 No one is more of a man or more of a woman for leading a disordered life.

Obviously anyone who thinks so would find their ideal of a person in a prostitute, or someone who was perverted and corrupt — that is in those who have rotten hearts and cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

849 May I give you some advice for you to put into practice daily? When your heart makes you feel those low cravings, say slowly to the Immaculate Virgin: "Look on me with compassion. Don't abandon me, my Mother." And recommend this prayer to others.

PEACE

850 In your heart and soul, in your intelligence and in your will, implant a spirit of trust and abandonment to the loving Will of your heavenly Father. From this will arise the interior peace you desire.

851 How can you be at peace if you allow passions you do not even attempt to control to drag you away from the pull of grace?

Heaven pulls you upwards; you drag yourself downwards. And don't seek excuses — that is what you are doing. If you go on like that you will tear yourself apart.

852 We have both peace and war within us.

Victory and peace cannot be attained if loyalty and resolve to win the combat are lacking.

853 There is a remedy for those anxieties of yours. Be patient, have rectitude of intention and look at things with a supernatural perspective.

854 God is with you: so cast far away from you that fear and spiritual agitation. They are reactions to avoid in the first place, for they only serve to multiply temptations and increase the danger.

855 Everything may collapse and fail. Events may turn out contrary to what was expected and great adversity may come. But nothing is to be gained by being perturbed. Furthermore, remember the confident prayer of the prophet: "The Lord is our judge, the Lord gives us our laws, the Lord is our king; it is he who will save us."

Say it devoutly every day, so that your behaviour may agree with the designs of Providence, which governs us for our own good.

856 If you fix your sight on God and thus know how to keep calm in the face of worries; if you can forget petty things, jealousies and envies, you will save a lot of energy, which you need if you are to work effectively in the service of men.

857 Someone we know well told us sincerely, in confidence, that he had never been bored, for he had never been on his own, without our Friend.

It was late in the evening, and there was a great silence. You felt very intently the presence of God. And what peace there was in the knowledge of that reality.

858 One day when you were travelling, a hearty greeting from a brother reminded you that the honest ways of the world are open to Christ. It is just a matter of launching out on them with the spirit of conquerors.

If God has created the world for his children, for them to live in and sanctify, what are you waiting for?

859 You are extraordinarily happy. Sometimes you may find out that God has been abandoned by a son of his. Then, in the midst of the peace and joy deep within you, you feel a pang of grief and a sorrow which arises from affection, but you do not allow it really to disturb or upset you.

All right, but make sure you use all human and supernatural resources available to help him change his mind. And you must trust fully in Jesus Christ. If you do, the waters will return to their course.

860 As soon as you truly abandon yourself in the Lord, you will know how to be content with whatever happens. You will not lose your peace if your undertakings do not turn out the way you hoped, even if you have put everything into them, and

used all the means necessary. For they will have turned out the way God wants them to.

861 Your forgetfulness and your faults are still there, and they hurt you. At the same time, you go on your way bursting with happiness.

Precisely because they cause you the pain of love, your failings no longer rob you of your peace.

862 When darkness surrounds us and our soul is blind and restless, we have to go to the Light, like Bartimaeus. Repeat, shout, cry out ever more strongly, Domine, ut videam! — Lord, that I may see. And daylight will dawn upon you, and you will be able to enjoy the brightness He grants you.

863 Fight against your harshness of character, against your selfishness, your spirit of comfort and your dislikes. We have to be co-redeemers; and, besides, consider carefully that the prize you receive will bear a very direct relation to the sowing you may have done.

864 The task for a Christian is to drown evil in an abundance of good. It is not a question of negative campaigns, or of being anti anything. On the contrary, we should live positively, full of optimism, with youthfulness, joy and peace. We should be understanding with everybody, with the followers of Christ and with those who abandon him, or do not know him at all.

But understanding does not mean holding back, or remaining indifferent, but being active.

865 Through Christian charity and human good manners, you should make an effort not to create an unbridgeable distance between you and anybody else. You should leave a way out for others, so that they need go no further from the Truth.

866 Violence is not a good method for convincing anyone. Even less is it so in the apostolate.

867 A violent person always stands to lose, even though he may win the first battle, for he ends up isolated and hedged around by his lack of understanding.

868 The tactics of a tyrant towards those who could overthrow him if they were united are to make them quarrel among themselves. It is an old ploy of the enemy, the devil and his followers, to destroy many apostolic plans.

869 Those who see adversaries where there are only brothers deny with their works the Christianity they profess.

870 Matters can rarely be resolved by aggressive polemics which humiliate people. And things are certainly never cleared up when among those arguing the case there is a fanatic.

871 I can't understand why you are annoyed and disappointed. They paid you back in your own currency, delighting in insults by word and deeds.

Learn from the lesson and never forget from now on that the people who live with you have a heart too.

872 To help you keep your peace during those times of hard and unjust contradictions I used to say to you: "If they break our skulls, we shall not take it too seriously. We shall just have to put up with having them broken."

873 A paradox: I have had fewer worries on my mind every day since I decided to follow the advice of the psalm: "Cast your cares upon the Lord, and he will sustain you." And at the same time, once we have done whatever needs doing, everything can be solved more easily.

874 Holy Mary is the Queen of peace, and thus the Church invokes her. So when your soul or your family are troubled, or things go wrong at work, in society or between nations, cry out to her without ceasing. Call to her by this title: Regina pacis, ora pro nobis — Queen of peace, pray for us." Have you at least tried it when you have lost your calm? You will be surprised at its immediate effect.

BEYOND DEATH

875 A true Christian is always ready to appear before God. Because, if he is fighting to live as a man of Christ, he is ready at every moment to fulfil his duty.

876 When facing death, be calm. I do not want you to have the cold stoicism of the pagan, but the fervour of a child of God who knows that life is changed, not taken away. To die is to live!

877 He acquired a Doctorate in law and in philosophy, and was applying for a post as a professor at the University of Madrid. He had specialised in two demanding subjects and had done brilliantly in both. He sent word to me: he was ill, and wanted me to go and see him. I arrived at the lodgings where he was staying. He greeted me with the words: "Father, I am dying." I comforted him affectionately. He wished to make a general confession. That very same night, he died.

An architect friend and a doctor helped me dress the corpse. Seeing that young body, which soon began to decompose, the three of us agreed that two university qualifications were worth nothing compared to the definitive qualification which as a good Christian he had just obtained.

878 There is an answer to everything, except death. And death is the answer to everything.

879 Death comes and cannot be avoided. What empty vanity it is, then, to centre our existence on this life. See how much many men and women suffer. Some suffer because life is coming to an end and it pains them to leave it; others because it is going on, and they are sick of it. In neither case is there room for the mistaken view that makes our passage through this world an end in itself.

One must leave that way of thinking behind and anchor oneself to another, an eternal one. A total change is required, to empty oneself of self-centred motives, which pass away, and to be renewed in Christ, who is eternal.

880 When you think about death, do not be afraid, in spite of your sins. For he already knows that you love him and what stuff you are made of.

If you seek him, he will welcome you as the father welcomed the prodigal son; but you have to seek him.

881 Non habemus hic manentem civitatem — here we have no lasting city. And lest we forget it, at the hour of death this truth appears crudely at times, in lack of understanding, say, or in persecution or in being despised. But there is always a sense of loneliness, for even though we may be surrounded by affection, every person dies alone.

Now is the time to untie all the bonds that bind us. Let us prepare ourselves at all times for that step which will bring us into the eternal presence of the Most Holy Trinity.

882 Time is our treasure, the money with which to buy eternity.

883 You were consoled by the idea that life is to be spent, burned in the service of God. And spending ourselves entirely for him is how we shall be freed from death, which brings us the possession of Life.

884 That priest, a friend of ours, worked away while thinking of God, holding on to his paternal hand and helping others to make these fundamental ideas their own. That is why he said to himself: "When you die, all will be well, because He will continue to look after things."

885 Don't make a tragedy out of death, for it is not one. Only unloving children do not look forward to meeting their parents.

886 Everything down here is a handful of dust. Consider the millions of "important" people who have "recently" died and nobody remembers at all.

887 The great Christian revolution has been to convert pain into fruitful suffering and to turn a bad thing into something good. We have deprived the devil of this weapon; and with it we can conquer eternity.

888 The judgement will be dreadful for those who knew the way perfectly well, showed it to others or encouraged them to follow it, but would not go along it themselves.

God will judge and condemn them out of their own mouths.

889 Purgatory shows God's great mercy and washes away the defects of those who long to become one with Him.

890 Hell alone is a punishment for sin. Death and judgement are only consequences, which those who are in the grace of God do not fear.

891 If at any time you feel uneasy at the thought of our sister death because you see yourself to be such a poor creature, take heart. Heaven awaits us and consider: what will it be like when all the infinite beauty and greatness, and happiness and Love of God will be poured into the poor clay vessel that the human being is, to satisfy it eternally with the freshness of an ever new joy?

892 When the honest soul is confronted with the cruel injustice of this life, how it rejoices when it remembers the eternal justice of its eternal God!

With the knowledge of its own wretchedness, it utters with a fruitful desire that Pauline exclamation: Non vivo ego — it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And He will live for ever.

893 How happy when they die must be those who have lived heroically every minute of their life! I can assure you it is so, because I have seen the joy of those who have prepared themselves for many years, with calm impatience, for this encounter.

894 Pray that none of us may fail the Lord. It will not be difficult, unless we play the fool. For Our Father God helps us in everything, even by making this our exile on earth last for only a while.

895 The thought of death will help you to grow in the virtue of charity, for it might be that this particular instant in which you are together with one person or another is the last one. They, or you, or I, could be gone at any moment.

896 A soul who was ambitious to be united with God used to say: "Fortunately, we men are not eternal."

897 That piece of information made me think: fifty-one million people die every year; ninety-seven every minute. The Master had already told us when he said: the fisherman throws his nets into the sea; the Kingdom of Heaven is like a drag-net ... , and from the catch the good will be selected; the bad, those that are of no use, will be rejected for ever. Fifty-one million people die every year, ninety-seven every minute. Tell other people as well.

898 Our Mother went up to Heaven, body and soul. Tell her often that we, her children, do not want to be separated from her. She will hear you!

THE TONGUE

899 Having the gift of tongues is knowing how to transmit the knowledge of God — an essential requisite for whoever is to be an apostle. That is why I ask God Our Lord each day to grant it to every one of his sons and daughters.

900 Learn how to say No, without hurting people unnecessarily or having recourse to the kind of abrupt rejection which destroys charity.

Remember that you are always in the presence of God.

901 Do you object to my repeating in the same way the same essential things without taking into account the latest fashionable trends? Look, the straight line has been defined in the same way for centuries, because it is the clearest and briefest definition. Other definitions would be more obscure and complicated.

902 Acquire the habit of speaking about everyone and about everything they do in a friendly manner, especially when you are speaking of those who labour in God's service.

Whenever that is not possible, keep quiet. Sharp or irritated comment may border on gossip or slander.

903 A young man who had just given himself more fully to God said: "What I need to do now is speak less, visit the sick and sleep on the floor."

Apply that to yourself.

904 One should speak about Christ's priests only in order to praise them.

I hope with all my heart that my brothers and I bear this in mind in our daily behaviour.

905 There are many sides to lying: reticence, intrigue, slander ... But it is always the coward's weapon.

906 You are wrong to let yourself be impressed by the first words someone says to you or by the last one.

Listen with respect and interest. Give due credit to people, but carefully ponder your judgement in the presence of God.

907 They spread slander and then make sure themselves that someone comes along immediately to tell you: "It is said that ... " No doubt that is villainous, but don't lose your peace; the tongue can do you no harm, if you work honestly. Consider how silly they are, how tactless, humanly speaking, and what a lack of loyalty they show towards their brothers — and especially towards God!

And don't go and fall into slander yourself, through an ill-conceived idea of the right to reply. If you have to say anything, make use of fraternal correction as the Gospel advises us.

908 Don't be worried by those contradictions and all that talk. It is true that we are working in a divine undertaking, but we are men. And it is natural that as we walk we raise dust along the road.

If anything bothers you or hurts you, make use of it for your purification and, if necessary, to straighten out your own behaviour.

909 Gossip is a very human thing, they say. And I reply: we have to live in a divine manner.

The evil or flippant word of only one man can create a climate of opinion, and even make it fashionable to speak badly about somebody. Then that thin mist of slander rises from below, reaches a high level and perhaps condenses into black clouds.

But when the man persecuted in this way is a soul of God, the clouds shower down a beneficial rain, come what may; and the Lord ensures that he is exalted by the very means with which they tried to humiliate or defame him.

910 You didn't want to believe it, but you had to yield to the evidence, to your cost. Those statements you made simply and with a sound Catholic sense have been twisted maliciously by enemies of the faith.

It is true that "we have to be simple as doves and wise as serpents." Don't talk out of place or at the wrong time.

911 Because you don't know, or don't want to know, how to imitate that man's upright manner of acting, your secret envy makes you seek to ridicule him.

912 Speaking badly of others is the daughter of envy; and envy is where the sterile seek refuge.

So, now you are faced by sterility, examine the way you see things. If you carry on working and do not get annoyed at others who are also working and obtaining results, then the sterility of your effort will merely be an apparent one. In time you will gather the harvest.

913 Some people seem to think that when they are not causing harm or mortifying others they are at a loose end.

914 Sometimes I think slanderers are like men possessed. For the devil always insinuates himself and his evil spirit here, forever critical of God or God's followers.

915 "They are doing some pretty dreadful things," you say looking down on them.

Do you know them personally? You don't? Then, how can you speak of what you do not know?

916 This is how you should answer a backbiter: "I shall tell the person concerned" or "I shall speak to him about it."

917 A contemporary author has written: "Going around gossiping is always inhuman; it reveals a person of mediocre quality; it is a sign of being uneducated; it shows a lack of refinement of feeling; it is unworthy of a Christian."

918 You should always avoid complaining, criticising, gossiping. You must avoid absolutely anything that could bring discord among brothers.

919 Having a position of high authority, you would be imprudent to interpret the silence of those who listen to you as a sign of acquiescence. Ask yourself whether you allow them to make suggestions, or whether you take offence if they actually let you know what they think. You must change your ways.

920 This has to be your attitude when faced by defamation. First, forgive everyone from the very beginning and with all your heart. Then love. Never fall into a single uncharitable act. Always respond with love.

But if your Mother the Church is being attacked, defend her courageously. Keep calm, but be firm. Have the strength not to give in, and prevent anyone fouling up or blocking the way ahead for Christian souls when they in their turn are eager to forgive and respond with charity to personal insults.

921 Someone who was fed up with gossip once said that he wished the smallest town were the capital.

He didn't realise, poor man, that it would be exactly the same there.

For the love of God and your neighbour, don't fall into such a small-town defect. It is so un-Christian. It was said of the first followers of Christ: "See how they love one another." Can this be said of you, and of me, at all times?

922 Criticisms of apostolic enterprises are usually of two kinds: the work is presented by some people as a most complicated structure; others deem it to be a comfortable and easy task.

In the end, such "objectivity" boils down to narrow-mindedness, with a good dose of idle chatter thrown in. Don't get annoyed, but ask them: "What is it that you do?"

923 You might not be able to expect understanding for the demands of your faith, but you do have to ask for respect.

924 Those people you heard speak ill of that loyal friend of God, will also speak ill of you when you decide to behave better.

925 Certain comments can hurt only those who consider themselves to be affected. That is why, once you are following the Lord with all your heart and soul, you can accept criticisms as purification, and as a goad to make you lengthen your stride.

926 The Most Holy Trinity has crowned Our Mother.

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, will ask us to render an account of every idle word. That is another reason for asking Holy Mary to teach us always to speak in the presence of the Lord.

SPREADING THE FAITH

927 Be convinced of this: your apostolate consists in spreading goodness, light, enthusiasm, generosity, a spirit of sacrifice, constancy in work, deep study, complete self-surrender, being up-to-date, cheerful and complete obedience to the Church, and perfect charity.

Nobody can give what he does not have.

928 This advice is for you, since you are still young and have just started along your way. As God deserves everything, try to be outstanding professionally, so that you will later be able to spread your ideas more effectively.

929 Don't forget that we will be more convincing the more convinced we are.

930 "Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

And at the end of his time upon earth, Christ commanded: *Euntes docete* — go out and teach. He wants his light to shine in the behaviour and words of his disciples, and in yours too.

931 It is striking how often, even in the name of freedom, many people fear and oppose Catholics being simply good Catholics.

932 Be on guard against the propagators of scandal and innuendo, which some take in through lack of reflection while others do so through bad faith. They destroy a calm atmosphere and poison public opinion.

Sometimes true charity demands that such abuses and their promoters should be denounced. Otherwise, with their devious or badly-formed consciences, they or those who listen to them could think: "They keep quiet, so they must agree."

933 Sectarians protest loudly against what they call our fanaticism because the centuries go by and the Catholic Faith remains immutable.

On the other hand, the fanaticism of the sectarians, since it bears no relation to the truth, changes its coat at different times. They raise against the Holy Church a bogey of mere words lacking in any factual content. Their "freedom" enchains men; their "progress" leads humanity back to the jungle; their "science" conceals ignorance. Behind their stall are hidden only old damaged goods.

May such fanaticism for the Faith as yours is become stronger every day, for it is the sole defence of the one Truth.

934 Do not be afraid, or surprised, to see the resistance of some people's minds. There will always be stupid people who deck out the armour of their ignorance with a display of culture.

935 How sad it is to realise that those who hate the Lord march arm-in-arm with some who claim they are in his service. They follow different passions, but are united against Christians, the children of God.

936 In certain surroundings, especially in the intellectual sphere, one sees and feels a sort of conspiracy of "cliques," not infrequently assisted by Catholics. With cynical perseverance they maintain and spread slanders to cast a shadow over the Church, or over certain individuals and organisations within it. All this is done against all truth or reason.

Pray each day with faith: "Ut inimicos Sanctae Ecclesiae" — enemies, because that is what they proclaim themselves to be — "humiliare digneris, te rogamus audi nos." Confound, Lord, those who persecute you, with the clarity of your light, which we are ready to spread.

937 Is the idea of Catholicism old and therefore unacceptable? The sun is older and has not lost its light; water is more ancient, and it still quenches the thirst and refreshes us.

938 No one, even with a good intention, should be allowed to falsify historical or biographical facts. But it is a great mistake to put on a pedestal enemies of the Church who have spent their days doing precisely that. Be sure of this: historical truth does not suffer because a Christian does not wish to collaborate in the construction of a pedestal which should not exist. Since when is hatred to be set up as a model?

939 The spreading of Christian teaching need not provoke antagonism, or harm those who do not know our doctrine. Caritas omnia suffert! — love bears all things. If one proceeds with charity, anyone who might otherwise have been opposed to Christianity and been deceived by error may easily and honestly end up committing himself to it. However, there can be no giving ground in dogma in the name of a naive "breadth of belief," for if anyone acted in this way he would risk putting himself out of the Church. Instead of winning a benefit for others he would harm himself.

940 Christianity is "unusual"; it does not sit easily with the things of this world. And that is perhaps its greatest nuisance value when it is used as a banner by the worldly.

941 Some people know nothing about God because no one has talked to them about him in terms they can understand.

942 Pray that your holy ingenuity may achieve what your intelligence can not, so that you may give more service of a better kind to everyone.

943 Believe me, the apostolate of giving doctrine usually has to be, as it were, capillary, spreading from one to another, from each believer to his immediate companion.

The children of God care about all souls, because every soul is important.

944 Seek refuge with the Blessed Virgin, Mother of Good Counsel, so that your lips may never utter any offence against God.

RESPONSIBILITY

945 If we Christians really lived in accordance with our faith, the greatest revolution of all times would take place. The effectiveness of our co-redemption depends on each one of us. You should meditate on this.

946 You will feel completely responsible when you realise that, before God, you have only duties. He already sees to it that you are granted rights.

947 May you acquire the custom of concerning yourself every day about others, and give yourself to the task so much that you forget you even exist.

948 Here is a thought to help you in difficult moments. "The more my faithfulness increases, the better will I be able to contribute to the growth of others in that virtue." How good it is to feel supported by each other.

949 Don't come to me with theories. Each day our lives have to convert those high ideals into ordinary, heroic, fruitful reality.

950 We should indeed respect things that are old, and be grateful for them. Learn from them by all means, and bear in mind those past experiences, too. But let us not exaggerate; everything has its own time and place. Do we now dress in doublet and hose or wear powdered wigs on our heads?

951 Don't get annoyed. Irresponsible behaviour often denotes poor formation or a lack of intelligence, rather than want of good spirit.

Teachers and directors should be expected to fill in those gaps with the responsible fulfilment of their duties.

You should examine yourself if you are in such a position.

952 You run the great risk of being satisfied with living, or thinking that you have to live, "like a good boy," who stays in a cosy and neat house, with no problems, and knowing only happiness.

That is a caricature of the home in Nazareth. Because Christ brought happiness and order, he went out to spread those treasures among men and women of all times.

953 I think it is very natural for you to want the whole world to know Christ. But start with the responsibility of saving the souls who live with you and sanctifying each one of your fellow workers or fellow students. That is the principal mission that the Lord has entrusted to you.

954 You should behave as if it all depended on you: whether the atmosphere in your place of work is to be one of hard work, cheerfulness, presence of God and supernatural outlook.

Why are you so apathetic? If you come across a group at work who are a bit difficult, you lose interest in them. Perhaps they have become difficult because you have neglected them. Yet you throw in the towel and think of them as a dead weight which holds back your apostolic ideals because they do not understand you ...

You may love and serve them with your prayer and mortification, but how do you expect them to listen to you if you never speak to them?

You will have many surprises in store the day you decide to talk to them one by one. What is more, if you do not change, they will one day be able to point the finger at you and say quite rightly: *Hominem non habeo* — I have no one to help me.

955 Understand that holy things, when they are looked at and done every day in a holy manner, do not become "everyday" things. Everything Jesus Christ did on this earth was human, and divine.

956 You say you cannot be happy to live like everyone else, with the faith of the crowd. Indeed, you have to have a personal faith joined to a sense of personal responsibility.

957 The Most Holy Trinity grants you grace and expects you to make use of it responsibly. Given such an endowment, there is no place for your adopting easy, slow, lazy attitudes, because, apart from everything else, souls await you.

958 You have a big problem; but if such things are approached properly, that is to say, with a calm and responsible supernatural vision, the solution is always to be found.

959 When they take their little children in their arms, mothers — good mothers — make sure they do not have any pins in their clothes which could hurt them. When we deal with souls, we should have the same gentleness, together with all the determination required.

960 *Custos, quid de nocte?* — Watchman, how goes the night?

May you acquire the habit of having a day on guard once a week, during which to increase your self-giving and loving vigilance over details, and to pray and mortify yourself a little more.

Realise that the Holy Church is like a great army in battle array. And you, within that army, are defending one front on which there are attacks, engagements with the enemy and counter-attacks. Do you see what I mean?

This readiness to grow closer to God will lead you to turn your days, one after the other, into days on guard.

961 As the obverse side to a lost vocation, or of a negative response to one of those constant calls of grace, we have to see God's will allowing it to happen. True, but if we are sincere, we know well enough that this does not mean the excuse or mitigation of whatever happened. For, looking at the reverse side, we can see a personal failure to fulfil the divine Will, which has sought us for himself and found no response.

962 If you really love your own country, and I am sure you do, you would not hesitate to enlist as a volunteer to defend it from imminent danger. As I wrote to you before, everyone can be useful in an emergency: men and women; the old, the

middle-aged, the young and even adolescents. Only invalids and children are left out.

Every day there is a call, not just for volunteers to enlist — that is very little — but for a general mobilisation of souls to defend Christ's Kingdom. And the King himself, Jesus, has called you expressly by your name. He asks you to fight in God's battles, and to put at his service the noblest powers of your soul: your heart, your will, your understanding, all your being.

You must know that the flesh, with your clean life and especially with the protection of the Virgin Mary, is no problem. Are you going to be such a coward as to try to get out of being enlisted with the excuse that your heart or will or intellect are weak? Are you going to pretend to claim some grounds for remaining in the ancillary services?

The Lord wants to make you an instrument for the front line — you are one already — and if you turn your back you deserve only pity, as a traitor.

963 If time were mere gold you could perhaps afford to squander it. But time is life, and you don't know how much you have left.

964 The Lord converted Peter, who had denied him three times, without even a reproach, with a look full of Love.

Jesus looks at us with those same eyes, after we have fallen. May we also be able to say to him, as Peter did: "Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you," and amend our lives.

965 They argue that they act gently and with understanding, in the name of charity, towards those who throw their weight around.

I pray to God that this gentleness and understanding of theirs may not be a camouflage for human respect and for seeking their own comfort, while they allow evil to be committed. For if that were so, this gentleness and understanding would merely be complicity in the offence against God.

966 The conversion of a soul cannot be made easy at the risk of many others possibly falling away.

967 If someone thought that wolves could be reared among sheep, imagine what chance the sheep would have.

968 Mediocre men, mediocre in mind and in Christian spirit, surround themselves by stupid people when they are in power. They are falsely persuaded by their vanity that in this way they will never lose control.

Sensible men, however, surround themselves with learned people who live a clean life as well as possessing knowledge, and become, through their help, men who can really govern. They are not in this matter deceived by their humility, for in making others great they themselves are made great.

969 There is no prudence in appointing untried men to important posts of direction just to see how it works out. It would be like risking the common good on a lucky dip.

970 You must be quite foolish to go by what people say when you have been given a position of authority. First of all you should worry about what God will say; then, very much in the second place, and sometimes not at all, you may consider what others might think. "Whoever acknowledges me before men," says the Lord, "I too will acknowledge him before my Father who is in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father who is in heaven."

971 If you occupy a position of responsibility you should remember as you do your job that personal achievement perishes with the person who made himself indispensable.

972 A fundamental rule for good management is to give responsibility to others without this becoming for you a way of seeking anonymity or comfort. I repeat, delegate responsibility and ask each person to give an account of how his job is going, so that you can "render an account" to God; and to souls, if necessary.

973 When you are dealing with problems, try not to exaggerate justice to the point of forgetting charity.

974 The strength of a chain is the strength of its weakest link.

975 Never say of anybody under you: he is no good.

It is you who are no good, for you cannot find a place where he will be of use.

976 Reject any ambition for honours. Think instead about your duties, how to do them well and the instruments you need to accomplish them. In this way, you will not hanker for position, and if one comes you will see it just as it is: a burden to bear in the service of souls.

977 In the hour of rejection at the Cross, the Virgin Mary is there by her Son, willing to go through the same fate. Let us lose our fear of behaving like responsible Christians when the environment in which we move is not easy. She will help us.

PENANCE

978 This is what Our Lord wants, for we need it if we are to follow him closely. There is no other way. This is the work of the Holy Spirit in each soul — in yours. Be docile and present no obstacles to God, until he makes your poor flesh like that of Jesus on the Cross.

979 If the word love is often on your lips, without being backed by little sacrifices, it becomes tedious.

980 From every point of view, mortification has an extraordinary importance.

Considering it humanly, anyone who does not know how to control himself will never be able to have a positive influence on others. He will be overwhelmed by his surroundings as soon as he finds they appeal to his personal tastes. He will be a man without energy, incapable of any great effort when required.

Considering it before God, do you not think it appropriate for us to show, with these small acts, how much we love, obey and respect the One who gave everything for us?

981 A spirit of mortification, rather than being just an outward show of Love, arises as one of its consequences. If you fail in one of these little proofs, acknowledge that your love for the Love is wavering.

982 Have you not noticed that mortified souls, because of their simplicity, have a greater enjoyment of good things, even in this world?

983 Without mortification there is no happiness on earth.

984 When you make up your mind to be more mortified, your interior life will improve and you will be much more fruitful.

985 Let us not forget that in all human activities there must be men and women who, in their lives and work, raise Christ's Cross aloft for all to see, as an act of reparation. It is a symbol of peace and of joy, a symbol of the Redemption and of the unity of the human race. It is a symbol of the love that the Most Holy Trinity, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit had, and continues to have, for mankind.

986 "You won't laugh, Father, will you, if I tell you that, a few days ago, I found myself spontaneously offering the Lord the sacrifice of time it meant for me to mend a broken toy for one of my little children?"

I am not laughing. I am delighted because with that Love, God sets about mending our faults.

987 Be mortified, but not careless or bitter. Be recollected, but not timid.

988 A day without mortification is a day lost, because if we have not denied ourselves, we have not lived the holocaust.

989 Haven't you gone against your own preference, your whims, some time, in something? You must realise that the One who asks you is nailed to a Cross, suffering in all his senses and faculties, with a crown of thorns on his head ... for you.

990 You present yourself as a wonderful theoretician. But you don't give way to others even in the most insignificant trifles. I do not believe in that spirit of mortification of yours.

991 Care in little things requires constant mortification. It is a way to make life more agreeable for others.

992 I prefer virtue to austerity, Yahweh said, using different words, to the chosen people, who set too much store by certain external formalities.

That is why we must cultivate penance and mortification as a proof of our true love for God and for our neighbour.

993 In our meditation, the Passion of Christ comes out of its cold historical frame and stops being a pious consideration, presenting itself before our eyes, as terrible, brutal, savage, bloody ... yet full of Love.

And we feel that sin cannot be regarded as just a trivial error: to sin is to crucify the Son of God, to tear his hands and feet with hammer blows, and to make his heart break.

994 If you really want to be a penitent soul — both penitent and cheerful — you must above all stick to your daily periods of prayer, which should be fervent, generous and not cut short. And you must make sure that those minutes of prayer are not done only when you feel the need, but at fixed times, whenever it is possible. Don't neglect these details.

If you subject yourself to this daily worship of God, I can assure you that you will be always happy.

995 A Christian always triumphs through the Cross, through his self-renunciation, because he allows God's omnipotence to act.

996 When you look back on your life, which seems to have been marked by no great efforts or achievements, think how much time you have wasted, and how you can recover it with penance and greater self-giving.

997 When you think of all the things in your life which remain worthless for not having been offered to God, you should act like a miser, anxious to get hold of every opportunity you can and to make use of each and every suffering. For if suffering is always there for us poor creatures, what can it be but stupidity to waste it?

998 Do you entertain a spirit of opposition, of contradiction? Very well, exercise it by opposing and contradicting yourself.

999 While the Holy Family was asleep, the angel appeared to Joseph so that they would be able to flee to Egypt. Mary and Joseph took the Child and started out on the journey without delay. They did not rebel, they did not find excuses, they did not wait till the following morning. Tell our Holy Mother Mary and our Father and Lord Saint Joseph that we wish to be prompt in loving all passive penance.

1000 I write this number so that you and I can finish this book with a smile, and so that those blessed readers who out of simplicity or malice sought a cabalistic significance in the 999 points of The Way may rest easy.

By Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer

DAZZLED

STRUGGLE

DEFEAT

PESSIMISM

YOU CAN!

TO FIGHT ONCE MORE

RECOVERY

VICTORY

WORK

CRUCIBLE

SELECTION

FRUITFULNESS

ETERNITY

There was a mother who, like all mothers, was passionately fond of her little child, whom she called her prince, her king, her treasure, her very sun. I thought of you. And I understood — for what father does not carry deep inside some maternal feelings? — that it was no exaggeration for that good mother to say: you are more than a treasure, you are worth more than the sun itself: you are worth all Christ's Blood! How can I fail to take up your soul — pure gold — and place it in "the forge", and fashion it with fire and hammer, until that gold nugget is turned into a splendid jewel to be offered to my God, to your God?

DAZZLED

1 We are children of God, bearers of the only flame that can light up the paths of the earth for souls, of the only brightness which can never be darkened, dimmed or overshadowed.

The Lord uses us as torches, to make that light shine out. Much depends on us; if we respond many people will remain in darkness no longer, but will walk instead along paths that lead to eternal life.

2 God is my Father! If you meditate on it, you will never let go of this consoling thought.

Jesus is my dear Friend (another thrilling discovery) who loves me with all the divine madness of his Heart.

The Holy Spirit is my Consoler, who guides my every step along the road.

Consider this often: you are God's — and God is yours.

3 My Father — talk to him like that, confidently — who art in heaven, look upon me with compassionate Love, and make me respond to thy love.

Melt and enkindle my hardened heart, burn and purify my unmortified flesh, fill my mind with supernatural light, make my tongue proclaim the Love and Glory of Christ.

4 Christ ascended the Cross with his arms wide open, with the all-embracing gesture of the Eternal Priest. Now he counts on us — who are nothing! — to bring the fruits of his Redemption to "all" men.

5 Lord, we are glad to find ourselves in your wounded palm. Grasp us tight, squeeze us hard, make us lose all our earthly wretchedness, purify us, set us on fire, make us feel drenched in your Blood.

And then, cast us far, far away, hungry for the harvest, to sow the seed more fruitfully each day, for Love of you.

6 Do not be afraid. Do not be alarmed or surprised. Do not allow yourself to be overcome by false prudence.

The call to fulfil God's will — this goes for vocation too — is sudden, as it was for the Apostles: a meeting with Christ and his call is followed.

None of them doubted. Meeting Christ and following him was all one.

7 The day of salvation, of eternity, has come for us. Once again the call of the Divine Shepherd can be heard, those affectionate words: "Vocavi te nomine tuo" — I have called you by your name.

Just like our mother, he calls us by our name, by the name we're fondly called at home, by our nickname. There, in the depths of our soul, he calls us and we just have to answer: "Ecce ego quia vocasti me" — here I am, for you have called me, and this time I'm determined not to let time flow by like water over the pebbly bed of a stream, leaving no trace behind.

8 Live your life close to Christ. You should be another character in the Gospel, side by side with Peter, and John, and Andrew. For Christ is also living "now: Iesus Christus, heri et hodie, ipse et in saecula!" — Jesus Christ lives! Today, as yesterday, he is the same, for ever and ever.

9 Lord, may your children be like red-hot coals, but without flames to be seen from afar. Let them be burning embers that will set alight each heart they come into contact with.

You will make that first spark turn into a burning fire, for your angels are very skilled at blowing on the embers in our hearts. I know, I have seen it. And a heart cleared of dead ashes cannot but be yours.

10 Think about what the Holy Spirit says, and let yourself be filled with awe and gratitude: "Elegit nos ante mundi constitutionem" — he chose us before the foundation of the world, "ut essemus sancti in conspectu eius!" — that we might be holy in his presence.

To be holy isn't easy, but it isn't difficult either. To be holy is to be a good Christian, to resemble Christ. The more closely a person resembles Christ, the more Christian he is, the more he belongs to Christ, the holier he is.

And what means do we have? The same means the early faithful had, when they saw Jesus directly or caught a glimpse of him in the accounts the Apostles and Evangelists gave of him.

11 You owe such a great debt to your Father-God! He has given you life, intelligence, will... He has given you his grace -the Holy Spirit; Jesus, in the Sacred Host; divine sonship; the Blessed Virgin, the Mother of God and our Mother. He has given you the possibility of taking part in the Holy Mass; and he grants you forgiveness for your sins. He forgives you so many times. He has given you countless gifts, some of them quite extraordinary...

Tell me, my son: how have you corresponded so far to this generosity? How are you corresponding now?

12 I do not know how it strikes you, but I feel I must tell you how moved I am whenever I read the words of the prophet Isaiah: "Ego vocavi te nomine tuo, meus es tu!" — I have called you, I have brought you into my Church, you are mine! God himself telling me I am his! It is enough to make one go mad with Love!

13 Just think, there are so many men and women on earth, and the Master does not fail to call every single one.

He calls them to a Christian life, to a life of holiness, to a chosen life, to life eternal.

14 Christ suffered in your place and for your benefit, to tear you away from the slavery of sin and imperfection.

15 In these times of violence and of brutal, savage sexuality, we have to be rebels: we refuse point blank to go with the tide, and become beasts.

We want to behave like children of God, like men and women who are on intimate terms with their Father, who is in Heaven and who wants to be very close to — inside! — each one of us.

16 Meditate on this frequently: I am a Catholic, a child of Christ's Church. He brought me to birth in a home that is his, without my doing anything to deserve it.

My God, how much I owe you.

17 Remind everyone (and especially all those fathers and mothers, who call themselves Christians) that a vocation, a call from God, is a grace from the Lord, a choice made by the divine goodness, a motive for holy pride, a call to serve all joyously for the love of Jesus Christ.

18 Please echo these words for me: it is no "sacrifice" for parents when God asks them for their children. Neither, for those he calls, is it a sacrifice to follow him.

It is, on the contrary, an immense honour, a motive for a great and holy pride, a mark of predilection, a very special affection that God has shown at a particular time, but which has been in his mind from all eternity.

19 Be grateful to your parents for bringing you into this world, thus enabling you to become a child of God. And be all the more grateful if it was they who placed in your soul the first seeds of faith and piety, of your Christian way, or of your vocation.

20 There are many people around you, and you have no right to be an obstacle to their spiritual good, to their eternal happiness.

You are under an obligation to be a saint. You must not let God down for having chosen you. Neither must you let those around you down: they expect so much from your Christian life.

21 The commandment to love our parents belongs to both natural law and to divine positive law, and I have always called it a "most sweet precept".

Do not neglect your obligation to love your parents more each day, to mortify yourself for them, to pray for them and to be grateful to them for all the good you owe them.

22 Following the Master's wishes, you are to be salt and light while being fully immersed in this world we were made to live in, sharing in all human activities. Light illumines the hearts and minds of men. Salt gives flavour and preserves from corruption.

That is why if you lack apostolic zeal you will become insipid and useless. You will be letting other people down and your life will be absurd.

23 A reddish-green wave of filth and corruption has set out to overcome the world, throwing its vile spittle over the Cross of the Redeemer.

Now He wants another wave to issue forth from our souls -a wave that's white and powerful, like the Lord's right hand -to overcome with its purity all the rottenness of materialism and undo the corruption that has flooded the world. It is for this, and more, that the children of God have come.

24 Many people ask with an air of self-justification: Why should I get involved in the lives of others?

Because it is your Christian duty to get involved in their lives, in order to serve them.

Because Christ has got involved in your life and in mine.

25 If you are another Christ, if you behave as a son of God, you will set things alight no matter where you are. Christ enkindles all hearts, leaving none indifferent.

26 It is painful to see that after two thousand years there are so few people in the world who call themselves Christians and that of those who do call themselves Christians, so few practice the true teaching of Jesus Christ.

It is worthwhile putting our whole life at stake, working and suffering for Love, in order to accomplish God's plans and co-redeem with him.

27 I look at your Cross, my Jesus, and I rejoice in your grace, because your Calvary has won for us the reward of the Holy Spirit. And you give yourself to me, each day, lovingly, madly, in the Sacred Host. And you have made me a son of God, and have given me your Mother to be mine.

I can't be satisfied with just giving thanks. My thoughts take flight: Lord, Lord, there are so many souls who are so far from you!

Foster those yearnings for apostolate in your life, that many may get to know him and love him and come to feel loved by him.

28 Sometimes one hears love described (you'll have heard me mention this more than once) as if it were a movement towards self-satisfaction, or merely a means of selfishly fulfilling one's own personality.

And I have always told you that it isn't so. True love demands getting out of oneself, giving oneself. Genuine love brings joy in its wake, a joy that has its roots in the shape of the Cross.

29 My God, how is it that I do not cry out in sorrow and love whenever I see a Crucifix?

30 Marvel at God's magnanimity: he has become Man to redeem us, so that you and I — who are absolutely worthless, admit it! — may come to know him and trust him.

31 O Jesus, strengthen our souls, open out the way for us, and, above all, intoxicate us with your Love. Make us into blazing fires to enkindle the earth with the heavenly fire you brought us.

32 Coming closer to God means being ready to be converted anew, to change direction again, to listen attentively to his inspirations — those holy desires he places in our souls — and to put them into practice.

33 What are you so proud of? Every impulse that moves you comes from Him. Act accordingly.

34 What respect, veneration and affection we should feel for every single soul when we realise that God loves it as his very own.

35 An aspiration: May we spend the days the Lord grants us only in pleasing him.

36 I would like you to behave as Peter and John did — speaking to Jesus about the needs of your friends and colleagues as you pray. And then with your example you will be able to say to them: *Respice in nos!* — look at me!.

37 When you love somebody very much, you want to know everything about him.

Meditate on this: Do you feel a hunger to know Christ? Because that is the measure of your love for him.

38 People who say that we priests are lonely are either lying or have got it all wrong. We are far less lonely than anyone else, for we can count on the constant company of the Lord, with whom we should be conversing without interruption.

We are in love with Love, with the Author of Love!

39 I see myself like a poor little bird, accustomed only to making short flights from tree to tree, or, at most, up to a third floor balcony. One day in its life it succeeded in reaching the roof of a modest building, that you could hardly call a skyscraper.

And lo and behold, our little bird is snatched up by an eagle, who mistakes the bird for one of its own brood. In its powerful talons the bird is borne higher and higher, above the mountains of the earth and the snow-capped peaks, above the white, blue and rose-pink clouds, and higher and higher until it can look right into the sun. And then the eagle lets go of the little bird and says: Off you go. Fly!

Lord, may I never flutter again close to the ground. May I always be enlightened by the rays of the divine sun — Christ -in the Eucharist. May my flight never be interrupted until I find repose in your Heart.

40 That friend of ours would finish his prayer in this way: "I love the Will of my God and that is why, abandoning myself completely into his hands, I pray that he may lead me however and wherever he likes."

41 Ask the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and your Mother, to make you know yourself and weep for all those foul things that have passed through you, and which, alas, have left such dregs behind... And at the same time, without wishing to stop considering all that, say to him: Jesus, give me a Love that will act like a purifying fire in which my miserable flesh, my miserable heart, my miserable soul, my miserable body may be consumed and cleansed of all earthly wretchedness. And when I have been emptied of myself, fill me with yourself. May I never become attached to anything here below. May Love always sustain me.

42 Desire nothing for yourself, either good or bad. For yourself, want only what God wants.

Whatever it may be, if it comes from his hand, from God, however bad it may appear in the eyes of men, with God's help it will appear good, yes very good, to you. And with an ever-increasing conviction you will say: Et in tribulatione mea dilatasti me..., et calix tuus inebrians, quam praeclarus est! — I have rejoiced in tribulation..., how marvellous is your chalice. It inebriates my whole being!

43 We should offer the Lord the sacrifice of Abel. A sacrifice of young unblemished flesh, the best of the flock; of healthy and holy flesh; a sacrifice of hearts that have one love alone -you, my God. A sacrifice of minds, which have been shaped through deep study and will surrender to your Wisdom; of childlike souls who will think only of pleasing you.

Lord, receive even now this sweet and fragrant sacrifice.

44 We have to learn how to give ourselves, to burn before God like the light placed on a lampstand to give light to those who walk in darkness; like the sanctuary lamps that burn by the altar, giving off light till their last drop is consumed.

45 The Lord, the teacher of Love, is a jealous lover who asks for all we possess, for all our love. He expects us to offer him whatever we have, and to follow the path he has marked out for each one of us.

46 My God, I see I shall never accept you as my Saviour unless I acknowledge you as my Model at the same time.

Since you yourself chose to be poor, make me love holy poverty. I resolve, with your grace, to live and die in poverty, even though I may have millions at my disposal.

47 You became very thoughtful when I told you: "The way I see it, everything seems too little when it is for the Lord."

48 It would be good if it could be said of you that the distinguishing feature of your life was "loving God's Will".

49 Any job, no matter how hidden, no matter how insignificant, when offered to the Lord, is charged with the strength of God's life!

50 Feel the responsibility of your mission: the whole of Heaven is looking down on you.

51 God awaits you. So, wherever you are, you must commit yourself to imitating him and uniting yourself to him, cheerfully, lovingly, keenly, though circumstances might require you — even permanently — to go against the grain.

God awaits you — and needs you to be faithful.

52 You wrote: "My King, I hear you proclaiming in a loud voice that still resounds: Ignem veni mittere in terram, et quid volo nisi ut accendatur? — I have come to cast fire upon the earth, and would that it were already kindled!"

Then you added: "Lord, I answer, with all my heart, with all my senses and faculties: Ecce ego quia vocasti me! — here I am because you have called me."

May this answer of yours be a daily reality.

53 You should show the moderation, fortitude and sense of responsibility that many people acquire after many long years, in their old age. You will achieve all this, while you are still young, if you do not lose the supernatural outlook of a son of God. For he will give you, more than to the old, those qualities you need for your apostle's work.

54 You enjoy an interior happiness and peace that you would not exchange for anything in the world. God is here. There is no better way than telling him our woes for them to cease being such.

55 Is it possible, you asked me, that Christ should have spent so many years — twenty centuries — acting on earth, and the world should be now what it is? Is it possible, you went on, that there should still be people who do not know Our Lord?

And I answered you with conviction: It is our fault. For we have been called to be co-redeemers, and at times, perhaps often, we do not follow the Will of God.

56 How humble Jesus is. What a shame, in contrast, that I who am nothing but dust from a dung-heap should so often have disguised my pride under the cloak of dignity, or justice. And as a result, how many opportunities to follow the Master I have missed or wasted, by failing to supernaturalise them.

57 Sweet Mother, lead us to that madness that will make others fall madly in love with our Christ.

Sweet Lady Mary, may Love not be in us a flash in the pan, or a will-o'-the-wisp, such as decomposing corpses sometimes produce. May it be a true devouring fire, which sets alight and burns everything it touches.

STRUGGLE

58 Being chosen by God means, and demands, personal holiness.

59 If you respond to the call the Lord has made to you, your life — your poor life — will leave a deep and wide furrow in the history of the human race, a clear and fertile furrow, eternal and godly.

60 Each day be conscious of your duty to be a saint. A saint! And that doesn't mean doing strange things. It means a daily struggle in the interior life and in heroically fulfilling your duty right through to the end.

61 Sanctity does not consist in great concerns. It consists in struggling to ensure that the flame of your supernatural life is never allowed to go out; it consists in letting yourself to be burned down to the last shred, serving God in the lowest place, or in the highest: wherever the Lord may call you.

62 Our Lord did not confine himself to telling us that he loved us. He showed it us with deeds, with his whole life. What about you?

63 If you love the Lord, you will necessarily become aware of the blessed burden of souls that need to be brought to God.

64 For someone who wants to live for Love with a capital letter, the middle course is not good enough; that would be meanness, a wretched compromise.

65 Here is a recipe for your way as a Christian: pray, do penance, work without rest, fulfilling your duty lovingly.

66 My God, teach me how to love. My God, teach me how to pray.

67 We must ask God for faith, hope and charity, with humility, with persevering prayer, with upright behaviour and a clean life.

68 You told me that you did not know how to repay me for the holy zeal that flooded your soul.

I hastened to answer: It is not I who have given you any of those yearnings; it is the Holy Spirit.

Desire his company, get to know him. That way you will come to love him better and better, and you will come to thank him for taking up his abode in your soul so that you may have interior life.

69 Keep struggling, so that the Holy Sacrifice of the Altar really becomes the centre and the root of your interior life, and so your whole day will turn into an act of worship — an extension of the Mass you have attended and a preparation for the next. Your whole day will then be an act of worship that overflows in aspirations, visits to the Blessed Sacrament and the offering up of your professional work and your family life.

70 Try to give thanks to Jesus in the Eucharist by singing the praises of Our Lady, the Virgin most pure, without stain, who brought forth the Lord into this world.

And, with childlike daring, say to Jesus: My dearest Love, blessed be the Mother who brought you into this world!

I assure you it will please him, and he will put even greater love in your soul.

71 Saint Luke the Evangelist tells us that Jesus prayed. What must his prayer have been like!

Contemplate this fact slowly: the disciples had the opportunity of talking to Jesus and in their conversations with him the Lord taught them by his words, and deeds,

how they should pray. And he taught them this amazing truth of God's mercy: that we are God's children and that we can address Him as a child addresses his Father.

72 When you start out each day to work by Christ's side and to look after all those souls who seek him, remember that there is only one way of doing it: we must turn to the Lord.

Only in prayer, and through prayer, do we learn to serve others.

73 Remember that prayer does not consist in making pretty speeches, or high-sounding or consoling phrases.

Prayer, at times, will be a glance at a picture of Our Lord or of his Mother; sometimes a petition, expressed in words; or offering good works, and the fruits of faithfulness.

We have to be like a guard on sentry duty at the gate of God Our Lord: that's what prayer is. Or like a small dog that lies down at his master's feet.

Do not mind telling him: Lord, here I am, like a faithful dog; or better still like a little donkey, which will not kick the one who loves him.

74 We all have to be ipse Christus — Christ himself. This is what Saint Paul commands in the name of God: *Induimini Dominum Iesum Christum* — put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Each one of us — and that includes you — has to see how he puts on that clothing of which the Apostle speaks. Each one personally, has to sustain an uninterrupted dialogue with the Lord.

75 Your prayer cannot stop at mere words. It has to lead to deeds and practical consequences.

76 The way to cut short all the evils we suffer is to pray.

77 Here is a piece of advice I shall never tire of telling souls: Love the Mother of God madly, for she is our Mother too.

78 Heroism, sanctity, daring, require a constant spiritual preparation. You can only ever give to others what you already have. And in order to give God to them you yourself need to get to know him, to live his Life, to serve him.

79 I will not stop repeating until it is deeply engraved in your soul: Piety, piety, piety! For if you lack charity it will be for want of interior life, not for any defect of character.

80 If you are a good son of God, your first and last thought each day will be for him, just as a little child needs to be assured of the presence of his parents when he gets up in the morning or goes to bed at night.

81 You must be constant and demanding with yourself in your regular practices of piety, even when you feel tired and arid. Persevere! Those moments are like the tall red-painted poles which serve as markers along the mountain roads when there are heavy snowfalls. They are always there to show where it is safe to go.

82 Make an effort to respond at each moment to what God is asking of you: have the will to love him with deeds. They may be little deeds, but do not leave any out.

83 Interior life is strengthened by a daily struggle in your practices of piety, which you should fulfil — or rather which you should live — lovingly, for the path we travel as children of God is a path of Love.

84 Seek God in the depths of your pure, clean heart; in the depths of your soul when you are faithful to him. And never lose that intimacy.

And if ever you do not know how to speak to him or what to say, or you do not dare to look for Jesus inside yourself, turn to Mary, *tota pulchra*, all pure and wonderful, and tell her: Our Lady and Mother, the Lord wanted you yourself to look after God and tend him with your own hands. Teach me, teach us all, how to treat your Son.

85 You must instil in all souls the heroism of doing the little things of each day perfectly, as if the salvation of the world depended on each one of those actions.

86 With your life of piety you will learn how to practise the virtues befitting your condition as a son of God, as a Christian.

And together with those virtues you will acquire a whole range of spiritual values which seem small but are really very great. They are like shining precious stones, and we must gather them along the way and then take them up to the foot of God's Throne in the service of our fellow men: simplicity, cheerfulness, loyalty, peace, small renunciations, little services which pass unnoticed, the faithful fulfilment of duty, kindness.

87 Don't create more obligations for yourself than God's glory, his Love, his Apostolate.

88 Our Lord has made you see your way clearly as a Christian in the middle of the world. Nevertheless, you tell me that you have often thought, enviously (though in the end you admitted it would be taking the easy way out) of the happiness of being a nobody, of working away, totally obscure, in the remotest corner — just God and you!

Now, apart from the idea of missionary work in Japan, the thought of just such a hidden and sacrificed life has come to your mind. But if, free from other holy natural obligations, you were to try to "hide away" in a religious institution, assuming that was not your vocation, you would not be happy. You would lack peace; because you would have done your own will, not God's.

Your "vocation", in that case, would deserve another name: it would be a defection. It would not be the result of divine inspiration, but of sheer human reluctance to face the coming struggle. And that would never do!

89 In living holy purity and a clean life, there is a great difficulty to which we are all exposed. The danger is one of becoming bourgeois, either in our spiritual life or in our professional life; the danger — also a real one for those called by God to marriage — of becoming dry old bachelors, selfish; people who do not love.

Fight that danger tooth and nail, without making concessions of any kind.

90 Because we shall always have to put up with this little donkey which is our body, in order to conquer sensuality you have to practise daily and generously little mortifications — and sometimes big ones as well. And you must live in the presence of God, who never ceases to watch over you.

91 Your chastity cannot be confined to avoiding falls or occasions. In no way can it be a cold and mathematical negative.

Haven't you realised that chastity is a virtue and that as such it should grow and become more perfect?

It is not enough, then, to be continent according to your state. You have to be chaste, with a heroic virtue.

92 The bonus odor Christi, the fragrance of Christ, is also that of our clean life, of our chastity — the chastity of each one in his own state, I repeat — of our holy purity, which is a joyful affirmation. It is something solid and at the same time gentle; it is refined, avoiding even the use of unfitting words, since they cannot be pleasing to God.

93 Get used to thanking the Guardian Angels in advance, thus putting them under an obligation.

94 One ought to be able to apply to every Christian the name that was used in the early ages: Bearer of God.

Your actions should be such that you really deserve to be called by that wonderful name.

95 Think what would happen if we Christians chose not to behave as such... and then rectify your conduct.

96 Discover Our Lord behind each event and in every circumstance, and then, from everything that happens, you will be able to draw more love for God and a greater desire to respond to him. He is always waiting for us, offering us the possibility to fulfil at all times that resolution we made: Serviam! I will serve you.

97 Renew each day the effective desire to annihilate yourself, to deny yourself, to forget yourself, to walk in novitate sensus, with a new life, exchanging this misery of ours for all the hidden and eternal grandeur of God.

98 Lord, make me so much yours that not even the holiest affections may enter my heart except through your wounded Heart.

99 Try to be considerate, well-mannered. Don't be boorish!

Try to be polite always, which doesn't mean being affected.

100 Charity succeeds always. Without it, there's "nothing doing".

Love, then, is the secret of your life. Love. Suffer gladly. Toughen up your soul. Invigorate your will. And as for your self-surrender, link it tightly to the will of God, and with this your life will be effective.

101 Have the piety and simplicity of a child, and the strength and fortitude of a leader.

102 Peace, and the joy which comes with it, cannot be given by the world.

Men are forever "making peace" and forever getting entangled in wars. This is because they have forgotten the advice to struggle inside themselves and to go to God for help. Then He will conquer, and we will obtain peace for ourselves and for our own homes, for society and for the world.

If we do things in this way, you and I will have joy, because it is the possession of those who conquer. And with the grace of God — who never loses battles — we will be able to count ourselves conquerors as long as we are humble.

103 Your life, your work, should never be negative, nor anti anything. It is — it must be — positive, optimistic, youthful, cheerful and peaceful.

104 In national life there are two things which are really essential: the laws concerning marriage and the laws to do with education. In these areas God's sons have to stand firm and fight with toughness and fairness, for the sake of all mankind.

105 Joy is a Christian possession which we will have as long as we keep fighting, for it is a consequence of peace. Peace is the fruit of having conquered in war, and the life of man upon this earth — as we read in Sacred Scripture — is a warfare.

106 This divine warfare of ours is a marvellous sowing of peace.

107 The person who stops struggling causes harm to the Church, to his own supernatural undertaking, to his brothers and to all souls.

Examine yourself. Could you not put a more lively love for God into your spiritual struggle? I am praying for you — and for everyone. You should do the same.

108 Jesus, if there is anything in me which is displeasing to you, tell me what it is so that we may uproot it.

109 There is an enemy of the interior life which is both little and silly. Unfortunately, it can be very effective. It is the neglect of effort in one's examination of conscience.

110 In Christian asceticism the examination of conscience meets a need of love, and of sensitivity.

111 If there is anything in you that is out of harmony with God's spirit, get rid of it straight away.

Think of the Apostles. They were not of much account, yet they could work miracles in the name of the Lord. Only Judas, who at one time may also have worked miracles, went astray by voluntarily separating himself from Christ, because he did not cut himself away violently and courageously from what was out of harmony with God's spirit.

112 My God, when am I really going to be converted?

113 Don't wait until you are old to start becoming a saint. That would be a great mistake.

Begin right now, in earnest, cheerfully and joyfully, by fulfilling the duties of your work and of your everyday life.

Don't wait until you are old to become a saint. Because -I insist — apart from its being a great mistake, you never know whether you will live as long as that.

114 Ask the Lord to grant you all the sensitivity you need to realise how evil venial sin is, so as to recognise it as an outright and fundamental enemy of your soul, and, with God's grace, to avoid it.

115 You need to think about your life calmly and without scruples, to ask for forgiveness, and make a firm, definite and determined resolution to improve in one point and another, to improve in that particular small detail which you find hard, and in that other one which as a rule you do not carry out as you should, even though you well know you ought to be doing it.

116 To be full of good desires is indeed a holy thing, and God praises it. But don't leave it at that. You have to be a soul -a man, a woman — who deals in realities. To carry out those good desires, you have to form clear and precise resolutions.

And then, my child, you have to fight to put them into practice, with the grace of God.

117 "What do I have to do to maintain my love for God and make it increase?" you asked me, fired with enthusiasm.

Leave the "old man" behind, my son, and cheerfully give up things which are good in themselves but hinder your detachment from yourself. You have to repeat constantly and with deeds, "Here I am, Lord, ready to do whatever you want."

118 A saint! A son of God should exaggerate in practising virtue — if exaggeration is possible here. Because other people will see themselves reflected in him, as in a mirror, and it is only by our aiming very high that others will reach a middling level. 119 Do not be ashamed to discover in your heart the fomes peccati — the inclination to evil, which will be with you as long as you live, for nobody is free from this burden.

Do not be ashamed, for the all-powerful and merciful Lord has given us all the means we need for overcoming this inclination: the Sacraments, a life of piety and sanctified work.

Persevere in using these means, ever ready to begin again and again without getting discouraged.

120 Lord, rescue me from myself!

121 An apostle who does not pray regularly and methodically will necessarily fall into lukewarmness... and he will then cease to be an apostle.

122 Lord, from now on let me be another: no longer "me", but that "other person" you would like me to be.

Let me not deny you anything you ask of me. Let me know how to pray. Let me know how to suffer. Let me not worry about anything except your glory. Let me feel your presence all the time.

May I love the Father. May I hunger for you, my Jesus, in a permanent Communion. May the Holy Spirit set me on fire.

123 The Lord has told you: *Meus es tu* — you are mine.

To think that God, who is all beauty and all wisdom, all splendour and all goodness, should say to you that you are his and then, after all this, you can't bring yourself to respond to him!

124 You should not be surprised to feel in your life that weight dragging you down which Saint Paul spoke of: "I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind."

Remember then that you belong to Christ, and have recourse to the Mother of God, who is also your Mother. They will never abandon you.

125 Receive the advice you are given in spiritual guidance as though it came from Jesus Christ himself.

126 You asked me to suggest a way for winning through in your daily struggles, and I replied: When you lay your soul open, say first of all what you wouldn't like to be known. In this way the devil will always end up defeated.

Lay your soul wide open, clearly and simply, so that the rays of God's Love may reach and illuminate the last corner of it.

127 If that dumb devil mentioned in the Gospel gets into your soul, he will spoil everything. On the other hand, if you get rid of him immediately, everything will turn out well; you will carry on merrily, and all will be well.

Resolve firmly to be "savagely sincere" in spiritual direction (always keeping your good manners) and to be sincere immediately.

128 Love and seek help from the person who guides your soul. In spiritual direction lay your heart completely open — if it were rotten, show it as it is, rotten — with all sincerity, with the desire to be cured. If you don't, you will never get rid of that rottenness.

If you go to a person who only cleanses the wound in a superficial way, you are a coward, because you will be going along to hide the truth, and that can only do you harm.

129 Never be afraid of telling the truth. But don't forget that sometimes it is better to remain silent out of charity towards your neighbour. However, you should never be silent out of laziness, or love of comfort, or cowardice.

130 The world thrives on lies even twenty centuries after the Truth came among men.

We have to tell the truth! This is precisely what we have to do as children of God. When men get used to proclaiming and hearing the truth, there will be more understanding in this world of ours.

131 To give way in matters of faith would be a false charity. It would be a diabolical, deceitful charity. We must be fortes in fide — strong, firm in faith, as Saint Peter demands.

This is not fanaticism, but quite simply the practice of our faith. It does not entail disliking anyone. We can give way in all accidental matters, but in matters of faith we cannot give way. We cannot spare the oil from our lamps, otherwise when the Bridegroom comes he will find they have burned out.

132 Humility and obedience are the indispensable conditions for acquiring good doctrine.

133 Welcome the Pope's words with a religious, humble, internal and effective acceptance. And pass them on.

134 You must love, venerate, pray and mortify yourself for the Pope, and do so with greater affection each day. For he is the foundation stone of the Church and, throughout the centuries, right to the end of time, he carries out among men that task of sanctifying and governing which Jesus entrusted to Peter.

135 Your deepest love, your greatest esteem, your most heartfelt veneration, your most complete obedience and your warmest affection have also to be shown towards the Vicar of Christ on earth, towards the Pope.

We Catholics should consider that after God and the most Holy Virgin, our Mother, the Holy Father comes next in the hierarchy of love and authority.

136 May the daily consideration of the heavy burden which weighs upon the Pope and the bishops move you to venerate and love them with real affection, and to help them with your prayers.

137 Your love for Our Lady should be more lively, more supernatural.

Don't just go to the Virgin Mary to ask her for things. You should also go to give: give her your affection; give her your love for her divine Son; and show her your affection with deeds of service to others, who are also her children.

138 Jesus is our model. Let us imitate him.

Let us imitate him by serving the Holy Church and all mankind.

139 When contemplating the scene of the Incarnation, strengthen in your soul the resolve to be "humble in practice". See how he lowered himself, taking on our poor nature.

That is why every day you need to react, right away, with God's grace, accepting — and wanting — the humiliations the Lord may offer you.

140 Live your Christian life with naturalness. Let me stress this: make Christ known through your behaviour, just as an ordinary mirror reproduces an image without distorting it or turning it into a caricature. If, like the mirror, you are normal, you will reflect Christ's life, and show it to others.

141 If you are fatuous, if all you can think of is your own personal comfort, if you centre everyone else and even the world itself on yourself, then you have no right to call yourself a Christian or to consider yourself a disciple of Christ. He set the level of what can be demanded of us when he offered, for each of us: *et animam suam* — his own soul, his whole life.

142 Try to make "intellectual humility" an axiom in your life.

Think about it carefully. Isn't it true that it just doesn't make sense to be "intellectually proud"? That saint and doctor of the Church put it very well when he said: "It is a detestable disorder for a man to see God become a little child, and yet still want to appear great in this world."

143 The moment you have anyone — whoever he may be — at your side, find a way, without doing anything strange, to pass on to him the joy you experience in being a son of God and living as such.

144 The mission to serve which the Divine Master has entrusted to us is a great and beautiful mission. That is why this good spirit — which entails great self-mastery — is perfectly compatible with the love of freedom that should pervade the work of all Christians.

145 You must never treat anyone unmercifully. If you think someone is not worthy of your mercy, you should realise that you don't deserve mercy either.

You do not deserve to have been created, or to be a Christian, or to be a son of God, or to have the family you have...

146 Don't neglect the practice of fraternal correction, which is a clear sign of the supernatural virtue of charity. You may find it hard, for it's easier to be inhibited. It's easier to behave that way, but it's not supernatural.

And you will have to render an account to God for such omissions.

147 When you have to make a fraternal correction, do it with great kindness — with charity — in what you say and in the way you say it, for at that moment you are God's instrument.

148 When you love other people and you spread that affection -Christ's kindly, gentle charity — all around you, you will be able to support one another, and if someone is about to stumble he will feel that he is being supported, and also encouraged, to be faithful to God through this fraternal strength.

149 Bring out your spirit of mortification in those nice touches of charity, eager to make the way of sanctity in the midst of the world attractive for everyone. Sometimes a smile can be the best proof of a spirit of penance.

150 May you know how to put yourself out cheerfully, discreetly and generously each day, serving others and making their lives more pleasant.

To act in this way is to practise the true charity of Jesus Christ.

151 You should make sure that wherever you are there is that good humour — that cheerfulness — which is born of an interior life.

152 Make sure you practise this very interesting mortification: that of not making your conversation revolve around yourself.

153 Here is a good way of doing an examination of conscience:

Have I accepted in a spirit of expiation the difficulties which have come to me this day from the hand of God, or those which came from the behaviour of my colleagues, or from my own wretchedness?

Have I managed to offer Our Lord in expiation the very sorrow I feel for having offended him so many times? Have I offered him the shame of all my inner embarrassment and humiliation at seeing how little progress I make along the path of virtue?

154 Habitual and customary mortifications are a good thing, but don't become one-track minded about them.

They need not necessarily be the same ones all the time. What should be constant, habitual and customary — without your getting accustomed to it — is to have a spirit of mortification.

155 You want to follow in Christ's footsteps, to wear his livery, to identify yourself with Jesus. Well then, make your faith a living faith, full of sacrifice and deeds of service, and get rid of everything that stands in the way.

156 Sanctity has the flexibility of supple muscles. Whoever wishes to be a saint should know how to behave so that while he does something that involves a mortification for him, he omits doing something else — as long as this does not offend God -which he would also find difficult, and thanks the Lord for this comfort. If we Christians were to act otherwise we would run the risk of becoming stiff and lifeless, like a rag doll.

Sanctity is not rigid like cardboard; it knows how to smile, to give way to others and to hope. It is life — a supernatural life.

157 Mother, do not leave me! Let me seek your Son, let me find your Son, let me love your Son — with my whole being. Remember me, my Lady, remember me.

DEFEAT

158 When our vision is clouded, when our eyes have lost their clarity, we need to go to the light. And Jesus Christ has told us that he is the Light of the world and that he has come to heal the sick.

That is why, your weaknesses and your falls — when God allows them — should not separate you from Christ, but rather draw you closer to him.

159 In my wretchedness I complained to a friend of mine, saying that it seemed as if Jesus were passing me by, and leaving me on my own.

But immediately I thought better of it and was sorry. Full of confidence, I said: It is not true, my Love. Quite clearly it is I who have gone away from you. Never again!

160 Beg the Lord for his grace so that you may be purified by his Love — and by constant penance.

161 Turn to Our Lady and ask her — as a token of her love for you — for the gift of contrition. Ask that you may be sorry, with the sorrow of Love, for all your sins and for the sins of all men and women throughout the ages.

And with that same disposition, be bold enough to add: "Mother, my life, my hope, lead me by the hand. And if there is anything in me which is displeasing to my Father God grant that I may see it, so that, between the two of us, we may uproot it."

Do not be afraid to continue, saying to her: "O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary, pray for me, that by fulfilling the most lovable Will of your Son, I may be worthy to obtain and enjoy what Our Lord Jesus has promised."

162 Heavenly Mother, let me regain once more fervour, dedication, self-denial — in one word Love.

163 You shouldn't be so easy on yourself. Don't wait until the New Year to make your resolutions. Every day is a good day to make good decisions. Hodie, nunc! — today, now!

It tends to be the poor defeatist types who leave it until the New Year before beginning afresh. And even then, they never really begin.

164 I agree. You acted badly, out of weakness. But what I fail to understand is how, with a clear conscience, you have not repented. You cannot do something wrong and then say, or think, that it is something holy, or that it is of no importance.

165 You must always remember that the spiritual faculties are fed by what they receive from the senses. Guard them well!

166 As you very well know, you lose your peace when you consent in matters which entail unfaithfulness to your way.

Make up your mind to be consistent and responsible in your behaviour.

167 The indelible memory of the favours you have received from God should always be a compelling force within you; especially so in times of tribulation.

168 There is but one fatal illness, one deadly mistake you can make: to settle for defeat, not to know how to fight with the spirit of a child of God. If this personal effort is lacking, the soul becomes paralysed and languishes alone, and is incapable of bearing fruit.

Such cowardice on man's part puts pressure on Our Lord to utter those words addressed to him by the paralytic at the pool of Bethsaida, *hominem non habeo!* — I have no man to help me.

What a pity if Jesus does not find in you the man or the woman he expects.

169 The ascetical struggle is not something negative and therefore hateful, but rather a joyful affirmation. It is a sport.

A good sportsman doesn't fight to gain just one victory, and that at the first attempt. He has to build himself up for it, training over a long period of time, calmly and confidently. He keeps trying again and again, and if he doesn't succeed at the first attempt, he keeps on trying with determination until the obstacle is overcome.

170 You are my hope in all things, dear Jesus. Convert me!

171 When that priest, our good friend, used to sign himself "the sinner", he did so convinced that what he wrote was true.

My God, purify me too!

172 If you have done something wrong, be it big or small, go running back to God.

Savour those words of the psalm, *cor contritum et humiliatum, Deus, non despicies* — the Lord will never despise or ignore a contrite and humbled heart.

173 Keep turning this over in your mind and in your soul: Lord, how many times you have lifted me up when I have fallen and once my sins have been forgiven have held me close to your Heart.

Keep returning to the thought... and never separate yourself from God again.

174 You see yourself as a poor man whose master has stripped him of his livery. You are only a sinner! And you understand the nakedness felt by our first parents.

You should be weeping all the time. And you have wept. You have suffered a great deal. And yet you are very happy. You wouldn't change places with anyone. For many years now you have not lost your *gaudium cum pace* — your peaceful joy. You thank God for this and would like to let everyone into the secret of your happiness.

Yes, I can see why people have often said of you — though you couldn't care less about "what people say" — that you are "a man of peace".

175 Some people do only what lies within the capacity of poor human creatures to accomplish, and consequently waste their time. What Peter experienced is repeated once more, word for word: *Praeceptor, per totam noctem laborantes nihil cepimus*. — Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing.

If they work on their own, without being united with the Church, not reckoning with the Church, what possible effectiveness could their apostolate have? None at all!

They need to be convinced that on their own they can achieve nothing. You should help them to go on listening to the rest of that Gospel story: *in verbo autem tuo laxabo rete* — at your word I will let down the net. It is then that the catch will be plentiful and effective.

How beautiful it is to mend our ways when we find we have done, for whatever reason, "our" apostolate not his.

176 It was you who wrote what I am now copying out: "*Domine, tu scis quia amo te!* — Lord, you know that I love you! How very often, Jesus, I repeat again and again those words your dear Cephas uttered, as a bitter-sweet litany. For I know that I love you, and yet I am so very unsure of myself that I cannot bring myself to say it to you clearly. There are so many denials in my wicked life. *Tu scis, Domine!* — You know that I love you. May my actions, Jesus, never go against these yearnings of my heart."

Keep up this prayer of yours and he will certainly hear you.

177 Repeat this with confidence: Lord, if only my tears had been contrite!

Ask him humbly to grant you the sorrow you desire.

178 How villainous has been my behaviour and how unfaithful I have been to God's grace.

My Mother, Refuge of sinners, pray for me. May I never again hinder God's work in my soul.

179 So close to Christ for so many years — and such a sinner!

Doesn't that intimate love of Jesus for you move you to tears?

180 It is not that I lack true joy; on the contrary. And yet, painfully aware of my unworthiness, it is only natural that I should cry out with Saint Paul, "wretched man that I am!"

It is at such a time that you should increase your desire to tear down once and for all the barriers you yourself have set up.

181 Do not become alarmed or discouraged to discover that you have failings — and such failings!

Struggle to uproot them. And as you do so, be convinced that it is even a good thing to be aware of all those weaknesses, for otherwise you would be proud. And pride separates us from God.

182 Be filled with wonder at God's goodness, for Christ wants to live in you. Be filled with wonder too when you are aware of all the weight of your poor flesh, of your wretched flesh, and all the vileness of the poor clay you are made of.

Yes, but then remember too that call from God: Jesus Christ, who is God and Man, understands me and looks after me, for he is my Brother and my Friend.

183 Your life is happy, very happy, though on occasions you feel a pang of sadness, and even experience almost constantly a real sense of weariness.

Joy and affliction can go hand in hand like this, each in its own "man": the former in the new man, the latter in the old.

184 Humility is born of knowing God and knowing oneself.

185 Lord, I ask for a gift from you: Love, a Love that will cleanse me. And another gift as well: self-knowledge so that I may be filled with humility.

186 The saints are those who struggle right to the end of their lives, who always get up each time they stumble, each time they fall, and courageously embark on their way once more with humility, love and hope.

187 If your mistakes make you more humble, if they make you reach out more urgently for God's helping hand — then they are a road to sanctity. Felix culpa! — O happy fault!, the Church sings.

188 Prayer — even my prayer — is all-powerful.

189 Humility teaches each soul not to lose heart in the face of its own blunders.

True humility leads us to ask for forgiveness.

190 If I were a leper my mother would kiss me. She would kiss my wounds without fear or hesitation.

Well then, what would the Blessed Virgin Mary do? When we feel we are like lepers, all full of sores, we have to cry out: Mother! And the protection of our Mother will be like a kiss upon our wounds, which will then be healed.

191 In the Sacrament of Penance it is Jesus who forgives us.

Christ's merits are applied to us there. It is for love of us that he is on the Cross with his arms stretched out, stitched to the wood more by the Love he has for us than by the nails.

192 If ever you fall, my son, go quickly to Confession and seek spiritual guidance. Show your wound so that it gets properly healed and all possibility of infection is removed, even if doing this hurts you as much as having an operation.

193 Sincerity is indispensable if we are to achieve greater union with God.

If you have an ugly "toad" inside you, my son, let it out! As I have always advised you, the first thing you must mention is what you wouldn't like anybody to know. Once the "toad" has been let out in Confession — how well one feels.

194 Nam, et si ambulavero in medio umbrae mortis, non timebo mala — though I should walk through the valley of the shadow of death, no evil will I fear. Neither my wretchedness nor the temptations of the enemy will worry me, quoniam tu mecum es -for you Lord are with me.

195 Just now, Jesus, when I was considering my wretchedness, I said to you: allow yourself to be taken in by this son of yours, just like those good fathers, full of kindness, who put into the hands of their little child the presents they want to receive from them — knowing perfectly well that little children have nothing of their own.

And what joy father and son have together, even though they are both in on the secret.

196 Jesus, my Love, to think that I could offend you again! Tuus ego sum... salvum me fac. — I am yours, save me.

197 You, who see yourself so badly lacking in virtues, in talents, in abilities... Do you not feel the desire to cry out like the blind Bartimaeus, "Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me"?

What a beautiful aspiration for you to say very often, "Lord, have pity on me!"

He will hear you and come to your aid.

198 Foster a desire for atonement in your soul, so that you may acquire greater contrition each day.

199 If you are faithful you will be able to count yourself a conqueror.

Even though you may lose some battles in your life, you will not know defeat. You can be sure that there is no such thing as failure if you act with purity of intention and with a desire to fulfil the Will of God.

And then, whether you win or lose, you will always triumph in the end, because you will have carried out your work with Love.

200 I am sure that God has listened to your humble and heartfelt plea: My Lord, I am not worried about what "others" may say. Forgive me for my unworthy life. May I be a saint — but it's You alone I wish to please.

201 In a Christian's life everything has to be for God — even personal weaknesses, once they have been put right. The Lord understands and forgives them.

202 What have I done to you, Jesus, that you should love me so? I have offended you... and loved you.

Loving you — this is what my life is going to be all about.

203 Surely all those consolations I receive from the Master are given me so that I may think of him all the time and serve him in little things, and so be able to serve him in great things.

A resolution: to please my good Jesus in the tiniest details of my daily life.

204 We have to love God because our heart is made for love. That is why, if we don't give our heart to God, to Our Lady and Mother, to souls... with a pure affection, it will seek revenge — and will breed worms instead.

205 Tell Our Lord with your whole heart: In spite of all my wretchedness I am madly in Love — drunk with Love!

206 From now on, truly sorrowful for my many falls, I shall remain, with God's grace, always upon the Cross.

207 What has been lost through the flesh, the flesh should pay back: be generous in your penance.

208 Invoke the Lord, and beg him for the spirit of penance of one who conquers himself every day, and offers him this constant victory unassumingly and perseveringly.

209 In your personal prayer, whenever you experience the weakness of the flesh you should repeat: Lord, give the Cross to this poor body of mine, which gets tired and rebellious.

210 How right that priest was when he preached, saying, "Jesus has forgiven me the great multitude of my sins in spite of my ingratitude. How generous he is. If the many sins of Mary Magdalen were forgiven because she loved greatly, many more have been forgiven me. What a great debt of love still remains for me to pay."

Jesus, teach me to go to the point of madness and heroism. With the help of your grace, even if I have to die for you, Lord, I will never abandon you again.

211 Lazarus rose because he heard the voice of God and immediately wanted to get out of the situation he was in. If he hadn't wanted to move, he would just have died again.

A sincere resolution: to have faith in God always; to hope in God always; to love God always — he never abandons us, even if we are rotting away as Lazarus was.

212 Let us marvel at the lovable paradox of our Christian condition: it is our own wretchedness which leads us to seek refuge in God, to become "like unto God". With him we can do all things.

213 When you have fallen or when you find yourself overwhelmed by the weight of your wretchedness, repeat with a firm hope: Lord, see how ill I am; come and heal me, Lord, you who died on the Cross for love of me.

Be full of confidence. Keep on calling out to his most loving Heart. He will cure you, as he cured the lepers we read about in the Gospel.

214 Trust fully in God and have a greater desire each day never to run away from him.

215 Virgin Immaculate, my Mother, do not abandon me. See how my poor heart is filled with tears. I do not want to offend my God!

I already know, and I trust I shall never forget, that I am worth nothing. My smallness and my loneliness weigh upon me so much! But... I am not alone. You, Sweet Lady, and my Father God will never leave me.

Faced with the rebellion of my flesh and all manner of diabolical arguments against my Faith, I love Jesus and I believe — I do Love and do Believe.

PESSIMISM

216 With God's grace, you have to tackle and carry out the impossible, because anybody can do what is possible.

217 Reject your pessimism and don't allow those around you to be pessimistic. God should be served with cheerfulness and abandonment.

218 Get rid of that human prudence which makes you so very cautious, so — sorry to be so blunt! — cowardly.

Let us not be narrow-minded. Let us not be infantile men or women, who are nearsighted and lack a supernatural breadth of vision. Could we be working for ourselves? Of course not!

Well then, let us say quite fearlessly: Dearest Jesus, we are working for you. Are you going to deny us the material means we need? You know full well how worthless we are; still, I would not treat a servant working for me in that way.

Therefore, we hope and are sure you will give us all we need to be able to serve you.

219 An act of faith: Nothing can prevail against God. Nothing can prevail against God's people.

Don't forget it.

220 Don't lose heart. Carry on! Carry on with that holy stubbornness which in spiritual terms is called perseverance.

221 My Lord, you always come to meet our real needs.

222 You are not getting worse. It is just that now you have more light to see yourself as you really are. You must avoid even the slightest hint of discouragement.

223 Along the road that leads to personal sanctity we can at times get the impression that we are going backwards instead of forwards, that we are getting worse instead of better.

As long as there is interior struggle this pessimistic thought is only an illusion, a deception to be rejected as false.

Persevere and don't worry. If you fight with tenacity you are making progress and are growing in sanctity.

224 Interior dryness is not lukewarmness. When a person is lukewarm the waters of grace slide over him without being soaked in. In contrast, there are dry lands which seem arid but which, with a few drops of rain at the right time, yield abundant flowers and delicious fruit.

That is why I ask: When are we going to be convinced? How important it is to be docile to the divine calls which come at each moment of the day, because it is precisely there that God is awaiting us!

225 Be clever, spiritually clever. Don't wait for the Lord to send you setbacks; go out to meet them with a spirit of voluntary atonement. Then you'll receive them not so much with resignation (an old-sounding word) as with Love — a word which is forever young.

226 Today, for the first time, you had the feeling that things were getting simpler, that everything was "sorting itself out". At last you see an end to the problems that

were worrying you. And you understand that they are more thoroughly and better resolved the more you abandon yourself into the arms of your Father God.

What are you waiting for to start behaving always as a son of God? This should be the driving force in your life.

227 Turn to Our Lady — the Mother, Daughter and Spouse of God, and our Mother — and ask her to obtain more graces for you from the Blessed Trinity: the grace of faith, of hope, of love and of contrition. So that when it seems that a harsh dry wind is blowing in your life, threatening to wither those flowers of your soul, they will not wither — and neither will those of your brothers.

228 Be filled with faith and rest assured. The Lord tells us this through the prophet Jeremiah: orabitur me, et ego exaudiam vos — whenever you call upon me, whenever you pray, I will listen to you.

229 I refer everything to you, my God. Without you — who are my Father — what would become of me?

230 Allow me to give you the advice of an experienced soul: your prayer — and your whole life should be spent in prayer — ought to have the simplicity of "a child's prayer".

231 A sick man is brought to Jesus, who looks at him. Contemplate the scene closely and meditate upon his words: confide, fili — take heart, my son.

This is what Our Lord says to you when you feel the weight of your errors. Have faith. In the first place: faith. And then allow yourself to be carried like the paralytic did, with interior and submissive obedience.

232 My son, you can do nothing on the supernatural level through your own strength; whereas when you become God's instrument you can do everything. Omnia possum in eo qui me confortat! — I can do all things in him who strengthens me. For in his goodness he wishes to use inadequate instruments, like you and like me.

233 Whenever you pray, make the effort to have the kind of faith of those sick people we read about in the Gospel. You can be sure Jesus is listening to you.

234 My Mother! Mothers on earth look with greater love upon the weakest of their children, the one with the worst health, or who is least intelligent, or is a poor cripple.

Sweet Lady, I know that you are more of a Mother than all other mothers put together. And, since I am your son, since I am weak, and ill, and crippled, and ugly...

235 We lack faith. The day we practise this virtue, trusting in God and in his Mother, we will be daring and loyal. God, who is the same God as ever, will work miracles through our hands.

Grant me, dear Jesus, the faith I truly desire. My Mother, sweet Lady, Mary most holy, make me really believe.

236 A firm resolution: to abandon myself in Jesus Christ with all my wretchedness. Whatever he may want, at any moment, Fiat — let it be done.

237 Never lose heart, for Our Lord is always ready to give you the grace to bring about the new conversion you need, a real advance on the supernatural plane.

238 "Blessed be God" you said to yourself after having finished your sacramental Confession. And you thought: it is as if I had just been born again.

You then continued calmly: "Domine, quid me vis facere? -Lord, what would you have me do?"

And you yourself came up with the reply: "By the help of your grace I will let nothing and no one come between me and the fulfilment of your most Holy Will: Serviam — I will serve you unconditionally."

239 We read in the Gospel that the Magi were filled with great joy, videntes stellam — when they saw the star.

They rejoiced, my son, they were immensely glad, because they had done what they were supposed to do, and they rejoiced because they knew for certain they would reach the King who never abandons those who seek him.

240 When you really come to love God's Will you will never, even in the worst state of agitation, lose sight of the fact that our Father in Heaven is always close to you, very close, right next to you, with his everlasting Love and with his unbounded affection.

241 If the outlook in your interior life and in your soul is darkened, allow yourself to be led along by the hand, as a blind man would do.

In time the Lord will reward this humble surrendering of your own judgement by giving you clarity of mind.

242 To be afraid of anything or anybody, but especially of the person who directs our soul, is unworthy of a son of God.

243 Are you not moved to hear some affectionate word addressed to your mother?

The same thing happens to Our Lord. We cannot separate Jesus from his Mother.

244 When you find yourself worn out or fed up, go and confide in Our Lord, as that good friend of ours did, and say: "Jesus, see what you can do about it. Even before I begin to struggle, I am already tired."

He will give you his strength.

245 A task which presents no difficulties lacks human appeal -and supernatural appeal too. If you find no resistance when hammering a nail into a wall, what can you expect to hang on it?

246 It seems incredible that a man like you — who say you know you're nothing — should dare to place obstacles in the way of God's grace.

Yet this is what you're doing with your false humility, your "objectivity", your pessimism.

247 Lord, grant me the grace to give up everything that has to do with myself. I should have no other concern than your Glory — in other words, your Love. Everything for Love!

248 "When Herod heard this," (that the King had come to this earth), "he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him."

This is an every day occurrence. We see the same thing happening now. In the face of God's greatness, which shows itself in a thousand ways, there are always some people — sometimes even in positions of authority — who are troubled. It's because they do not love God; because they have no real wish to meet him; because they don't want to follow his inspirations, and so they become obstacles in God's path.

Be forewarned; carry on working and don't worry. Seek the Lord and pray — he will triumph.

249 You are not alone. Neither you nor I can ever find ourselves alone. And even less if we go to Jesus through Mary, for she is a Mother who will never abandon us.

250 Don't give way to sadness when it feels as if the Lord has given up on you. Seek him with greater determination. He who is Love does not leave you on your own.

Be convinced that "he has left you on your own" out of Love, so that you may see clearly in your life what is his and what is yours.

251 You said to me: "I seem not only unable to go ahead along my way, but also unable to be saved without a miracle of grace. Oh, my poor soul! I remain cold and, what is worse, almost indifferent. It's as if I were an outsider looking at 'a case' (mine) which had nothing to do with him. Will these days turn out to be completely futile?

And nevertheless, my Mother is my Mother and Jesus is -dare I say it? — my Jesus. And there are good and saintly souls, at this very moment, praying for me."

Go on walking hand in hand with your Mother, I replied, and "dare" to say to Jesus that he is yours. In his goodness he will bring clear light to your soul.

252 Grant me, Jesus, the Cross with no Simon of Cyrene to help me. No, that's not right; I need your grace, I need your help here as in everything. You must be my Simon of Cyrene. With you, my God, no trial can daunt me.

But what if my Cross should consist in boredom or sadness? In that case I say to you, Lord, with You I would gladly be sad.

253 As long as I don't lose You, no sorrow will be a sorrow at all.

254 Jesus will refuse a word to no one, and his words bring healing, they console, they bring light.

This is what you and I have to remember at all times, especially when we find ourselves tired and weighed down by work or opposition.

255 Don't expect people's applause for your work.

What is more, sometimes you mustn't even expect other people and institutions, who like you are working for Christ, to understand you.

Seek only the glory of God and, while loving everyone, don't worry if there are some who don't understand you.

256 If there are mountains in the way, obstacles, misunderstandings and backbiting, which Satan seeks and God allows, you must have faith, faith with deeds, faith with sacrifice, faith with humility.

257 Faced by apparent sterility in your apostolate you begin to detect the first waves of discouragement, which your faith rejects quite firmly. But you realise that you need a more humble, lively and operative faith.

As someone who longs to bring health to souls, you should cry out like the father of that sick boy possessed by the devil: Domine, adiuva incredulitatem meam! — Lord, help my unbelief!

Have no doubt: the miracle will be performed again.

258 What a beautiful prayer for you to say frequently, that one of our good friend praying for a priest whom hatred for religion imprisoned: My God, comfort him, since it is for you he suffers persecution. There are many who suffer because they serve you. What a source of joy the Communion of Saints is.

259 The measures taken by some governments to ensure that the faith in their countries dies out reminds me of the seals set upon the tomb of Jesus by the Sanhedrin.

He was not subject to anybody or anything, and despite those seals, he rose again.

260 The solution is to love. Saint John the Apostle wrote some words which really move me: qui autem timet, non est perfectus in caritate. I like to translate them as follows, almost word for word — the fearful man doesn't know how to love.

You, therefore, who do love and know how to show it, you mustn't be afraid of anything. So, on you go!

261 God is with you. The Blessed Trinity dwells in your soul in grace.

That is why, in spite of your wretchedness, you can and should keep up a continuous conversation with the Lord.

262 You should pray at all times — always.

You should feel the need to go to God after every success and after every failure in your interior life.

263 May your prayer always be a real and sincere act of adoration of God.

264 When the Lord brought you into the Church he put an indelible mark upon your soul through Baptism: you are a son of God. Don't forget it.

265 Give thanks often to Jesus, for through him, with him and in him you are able to call yourself a son of God.

266 If we feel we are beloved sons of our Heavenly Father, as indeed we are, how can we fail to be happy all the time? Think about it.

267 As he was giving out Holy Communion that priest felt like shouting out: this is Happiness I am giving to you!

268 Build up a gigantic faith in the Holy Eucharist. Be filled with wonder before this ineffable reality. We have God with us; we can receive him every day and, if we want to, we can speak intimately with him, just as we talk with a friend, as we talk with a brother, as we talk with a father, as we talk with Love itself.

269 How beautiful our Christian vocation is — to be sons of God! It brings joy and peace on earth which the world cannot give.

270 Lord, grant me the love with which you want me to love you.

271 To remove the dark shadow of pessimism which hung over you that morning, you again appealed to your Angel as you do every day — but this time you were more thorough. You said a few nice words to him and you asked him to teach you to love Jesus at least, at least as much as he loves Him. And with that you recovered your calm.

272 Ask your Mother Mary, ask Saint Joseph and your Guardian Angel to speak to the Lord and tell him the things you can't manage to put into words because you are so dull.

273 Fill yourself with confidence. The Mother we have is the Mother of God, the Most Blessed Virgin, the Queen of Heaven and Earth.

274 Jesus was born in a cave in Bethlehem because, Sacred Scripture tells us, "there was no room for them in the inn."

I am not departing from theological truth when I say that Jesus is still looking for shelter in your heart.

275 Our Lord is upon the Cross saying, I am suffering so that men, who are my brothers, may be happy, not only in Heaven, but also — as far as possible — on earth, if they really embrace the most Holy Will of my heavenly Father.

276 It is true that your contribution is nil and that it is God who does everything in your soul.

However, let not this be the case as far as your correspondence to his grace is concerned.

277 Practise the virtue of hope and, with God as your motive, even when you find it hard, persevere at your work and try to finish it well, convinced that those efforts of yours are not useless in the Lord's sight.

278 When there is the desire and also the reality of pleasing God continually in your daily work, which is normally made up of many little things, I assure you that nothing is ever lost.

279 You would be right in thinking: how good the Lord is, who has sought me and has made known to me this holy path where I can be effective and where I can love all men, bringing them peace and happiness.

This thought has then to be turned into resolutions.

280 You know that you will never lack God's grace, because he has chosen you from all eternity. And if this is what he has done for you, he will grant you all the help you need to be faithful to him as his son.

Go forward, therefore, with a sure step and try to correspond at every moment to the promptings of God's grace.

281 I ask the Mother of God to smile upon us if she wishes, if she can... She will indeed do so.

Moreover, she will reward our generosity a thousandfold here on earth. A thousandfold, that's what I am asking her for!

282 Practise a cheerful charity which is at once kindly and firm; human and at the same time supernatural. It should be an affectionate charity, knowing how to welcome everyone with a sincere and habitual smile, and how to understand the ideas and the feelings of others.

In this way, with gentleness and strength, and without concessions in matters of personal morals or in doctrine, the charity of Christ — when it is being well lived — will give you a spirit of conquest. Each day you will have a greater desire to work for souls.

283 My son, I said with assurance, in spreading our "madness" to other apostles I am not unaware of the "obstacles" we will find. Some of them may appear insurmountable... But *inter medium montium pertransibunt aquae* — the waters will pass through the midst of the mountains. Our supernatural spirit and the

drive of our zeal will cut through the mountains and we shall overcome those obstacles.

284 "My God, my God. All of them were equally loved, through you, in you and with you, and now they are all scattered." Thus you complained when you saw yourself once again all alone and lacking in human resources.

But Our Lord immediately made you feel sure in your soul that He would sort it out. And you said to him: "You will fix everything."

And so he did. God solved everything sooner, more fully and better than you expected.

285 It is indeed just that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit should crown the Blessed Virgin as Queen and Lady of all created things.

You have to make use of her power. With the daring of a child join in this celebration in Heaven. For myself, since I have no precious stones or virtues to offer, I crown the Mother of God and my Mother with my failings, once they have been purified.

She is expecting something from you too.

YOU CAN!

286 I want to warn you against a difficulty that may arise: it is the temptation of weariness and discouragement.

Isn't it still fresh in your memory what life — your old life — used to be like, with no aim to it, no purpose, no sparkle, and then, with God's light and your own dedication, a new direction was given to it and you were filled with joy?

Don't be so silly as to exchange your new life for that other one.

287 If you feel for whatever reason that you cannot manage to go on, abandon yourself in God, telling him: Lord, I trust in you, I abandon myself in you, but do help me in my weakness!

And filled with confidence, repeat: See Jesus what a filthy rag I am. My life seems to me so miserable. I am not worthy to be a son of yours. Tell him all this — and tell him so over and over again.

It will not be long before you hear him say, Ne timeas! -do not be afraid; and also: Surge et ambula! — rise up and walk!

288 You were still rather hesitant when you were telling me: "I am deeply aware of the occasions when the Lord is asking more of me."

All I could think of was to remind you how you used to assure me that the only thing you wanted was to identify yourself with him. What's keeping you back?

289 If only you could manage to fulfil that resolution you made: "to die a little to myself each day."

290 Cheerfulness, and supernatural and human optimism, can go hand in hand with physical tiredness, with sorrow, with tears (because we have a heart), and with difficulties in our interior life or our apostolic work.

He who is perfectus Deus, perfectus Homo — perfect God and perfect Man — and who enjoyed every happiness in Heaven, chose to experience fatigue and tiredness, tears and suffering... so that we might understand that if we are to be supernatural we must also be very human.

291 Jesus is asking you to pray more. You see this very clearly.

Nonetheless... how poor your response has been. Everything is a great effort for you: you are like a baby who is too lazy to learn to walk. But in your case it isn't just laziness. It is fear, too, and a lack of generosity.

292 You should repeat very often: Jesus, if ever a doubt creeps into my soul, setting up other noble ambitions in place of what you are asking of me, I tell you now that I prefer to follow you, no matter how much it costs. Do not leave me!

293 Seek union with God and buoy yourself up with hope — that sure virtue — because Jesus will illumine the way for you with the gentle light of his mercy, even in the darkest night.

294 Your prayer went like this: "My wretchedness weighs me down, but it doesn't overwhelm me because I am a son of God. I want to atone, to Love... And," you added, "like Saint Paul, I want to turn my weaknesses to good use, convinced that the Lord will not abandon those who place their trust in him."

Carry on like that. I assure you that — with God's grace — you will succeed, and you will overcome your wretchedness and your shortcomings.

295 Any time is the right time to make an effective resolution, to say "I believe", to say "I hope", to say "I love".

296 Learn to praise the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Learn to have a special devotion to the Blessed Trinity: I believe in God the Father, I believe in God the Son, I believe in God the Holy Spirit; I hope in God the Father, I hope in God the Son, I hope in God the Holy Spirit; I love God the Father, I love God the Son, I love God the Holy Spirit. I believe, I hope and I love the most Holy Trinity.

This devotion is much needed as a supernatural exercise for the soul, expressed by the movement of the heart, although not always in words.

297 The system, the method, the procedure, the only way to have a life abundant and fertile in supernatural fruits, is to follow the Holy Spirit's advice, which comes to us via the "Acts of the Apostles: omnes erant perseverantes unanimiter in oratione" — all these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer.

"Nothing" can be done without prayer!

298 My Lord Jesus has a Heart more tender than the hearts of all good men put together. If a good man (of average goodness) knew that a certain person loved him, without seeking personal satisfaction or reward of any kind (he loves for love's sake); and if he also knew that all this person wanted from him was that he should not object to being loved, even from afar... then it would not be long before he responded to such a disinterested love.

If the Loved One is so powerful that he can do all things, I am sure that, as well as surrendering in the end to the faithful love of a created being (in spite of the wretchedness of that poor soul) he will give this lover the supernatural beauty, knowledge and power he needs so that the eyes of Jesus are not sullied when he gazes upon the poor heart that is adoring him.

Love, my child; love and await.

299 If there is sacrifice when you sow love, you will also reap Love.

300 My child, are you not aflame with the desire to bring all men to love Him?

301 Jesus as a child and as an adolescent. I love to picture you like this, Lord, because I somehow pluck up more courage. I love to see you as a tiny, almost helpless babe. It makes me feel you need me.

302 Whenever I go into the oratory, having become a little child once more, I say to Our Lord that I love him more than anyone.

303 How wonderfully effective the Holy Eucharist is in the actions, and even before that in the souls, of those who receive it frequently and piously.

304 If all those people became so enthusiastic and were ready to acclaim you over a piece of bread, even granting that the multiplication of loaves was a very great miracle, shouldn't we be doing much more for all the many gifts you have granted us, and especially for giving us your very self unreservedly in the Eucharist?

305 Good child: see how lovers on earth kiss the flowers, the letters, the mementos of those they love...

Then you, how could you ever forget that you have him always at your side — yes, Him? How could you forget... that you can eat him?

306 Put your head frequently round the oratory door to say to Jesus: I abandon myself into your arms.

Leave everything you have — your wretchedness — at his feet.

In this way, in spite of the welter of things you carry along behind you, you will never lose your peace.

307 Pray resolutely using the words of the Psalmist: "Thou, Lord, art my refuge and my strength, I trust in thee."

I promise you that he will preserve you from the ambushes of the "noontide devil", when you are tempted and even when you fall, and when your age and virtues ought to have proved solid and you should have known by heart that He alone is your stronghold.

308 Do you think people are grateful for services rendered only reluctantly? Evidently not. You might even say it would have been better not to have bothered.

And yet you think you can serve God with sour looks? No you can't! You have to serve him cheerfully, in spite of your wretchedness, which we will be able to get rid of with God's grace.

309 Doubts assail you, temptations, with that gloss of elegance about them.

I love to hear you say how this shows that the devil considers you his enemy, and that the grace of God will never leave you unprotected. Keep up the struggle!

310 The majority of people who have personal problems "have them" because they selfishly think about themselves.

311 Everything seems so peaceful. God's enemy, however, is not asleep...

The Heart of Jesus is also awake and watching! Herein lies my hope.

312 Sanctity consists in struggling, in knowing that we have defects and in heroically trying to overcome them.

Sanctity, I insist, consists in overcoming those defects -although we will still have defects when we die; for if not, as I have told you, we would become proud.

313 Thank you, Lord, because — as well as allowing us to be tempted — you also give us the strength and beauty of your grace so that we can win through. Thank you, Lord, for the temptations you allow us to have so that we may be humble. ~S

314 Do not abandon me, Lord. Don't you see the bottomless pit this poor son of yours would end up in?

My Mother: I am your son too.

315 Without God's help it is impossible to live a clean life. God wants us to be humble, and to ask him for his help through our Mother who is his Mother.

You should say to Our Lady, right now, speaking without the sound of words, from the accompanied solitude of your heart: "O, my Mother, sometimes this poor heart of mine rebels; but if you help me..." She will indeed help you to keep it clean and to follow the way God has called you to pursue. The Virgin Mary will always make it easier for you to fulfil the Will of God.

316 To preserve holy purity and live a clean life you have to love and practise daily mortification.

317 Whenever you feel the stirrings of your poor flesh, which sometimes attacks with violent assaults, kiss your crucifix, kiss it many times with firm resolve, even if it seems you are doing so without love.

318 Place yourself before the Lord each day and tell him slowly and in all earnestness, like the man in the Gospel who was in such great need, Domine, ut videam! — Lord, that I may see; that I may see what you expect from me, and struggle to be faithful to you.

319 My God, how easy it is to persevere when we know that You are the Good Shepherd, and that we — you and I — are sheep belonging to your flock!

For we know full well that the Good Shepherd gives his whole life for each one of his sheep.

320 Today in your prayer you confirmed your resolution to be a saint. I understand you when you make this more specific by adding, "I know I shall succeed, not because I am sure of myself, Jesus, but because I am sure of you."

321 By yourself, if you don't count on grace, you can do nothing worthwhile, for you would be cutting the link which connects you with God.

With grace, on the other hand, you can do all things.

322 Do you want to learn from Christ and follow the example of his life? Open the Holy Gospels and listen to God dialoguing with men — with you.

323 Jesus knows very well what is best — and I love his Will and will do so always. He it is who controls "the puppets" and so he will always give whatever I ask of him, provided it is a means to achieving our end — even if there are godless men who are determined to put obstacles in the way.

324 True faith shows itself in humility. Dicebat enim intra se — that poor woman said to herself: Si tetigero tantum vestimentum eius, salva ero — if I can but touch the hem of his garment, I shall be healed.

What humility she showed. It was both a result and a sign of her faith.

325 If it is God who lays the burden upon you, God will also give you the strength to bear it.

326 Invoke the Holy Spirit in your examination of conscience so that you may get to know God better, and yourself also. In this way you will be converted each day.

327 Spiritual direction. You must have that true supernatural sense and holy shamelessness to allow another to poke at your soul and determine how far you are able — and willing — to give glory to God.

328 Quomodo fiet istud quoniam virum non cognosco? — How can this marvel take place if I have no knowledge of man? Mary asks the Angel in words which reflect the sincerity of her Heart.

Observing the Blessed Virgin has confirmed for me a clear rule of conduct: if we want to enjoy peace, and also to live in peace, we must be very sincere with God, with those who direct our souls and with ourselves.

329 A foolish child wails and stamps his feet when his loving mother puts a needle to his finger to get a splinter out. A sensible child, on the other hand, perhaps with his eyes full of tears — for the flesh is weak — looks gratefully at his good mother who is making him suffer a little in order to avoid much greater harm.

Jesus, may I be a sensible child.

330 My child, my little donkey: if the Lord, with Love, has washed your grimy back, so accustomed to the muck, and has laid a satin harness upon you, and covered you with dazzling jewels, don't forget, poor donkey, that with your faults you could throw that beautiful load on to the ground... But on your own you couldn't put it back on again.

331 Draw strength from your divine filiation. God is a Father — your Father! — full of warmth and infinite love.

Call him Father frequently and tell him, when you are alone, that you love him, that you love him very much, and that you feel proud and strong because you are his son.

332 Cheerfulness is a necessary consequence of our divine filiation, of knowing that our Father God loves us with a love of predilection, that he holds us up and helps us and forgives us.

Remember this and never forget it: even if it should seem at times that everything around you is collapsing, in fact nothing is collapsing at all, because God doesn't lose battles.

333 The best way of showing our gratitude to God is to be passionately in love with the fact that we are his children.

334 You are like the little pauper who suddenly finds out that he is the son of the King. That is why now the only thing that concerns you on this earth is the Glory of your Father God, his Glory in everything.

335 My little friend, say to him: Jesus, knowing that I love you and that you love me, nothing else matters — all is well.

336 "I have asked Our Lady for many things," you were telling me, and then you corrected yourself: "What I should say is that I have brought many things to Our Lady's attention."

337 "I can do all things in him who strengthens me." With him there is no possibility of failure, and this conviction gives rise to the holy "superiority complex" whereby we take on things with a spirit of victory, because God grants us his strength.

338 The artist stood before his canvas with a deep desire to surpass himself and cried out, "Lord, I want to paint for you thirty-eight hearts, thirty-eight angels bursting with continual love for you, thirty-eight marvels embroidered on your heaven, thirty-eight suns upon your mantle, thirty-eight flames of fire, thirty-eight ardours, thirty-eight feats of madness, thirty-eight joys..."

Then, humbly, he had to admit that it was all in his imagination and desire. In reality what confronts him are thirty-eight figures which haven't come out properly and which mortify the sight rather than give pleasure.

339 We have no right to claim that the Angels should obey us -but we can be absolutely sure that the Holy Angels hear us always.

340 Allow God to lead you. He will lead you along "his path", making use of innumerable adversities — possibly including your own sluggishness — so that it may clearly be seen that your work is being carried out by him.

341 Ask him without any fear, and insist. Remember that scene of the multiplication of loaves we read about in the Gospel. Notice how magnanimously he says to the Apostles, How many loaves do you have? Five?... How many are you asking for? And he gives six, a hundred, thousands... Why?

Because Christ sees all our needs with divine wisdom, and with his almighty power he can and does go far beyond our desires.

Our Lord sees much farther than our poor minds can discern and he is infinitely generous!

342 When we're working for God we have to have a superiority complex, I told you.

But isn't that a sign of pride? you asked me. No. It is a consequence of humility; the humility which makes me say: Lord, you are who you are. I am nothingness itself. You have all the perfections: power, strength, love, glory, wisdom, authority, dignity... If I unite myself to you, like a child who goes to the strong embrace of his father or sits on his dear mother's knee, I will feel the warmth of your divinity, I will experience the light of your wisdom, I will sense your strength coursing through my veins.

343 If you live in the presence of God, high above the deafening storm, the sun will always be shining on you; and deep below the roaring and destructive waves, peace and calm will reign in your soul.

344 For a son of God each day should be an opportunity for renewal, knowing for sure that with the help of grace he will reach the end of the road, which is Love.

That is why if you begin and begin again, you are doing well. If you have a will to win, if you struggle, then with God's help you will conquer. There will be no difficulty you cannot overcome.

345 Make your way to Bethlehem, go up to the Child, rock him in your arms, say warm and tender things to him, press him close to your heart...

I am not talking childish nonsense, I am speaking of love! And love is shown with deeds. In the intimacy of your soul, you can indeed hug him tight.

346 We should let Jesus know that we are children. And when children are tiny and innocent, what a lot of effort it takes for them to go up one step. They look as though they are wasting their time, but eventually they manage to climb up. Now there is another step. Crawling on their hands and knees, and putting their whole body into it, they score another success — one more step. Then they start again. What an effort! There are only a few more steps to go now. But then the toddler stumbles, and -whoops! — down he goes. With bumps all over and in floods of tears, the poor child sets out and begins to try again.

We are just like that, Jesus, when we are on our own. Please take us up in your loving arms, like a big and good Friend of the simple child. Do not leave us until we have reached the top. And then — oh then! — we will know how to correspond to your Merciful Love, with the daring of young children, telling you, sweet Lord, that after Mary and Joseph, there never has been nor will there ever be a mortal soul — and there have been some who have been really crazy — who loves you as much as I love you.

347 Don't be ashamed of doing little childlike things, I advised you. As long as they are not done out of routine, they will not be fruitless.

Here is an example. Imagine that a soul who is following the way of spiritual childhood is moved each night, during the hours of sleep, to adorn a wooden statue of the Blessed Virgin.

Our intelligence would reject such an action as quite useless. But humble souls, touched by grace, understand very well that a child would indeed act like this out of love.

And then the strong will, which all those who are little children spiritually have, insists and moves the intelligence to give way... And if that childlike soul were to continue each day dressing up the statue of Our Lady, there would be repeated each day a little act of childlike love which would be fruitful in the eyes of God.

348 When you are genuinely a child and you follow the ways of childhood — if you are moved by God to follow this path — you will be invincible.

349 The confident petition of a small child: Grant me, Lord, the sort of compunction which those who have pleased you most have had.

350 Small child, you would cease to be one if anyone or anything came between you and God.

351 I shouldn't ask Jesus for anything. I will concentrate on pleasing him in everything and telling him things as though he didn't know them already, just as a little child does with his father.

352 Little child, say to Jesus: I will not be satisfied with anything less than You.

353 In your prayer of spiritual childhood what childish things you say to your Lord! With the confidence of a child speaking to his great Friend of whose love he is utterly sure, you confided in him, saying, May I live only for your Glory!

Thinking things over you admit in all sincerity that everything you do turns out badly. "But," you add, "this can't surprise you, Jesus. It is impossible for me to do anything right. You have to help me. Please do it for me and you will see how well it turns out."

Then, with great daring, and without departing from the truth, you continue: "May your Spirit thoroughly penetrate me and intoxicate me so that I may be able to do your Will. I want to do it. And if I don't do it... it's because you are not helping me. But you are helping me!"

354 You have to feel the urgent necessity to see yourself as small, weak and bereft of everything. You will then clamber on to the lap of our Mother in Heaven, with heartfelt aspirations and loving glances, Marian devotions... which are such a vital part of your filial spirit.

She will watch over you.

355 Persevere along your way no matter what happens; persevere, cheerfully and optimistically, because the Lord is bent on sweeping aside all obstacles.

Hear me well: I am quite certain that if you struggle, you will be a saint!

356 When Our Lord called the first Apostles they were busy mending their broken nets by the side of an old boat. Our Lord told them to follow him and statim — immediately — they left everything — relictis omnibus — everything! And followed him.

Sometimes, though we wish to imitate them, we find we don't manage to leave everything, and there remains some attachment in our heart, something wrong in our life which we're not willing to break with and offer it up to God.

Won't you examine your heart in depth? Nothing should remain there except what is his. If not, we aren't really loving him, neither you nor I.

357 Tell Our Lord constantly that you sincerely desire to be a saint and to do apostolate. Then the poor vessel of your soul will not get broken. And should it do so, it will be put together again and acquire an added attractiveness, and it will continue to be of use for your sanctity and the apostolate.

358 Your prayer should be that of a child of God, and not that of the hypocrites who will hear from Jesus' lips: "Not every one who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."

Your prayer, your clamour of "Lord, Lord" should be linked in a thousand different ways throughout the day to a desire and an effective effort to fulfil the Will of God.

359 Little one, say to him: O Jesus, I don't want the devil to get hold of souls!

360 If God's Love has chosen you out and called you to follow him, you have a duty to respond to him... and it is also your duty, an equally serious duty, to lead and help your fellow men towards sanctity and the right path.

361 Cheer up! Not least when the going gets hard. Doesn't it make you happy to think that your faithfulness to your Christian commitments depends to a large extent on you?

Be full of joy and freely renew your decision: "Lord, I want it too. Count on the little I have to offer."

362 God is not removing you from your environment. He is not taking you away from the world, or from your condition in life, or from your noble human ambitions, or from your professional work... But he wants you to be a saint — right there!

363 Putting yourself in the presence of God, and with your forehead flat against the ground, consider how (for that's the way it is) you are more filthy and despicable than the sweepings swept up by a broom.

And in spite of this, the Lord has chosen you.

364 When are you going to make up your mind?

Many people around you live a life of sacrifice simply for human reasons. These poor people forget they are children of God and act the way they do perhaps only out of pride, or ostentation, or in order to be more comfortably off later on in life. They are willing to give up all kinds of things!

You instead have many motives for which to sacrifice yourself. You have the sweet burden of the Church, of your family, your colleagues and friends. What are you doing about it? Are you ready to act with a proper sense of responsibility?

365 "O Lord, why did you come looking for me — who am nothing — when there are so many holy, wise and rich people, so full of prestige?"

You are perfectly right. And so, thank God for having done just that. Thank him with deeds and with love.

366 Jesus, may everyone in your Holy Church persevere in their way, following their Christian vocation, like the Wise Men who followed the star, spurning Herod's advice — for that type of advice will not be lacking.

367 Let us ask Jesus Christ that the fruits of his Redemption may grow abundantly in men's hearts: more and more, ever more abundantly — divinely abundantly!

And for this to be so, may he make us good children of his Blessed Mother.

368 Would you like to know a secret to happiness? Give yourself to others and serve them, without waiting to be thanked.

369 Live and work for God, with a spirit of love and service, with a priestly soul, even though you may not be a priest. Then all your actions will take on a genuine supernatural meaning which will keep your whole life united to the source of all graces.

370 Looking on the immense panorama of souls who are awaiting us, and being struck by the wonderful and awesome responsibility before us, you may at times have asked yourself, as I have: "Can I contribute anything, when the task is so vast? I, who am so puny?"

It is then we have to open the Gospel and contemplate how Jesus cures the man born blind. He uses mud made from the dust of the earth and saliva. Yet this is the salve which brings light to those blind eyes!

That is what you and I are. Fully aware of our weaknesses and our worthlessness, but with the grace of God and our good will, we can be salve to give light and provide strength for others as well as for ourselves.

371 Said an apostolic soul: Jesus, You know what needs to be done... you know I am not working for myself.

372 If you persevere in your prayer, with "personal perseverance", God Our Lord will give you all the means you need to be more effective and to spread his kingdom in the world.

But you have to keep faithful: asking, asking, asking... Are you really behaving this way?

373 The Lord wants his children in all the honest pathways of this earth, sowing the seeds of understanding and forgiveness, of harmony, charity and peace.

How about you? What are you doing?

374 The Redemption is still being accomplished, even now, and you are — you have to be — a co-redeemer.

375 To be a Christian in the world doesn't mean isolating oneself — on the contrary! It means loving all mankind and burning with a desire to enkindle in everyone the fire of the love of God.

376 Dear Lady, Mother of God and my Mother, not in the remotest way do I wish that you may ever be anything less than Mistress and Empress of the whole of creation.

TO FIGHT ONCE MORE

377 Follow Saint Paul's advice: *hora est iam nos de somno surgere!* — it is time to get down to work. Both on the inside, building up your soul; and on the outside, building up the Kingdom of God, right where you are.

378 All contrite you told me: "How much wretchedness I see in myself! I am so stupid and I am carting around such a weight of concupiscence that it is as though I had never really done anything to get closer to God. Lord, here I am beginning, beginning, always just beginning! I will try, however, to push forward each day with all my heart."

May he bless those efforts of yours.

379 Father, you told me, I have committed many errors, I have made so many mistakes.

I know, I replied. But God Our Lord, who also knows all that and has taken it into account, only asks you to be humble enough to admit it and asks that you struggle to make amends, so as to serve him better each day with more interior life, with continual prayer and with piety, and making use of the proper means to sanctify your work.

380 Would that you could acquire, as I know you would like to, the virtues of the donkey. Donkeys are humble, hard-working, persevering — stubborn — and faithful, with a sure step, tough and — if they have a good master — also grateful and obedient.

381 Continue thinking about the donkey's good qualities and notice how in order to do anything worth while, it has to allow itself to be ruled by the will of whoever is leading it. On its own the donkey would only... make an ass of itself. Probably the brightest thing that would occur to it to do would be to roll over on the ground, trot to the manger and start braying.

Dear Jesus, you too should say to him, *ut iumentum factus sum apud te!* — you have made me be your little donkey. Please don't leave me: *et ego semper tecum!* — and I'll try to stay with you always. Lead me, tightly harnessed by your grace: *Tenuisti manum dexteram meam...* — you have led me by the halter; *et in voluntate tua deduxisti me...* — make me do your Will. And so I will love you for ever and ever — *et cum gloria suscepisti me!*

382 You make a big tragedy out of the most insignificant mortification. Sometimes Jesus makes use of your peculiarities and silly little fads, to help you mortify yourself, by turning something you ought to be doing anyway into a virtue.

383 Dear Jesus, I do want to correspond to your Love, but I am so feeble.

With your grace, I will know how to.

384 Spiritual life is — and I repeat this again and again, on purpose — a constant beginning and beginning again.

Beginning again? Yes. Every time you make an act of contrition — and you should make many every day — you begin again, because you offer a new love to God.

385 We can never be content with what we are doing to serve our God, just as an artist is never satisfied with the painting or statue he is working on. Everyone tells

him how marvellous it is, but he thinks: "No. It isn't quite right. I wanted it to be better." This is how we should feel.

Moreover, the Lord has given us so much. He has a right to the very best from us — and we must go at his pace.

386 You lack faith — and you lack love. Were it not so you would go immediately and much more often to Jesus, asking for this thing and that.

Don't delay any further; call out to him and you will hear Christ speaking to you: "What do you want me to do for you?" Just as when he stopped for that poor blind man by the roadside who kept on crying out, undeterred.

387 That good friend of ours wrote: "I have asked the Lord many times to forgive me my very great sins. Kissing the Crucifix, I have told him that I love him and I have thanked him for his fatherly providence during these days. I was rather surprised, as I had been years ago, when I found myself saying (I didn't realise it until later): *Dei perfecta sunt opera* — all the works of God are perfect. At the same time I was left with the complete certainty, without the slightest doubt, that this reply to his sinful yet loving creature came from my God. All my hope is in him. May he be blessed for ever."

I hastened to reply: "The Lord always acts as the good Father he is, and gives us continual proofs of his Love. Place all your hope in him — and keep up your struggle."

388 O Jesus! If in spite of the poor way I have behaved, you have done for me what you have done, what would you do if I were to respond well?

This truth will lead you to be generous without measure.

Weep and show with sorrow and love how much it pains you, for Our Lord and his Blessed Mother deserve different treatment from you.

389 Even though at times you don't feel like praying and you think you are only saying things with your lips, nevertheless keep up your acts of faith and hope and love. Don't fall asleep. Otherwise, when things are going fine, an ill wind will come and it will drag you off.

390 This is how you should pray: if I am to do anything worthwhile, Jesus, you will have to do it for me. May your Will be done. I do love it, even if your Will should permit that I be always as I am now, falling dismally only to be lifted up by you!

391 Make me into a saint, my God, even if you have to beat me into it. I don't want to be a hindrance to your Will. I want to respond, I want to be generous... But what sort of a wanting is mine?

392 You are full of concern because you do not love as you ought. Everything annoys you. And the enemy does all he can to make you show your bad temper.

I realise you feel very humiliated. Precisely because of this you must take measures to react without delay.

393 The holiness which makes people say that "to put up with a saint you need two saints" is not true holiness. At best, it would only be its caricature.

394 The devil tries to draw us away from God, and if you allow him to dominate you, good people will draw away from you, because they draw away from the devil's friends and from those possessed by him.

395 When you speak to God, even if you think yours are just empty words, ask him for a greater dedication, for a more determined progress towards Christian perfection. Ask him to put more fire into you!

396 Renew your firm resolution to live your Christian life right now, at every moment and in all circumstances.

397 Don't place obstacles in grace's way. You need to be convinced that in order to be leaven you must become a saint, and must struggle to identify yourself with Him.

398 Say slowly and in all earnestness: Nunc coepi — now I begin!

Don't get discouraged if, unfortunately, you don't see any great change in yourself brought about by the Lord's right hand. From your lowliness you can cry out: Help me, my Jesus, because I want to fulfil your Will — your most lovable Will.

399 Agreed: your concern ought to be for them. But your first concern must be yourself, your own interior life. Otherwise, you will not be able to serve them.

400 How difficult you find that mortification suggested to you by the Holy Spirit! Look at a Crucifix, steadily — and you will come to love that expiation.

401 "To be nailed to the Cross!" This aspiration kept coming again and again, as a new light, to the mind and heart and lips of a certain soul.

"To be nailed to the Cross?", he asked himself. "How hard it is!" And yet he knew full well the way he had to go, against himself, the way of self-denial: *agere contra*. This is why he earnestly implored, "Help me, Lord!"

402 When we look upon Calvary, where Jesus died, the realisation of our own sins should move us to be sorry, to make a deeper and more mature decision not to offend him again.

403 We need to smooth off the rough edges a little more each day — just as if we were working in stone or wood — and get rid of the defects in our own lives with a spirit of penance. And with small mortifications, which are of two types: active mortifications — the ones we ourselves look for, like little flowers we gather up during the course of the day — and passive mortifications, which come from without and we find difficult to accept. Jesus Christ will later make up for whatever is still lacking.

What a wonderful figure of the crucified Christ you will become if you give your all, generously and cheerfully.

404 Our Lord, with his arms outstretched, is continually begging for your love.

405 Draw close to Jesus who has died for you; draw close to that Cross, outlined against the sky on the summit of Golgotha.

But draw close sincerely and with interior recollection, which is the sign of Christian maturity. That way the divine and human events of the Passion will sink deep into your soul.

406 We should accept mortification with those same sentiments that Jesus Christ had in his Holy Passion.

407 Mortification is a necessary premise for every kind of apostolate, and for bringing each apostolate to perfection.

408 A spirit of penance is to be found first of all in taking advantage of the many little things — deeds, renunciations, sacrifices, services rendered and so on — which we find daily along our way and we then convert into acts of love and contrition, into mortifications. In this way we shall be able to gather a bouquet at the end of each day — a fine display which we can offer to God.

409 The best spirit of sacrifice is to persevere in the work you have begun, both when you find it exciting and when it proves an uphill struggle.

410 Take your plan of mortifications to your spiritual Director, for him to monitor them.

But to monitor will not always mean to diminish. It can also mean increasing them, if he thinks fit. Either way, accept his advice.

411 We can say with Saint Augustine that our evil passions tug at our garments, dragging us down. At the same time we are aware of great, noble and pure ambitions within our hearts, and know that a struggle is going on.

If, with the grace of God, you make use of the ascetical means: if you seek to have presence of God, if you look for mortification and — don't be afraid — penance, then you will make progress, you will find peace and victory will be yours.

412 Custody of the heart. That priest used to pray: "Jesus, may my poor heart be an enclosed garden; may my poor heart be a paradise wherein you dwell; may my Guardian Angel watch over it with a sword of fire and use it to purify every affection before it comes into me. Jesus, seal my poor heart with the divine seal of your Cross."

413 Each person in his own situation should lead a pure life, courageously lived. We have to learn to say No for the sake of that great Love, Love with a capital letter.

414 There is a Spanish saying which speaks clearly enough: Entre santa y santo, pared de cal y canto ("Twixt holy man and holy maid, a wall of solid stone be laid").

We have to watch over our hearts and our senses, and pull ourselves away from all occasions of sin. No matter how holy it may appear, passion must not have its way.

415 Dear Lord, I find beauty and charm in everything I see! I will guard my sight at every moment, for the sake of Love.

416 You are a Christian and, as a Christian, a son of God. You should feel a grave responsibility for corresponding to the mercies you have received from the Lord, showing careful vigilance and loving firmness, so that nothing and nobody may disfigure the distinctive features of the Love he has imprinted upon your soul.

417 You have reached a level of real intimacy with this God of ours, who is so close to you, so deeply lodged in your soul. But what are you doing to increase and deepen this intimacy? Are you careful not to allow silly little hindrances to creep in which would upset this friendship?

Show courage! Don't refuse to break with every single thing, no matter how small, which could cause suffering to the One who loves you so much.

418 If we are faithful to him, Jesus' own life will somehow be repeated in the life of each one of us, both in its internal development (the process of sanctification) and in our outward behaviour.

Give thanks to him for being so good.

419 It seems an excellent idea to me that you should tell the Lord often about your great and ardent desire to be a saint, even though you see yourself filled with wretchedness...

Tell him — precisely because of this!

420 You have seen very clearly that you are a child of God. Even if you were never again to see it — it won't happen! — you should continue along your way forever, out of a sense of faithfulness, without ever looking back.

421 A resolution: to be faithful to my timetable — heroically faithful and without excuses — on ordinary days and on extraordinary days.

422 You might have thought occasionally, with holy envy, about the adolescent Apostle, John, quem diligebat Iesus — whom Jesus loved.

Wouldn't you like to deserve to be called "the one who loves the Will of God"? Then take the necessary steps, day after day.

423 You can be sure of the following: the desire — shown by deeds — to live like a good son of God brings permanent youthfulness and serenity, joy and peace.

424 If you abandon yourself once more in God's hands, the Holy Spirit will give light to your understanding and strength to your will.

425 Listen to that parable which comes to us from Jesus' own lips and is told us by Saint John in his Gospel: Ego sum vitis, vos palmites — I am the vine, you are the branches.

Picture the whole parable in your imagination and in your mind. You will see that a branch separated from the stock, from the vine, is useless, it cannot produce fruit. It will end up like a dry stick which men or animals trample underfoot, or will be thrown on the fire.

You are the branch; draw the necessary conclusions.

426 Today once again I prayed full of confidence. This was my petition: "Lord, may neither our past wretchedness which has been forgiven us, nor the possibility of future wretchedness cause us any disquiet. May we abandon ourselves into your merciful hands. May we bring before you our desires for sanctity and apostolate, which are hidden like embers under the ashes of an apparent coldness."

"Lord, I know you are listening to us." You should say this to him too.

427 Be sincere when you open up your soul. Speak out and don't try to gild the lily; that could be a very childish thing to do.

And then continue on your way, with docility. You will be holier, and happier.

428 Don't look for consolations apart from God. See what that priest wrote: There should be no unburdening of your heart to any other friend when there is no need to do so.

429 Holiness is attained with the help of the Holy Spirit, who comes to dwell in our souls, through grace given us by the sacraments and as a result of a constant ascetical struggle.

My son, let us not have any false illusions about this. You and I — I'll never tire of repeating it — will always have to struggle, always, until the end of our lives. We will thus come to love peace, and we will spread peace around us, and we will receive our everlasting reward.

430 Don't confine yourself to speaking to the Paraclete. Listen to him as well.

When you pray, consider how the life of childhood which enabled you to realise more deeply that you are a son of God filled you with a filial love for the Father. Think how, before that, you have gone through Mary to Jesus, whom you adore as his friend, as his brother, as his lover for that is what you are.

After receiving this advice you realised that until now you had known that the Holy Spirit was dwelling in your soul, to sanctify it. But you hadn't really grasped this truth about his presence. You needed that advice. Now you feel his Love within you, and you want to talk to him, to be his friend, to confide in him. You want to facilitate his work of polishing, uprooting, and enkindling.

I wouldn't know how to set about it, you thought. Listen to him, I insist. He will give you strength. He will do everything, if you so want. And you do want!

Pray to him: Divine Guest, Master, Light, Guide, Love, may I make you truly welcome inside me and listen to the lessons you teach me. Make me burn with eagerness for you, make me follow you and love you.

431 To draw closer to God, to fly all the way to God, you need the strong and generous wings of Prayer and Expiation.

432 To avoid routine in your vocal prayers try to say them with the same ardour with which a person who has just fallen in love speaks... and as if it were the last chance you had to approach Our Lord.

433 If you feel proud to be a son of Our Lady, ask yourself: How often do I express my devotion to the Virgin Mary during the day, from morning to night?

434 That friend was saying to himself: Apart from other reasons, there are two good reasons why I should make reparation to my Immaculate Mother every Saturday and on the eve of her feasts.

The second is that on Sundays and on feasts of Our Lady (which are often local feasts), instead of dedicating such days to prayer, so many people spend them offending Our Jesus with public sins and scandalous crimes — you have only to look around you and see.

The first reason is that, perhaps due to the devil's influence, those of us who want to be good sons are not taking proper care in the way we live these days dedicated to Our Lord and to his Mother.

You'll realise that unfortunately these reasons are still very valid. And so we too should make reparation.

435 I have always understood Christian prayer as being a loving conversation with Jesus, which shouldn't be interrupted even in the moments when we are physically far from the Tabernacle, because our whole life is a serenade of human love for our God... and we can love always.

436 God's love for his creatures is so boundless and our response to it should be so great that time ought to stand still when Holy Mass is being said.

437 When the branches are united to the vine they grow to maturity and bear fruit.

What then should you and I do? We should get right close to Jesus, through the Bread and through the Word. He is our vine. We should speak affectionate words to him throughout the day. That is what people in love do.

438 Love Our Lord very much. Maintain and foster in your soul a sense of urgency to love him better. Love God precisely now when perhaps a good many of those who hold him in their hands do not love him, but rather ill-treat and neglect him.

Be sure to take good care of the Lord for me, in the Holy Mass and throughout the whole day.

439 Prayer is the most powerful weapon a Christian has. Prayer makes us effective. Prayer makes us happy. Prayer gives us all the strength we need to fulfil God's commands.

Yes, indeed, your whole life can and should be prayer.

440 Personal sanctity is not an abstruse theory, but a specific reality, which is both divine and human. And it manifests itself constantly in daily acts of Love.

441 The spirit of prayer which fills the entire life of Jesus Christ among men teaches us that all our actions — great or small — ought to be preceded by prayer, accompanied by prayer and followed by prayer.

442 Contemplate and live the Passion of Christ, with Him. Proffer your own shoulders frequently, daily, when he is scourged; offer your own head to be crowned with thorns.

Where I come from they say: "Love is repaid with love."

443 A person in love doesn't miss the tiniest detail. I have seen it in so many souls. Those little things become something very great: Love!

444 Love God for those who do not love him. You should make this spirit of reparation and atonement flesh of your flesh.

445 If at any time the going gets harder in our interior struggle, that will be a good moment to show that our Love is in earnest.

446 You are certain it was God who made you see quite clearly that you must return to the more childlike little things of your earlier interior life, and persevere for months and even years in those heroic trivialities. (You needn't take into account your feelings here since they are so often slow to recognise the good.) Your will may be cold but let it be ready to fulfil those little duties out of Love.

447 Persevere in your life of piety, willingly and with love, even if you feel arid. Don't worry if you find yourself counting the minutes or days still to go before you finish that act of piety or that job of work, with the turbid delight of the lazy schoolboy who in a similar situation is looking forward to the end of term; or of the petty criminal who can't wait to get back to his tricks once he is out of jail again.

Persevere, I insist, with a real and effective determination. Don't cease, not even for a moment, to want to fulfil and benefit from those means of piety.

448 Practise your faith cheerfully, keeping very close to Jesus Christ. Really love him — but really, really love him! — and you will take part in a great Adventure of Love, because you will be more in love each day.

449 Say slowly to the Master: Lord, all I want is to serve you. All I want is to fulfil my duties and love you with all my heart. Make me feel your firm step by my side. May you be my only support!

Say this to him slowly... and really mean it!

450 You need interior life and doctrinal formation. Be demanding on yourself! As a Christian man or woman, you have to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, for you are obliged to give good example with holy shamelessness.

The charity of Christ should compel you. Feeling and knowing yourself to be another Christ from the moment you told him that you would follow him, you must not separate yourself from your equals — your relatives, friends and colleagues — any more than you would separate salt from the food it is seasoning.

Your interior life and your formation include the piety and the principles a child of God must have in order to give flavour to everything by his active presence there.

Ask the Lord that you may always be that good seasoning in the lives of others.

451 We Christians, with a spirit of youthfulness, have come to collect the treasures of the Gospels, which are always new, so that we can make them reach every corner of the earth.

452 You need to imitate Jesus Christ and make him known through your behaviour. I want you not to forget that Christ assumed our human nature so as to raise all men to a divine way of life; and so that, united to him, we might live the commands of Heaven both individually and as members of society.

453 Because you are a Christian you cannot turn your back on any concern or any need of your fellow men.

454 How very insistent the Apostle Saint John was in preaching the *mandatum novum*, the new commandment that we should love one another.

I would fall on my knees, without putting on any act — but this is what my heart dictates — and ask you, for the love of God, to love one another, to help one another, to lend one another a hand, to know how to forgive one another.

And so, reject all pride, be compassionate, show charity; help each other with prayer and sincere friendship.

455 You will only be good if you know how to see the good points and the virtues of the others.

That is why when you have to correct, you should do so with charity, at the opportune moment, without humiliating. And being ready yourself to learn and to improve in the very faults you are correcting.

456 Love and practise charity without setting any limits or discriminating between people, for it is the virtue which marks us out as disciples of the Master.

Nevertheless, this charity cannot lead you to dampen your faith — for it would then cease to be a virtue. Nor should it blur the clear outlines that define the faith, nor soften it to the point of changing it, as some people try to do, into something amorphous and lacking the strength and power of God.

457 You have to live in harmony with your fellow men and understand them as a brother would. As the Spanish mystic says, you have to put love where there is no love to obtain love.

458 Whenever you need to criticise, your criticism must seek to be positive, helpful and constructive. It should never be made behind the back of the person concerned.

To act otherwise would be treacherous, sneaky, defamatory, slanderous even, as well as being utterly ignoble.

459 Whenever you see that the glory of God and the good of the Church demand that you should speak out, you cannot remain silent.

Think about it. Who would lack courage before God and in the face of eternity? There is nothing to be lost and instead so much to be gained. Why do you hold back then?

460 We are not good brothers to our fellow men if we are not ready to continue behaving correctly, even when those around us may interpret our actions badly or react in an unpleasant manner.

461 Your love for Mother Church and the service you render her should in no way be conditioned by the greater or lesser holiness of the individuals who make up the Church, even though we ardently desire that everyone will achieve Christian perfection.

You have to love the Spouse of Christ, your Mother. She is, and always will be, pure and spotless.

462 Our striving for our own sanctification has repercussions on the sanctity of so many souls and also on the sanctity of God's Church.

463 Be convinced of this: if only you wish it (and don't forget that God listens to you and loves you and promises you glory and you will be protected by the almighty hand of your Father in Heaven) you can be a person full of fortitude, ready to be a witness everywhere to the most lovable truth of his doctrine.

464 The Lord's field is fertile and the seed he sows of good quality. Therefore when weeds appear in this world of ours, never doubt that they spring up because of a lack of correspondence on the part of men, Christians especially, who have fallen asleep and have left the field open to the enemy.

Don't complain, for there's no point; examine your behaviour, instead.

465 The following comment, which caused me great sorrow, will also make you reflect: "I see very clearly why there is a lack of resistance, and why what resistance there is to iniquitous laws is so ineffective, for above, below and in the middle there are many people — so very many — who just follow the crowd."

466 The enemies of God and of his Church, manipulated by the devil's unremitting hatred, are relentless in their activities and organization.

With "exemplary" constancy they prepare their cadres, run schools, appoint leaders and deploy agitators. In an undercover way — but very effectively — they spread their ideas and sow, in homes and places of work, a seed which is destructive of any religious ideology.

What is there that we Christians should not be ready to do in order to serve our God, of course always with the truth?

467 Don't confuse serenity with being lazy or careless, with putting off decisions or deferring the study of important matters.

Serenity always goes hand in hand with diligence, which is a virtue we need in order to consider and solve outstanding problems without delay.

468 My son, where do men find in you the Christ they are looking for? In your pride? In your desire to impose yourself on others? In those little character defects which you don't wish to overcome? In your stubbornness?... Is Christ to be found there? No, he is not!

You need to have your own personality, agreed. But you should try to make it conform exactly to Christ's.

469 I will suggest to you a good rule of conduct for living fraternity and a spirit of service. When you are not around, other people should be able to go ahead with the work you have in hand thanks to the experience you have generously passed on to them, and to your not having made yourself indispensable.

470 The responsibility for the sanctity of others, for their Christian behaviour and for their effectiveness, lies with you. And this is so even though you have passions.

You are not on your own. If you stop you could be holding up or harming so many people!

471 Think about your Mother the Holy Church and consider how, if one member suffers, the whole body suffers.

Your body needs each one of its members, but each member needs the whole body. What would happen if my hands were to stop doing their duty... or if my heart were to stop beating?

472 You saw it quite clearly: while so many people do not know God, he has looked to you. He wants you to form a part of the foundations, a firm stone upon which the life of the Church can rest.

Meditate upon this reality and you will draw many practical consequences for your ordinary behaviour: the foundations, made of blocks of stone — hidden and possibly rather dull — have to be solid, not fragile. They have to serve as a support for the building. If not, they are useless.

473 Since you feel you have been chosen by God to support and co-redeem — without forgetting that you are... wretched and utterly so — your humility should lead you to place yourself under the feet — at the service — of all. This is what the supports of a building do.

But foundations need to be strong. Fortitude is an indispensable virtue for someone who has to sustain or encourage others.

Say this to Jesus and say it to him strongly: May I never through false humility stop practising the cardinal virtue of fortitude. Make me know how to separate, my God, the dross from the gold.

474 Our Mother, our Hope! How safe and sure we are when we keep close to you, even when everything around us is quivering and shaking.

RECOVERY

475 You feel the need of conversion: He is asking more of you... and you are giving him less each day!

476 For each one of us, as for Lazarus, it was really a *veni foras* — come out — which got us moving.

How sad it is to see those who are still dead and do not know the power of God's mercy!

Renew your holy joy, for opposite the man who is decomposing without Christ, there is another who has risen with him.

477 Earthly affections, even when they aren't just squalid concupiscence, usually involve some element of selfishness.

So, though you must not despise those affections — they can be very holy — always make sure you purify your intention.

478 Don't be anxious for people to sympathise with you. That is often a sign of pride or vanity.

479 Whenever you speak of the theological virtues, of faith, of hope, of love, remember that they are first of all virtues to be practised rather than to be speculated on.

480 Is there something in your life that does not suit your dignity as a Christian, something which makes you unwilling to be cleansed?

Examine your conscience, and change.

481 Take a good look at the way you behave. You will see that you are full of faults that harm you and perhaps also those around you.

Remember, my child, that microbes may be no less a menace than wild beasts. Just as bacteria are cultivated in a laboratory, so you are cultivating those faults and those errors, with your lack of humility, with your lack of prayer, with your failure to fulfil your duty, with your lack of self-knowledge. Those tiny germs then spread everywhere.

You need to make a good examination of conscience every day. It will lead you to make definite resolutions to improve, because it will have made you really sorry for your shortcomings, omissions and sins.

482 Almighty God, Omnipotent and Infinitely Wise, had to choose his Mother.

What would you have done, if you had had to choose yours? I think that you and I would have chosen the mother we have, filling her with all graces. That is what God did: and that is why, after the Blessed Trinity, comes Mary.

Theologians have given a rational explanation for her fulness of grace and why she cannot be subject to the devil: it was fitting that it should be so, God could do it, therefore he did it. That is the great proof: the clearest proof that God endowed his Mother with every privilege, from the very first moment. That is how she is: beautiful, and pure, and spotless in soul and body!

483 Is this how it is? You are longing for the victory, the end of the struggle... but it doesn't come!

Thank God, as if you had already gained what you are seeking, and offer him your feelings of impatience: *Vir fidelis loquetur victoriam*, the faithful man will sing the joys of victory.

484 There are moments in which you are deprived of that union with Our Lord which enabled you to pray continually, even when you were asleep. You seem almost to be wrestling with God's Will.

It is your weakness, as you well know. Love the Cross. Love the fact that you lack so many things which the world thinks of as necessary; love the obstacles that you find as you start or... as you continue on your way; love your very littleness and spiritual wretchedness.

Offer — with a desire that is effective — all you have, and all that belongs to those who are yours. Humanly speaking, it's quite a lot, but from a supernatural point of view, it's nothing.

485 At times, someone has told me: "Father, I feel tired and cold; when I pray or fulfil some other norm of piety, I seem to be acting out a farce."

To that friend, and to you, if you are in the same boat, I answer: A farce? What an excellent thing, my child! Act out that farce! The Lord is your audience — the

Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Blessed Trinity is contemplating us in those moments when we are "acting out a farce".

Acting like that in front of God, out of love, in order to please him, when our whole life goes against the grain: how splendid, to be God's juggler! How marvellous it is to play one's part for Love, with sacrifice, without any personal satisfaction, just in order to please Our Lord!

That indeed is to live for Love.

486 A heart which loves the things of the earth beyond measure is like one fastened by a chain — or by a "tiny thread" -which stops it flying to God.

487 "Watch and pray, that you may not enter into temptation." It makes one shudder to see how someone can give up a divine undertaking for the sake of a fleeting delusion.

488 A lukewarm apostle: that's the great enemy of souls.

489 A clear sign of lukewarmness is a lack of supernatural "stubbornness", of fortitude to keep on working and not stop until you have laid "the last stone".

490 Some hearts are hard, but noble. When they come close to the warmth of Christ's Heart, they melt like bronze into tears of love, of reparation. They catch fire.

But lukewarm people have hearts of clay, of mean flesh. They crack and turn to dust. A sorry sight.

Say with me: "Our Jesus, keep us from being lukewarm. We do not want to be lukewarm."

491 All goodness, all beauty, all majesty, all loveliness, all grace adorn our Mother. Doesn't it make you fall in love, to have a Mother like that?

492 We are in love with Love. That is why Our Lord doesn't want us to be dry, stiff, lifeless. He wants us to be steeped in his tenderness!

493 See if you can understand this apparent contradiction. At thirty years of age, that man wrote in his diary: "I'm not young any more." When he was over forty, he wrote again: "I will stay young till I'm eighty: if I die before that, I'll think I haven't done my stint."

Wherever he went he took with him, in spite of the passing years, the mature youthfulness of Love.

494 How well I understand that question put by a soul in love with God: "Have I made any grimace of distaste, has there been anything in me which could have hurt you, my Lord, my Love?"

Ask your Father-God to grant us the grace to be constantly demanding in that way.

495 Have you seen the affection and the confidence with which Christ's friends treat him? In a completely natural way the sisters of Lazarus 'blame' Jesus for being away: "We told you! If only you'd been here!"

Speak to him with calm confidence: "Teach me to treat you with the loving friendliness of Martha, Mary and Lazarus and as the first Twelve treated you, even though at first they followed you perhaps for not very supernatural reasons."

496 How I like to think of John, leaning his head on Christ's breast! It is like giving up one's intelligence lovingly, difficult though this is, to let it be set on fire by the flame of the Heart of Jesus.

497 God loves me. And John the Apostle writes: "Let us love God, then, since God loved us first." As if this were not enough, Jesus comes to each one of us, in spite of our patent wretchedness, to ask us, as he asked Peter: "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these others?"

This is the moment to reply: "Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you!" adding, with humility, "Help me to love you more. Increase my love!"

498 "Love means deeds and not sweet words." Deeds, deeds! And a resolution: I will continue to tell you often, Lord, that I love you. How often have I repeated this today! But, with your grace, it will be my conduct above all that shows it. It will be the little things of each day which, with silent eloquence, will cry out before you, showing you my Love.

499 We men don't know how to show Jesus the gentle refinements of love that some poor, rough fellows — Christians all the same — show daily to some pitiful little creature — their wife, their child, their friend — who is as poor as they.

This truth should help us react.

500 The Love of God is so attractive, and so fascinating, that there are no limits to its growth in the life of a Christian.

501 You cannot behave like a naughty child, or like a madman.

You have to be strong, a child of God. You have to be calm in your professional work and in your dealings with others, with a presence of God which makes you give perfect attention to even the smallest details.

502 If bare justice is done, people may feel hurt.

Always act, therefore, for the love of God, which will add to that justice the balm of a neighbourly love, and will purify and cleanse all earthly love.

When you bring God in, everything becomes supernatural.

503 Love Our Lord passionately. Love him madly. Because if there is love there — when there is love — I would dare to say that resolutions are not needed. My

parents — think of yours — did not need to make any resolutions to love me: and what an effusion of tenderness they showed me, in little details every day.

With that same human heart we can and should love God.

504 Love is sacrifice; and sacrifice for Love's sake is a joy.

505 Answer this question in your heart: How often each day does your will ask you to set your heart on God, to give him your expressions of love and your actions?

This is a good way to measure the intensity and quality of your love.

506 Be convinced, my child, that God has a right to ask us: Are you thinking about of me? Are you aware of me? Do you look to me as your support? Do you seek me as the Light of your life, as your shield..., as your all?

Renew, then, this resolution: In times the world calls good I will cry out: "Lord!" In times it calls bad, again I will cry: "Lord!"

507 I don't want you ever to lose your supernatural outlook. Even though you see your own meannesses, your evil inclinations — the clay of which you are made — in all their raw shamefulfulness, God is counting on you.

508 Live as the others around you live, with naturalness, but "supernaturalising" every moment of your day.

509 In order to be able to judge with rectitude of intention, we need a pure heart, zeal for the things of God and love of souls, free from prejudices.

Think about it.

510 I heard some people I knew talking about their radio sets. Almost without realising it, I brought the subject round to the spiritual area: we have got a strong earth, too strong, and we have forgotten to put up the aerial of the interior life.

That is why there are so few souls who keep in touch with God. May we never be without our supernatural aerial.

511 Is it true that I pay more attention to trifles and trivialities, that bring me nothing and from which I expect nothing, than I do to my God? Who am I with, when I am not with God?

512 Tell him: Lord, I want nothing other than what You want. Even those things I am asking you for at present, if they take me an inch away from your Will, don't give them to me.

513 The secret of being effective, at root, lies in your piety, a sincere piety. This way you will pass the whole day with Him.

514 A resolution: to "keep up", without interruption as far as you can, a loving and docile friendship and conversation with the Holy Spirit. Veni, Sancte Spiritus...! — Come, O Holy Spirit, and dwell in my soul!

515 Repeat to yourself, with all your heart, and with ever-increasing love, and more when you are in front of the Tabernacle or have the Lord within your breast: *Non est qui se abscondat a calore eius* — "No one can hide from his warmth." May I not flee from you, may I be filled with the fire of your Holy Spirit.

516 *Ure igne Sancti Spiritus!* — burn me with the fire of your Spirit, you cried. You then added: "My poor soul needs to fly again as soon as possible, and not stop flying until it rests in God!"

I think your desires are admirable. I will pray for you often to the Paraclete. I will invoke him continually, so that he may nestle in the centre of your being, presiding and giving a supernatural tone to all your actions and words, thoughts and desires. 517 When you celebrated the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross you asked Our Lord, with the most earnest desire of your heart, to grant you his grace so as to "exalt" the Holy Cross in the powers of your soul and in your senses. You asked for a new life; for the Cross to set a seal on it, to confirm the truth of your mission; for the whole of your being to rest on the Cross!

We shall see...

518 Mortification has to be constant, like the beating of the heart. In this way we will have dominion over ourselves and the charity of Christ for others.

519 To love the Cross means being able to put oneself out, gladly, for the love of Christ, though it's hard — and because it's hard. You have enough experience to know that this is not a contradiction.

520 Christian cheerfulness is not something physiological. Its foundation is supernatural, and it goes deeper than illness or difficulties.

Cheerfulness does not mean the jingling of bells, or the gaiety of a dance at the local hall.

True cheerfulness is something deeper, something within: something that keeps us peaceful and brimming over with joy, though at times our face may be stern.

521 I wrote to you: Though I can understand that it's not an uncommon way of talking, I'm not happy when I hear people describe the difficulties born of pride as "crosses". These burdens are not the Cross, the true Cross, because they are not Christ's Cross.

So struggle against those invented obstacles, which have nothing to do with the seal Christ has set on you. Get rid of all the disguises of self!

522 Even on those days when you seem to be wasting time, in the prose of the thousand details of the day there is more than enough poetry for you to feel that you are on the Cross: on a Cross which no one notices.

523 Do not fix your heart on anything that passes away. Imitate Christ, who became poor for us, and had nowhere to lay his head.

Ask him to give you, in the midst of the world, a real detachment, a detachment that has nothing to soften it.

524 One clear sign of detachment is genuinely not to consider anything as one's own.

525 Whoever really lives his faith knows that the goods of the world are means, and uses them generously, heroically.

526 The risen Christ, Christ in glory, has divested himself of the things of this earth, so that we men, his brothers, should ask ourselves what things we need to get rid of.

527 We have to love the Blessed Virgin Mary more. We will never love her enough.

Love her a lot! It shouldn't be enough for you to put up pictures of her, and greet them, and say aspirations. You should learn to offer her, in your strenuous life, some small sacrifice each day, to show her your love, and to show her the kind of love that we want the whole human race to proclaim for her.

528 The truth of a Christian's life is this: self-giving and love — founded on sacrifice. Love for God, that is, and, for God's sake, love for one's neighbour.

529 Jesus, I put myself trustingly in Your arms, hiding my head on Your loving breast, my heart touching Yours: I want what You want, in everything.

530 Nowadays the world we live in is full of disobedience and gossip, of intrigue and conspiracy. So, more than ever we have to love obedience, sincerity, loyalty and simplicity: and our love of all these will have a supernatural significance, which will make us more human.

531 You say yes, you are determined to follow Christ.

All right. Then you should walk at his pace, not at your own.

532 You want to know on what our faithfulness is founded?

I would say, in broad outline, that it is based on loving God, which makes us overcome all kinds of obstacles: selfishness, pride, tiredness, impatience...

A man in love tramples on his own self. He is aware that even when he is loving with all his soul, he isn't yet loving enough.

533 I heard — and I write it down, because it's very beautiful — something that was said by a goodly nun from Aragon, in her gratitude for God's fatherly goodness: "How 'smart' he is! He's got his eye on everything."

534 Like all God's children, you too need personal prayer. You need to be intimate with him, to talk directly with Our Lord. You need a two-way conversation, face to face, without hiding yourself in anonymity.

535 The first thing needed as far as prayer is concerned is to keep at it; the second thing is to be humble.

Have a holy stubbornness, be trusting. Remember that when we ask the Lord for something important, he may want to be asked for many years. Keep on! But keep on with ever increasing trust.

536 Persevere in prayer, as the Master told us. This point of departure will be your source of peace, of cheerfulness, of serenity, and so it will make you humanly and supernaturally effective.

537 You were in a place where they were talking and listening to music. Prayer welled up in your soul, bringing an unspeakable solace. In the end you said: "Jesus, I don't want consolation; I want you."

538 Your life must be a constant prayer, a never-ceasing conversation with Our Lord: when things are pleasant or unpleasant, easy or difficult, usual or unusual.

In every situation, your conversation with your Father God should immediately come to life. You should seek him right within your soul.

539 To recollect oneself in prayer, in meditation, is so easy! Jesus doesn't make us wait. He doesn't leave us in the waiting-room. It is he who does the waiting.

You only have to say "Lord, I want to pray, I want to talk to you!" and you are at once in God's presence, talking to him.

And as if this were not enough, he doesn't begrudge you his time. He leaves it up to you, just as you please. And not just for ten minutes or a quarter of an hour, but for hours and hours! For the whole day! And he is who he is: the Almighty, the Most Wise.

540 In the interior life, as in human love, we have to persevere.

You have to meditate often on the same themes, keeping on until you re-discover an old discovery.

"How could I not have seen this so clearly before?" you'll ask in surprise. Simply because sometimes we're like stones, that let the water flow over them, without absorbing a drop.

That's why we have to go over the same things again and again — because they aren't the same things — if we want to soak up God's blessings.

541 In the Holy Sacrifice of the altar, the priest takes up the Body of our God, and the Chalice containing his Blood, and raises them above all the things of the earth, saying: Per Ipsum, et cum Ipso, et in Ipso — through My Love, with My Love, in My Love!

Unite yourself to the action of the priest. Or rather, make that act of the priest a part of your life.

542 The Gospel tells us that Jesus hid himself when they wanted to make him king after he had worked the miracle.

Lord, you make us share in the miracle of the Eucharist. We beg you not to hide away. Live with us. May we see you, may we touch you, may we feel you. May we want to be beside you all the time, and have you as the King of our lives and of our work.

543 Talk to the Three Persons, to God the Father, to God the Son, to God the Holy Spirit. And so as to reach the Blessed Trinity, go through Mary.

544 You don't have living faith if you aren't giving yourself to Jesus here and now.

545 All Christians should seek Christ and get to know him, so as to love him better and better. It's like courting. A couple need to get to know each other well, for if they don't, they will not really love each other. And our life is a life of Love.

546 Pause to consider the holy wrath of the Master, when he sees his Father's honour abused in the Temple at Jerusalem.

What a lesson for you! You should never be indifferent, or play the coward, when the things of God are treated without respect.

547 Fall in love with the Sacred Humanity of Jesus Christ.

Aren't you glad that he should have wanted to be like us? Thank Jesus for this wonderful expression of his goodness.

548 Advent is here. What a marvellous time in which to renew your desire, your nostalgia, your real longing for Christ to come — for him to come every day to your soul in the Eucharist. The Church encourages us: Ecce veniet! — He is about to arrive!

549 Christmas. The carols sing Venite, venite, "O come ye, O come ye." Let us go to him. He has just been born.

After contemplating how Mary and Joseph care for the Child, I now dare to hint to you: Look at him again, gaze at him without ceasing.

550 Although it pains us to admit it — and I ask God to increase that sorrow in us — you and I have our share in the death of Christ. For the sins of men were the hammer-blows which stitched him to the Cross with nails.

551 Saint Joseph. One cannot love Jesus and Mary without loving the Holy Patriarch.

552 There are many good reasons to honour Saint Joseph, and to learn from his life. He was a man of strong faith. He earned a living for his family — Jesus and Mary — with his own hard work. He guarded the purity of the Blessed Virgin, who was his Spouse. And he respected — he loved! — God's freedom, when God made

his choice: not only his choice of Our Lady the Virgin as his Mother, but also his choice of Saint Joseph as the Husband of Holy Mary.

553 Saint Joseph, our Father and Lord: most chaste, most pure. You were found worthy to carry the Child Jesus in your arms, to wash him, to hug him. Teach us to get to know God, and to be pure, worthy of being other Christs.

And help us to do and to teach, as Christ did. Help us to open up the divine paths of the earth, which are both hidden and bright; and help us to show them to mankind, telling our fellow men that their lives on earth can have an extraordinary and constant supernatural effectiveness.

554 Love Saint Joseph a lot. Love him with all your soul, because he, together with Jesus, is the person who has most loved our Blessed Lady and been closest to God. He is the person who has most loved God, after our Mother.

He deserves your affection, and it will do you good to get to know him, because he is the Master of the interior life, and has great power before the Lord and before the Mother of God.

555 Our Lady. Who could be a better Teacher of the love of God than this Queen, this Lady, this Mother, who has the closest bond with the Trinity: Daughter of God the Father, Mother of God the Son, Spouse of God the Holy Spirit? And at the same time she is our Mother!

Go and pray personally for her intercession.

556 You will become a saint if you have charity, if you manage to do the things which please others and do not offend God, though you find them hard to do.

557 Saint Paul has given us a wonderful recipe for charity: *alter alterius onera portate et sic adimplebitis legem Christi* — bear one another's burdens, and so you will fulfil the law of Christ.

Is this what happens in your life?

558 Jesus Our Lord loved men so much that he became incarnate, took to himself our nature, and lived in daily contact with the poor and the rich, with the just and with sinners, with young and old, with Gentiles and Jews.

He spoke to everyone: to those who showed good will towards him, and to those who were only looking for a way to twist his words and condemn him.

You should try to act as Our Lord did.

559 Loving souls for God's sake will make us love everyone: understanding, excusing, forgiving all.

We should have a love that can cover the multitude of failings contrived by human wretchedness. We have to have a wonderful charity, *veritatem facientes in caritate*, defending the truth, without hurting anyone.

560 When I speak to you of good example, I mean to tell you, too, that you have to understand and excuse, that you have to fill the world with peace and love.

561 Ask yourself often: am I making a real effort to be more refined in my charity towards the people I live with?

562 When I preach that we have to make ourselves a carpet so that the others may tread softly, I am not simply being poetic: it has to be a reality!

It's hard, as sanctity is hard; but it's also easy, because, I insist, sanctity is within everyone's reach.

563 In the midst of so much selfishness, so much coldness -everyone out for what he can get — I call to mind those little wooden donkeys. They were trotting on a desk-top, strong and sturdy. One had lost a leg, but it carried on forward, supported by the others.

564 When we Catholics defend and uphold the truth, without making concessions, we have to strive to create an atmosphere of charity, of harmony, to drown all hatred and resentment.

565 In a Christian, in a child of God, friendship and charity are one and the same thing. They are a divine light which spreads warmth.

566 To practise fraternal correction — which is so deeply rooted in the Gospel — is a proof of supernatural trust and affection.

Be thankful for it when you receive it, and don't neglect to practise it with those you live with.

567 When you correct someone — because it has to be done and you want to do your duty — you must expect to hurt others and to get hurt yourself.

But you should never let this fact be an excuse for holding back.

568 Get very close to your Mother, the Virgin Mary. You ought to be united to God always: seek that union with him by staying near his Blessed Mother.

569 Listen to me: being in the world and belonging to the world does not mean being worldly.

570 You have to act like a burning coal, spreading fire wherever it happens to be; or at least, striving to raise the spiritual temperature of the people around you, leading them to live a truly Christian life.

571 God wants the works he entrusts to men to go ahead on the basis of prayer and mortification.

572 The foundation of all we do as citizens — as Catholic citizens — lies in an intense interior life. It lies in being really and truly men and women who turn their day into an uninterrupted conversation with God.

573 When you are with someone, you have to see a soul: a soul who has to be helped, who has to be understood, with whom you have to live in harmony, and who has to be saved.

574 You insist on trying to walk on your own, doing your own will, guided solely by your own judgement. And you can see for yourself that the fruit of this is fruitlessness.

My child, if you don't give up your own judgement, if you are proud, if you devote yourself to "your" apostolate, you will work all night — your whole life will be one long night -and at the end of it all the dawn will find you with your nets empty.

575 To think of Christ's Death means to be invited to face up to our everyday tasks with complete sincerity, and to take the faith that we profess seriously.

It has to be an opportunity to go deeper into the depths of God's Love, so as to be able to show that Love to men with our words and deeds.

576 Make sure that your lips, the lips of a Christian — for that is what you are and should be at all times — speak those compelling supernatural words which will move and encourage, and will show your committed attitude to life.

577 There is a great love of comfort, and at times a great irresponsibility, hidden behind the attitude of those in authority who flee from the sorrow of correcting, making the excuse that they want to avoid the suffering of others.

They may perhaps save themselves some discomfort in this life. But they are gambling with eternal happiness — the eternal happiness of others as well as their own — by these omissions of theirs. These omissions are real sins.

578 For many people a saint is an "uncomfortable" person to live with. But this doesn't mean that he has to be unbearable.

A saint's zeal should never be bitter. When he corrects he should never be wounding. His example should never be an arrogant moral slap in his neighbour's face.

579 There was a young priest who used to address Jesus with the words of the Apostles: *Edissere nobis parabolam*, explain the parable to us. He would add: Master, put into our souls the clarity of your teaching, so that it may never be absent from our lives and our works. And so that we can give it to others.

You too should say this to Our Lord.

580 Always have the courage — the humility, the desire to serve God — to put forward the truths of faith as they are, without watering them down, without ambiguity.

581 There is no other possible attitude for a Catholic: we have to defend the authority of the Pope always, and to be ready always to correct our own views with docility, in line with the teaching authority of the Church.

582 A long time ago someone asked me, tactlessly, whether those of us whose career is the priesthood are able to retire when we get old. And since I gave him no answer, he persisted with his impertinent question.

Then an answer came to me which, I thought, put it in a nutshell. "The priesthood", I told him, "is not a career: it is an apostolate."

That's how I feel about it. And I wanted to put it down in these notes so that — with God's help — none of us may ever forget the difference.

583 To have a Catholic spirit means that we should feel on our shoulders the weight of our concern for the entire Church — not just of this or that particular part of it. It means that our prayer should spread out north and south, east and west, in a generous act of petition.

If you do this you will understand the cry — the aspiration — of that friend of ours, when he considered how unloving so many people are towards our Holy Mother: "The Church: it hurts me to see her treated so!"

584 "And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches", Saint Paul wrote. This sigh of the Apostle is a reminder for all Christians — for you, too — of our duty to place at the feet of the Spouse of Christ, of the Holy Church, all that we are and all that we can be; loving her faithfully, even at the cost of livelihood, of honour, of life itself.

585 Don't be scared by it. In so far as you can you should fight against the conspiracy of silence they want to muzzle the Church with. Some people stop her voice being heard; others will not let the good example of those who preach with their deeds be seen; others wipe out every trace of good doctrine..., and so very many cannot bear to hear her.

Don't be scared, I say again. But don't get tired, either, of your task of being a loudspeaker for the teachings of the Magisterium.

586 Become more Roman day by day. Love that blessed quality which is the ornament of the children of the one true Church, for Jesus wanted it to be so.

587 Devotion to Our Lady in Christian souls awakens the supernatural stimulus we need in order to act like *domestici Dei*, as members of God's family.

VICTORY

588 Imitate the Blessed Virgin. Only by openly admitting that we are nothing can we become precious in the eyes of our Creator.

589 I am convinced that John, the young Apostle, is at the side of Christ on the Cross because our Mother draws him there. The Love of Our Lady is so powerful!

590 We will never achieve true supernatural and human cheerfulness, real good humour, if we don't really imitate Jesus: if we aren't humble, as he was.

591 To give oneself sincerely to others is so effective that God rewards it with a humility filled with cheerfulness.

592 Our humiliation, our self-effacement, our disappearing and passing unnoticed, should be complete, entire, total.

593 Sincere humility. What can upset a person who delights in being insulted because he knows that he deserves nothing better?

594 My Jesus: what's mine is yours, because what's yours is mine, and what's mine I abandon in you.

595 Are you able to undergo those humiliations which God asks of you, in matters of no importance, matters where the truth is not obscured? You are not? Then you don't love the virtue of humility.

596 Pride dulls the edge of charity. Ask Our Lord each day for the virtue of humility, for you and for everyone. Because as the years go by, pride increases if it is not corrected in time.

597 Is there anything more displeasing than a child acting the grown-up? How can a poor man — a child — be pleasing to God if he "acts grown-up", puffed up by pride, sure that he's worth something and trusting only in himself?

598 Certainly you can go to Hell. You are convinced it could happen, for in your heart you find the seeds of all kinds of evil.

But if you become a child in front of God, that fact will bring you close to your Father God, and to your Mother, Holy Mary. And Saint Joseph and your Angel will not leave you unprotected when they see you are a child.

Have faith. Do as much as you can. Be penitent, and be Loving. They will supply whatever else you need.

599 How difficult it is to live humility! As the popular wisdom of Christianity says, "Pride dies twenty-four hours after its owner."

So when you think you're right, against what you are being told by someone who has been given a special grace from God to guide your soul, be sure that you are completely wrong.

600 Serving and forming children, caring lovingly for the sick.

To make ourselves understood by simple souls, we have to humble our intellect; to understand poor sick people we have to humble our heart. In this way, on our knees in both body and mind, it is easy to reach Jesus along that sure way of human wretchedness, of our own wretchedness. It will lead us to make 'a nothing' of ourselves in order to let God build on our nothingness.

601 A resolution: unless I really have to, never to speak of my personal affairs.

602 Thank Jesus for the confidence he gives you. It's not stubbornness, but God's light that makes you firm as a rock. Meanwhile, others, good as they are, present a sorry picture. They seem to be sinking in the sand. They lack the foundation of the faith.

Ask Our Lord to grant that the demands of the virtue of faith may be met both in your life and in the lives of others.

603 If I behaved differently, if I were more in control of my character, if I were more faithful to you, Lord, how marvellously would you help us!

604 Your Father God puts a longing for atonement in your soul. That longing will be satisfied if you unite your own poor expiation to the infinite merits of Jesus.

Rectify your intention, and love suffering in him, with him, and through him.

605 You have no idea whether you are making progress, or, if you are, how much. But what use is such a reckoning to you?

What is important is that you should persevere, that your heart should be on fire, that you should be more enlightened and descry farther horizons; that you should strive for our intentions, that you should feel them as your own — even though you don't know what they are — and that you should pray for all of them.

606 Tell him: Jesus, I cannot see a single perfect flower in my garden, all are blighted. It seems that all have lost their colour and their scent. Poor me! Face downwards in the muck, on the ground: that's my place.

That's the way, humble yourself. He will conquer in you, and you will attain the victory.

607 I understood you very well when you ended up saying: "Quite honestly, I haven't even made the grade of being a donkey — the donkey that was the throne of Jesus when he entered Jerusalem. I'm just part of a disgusting heap of dirty tatters that the poorest rag-picker would ignore."

But I told you: all the same, God has chosen you and wants you to be his instrument. So your wretchedness — which is a genuine fact — should turn into one more reason for you to be thankful to God for calling you.

608 Mary's humble song of joy, the Magnificat, recalls to our minds the infinite generosity of the Lord towards those who become like children, towards those who abase themselves and are sincerely aware that they are nothing.

609 God is very pleased with those who recognise his goodness by reciting the Te Deum in thanksgiving whenever something out of the ordinary happens, without caring whether it may have been good or bad, as the world reckons these things. For everything comes from the hands of our Father: so though the blow of the chisel may hurt our flesh, it is a sign of Love, as he smooths off our rough edges and brings us closer to perfection.

610 When human beings have work to do they try to use the right tools for the job.

If I had lived in another century, I would have written with a quill pen: now I use a fountain pen.

But when God wants to carry out some piece of work, he uses unsuitable means, so that it can be seen that the work is his. You have heard me say this very often.

So you and I, who are aware of the massive weight of our failings, should tell him: "Lord, wretched as I am, I still understand that in your hands I am a divine instrument."

611 We will dedicate all the exertions of our life, great and small, to the honour of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

I am moved when I recall the work of those brilliant professionals — two engineers and two architects — cheerfully moving furniture into a student residence. When they had put a blackboard into a classroom, the first thing those four artists wrote was: Deo omnis gloria! — all the glory to God.

Jesus, I know that this pleased you greatly.

612 Wherever you may happen to be, remember that the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve. Be sure that anyone who wants to follow him cannot attempt to act in any other way.

613 God has a special right over us, his children: it is the right to our response to his love, in spite of our failings. This inescapable truth puts us under an obligation which we cannot shirk. But it also gives us complete confidence: we are instruments in the hands of God, instruments that he relies on every day. That is why, every day, we struggle to serve him.

614 God expects his instruments to do what they can to be fit and ready: you should strive to make sure you are always fit and ready.

615 I have come to see that every Hail Mary, every greeting to Our Lady, is a new beat of a heart in love.

616 Our life — a Christian's life — has to be as ordinary as this: trying every day to do well those very things it is our duty to do; carrying out our divine mission in the world by fulfilling the little duty of each moment.

Or rather, struggling to fulfil it. Sometimes we don't manage, and when night comes, in our examination, we'll have to tell Our Lord, "I am not offering you virtues; today I can only offer you defects. But with your grace I will be able to count myself a victor."

617 I wish with all my heart that God, in his mercy, in spite of your sins (may you never offend Jesus again!), may make you constantly live that blessed life which is to love his Will.

618 In God's service there are no unimportant posts: all are of great importance.

The importance of the post depends on the spiritual level reached by the person filling it.

619 Aren't you glad to have the sure confidence that God is interested in even the tiniest details of his creatures?

620 Show him again that you really want to be his. "Jesus, help me. Make me really yours; may I burn and be consumed, by dint of little things that no one notices."

621 The Holy Rosary: the joys, the sorrows, and the glories of the life of Our Lady weave a crown of praises, repeated ceaselessly by the Angels and the Saints in Heaven — and by those who love our Mother here on earth.

Practise this holy devotion every day, and spread it.

622 Baptism makes us fideles, faithful. This is a word that was used — like sancti, the saints — by the first followers of Jesus to refer to one another. These words are still used today: we speak of the faithful of the Church.

Think about this.

623 God does not let himself be outdone in generosity. Be very sure that he grants faithfulness to those who give themselves to him.

624 Don't be afraid to be demanding on yourself. Many souls do so in their hidden inner life, so that only Jesus may shine out.

I wish you and I would react as that person did who wanted to be very close to God, on the feast of the Holy Family. In those days it was celebrated within the octave of the Epiphany.

"I have had a number of little crosses. There was one yesterday that hurt so much it made me weep. Today it made me think that my Father and Lord Saint Joseph, and my Mother, Holy Mary, won't have left this child of theirs without its Christmas present. The present was the light that made me see my thanklessness to Jesus in my failing to correspond to his grace; and to see how mistaken I was to resist, by my boorish behaviour, the most Holy Will of God, who wants me as his instrument."

625 When the holy women reached the tomb, they found that the stone had been rolled aside.

This is what always happens: when we make up our minds to do what we should, the difficulties are easily overcome.

626 Be convinced that if you do not learn to obey you will never be effective.

627 When you are told what to do, let no one show more alacrity than you in obeying; whether it is hot or cold, whether you feel keen or are tired, whether you are young or less so, it makes no odds.

Someone who "does not know how to obey" will never learn to command.

628 It's remarkably stupid for a Director to be content with a soul rendering four when it could be rendering twelve.

629 You have to obey — and you have to command — always with great love.

630 Help me with your prayer. I want all of us within Holy Church to feel that we are members of the same body, as the Apostle asks of us. I want us to be vividly and profoundly aware, without any lack of interest, of the joys, the troubles, the progress of our Mother who is one, holy, catholic, apostolic, Roman.

I want us to live as one, each of us identified with the cares of the others, and all identified with Christ.

631 Convince yourself, my child, that lack of unity within the Church is death.

632 Pray to God that in the Holy Church, our Mother, the hearts of all may be one heart, as they were in the earliest times of Christianity; so that the words of Scripture may be truly fulfilled until the end of the ages: *Multitudinis autem credentium erat cor unum et anima una* — the company of the faithful were of one heart and one soul.

I am saying this to you in all seriousness: may this holy unity not come to any harm through you. Take it to your prayer.

633 Faithfulness to the Pope includes a clear and definite duty: that of knowing his thought, which he tells us in Encyclicals or other documents. We have to do our part to help all Catholics pay attention to the teaching of the Holy Father, and bring their everyday behaviour into line with it.

634 I pray every day with all my heart that God may give us the gift of tongues. Such a gift of tongues does not mean knowing a number of languages, but knowing how to adapt oneself to the capacities of one's hearers.

It's not a question of "simplifying the message to get through to the masses", but of speaking words of wisdom in clear Christian speech that all can understand.

This is the gift of tongues that I ask of Our Lord and of his Holy Mother for all their children.

635 A few are wicked, and many are ignorant: that is how the enemy of God and of the Church reigns.

Let us confound the wicked, and enlighten the minds of the ignorant. With the help of God, and with our effort, we will save the world.

636 We have to try to ensure that in all fields of intellectual activity there are upright people, people with a true Christian conscience, who are consistent in their lives, who can use the weapons of knowledge in the service of humanity and of the Church.

Their presence will be necessary because in the world there will always be, as there were when Jesus came on earth, new Herods who try to make use of knowledge — even if they have to falsify it — to persecute Christ and those who belong to him.

What a great task we have ahead of us!

637 In your work with souls — and all your activity should be work with souls — be filled with faith, with hope, with love, because all the difficulties will be overcome.

To confirm this truth for us, the Psalmist wrote: *Et tu, Domine, deridebis eos: ad nihilum deduces omnes gentes* — You, O Lord, will laugh at them: You will bring them to nothing.

These words confirm those other words: *Non praevalerunt*; the enemies of God shall not prevail. They will not have any power against the Church, nor against those who serve the Church as instruments of God.

638 Our Holy Mother the Church, in a magnificent outpouring of love, is scattering the seed of the Gospel throughout the world; from Rome to the outposts of the earth.

As you help in this work of expansion throughout the whole world, bring those in the outposts to the Pope, so that the earth may be one flock and one Shepherd: one apostolate!

639 *Regnare Christum volumus!*: we want Christ to reign. *Deo omnis gloria!*: all the glory to God.

This ideal of warring, and winning, with Christ's weapons will only become a reality through prayer and sacrifice, through faith and Love.

Well, then: pray, believe, suffer, Love!

640 The work of the Church, each day, is like the weaving of a great fabric which we offer to God: because all of us who are baptised make up the Church.

If we carry out our tasks, faithfully and selflessly, this great fabric will be beautiful and flawless. But if we loosen a thread here, a thread there, another over there... instead of a beautiful fabric we will have a tattered rag.

641 Why don't you make up your mind to make that fraternal correction? Receiving one hurts, because it is hard to humble oneself, at least to begin with. But making a fraternal correction is always hard. Everyone knows this.

Making fraternal corrections is the best way you can help, after prayer and good example.

642 He has shown that He trusts you, by bringing you to the Church. So you have to have the balance, the calm, the strength, the human and supernatural prudence of a mature person, those qualities that it takes many people many years to acquire.

Don't forget what you learnt in your Catechism: that "a Christian" means a man or woman who has faith in Jesus Christ.

643 You want to be strong? Then first realise that you are very weak. After that, trust in Christ, your Father, your Brother, your Teacher. He makes us strong, entrusting to us the means with which to conquer — the sacraments. Live them!

644 I understood you very well when you confessed to me: I want to steep myself in the liturgy of the Holy Mass.

645 How great is the value of piety in the Holy Liturgy!

I was not at all surprised when someone said to me a few days ago, talking about a model priest who had died recently: "What a saint he was!"

"Did you know him well?" I asked.

"No," he said, "but I once saw him saying the Mass."

646 Since you call yourself a Christian, you have to live the Sacred Liturgy of the Church, putting genuine care into your prayer and mortification for priests — especially for new priests — on the days marked out for this intention, and when you know that they are to receive the Sacrament of Order.

647 Offer your prayer, your atonement, and your action for this end: *ut sint unum!* — that all of us Christians may share one will, one heart, one spirit. This is so that *omnes cum Petro ad Iesum per Mariam* — that we may all go to Jesus, closely united to the Pope, through Mary.

648 You ask me, my child, what you can do to make me very pleased with you.

If Our Lord is satisfied with you, then I am too. And you can know that He is happy with you, by the peace and joy in your heart.

649 A clear mark of the man of God, of the woman of God, is the peace in their souls: they have peace and they give peace to the people they have dealings with.

650 Get used to replying to those poor "haters", when they pelt you with stones, by pelting them with Hail Marys.

651 Don't worry if your work seems barren just now. When it is holiness that is being sown, it is not lost: others will gather in the harvest.

652 Even though you gain little light in your prayer, even though it seems dry and irksome, you should consider, with a sure, ever-new insight, that you need to persevere in every detail of your life of piety.

653 You grew in the face of difficulties in the apostolate when you prayed: "Lord, You are the same as ever. Give me the faith of those men who knew how to correspond to your grace, who worked great miracles, real marvels, in your Name..." And you finished off: "I know that you will do it; but I also know that you want to be asked. You want to be sought out. You want us to knock hard at the doors of your Heart."

At the end you renewed your resolve to persevere in humble and trusting prayer.

654 When you are troubled... and also in the hour of success, say again and again, "Lord, don't let go of me, don't leave me, help me as you would a clumsy child; always lead me by the hand!"

655 *Aquae multae non potuerunt exstinguere caritatem!* — the great turmoil of waters could not quench the fire of charity. I offer you two interpretations of these words of Holy Scripture. First: the throng of your past sins, now that you have fully repented of them, will not take you away from the Love of our God; and a second one: the waters of misunderstanding, the difficulties that you are perhaps encountering, should not interrupt your apostolic work.

656 Work on to the end, to the very end! My child, *qui perseveraverit usque in finem, hic salvus erit* — it is the one who perseveres right to the end who will be saved.

We children of God have the means we need: you too! We will finish, we will top out our building, for we can do all things in Him who strengthens us.

With God there are no impossibles. They are overcome always.

657 Sometimes the immediate future is full of worries, if we stop seeing things in a supernatural way.

So, faith, my child, faith — and more deeds. In that way it is certain that our Father-God will continue to solve your problems.

658 God's ordinary providence is a continual miracle; but He will use extraordinary means when they are required.

659 Christian optimism is not a sugary optimism; nor is it a mere human confidence that everything will turn out all right.

It is an optimism that sinks its roots in an awareness of our freedom, and in the sure knowledge of the power of grace. It is an optimism which leads us to make demands on ourselves, to struggle to respond at every moment to God's calls.

660 The Lord's triumph, on the day of the Resurrection, is final. Where are the soldiers the rulers posted there? Where are the seals that were fixed to the stone of

the tomb? Where are those who condemned the Master? Where are those who crucified Jesus? He is victorious, and faced with his victory those poor wretches have all taken flight.

Be filled with hope: Jesus Christ is always victorious.

661 If you look for Mary, you will necessarily find Jesus; and you will learn, in greater and greater depth, what there is in the Heart of God.

662 When you are preparing for a work of apostolate, make your own these words of a man who was seeking God: "Today I start to preach a retreat for priests. God grant we may draw profit from it — and, first of all, myself!"

And later: "I have been on this retreat for several days now. There are a hundred and twenty on it. I hope that Our Lord will do good work in our souls."

663 My child, it's worth your while being humble, obedient, loyal. Drench yourself in the spirit of God, so as to be able to carry it from where you are, from your place of work, to all the peoples that fill the earth!

664 During a war, the courage of the soldiers facing the enemy would be of little use if there were not others who seem to take no part in the struggle but who supply the fighting men with armament and food and medicines...

Without the prayer and sacrifice of many souls there would be no genuine apostolate of action.

665 The power of working miracles! How many dead — and even rotting — souls you will raise, if you let Christ act in you.

In those days, the Gospel tells us, the Lord was passing by; and they, the sick, called to him and sought him out. Now, too, Christ is passing by, in your Christian life. If you help him, many will come to know him, will call to him, will ask him for help: and their eyes will be opened to the marvellous light of grace.

666 You insist on doing your own thing, and so your work is barren.

Obey: be docile. Each cog in a machine must be put in its place. If not, the machine stops, or the parts get damaged. It will surely not produce anything, or if it does, then very little. In the same way, a man or a woman outside his or her proper field of action, will be more of a hindrance than an instrument of apostolate.

667 The apostle has no aim other than letting God work, making himself available.

668 The first Twelve, too, were strangers in the lands where they taught the Gospel. They came up against people whose world was built on foundations completely opposed to Christ's doctrine.

Look: despite these adverse circumstances, they knew that they had been entrusted with the divine message of the Redemption. And so the Apostle cries, "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!"

669 Our lives can effectively co-redeem, in an eternal way, only if we act with humility, passing unnoticed, so that others can discover Him.

670 When the children of God act in their apostolate, they have to be like those great lighting systems which fill the world with light, but the lamp is not seen.

671 Jesus says: "He who hears you hears me."

Do you still think it is your words that convince people? Don't forget either that the Holy Spirit can carry out his plans with the most useless instrument.

672 Saint Ambrose has some words that fit the children of God marvellously well. He is speaking of the ass's colt, tethered to its dam, which Jesus needed for his triumph: "Only an order of the Lord could untie it", he says. "It was set loose by the hands of the Apostles. To do such a deed, one needs a special way of living and a special grace. You too must be an apostle, to set free those who are captive."

Let me comment on this text for you once more. How often, upon a word from Jesus, will we have to loosen souls from their bonds, because he needs them for his triumph! May our hands be apostles' hands, and our actions, and our lives also. Then God will give us an apostle's grace, too, to break the fetters of those who are enchained.

673 We can never attribute to ourselves the power of Jesus who is passing by amongst us. Our Lord is passing by: and he transforms souls when we come close to him with one heart, one feeling, one desire: to be good Christians. But it is he who does it: not you nor I. It is Christ who is passing by!

And then he stays in our hearts — in yours and in mine -and in our tabernacles.

Jesus is passing by, and Jesus comes to stay. He stays in you, in each one of you, and in me.

674 Our Lord wants to make us co-redeemers with him.

That is why to help us understand this marvel, he moves the evangelists to tell us of so many great wonders. He could have produced bread from anything... but he doesn't! He looks for human co-operation: he "needs" a child, a boy, a few pieces of bread and some fish.

He needs you and me: and he is God! This should move us to be generous in our corresponding with his grace.

675 If you help him, even with a trifle, as the Apostles did, He is ready to work miracles; to multiply the bread, to reform wills, to give light to the most benighted minds, to enable those who have never been upright to be so, with an extraordinary grace.

All this he will do... and more, if you will help him with what you have.

676 Jesus has died. He is a corpse. Those holy women had no expectations. They had seen how he had been abused, and how he had been crucified. How vivid in their minds was the violence of the Passion he had undergone!

They knew, too, that the soldiers were keeping watch over the place. They knew that the tomb was sealed shut: "Who will roll away the stone for us from the door?" they asked themselves, for it was a massive slab. But all the same, in spite of everything, they went to be with him.

Look: difficulties, large and small, can be seen at once. But if there is love, one pays no heed to those obstacles: one goes ahead with daring, with conviction, with courage. Don't you have to confess your shame when you contemplate the drive, the daring and the courage of these women?

677 Mary, your Mother, will bring you to the Love of Jesus. There you will be cum gaudio et pace, with joy and peace. And you will be always "brought", because on your own you would fall and get covered with mud: you will be brought onward, brought to believe, to love, and to suffer.

WORK

678 From Saint Paul's teaching, we know that we have to renew the world in the spirit of Jesus Christ, that we have to place Our Lord at the summit and at the heart of all things.

Do you think you are carrying this out in your work, in your professional task?

679 Why don't you try converting your whole life into the service of God — your work and your rest, your tears and your smiles?

You can... and you must!

680 Each and every creature, each and every event of this life, without exception, must be steps which take you to God, which move you to know him and love him, to give him thanks, and to strive to make everyone else know and love him.

681 We are under an obligation to work, and to work conscientiously, with a sense of responsibility, with love and perseverance, without any shirking or frivolity. Because work is a command from God, and God is to be obeyed, as the Psalmist says, in laetitia, joyfully!

682 We have to conquer for Christ every noble human value.

683 When a person really lives charity, there is no time left for self-seeking. There is no room left for pride. We will not find occasion for anything but service!

684 Every activity — be it of great human importance or not -must become for you a means to serve Our Lord and your fellow men. That is the true measure of its importance.

685 Work always and in everything with sacrifice, in order to put Christ at the summit of all human activities.

686 Correspondence to grace is to be found also in the ordinary little things of each day, which seem unimportant and yet have the over-riding importance of Love.

687 You cannot forget that any worthy, noble and honest work at the human level can — and should! — be raised to the supernatural level, becoming a divine task.

688 As Jesus, who is our Lord and Model, grows in and lives as one of us, he reveals to us that human life — your life — and its humdrum, ordinary business, have a meaning which is divine, which belongs to eternity.

689 You should be full of wonder at the goodness of our Father God. Are you not filled with joy to know that your home, your family, your country, which you love so much, are the raw material which you must sanctify?

690 My daughter, you have set up a home. I like to remind you that you women — as you well know — have a great strength, which you know how to enfold within a special gentleness, so that it is not noticed. With that strength, you can make your husband and children instruments of God, or demons.

You will always make them instruments of God: he is counting on your help.

691 I am moved that the Apostle should call Christian marriage sacramentum magnum — a great sacrament. From this, too, I deduce the enormous importance of the task of parents.

You share in the creative power of God: that is why human love is holy, good and noble. It is a gladness of heart which God — in his loving providence — wants others freely to give up.

Each child that God grants you is a wonderful blessing from him: don't be afraid of children!

692 In conversations I have had with so many married couples, I tell them often that while both they and their children are alive, they should help them to be saints, while being well aware that none of us will be a saint on earth. All we will do is struggle, struggle, struggle.

And I also tell them: you Christian mothers and fathers are a great spiritual motor, sending the strength of God to your own ones, strength for that struggle, strength to win, strength to be saints. Don't let them down!

693 Don't be afraid of loving others, for His sake: and don't worry about loving your own people even more, provided that no matter how much you love them, you love Him a million times more.

694 Coepit facere et docere — Jesus began to do and then to teach. You and I have to bear witness with our example, because we cannot live a double life. We cannot

preach what we do not practise. In other words, we have to teach what we are at least struggling to put into practice.

695 Christian: you have the obligation of being an example in everything you do: including being an example as a citizen, in your fulfilment of the laws directed to the common good.

696 You are very demanding. You want everyone else, including those who work in the public service, to carry out their obligations. "It is their duty!" you say. Have you then ever thought about whether you respect your own timetable, whether you carry it out conscientiously?

697 Carry out all your duties as a citizen. Do not try to get out of any of your obligations. Exercise all your rights, too, for the good of society, without making any rash exceptions.

You must give Christian witness in that also.

698 If we really want to sanctify our work, we have inescapably to fulfil the first condition: that of working, and working well, with human and supernatural seriousness.

699 Your charity should be likeable. Without neglecting prudence and naturalness, try to have a smile on your lips for everyone at all times, though you may be weeping inside. The service you give to others should be unstinting too.

700 That half-finished work of yours is a caricature of the holocaust, the total offering God is asking of you.

701 If you say that you want to imitate Christ... and yet have time on your hands, then you are on the road to lukewarmness.

702 Professional work — and the work of a housewife is one of the greatest of professions — is a witness to the worth of the human creature. It provides a chance to develop one's own personality; it creates a bond of union with others; it constitutes a fund of resources; it is a way of helping in the improvement of the society we live in, and of promoting the progress of the whole human race...

For a Christian, these grand views become even deeper and wider. For work, which Christ took up as something both redeemed and redeeming, becomes a means, a way of holiness, a specific task which sanctifies and can be sanctified.

703 The Lord wants his children, those of us who have received the gift of faith, to proclaim the original optimistic view of creation, the love for the world which is at the heart of the Christian message.

So there should always be enthusiasm in your professional work, and in your effort to build up the earthly city.

704 You must be careful: don't let your professional success or failure — which will certainly come — make you forget, even for a moment, what the true aim of your work is: the glory of God!

705 Christian responsibility in work cannot be limited to just putting in the hours. It means carrying out the task with technical and professional competence... and, above all, with love of God.

706 What a pity to be killing time when time is a treasure from God!

707 All honest professions can and must be sanctified. No child of God, then, has a right to say: I cannot do apostolate.

708 You must draw from the hidden life of Jesus this further consequence: you must not be in a hurry... even though you are!

First and foremost, that is, comes the interior life. Everything else — the apostolate, any apostolate — is a corollary.

709 Face up to the problems of this world with a sense of the supernatural, and following the principles of ethics. They do not threaten or undermine your personality: they provide a framework for it.

In this way you will bring to your behaviour a living strength which will win people over; and you will be confirmed in your progress along the right path.

710 God Our Lord wants you to be holy, so that you can make others holy. For this to be possible you need to look at yourself with courage and frankness; you need to look at the Lord Our God; then, and only then, you need to look at the world.

711 Encourage your noble human qualities. They can be the beginning of the building of your sanctification. At the same time, remember what I have already told you before, that when serving God, you have to burn everything, even "what people will say", and if necessary even what they call reputation.

712 You need formation, because you need a profound sense of responsibility, if you are to encourage and direct the activity of Catholics in public life and do so with the respect that everyone's freedom deserves, reminding each and every one that they have to be consistent with their faith.

713 Through your professional work, which you bring to completion with all the human and supernatural perfection that is possible, you can and should give Christian standards in the places where you carry out your profession or job.

714 As a Christian you have a duty to act and not stand aloof, making your contribution to serve the common good loyally and with personal freedom.

715 We children of God, who are citizens with the same standing as any others, have to take part fearlessly in all honest human activities and organizations, so that Christ may be present in them.

Our Lord will ask a strict account of each one of us if through neglect or love of comfort we do not freely strive to play a part in the human developments and decisions on which the present and future of society depend.

716 With a sense of profound humility — strong in the name of our God, and, as the Psalmist says, not "in the numbers of our chariots and of our horses" — we have to make sure, without regard for human considerations, that there are no corners of society where Christ is not known.

717 Freely, according to your own interests and talents, you have to take an active, effective part in the wholesome public or private associations of your country, in a way that is full of the Christian spirit. Such organizations never fail to make some difference to people's temporal or eternal good.

718 Struggle to make sure that those human institutions and structures in which you work and move with the full rights of a citizen, are in accordance with the principles which govern a Christian view of life.

In this way you can be sure that you are giving people the means to live according to their real worth; and you will enable many souls, with the grace of God, to respond personally to their Christian vocation.

719 It is a Christian's duty, and a citizen's duty, to defend and promote, out of piety and general culture, those monuments that are found along streets and highways — the wayside crosses, the images of Our Lady, and the like. We should restore those which vandalism or the weather have damaged or destroyed.

720 We have to stand out boldly against those "damning freedoms" — those daughters of licence, granddaughters of evil passions, great granddaughters of original sin — which come down, as you can see, in a direct line from the devil.

721 For the sake of the objective truth, and to put a stop to the damage they do, I have to insist that we should give neither publicity nor hosannas to the enemies of God; not even after they are dead.

722 Nowadays our Mother the Church is being attacked in the social field and by the governments of nations. That is why God is sending his children — is sending you! — to struggle, and to spread the truth in those areas.

723 You are an ordinary citizen. It is precisely because of that secularity of yours, which is the same as, and neither more nor less than, that of your colleagues, that you have to be sufficiently brave — which may sometimes mean being very brave — to make your faith felt. They should see your good works and the motive that drives you to do them.

724 Children of God — like yourself — cannot be afraid of living in the professional or social surroundings which are proper to them. They are never alone!

God Our Lord, who always goes with you, grants you the means to be faithful to him, and to bring others to him.

725 All for Love! This is the way of holiness, the way of happiness.

Face up to your intellectual tasks, the highest things of the spirit and also those things that are most down to earth, the things we all of necessity have to do, with this in mind; and you will live joyfully and with peace.

726 As a Christian, you can give way, within the limits of faith and morals, in everything that is your own; you can give way with all your heart. But in what belongs to Jesus Christ, you cannot give way!

727 When you have to give orders, do not humiliate anyone. Go gently. Respect the intelligence and the will of the one who is obeying.

728 Naturally, you have to use earthly means. But put a lot of effort into being detached from everything of the earth, so that you can deal with it with your mind always fixed on the service of God and of your fellow men.

729 Plan everything? Everything! you told me. All right: we need to use our prudence. But bear in mind that human undertakings, whether they are hard or simple, always have to count on a margin of the unforeseen; and that a Christian should never shut off the road of hope, or be forgetful of God's Providence.

730 You have to work with such supernatural vision that you let yourself be absorbed by your activity only in order to make it divine. In this way the earthly becomes divine, the temporal eternal.

731 Things done in the service of God never fail through lack of money: they fail through lack of spirit.

732 Aren't you glad to feel the poverty of Jesus so close to you? How splendid it is to be lacking even what is necessary! But in our case, as in his, it should pass silently and unnoticed.

733 Sincere devotion — true love of God — leads us to work hard, to fulfil the duty of each day, even though it is far from easy.

734 People have often drawn attention to the danger of deeds performed without any interior life to inspire them; but we should also stress the danger of an interior life — if such a thing is possible — without deeds to show for it.

735 The interior struggle doesn't take us away from our temporal business — it makes us finish it off better!

736 Your life cannot be the repetition of actions which are monotonously all the same, because the next one should be more upright, more effective, more full of love than the last. Each day should mean new light, new enthusiasm — for Him!

737 Every single day, do what you can to know God better, to get acquainted with him, to fall more in love with him each moment, and to think of nothing but of his Love and his glory.

You will carry out this plan, my child, if you never, for any reason whatever, give up your times of prayer, your presence of God, with the aspirations and spiritual communions that set you on fire, your unhurried Holy Mass, and your work, finished off well for him.

738 I will never share the opinion — though I respect it — of those who separate prayer from active life, as if they were incompatible.

We children of God have to be contemplatives: people who, in the midst of the din of the throng, know how to find silence of soul in a lasting conversation with Our Lord, people who know how to look at him as they look at a Father, as they look at a Friend, as they look at someone with whom they are madly in love.

739 Those who are pious, with a piety devoid of affectation, carry out their professional duty perfectly, since they know that their work is a prayer raised to God.

740 Our being children of God, I insist, leads us to have a contemplative spirit in the midst of all human activities; to be light, salt and leaven through our prayer, through our mortification, through our knowledge of religion and of our profession. We will carry out this aim: the more within the world we are, the more we must be God's.

741 Good gold and diamonds lie far down in the depths of the earth, not within everyone's reach.

Your task of holiness — your holiness and that of others — depends on your fervour, your cheerfulness, your everyday, obscure, normal, ordinary work.

742 In our ordinary behaviour we need a power far greater than that of the legendary King Midas, who changed all he touched to gold.

We have to change, through love, the human work of our usual working day into the work of God: something that will last for ever.

743 If you put your mind to it, everything in your life can be offered to the Lord, can provide an opportunity to talk with your Father in Heaven, who is always keeping new illumination for you, and granting it to you.

744 Work with cheerfulness, with peace, with presence of God.

In this way you will also carry out your task with common sense. You will carry it through to the end. Though tiredness is beating you down, you will finish it off well; and your works will be pleasing to God.

745 You should maintain throughout the day a constant conversation with Our Lord, a conversation fed even by the things that happen in your professional work.

Go in spirit to the Tabernacle... and offer to God the work that is in your hands.

746 From there, where you are working, let your heart escape to the Lord, right close to the Tabernacle, to tell him, without doing anything odd, "My Jesus, I love You".

Don't be afraid to call him so — my Jesus — and to say it to him often.

747 A priest who was saying the Divine Office prepared himself for prayer in this way: "I will follow the rule of saying, when I start: 'I want to pray as the saints pray', and then I will invite my Guardian Angel to sing the Lord's praises with me."

Try this in your own vocal prayer, and also as a way of increasing your presence of God in your work.

748 You have received God's call to a specific way: it is to be at all the crossroads of the world, while remaining all the while, and as you carry out your professional work, in God.

749 Don't ever lose the supernatural point of view. Correct your intention as the course of a ship is corrected on the high seas: by looking at the star, by looking at Mary. Then you will always be sure of reaching harbour.

CRUCIBLE

750 I don't ask you to take away my feelings, Lord, because I can use them to serve you with: but I ask you to put them through the crucible.

751 Faced with the marvels of God, and with all our human failures, we have to make this admission: "You are everything to me. Use me as you wish!" Then, for you — for us — there will be no more loneliness.

752 The great secret of sanctity comes down to becoming more and more like Him, the only and most lovable Model.

753 When you pray, but see nothing, and feel flustered and dry, then the way is this: don't think of yourself. Instead, turn your eyes to the Passion of Jesus Christ, our Redeemer.

Be convinced that he is asking each one of us, as he asked those three most intimate Apostles of his in the Garden of Olives, to "Watch and pray."

754 When you open the Holy Gospel, think that what is written there — the words and deeds of Christ — is something that you should not only know, but live. Everything, every point that is told there, has been gathered, detail by detail, for you to make it come alive in the individual circumstances of your life.

God has called us Catholics to follow him closely. In that holy Writing you will find the Life of Jesus, but you should also find your own life there.

You too, like the Apostle, will learn to ask, full of love, "Lord, what would you have me do?" And in your soul you will hear the conclusive answer, "The Will of God!"

Take up the Gospel every day, then, and read it and live it as a definite rule. This is what the saints have done.

755 If you really want your heart to respond in a genuine way, I would recommend you to enter one of the Wounds of Our Lord. In this way you will get to know him closely, you will cleave to him, you will feel his Heart beating... and you will follow him in everything that he asks of you.

756 There can be no doubt that for us who love Jesus, prayer is the great pain-reliever.

757 The Cross symbolises the life of an apostle of Christ. It brings a strength and a truth that delight both soul and body, though sometimes it is hard, and one can feel its weight.

758 I understand. Through Love, you want to suffer with Christ: you want to put your back between him and the butchers who are flogging him; to offer your head instead of his for the thorns, and your hands and feet for the nails. Or at least you want to accompany our Mother, Holy Mary, on Calvary, and to plead guilty to decide on account of your sins... and to suffer and to love.

759 You tell me: I have made up my mind to go more often to the Paraclete, to ask him for his light.

Good. But remember, my child, that the Holy Spirit comes as a result of the Cross.

760 The cheerful love that fills the soul with happiness is founded on suffering. There is no love without renunciation.

761 Christ is nailed to the Cross. And you? Still taken up with your whims and fancies — or rather, nailed by them!

762 We cannot, must not, be easy-going Christians: on earth there must be sorrow and the Cross.

763 In this life of ours we must expect the Cross. Those who do not expect the Cross are not Christians, and they will be unable to avoid their own "cross", which will drive them to despair.

764 Now, when the Cross has become a serious and weighty matter, Jesus will see to it that we are filled with peace. He will become our Simon of Cyrene, to lighten the load for us.

Then say to him, trustingly: "Lord, what kind of a Cross is this? A Cross which is no cross. Now I know the trick. It is to abandon myself in you; and from now on, with your help, all my crosses will always be like this."

765 Renew in your own soul the resolution that friend of ours made long ago: "Lord, what I want is suffering, not exhibitionism."

766 To have found the Cross is to have found happiness: it is to have found you, Lord!

767 What really makes a person — or a whole sector of society — unhappy, is the anxiety-ridden, selfish search for well-being, that desire to get rid of whatever is upsetting.

768 The way of Love has a name: it is Sacrifice.

769 The Cross, the Holy Cross, is heavy.

First there are my sins. Then the sad truth of our Mother the Church's suffering. For so many Catholics are apathetic: they want, without really wanting. And those we love are separated from us, for all kinds of reasons. And other people or we ourselves are suffering illness and trials.

The Cross, the Holy Cross, is heavy. Fiat, adimpleatur...! "May the most just, the most lovable Will of God be done, be fulfilled, be praised and exalted above all things for ever! Amen. Amen."

770 When you walk where Christ walked; when you are no longer just resigned to the Cross, but your whole soul takes on its form — takes on its very shape; when you love the Will of God; when you actually love the Cross... then, only then, is it He who carries it.

771 Join your suffering, your Cross that comes from within or without, to the Will of God, by saying a generous Fiat! And you will be filled with joy and with peace.

772 These are the unmistakable signs of the true Cross of Christ: serenity, a deep feeling of peace, a love which is ready for any sacrifice, a great effectiveness which wells from Christ's own wounded Side. And always — and very evidently - cheerfulness: a cheerfulness which comes from knowing that those who truly give themselves are beside the Cross, and therefore beside Our Lord.

773 You must always be aware of and thankful for that favour of the King which throughout your life marks your flesh and your spirit with the royal seal of the Holy Cross.

774 That friend of ours wrote: "I carry a little Crucifix. Its Crucified is worn by use and by the kisses it receives. It was left to my father when his mother, who had used it, died.

It's a poor thing and much the worse for wear, so I would not have the nerve to give it away to anyone. That's why when I see it my love for the Cross will grow."

775 There was a priest who prayed in a moment of affliction: "Jesus, let whatever Cross You want come to me. I resolve here and now to receive it joyfully, and I bless it with all the richness of my blessing as a priest."

776 When you receive a hard knock, a Cross, you should not be downcast. Rather the reverse: with a happy face you should give thanks to God.

777 Yesterday I saw a picture which moved me profoundly, a picture of Jesus lying dead. An angel was kissing his left hand with an inexpressible devotion. Another, at the Saviour's feet, was holding a nail torn out of the Cross. In the foreground with his back to us there was a tubby little angel weeping as he gazed at Christ.

I prayed to God that they would let me have the picture. It is beautiful. It breathes devotion. I was saddened to hear that they had shown it to a prospective buyer who had refused to take it, saying, "It's a corpse!" To me, You will always be Life.

778 Lord, I have no qualms in repeating this thousands of times: I want to keep you company, suffering with you, in the humiliations and cruelties of your Passion and Cross.

779 To find the Cross is to find Christ.

780 Jesus, may your Divine Blood enter my veins, to make me live the generosity of the Cross at every moment.

781 Look at Jesus hanging dead on the Cross, and pray. In this way the Life and Death of Christ can become the model and the spur of your life, and for your answer to the Will of God.

782 At the moment of sorrow or expiation, remember this: the Cross is the symbol of the redeeming Christ. It has ceased to be the symbol of evil, becoming instead the sign of victory.

783 Among the ingredients of your meal include that most delicious of ingredients, mortification.

784 To do great mortifications some days, and nothing on others, is not the spirit of penance.

The spirit of penance means knowing how to overcome yourself every single day, offering up both great and small things for love, without being noticed.

785 If we join our own little things, those insignificant or big difficulties of ours, to the great sufferings of Our Lord, the Victim (He is the only Victim!), their value will increase. They will become a treasure, and then we will take up the Cross of Christ gladly and with style.

And then every suffering will soon be overcome: nobody, nothing at all, will be able to take away our peace and our cheerfulness.

786 To be an apostle you have to bear within you Christ crucified, as Saint Paul teaches us.

787 It's true: when the Holy Cross comes into our lives it unmistakably confirms that we are his, Christ's.

788 The Cross is not pain, or annoyance, or bitterness. It is the holy wood on which Jesus Christ triumphs... and where we triumph too, when we receive what He sends us with cheerful and generous hearts.

789 You have come to see that, after the Holy Sacrifice, it is on your Faith and your Love, on your penance, your prayer and your activity, that the perseverance, and even the life on earth of your people to a great extent depend.

Bless the Cross: the Cross that He — my Lord Jesus — and you and I bear.

790 Jesus, I want to be a blazing fire of Love-madness. I want it to be sufficient for me just to be present in order to set the world on fire for miles around, with an unquenchable flame. I want to know that I am yours. Then, let the Cross come...

This is the marvellous way: to suffer, to love, and to believe.

791 When you are ill, offer up your sufferings with love, and they will turn into incense rising up in God's honour, and making you holy.

792 As a child of God, with his grace in you, you have to be a strong person, a man or woman of desires and achievements.

We are not hothouse plants. We live in the middle of the world, and we have to be able to face up to all the winds that blow, to the heat and the cold, to rain and storms, but always faithful to God and to his Church.

793 Insults hurt so much, even though you want to love them.

Don't be surprised: offer them to God.

794 You were very hurt at being slighted. That means you are forgetting too easily who you are.

795 When we think we have been accused of something unjustly, we should examine our behaviour, in God's presence, *cum gaudio et pace* — calmly and cheerfully; and we should change our ways if charity bids us, even if our actions were harmless.

We have to struggle to be saints, more and more each day. Then let people say what they like so long as we can apply the words of the beatitude to their utterances: *Beati estis cum... dixerint omne malum adversus vos mentientes propter me* — Blessed are you when they slander you for my sake.

796 Someone — I don't remember who, or when — once said that the hurricane of slander always rages against those who are outstanding, just as the wind beats most furiously on the tallest pines.

797 Plots, wretched misinterpretations, cut to the measure of the base hearts that will read them, cowardly insinuations... It is a picture that, sadly, we see over and over again, in different fields. They neither work themselves, nor let others work.

Meditate slowly on those verses of the Psalm: "My God, I have become a stranger to my brothers, an alien to my mother's sons. Because zeal for thy house has consumed me, and the insults of those who insult thee have fallen on me." And keep on working.

798 It is not possible to do good, even among good people, without running into the holy Cross of gossip.

799 In silentio et in spe erit fortitudo vestra — in quietness and in trust shall be your strength. This is what the Lord assures to those who are his own. Keep quiet, and trust in him. These are two essential weapons in moments of difficulty, when there doesn't seem to be any human solution.

Look at Jesus in his Holy Passion and Death: suffering borne without complaint is also a measure of love.

800 This is the prayer of a soul who wanted to belong wholly to God, and, for his sake, to all mankind: "Lord, I beg you to work on this sinner, to rectify and purify my intentions, to pass them through the crucible."

801 I was deeply impressed by the disarming frankness of that holy and learned man, by his willingness to yield as well as by his refusal to give way, when he said "I can come to terms with anything except an offence against God."

802 Think of the good that has been done you throughout your lifetime by those who have injured or attempted to injure you.

Others call such people their enemies. Not so you. You should imitate the saints, even in this. You are nothing so special that you should have enemies; so call them "benefactors". Pray to God for them: as a result, you will come to like them.

803 Listen to me, my child: you must be happy when people treat you badly and dishonour you, when many come out against you and it becomes the done thing to spit on you, because you are omnium peripsema, like the refuse of the world.

It's hard, it's very hard. It is hard, until at last one goes to the Tabernacle, seeing oneself thought of as the scum of the earth, like a wretched worm, and says with all one's heart "Lord, if you don't need my good name, what do I want it for?"

Up to then even a child of God does not know what happiness is — up to that point of nakedness and self-giving. It is a self-giving of love, but it is founded on mortification, on sorrow.

804 Opposition from good people? It's the devil's doing.

805 When you lose your peace and get nervous, it's like not listening to reason.

At such times, one hears again the Master's words to Peter as he sank among the waves of his own nerves and lack of peace: "Why did you doubt?"

806 Order will bring harmony to your life, and lead you to perseverance. Order will give peace to your heart, and weight to your behaviour.

807 I copy these words for you because they can bring peace to your soul. "My financial situation is as tight as it ever has been. But I don't lose my peace. I'm quite sure that God, my Father, will settle the whole business once and for all.

I want, Lord, to abandon the care of all my affairs into your generous hands. Our Mother — your Mother — will have let you hear those words, now as in Cana: 'They have none!' I believe in you, I hope in you, I love you, Jesus. I want nothing for myself: it's for them."

808 I love your Will. I love holy poverty, my own great lady.

And, now and for ever, I detest and abominate anything that might mean the slightest lack of attachment to your most just, most lovable, and most fatherly Will.

809 The spirit of poverty, of detachment from the goods of the earth, results in effectiveness in the apostolate.

810 Nazareth: a way of faith, of detachment: a way in which the Creator subjects himself to his creatures as he does to his Heavenly Father.

811 Jesus always speaks with love... even when he corrects us or allows us to undergo trials.

812 Identify yourself with the Will of God. Then no trouble will be any trouble.

813 God loves us infinitely more than you love yourself. So let him make demands on you.

814 Accept the Will of God fearlessly. Resolve unhesitatingly to work all your life, with the materials which the teachings and the demands of our Faith provide.

If you do, you can be sure that along with the sufferings, and even along with slander, you will be happy, with a happiness that will move you to love others and give them a share in your supernatural joy.

815 If troubles come, you can be sure they are a proof of the Fatherly love God has for you.

816 All those who love find that their life is a forge, a forging in the fire of sorrow. There, in that forge, Our Lord teaches us that those who tread fearlessly where the Master treads, hard though the going is, find joy.

817 Strengthen your spirit with penance, so that when difficulty comes you may never lose heart.

818 When will you make up your mind, once and for all, to identify yourself with Christ, with Life!

819 In order to persevere in following in the footsteps of Jesus, you need always to be free, always to want, and always to make use of your own freedom.

820 You are amazed to find there are many different goals that can be pursued within each field in which improvement is possible.

They are other ways within the way, and they help you to avoid possible routine and bring you closer to Our Lord.

Be generous: aim for the highest.

821 Work with humility. I mean, count first on God's blessings, which will not fail you. Then, on your good desires, on the plans you have for working — and on your difficulties! Do not forget that among those difficulties you must always include your own lack of holiness.

You will be a good instrument if every day you struggle to be better.

822 You told me, in confidence, that in your prayer you would open your heart to God with these words: "I think of my wretchedness, which seems to be on the increase despite the graces you give me. It must be due to my failure to correspond. I know that I am completely unprepared for the enterprise you are asking of me. And when I read in the newspapers of so very many highly qualified and respected men, with formidable talents, and no lack of financial resources, speaking, writing, organizing in defence of your kingdom... I look at myself, and see that I'm a nobody: ignorant, poor: so little, in a word. This would fill me with shame if I did not know that you want me to be so. But Lord Jesus, you know how gladly I have put my ambition at your feet... To have Faith and Love, to be loving, believing, suffering. In these things I do want to be rich and learned: but no more rich or learned than you, in your limitless Mercy, have wanted me to be. I desire to put all my prestige and honour into fulfilling your most just and most lovable Will."

I then said to you: don't leave this merely as a good desire.

823 Love for God invites us to shoulder the Cross squarely: to feel on our back the weight of the whole human race, and to fulfil, in the circumstances of our own situation in life and the job we have, the clear and at the same time loving designs of the Will of the Father.

824 He was the greatest madman of all times. What greater madness could there be than to give oneself as he did, and for such people?

It would have been mad enough to have chosen to become a helpless Child. But even then, many wicked men might have been softened, and would not have dared to harm him. So this was not enough for him. He wanted to make himself even less, to give himself more lavishly. He made himself food, he became Bread.

Divine Madman! How do men treat you? How do I treat you?

825 Jesus, the madness of your Love has stolen my heart. You are small and helpless, so that those who eat you can become great.

826 You have to make your life essentially, totally eucharistic.

827 I like to call the Tabernacle a prison — a prison of Love.

For twenty centuries He has been waiting there, willingly locked up, for me and for everyone.

828 Have you ever thought how you would prepare yourself to receive Our Lord if you could go to Communion only once in your life?

We must be thankful to God that he makes it so easy for us to come to him: but we should show our gratitude by preparing ourselves to receive him very well.

829 Tell Our Lord that from now on, every time you celebrate Mass or attend it, and every time you administer or receive the Sacrament of the Eucharist, you will do so with a great faith, with a burning love, just as if it were to be the last time in your life.

And be sorry for the carelessness of your past life.

830 I can understand your keenness to receive the Holy Eucharist each day. Those who feel they are children of God have an overpowering need of Christ.

831 While you are at Mass, think that you are sharing in a divine Sacrifice. For that is how it is: on the altar, Christ is offering himself again for you.

832 When you receive him, tell him: Lord, I hope in you: I adore you, I love you, increase my faith. Be the support of my weakness: You, who have remained defenceless in the Eucharist so as to be the remedy for the weakness of your creatures.

833 We should dwell on those words of Jesus, and make them our own: *Desiderio desideravi hoc Pascha manducare vobiscum*: I have longed and longed to eat this Passover with you. There is no better way to show how great is our concern and love for the Holy Sacrifice than by taking great care with the least detail of the ceremonies the wisdom of the Church has laid down.

This is for Love: but we should also feel the need to become like Christ, not only inside ourselves but also in what is external. We should act, on the wide spaciousness of the Christian altar, with the rhythm and harmony which holy obedience provides, the holy obedience that unites us to the will of the Spouse of Christ, to the Will of Christ himself.

834 We should receive Our Lord in the Eucharist as we would prepare to receive the great ones of the earth, or even better: with decorations, with lights, with new clothes...

And if you ask me what sort of cleanliness I mean, what decorations and what lights you should bring, I will answer you: cleanliness in each one of your senses, decoration in each of your powers, light in all your soul.

835 Be a eucharistic soul!

If the centre around which your thoughts and hopes turn is the Tabernacle, then, my child, how abundant the fruits of your sanctity and apostolate will be!

836 The objects used in divine worship should have artistic merit, but bearing in mind that worship is not for the sake of art: art is for the sake of worship.

837 Go perseveringly to the Tabernacle, either bodily or in your heart, so as to feel safe and calm: but also in order to feel loved... and to love.

838 I copy some words which a priest wrote for those who followed him in an apostolic enterprise: "When you contemplate the Sacred Host exposed on the altar in the monstrance, think how great is the love, the tenderness of Christ. My way to understand it is by thinking of the love I have for you: if I could be far away, working, and at the same time at the side of each one of you, how gladly I would do it!

But Christ really can do it! He loves us with a love that is infinitely greater than the love that all the hearts of the world could hold; and he has stayed with us so that we can join ourselves at any time to his most Sacred Humanity, and so that he can help us, console us, strengthen us, so that we may be faithful."

839 Don't think that turning your life into service is easy. This good desire needs to be translated into deeds, for "the kingdom of God does not consist in talk, but in power", as the Apostle teaches us. Moreover, the practice of constantly helping other people is not possible without sacrifice.

840 You must always have, in everything, the same "instinct" as the Church. For this, you must acquire the spiritual and doctrinal training that you need, which will make you a person of sound judgement in temporal matters, humble and quick to correct yourself when you realise you have made a mistake.

Correcting your own mistakes, nobly, is a very human and very supernatural way of using your freedom.

841 There is an urgent need for spreading the doctrine of Christ.

Store up your training, fill yourself with clear ideas, with the fulness of the Christian message, so that afterwards you can pass it on to others.

Do not expect God to illuminate you, for he has no reason to when you have definite human means available to you: study and work.

842 Error does not only darken the understanding: it also sunders wills.

But veritas liberabit vos: the truth will set you free from the partisan spirit that dries up charity.

843 You spend your time with that companion of yours who is scarcely even civil to you: and it's hard.

Keep at it, and don't judge him. He'll have his "reasons", just as you have yours, which you strengthen so as to pray for him more each day.

844 You make such a mess of your own life — how can you be surprised if other people are not angels?

845 Be lovingly on your guard, in order to live holy purity, because a spark is more easily put out than a roaring blaze.

But all human care, and mortification, and the cilice, and fasting, which are essential weapons, how little all these are worth without you, my God!

846 Constantly call to mind that at every moment you are cooperating in the human and spiritual formation of those around you, and of all souls — for the blessed Communion of Saints reaches as far as that. At every moment: when you work and when you rest; when people see you happy or when they see you worried; when at your job, or out in the street, you pray as does a child of God and the peace of your soul shows through; when people see that you have suffered, that you have wept, and you smile.

847 Holy coercion is one thing; blind violence or revenge is quite another.

848 The Master has said it already: if only we children of the light were to put at least as much effort and obstinacy into doing good as the children of darkness put into their activities!

p class="MsoPlainText" style="margin-top:12.0pt;margin-right:0in;margin-bottom:6.0pt;margin-left:0in">Don't complain. Work instead to drown evil in an abundance of good.

849 The charity that harms the supernatural effectiveness of the apostolate is a false charity.

850 God needs men and women who are sure and strong, on whom he can lean.

851 We do not live for the world, or for our own honour, but for the honour of God, for the glory of God, for the service of God. It is this that should be our motive!

852 Ever since Jesus Christ Our Lord founded the Church, this Mother of ours has suffered continual persecution. Perhaps in other times persecution was carried out openly, while nowadays it is often done surreptitiously: but today as yesterday the Church continues to be attacked.

How great is our obligation to live every day as responsible Catholics!

853 Use this prescription for your life: "I don't remember my own existence. I don't think of my own affairs, because I haven't the time."

Work and service!

854 These are the characteristics that define the incomparable goodness of our holy Mother, Mary: a love taken to the extreme, fulfilling the Will of God with tender

care; a complete forgetfulness of herself, for she is happy to be where God wants her to be.

For this reason, not even the slightest gesture of hers is trivial. Learn from her.

SELECTION

855 Committed. How much I like that word! We children of God freely put ourselves under an obligation to live a life of dedication to God, striving that He may have complete and absolute sovereignty over our lives.

856 Whenever sanctity is genuine, it overflows from its vessel to fill other hearts, other souls, with its superabundance.

We, the children of God sanctify ourselves by sanctifying others. Is Christianity spreading to those around you? Consider this every day.

857 The Kingdom of Jesus Christ: that is our task. So, my child, be generous: do not be anxious to know any of the many reasons he has to want to reign in you.

If you look at him, it will be enough for you to consider how much he loves you. You will feel a hunger to correspond to his love, crying aloud that you really love him here and now; and you will understand that if you don't leave him, he won't leave you.

858 The first step towards bringing others to the ways of Christ is for them to see you happy and serene, sure in your advance towards God.

859 A Catholic man or woman can never forget this key idea: we have to imitate Jesus Christ in every sphere of society, without rejecting anyone.

860 Our Lord Jesus wants it: we have to follow him closely. There is no other way.

This is the task of the Holy Spirit in each soul, in yours too. You have to be docile, so as not to put obstacles in the way of your God.

861 A clear sign that you are seeking holiness is what I might call 'the healthy psychological prejudice' of thinking usually about others (while forgetting yourself) so as to bring them closer to God.

862 It should be engraved deeply on your soul that God doesn't need you. His calling is a most loving mercy of his Heart.

863 Treat those who are in error with loving kindness, with Christian charity. But do not compromise with anything that goes against our holy Faith.

864 Have recourse to the sweet Lady Mary, Mother of God and our Mother also, entrusting to her care the cleanliness of soul and body of all mankind.

Tell her that you want to call upon her, and want others to call upon her continually. And that you want to conquer always, in the bad moments — or the

good, very good moments — of your struggle against those who are hostile to our being children of God.

865 He came on earth because omnes homines vult salvos fieri, he wants to redeem the whole world.

While you are at your work, shoulder to shoulder with so many others, never forget that there is no soul that does not matter to Christ!

866 "Lord," you were telling him, "I like to say thank you. I want to be grateful to everyone, always."

Well, look: you aren't a stone or a speechless tree, or a mule. You are not one of those created things whose life is completed here on this earth. This is because God chose to make you a man or woman, a child of his. And he loves you in caritate perpetua, with an eternal love.

So you like to be grateful? And are you going to make an exception of your Lord? Make sure that your thanksgiving comes pouring out from your heart every day.

867 Understanding is real charity. When you really achieve it, you will have a great heart which is open to all without discrimination. Even with those who have treated you badly you will put into living practice that advice of Jesus: "Come to me all you that... are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

868 Be loving towards those who are ignorant of the things of God. And with all the more reason treat those who do know him in the same way. If not, you cannot do the former either.

869 If you really loved God with all your heart, then that love for your neighbour, which you sometimes find so hard to have, would come as a necessary consequence of your Great Love. You would never feel hostility towards anyone, nor would you discriminate between people.

870 Have you that urge, that divine madness, to bring souls to know the Love of God? In your ordinary life, then, offer up mortifications, pray, carry out your duty, and conquer yourself in all kinds of tiny details.

871 Tell him slowly: Good Jesus, if I am to be an apostle, and an apostle of apostles, you have to make me very humble.

May I know myself. May I know myself and know you.

Then I will never lose sight of my nothingness.

872 Per Jesum Christum Dominum nostrum: through Jesus Christ, Our Lord. That is the way you should do things: through and for Jesus Christ!

It's good that you have a human heart. But if you act merely because it's a particular person, that's bad. You should certainly also do it for that brother of yours, for that friend of yours: but above all do it for Jesus Christ!

873 The Church expects a lot from you, as do other people -people of all lands, and of all times, present and to come. But you should have it very firmly fixed in your head and in your heart that you will be fruitless if you are not a saint or, let me put it better, if you don't struggle to be a saint.

874 Let yourself be formed by the rough or gentle strokes of grace. Strive to be an instrument rather than an obstacle. And, if you are willing, your most Holy Mother will help you; and you will be a channel for the waters of God, rather than a boulder which diverts their flow.

875 Lord, help me to be faithful and docile towards you, sicut lutum in manu figuli, like clay in the potter's hands. In this way it will not be I that live, but you, my Love, who will live and work in me.

876 Jesus will enable you to have a great affection for everybody you meet, without taking away any of the affection you have for him. On the contrary, the more you love Jesus, the more room there will be for other people in your heart.

877 The closer a creature comes to God, the more universal it feels. Its heart expands, making room for everything and everybody in its single great desire to place the whole universe at the feet of Jesus.

878 When Jesus died on the Cross he was only thirty-three years old. Youthfulness can be no excuse!

Anyway, with each day that passes you are ceasing to be young... though with Him you will possess his eternal youth.

879 You must reject that form of nationalism which hinders understanding and harmony. In many moments of history it has been one of the most evil of barriers.

You must reject it yet more strongly, since it would be all the more harmful, when it tries to set foot within the Body of the Church, where the unity of everyone and everything in the love of Jesus Christ ought to shine out most clearly.

880 Child of God, what have you done up to now to help the souls around you?

You cannot be content with that passiveness, with that idleness of yours. He wants to reach others through your example, through your words, through your friendship, through your service.

881 Sacrifice yourself, give yourself, and work at souls one by one, as the jeweller works on precious stones: one by one.

Indeed you should exercise even more care, because you are dealing with something of incomparable value. The purpose of that spiritual attention you give is to prepare good instruments for the service of God: and they, each one of them, have cost Christ all of his Blood.

882 To be a Christian, and in particular to be a priest -bearing in mind, too, that all of us who are baptized share in Christ's priesthood — is to be at all times on the Cross.

883 If you were consistent, now that you have seen his light you would want to be as great a saint as you were once a sinner: and you would struggle to make those desires a reality.

884 It is not pride, but fortitude, when you make your authority felt, cutting out what needs to be cut out, when the fulfilment of the Holy Will of God demands it.

885 Hands must sometimes be tied, with respect and with temperateness, without insult or discourtesy. Not out of revenge, but as a remedy; not as a punishment, but as a medicine.

886 You looked at me very seriously. But at last you understood, when I told you: "I want to reproduce the life of Christ in the children of God, by getting them to meditate on it, so that they may act like him and speak only of him."

887 Jesus has remained within the Eucharist for love... of you.

He has remained, knowing how men would treat him... and how you would treat him.

He has remained so that you could eat him, so that you could visit him and tell him what's happening to you; and so that you could talk to him as you pray beside the Tabernacle, and as you receive him sacramentally; and so that you could fall in love more and more each day, and make other souls, many souls, follow the same path.

888 You tell me that you want to live the virtue of holy poverty. You want to be detached from the things you use. Ask yourself this question: have I got the same affections and the same feelings as Jesus Christ has, with regard to riches and poverty?

I told you: as well as resting in the arms of your Father-God, with all the confident abandonment of one who is his child, you should fix your eyes particularly on this virtue in order to love it as Jesus does. Then, instead of seeing it as a cross to bear, you will see it as a sign of God's special love for you.

889 At times some Christians do not give the commandment of charity its full scope and value in their actions. In that last wonderful discourse of his, we find Christ surrounded by his chosen ones and leaving them these words as a form of testament: *Mandatum novum do vobis, ut diligatis invicem* — a new commandment I give to you, that you love one another.

Then he went further: *In hoc cognoscent omnes quia discipuli mei estis* — by this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

If only we would make up our minds to live as he wants!

890 Piety is the bond which ties us close to God and, for his sake, to others too since we see Christ in them. Without it, disunity comes inevitably, and with disunity the loss of all Christian spirit.

891 Be grateful to God from the bottom of your heart for those wonderful and awesome faculties he chose to give you when he made you — your intellect and your will. They are wonderful, because they make you like him; and awesome because there are human beings who turn their faculties against their Creator.

It seems to me we could sum up the thankfulness that we owe as children of God by saying to this Father of ours, now and always, *serviam!*: I will serve you.

892 Without interior life, and without formation, there is no true apostolate and no work that is fruitful. Whatever work is done will be fragile, fictitious even.

How great, then, is our responsibility as children of God! We have to hunger and thirst for him and for his doctrine.

893 Someone told that good friend of ours, seeking to humiliate him, that his was a second- or third-rate soul.

As he was convinced of his nothingness, he was not upset. Instead he reasoned this way: "Each man has just one soul. I have mine, just the one. So for each one his own soul is first-rate. I'm not going to lower my sights. So, my soul is of the very very best: and with God's help, I want to purify it and whiten it and set it on fire, to please my Beloved."

You must not forget this: you cannot 'lower your sights' either, despite the fact that you see yourself full of wretchedness.

894 You complain that you are alone, and that your surroundings militate against you. Think of this, then: Jesus, the Good Sower, takes each of us, his children, and holds us tight in his wounded hand, like wheat. He soaks us in his Blood. He purifies and cleanses us. He fills us with his "wine"! And then he scatters us generously throughout the world, one by one, for wheat is not sown by the sackful, but grain by grain.

895 I insist: ask God to grant us, his children, the 'gift of tongues', the gift of making ourselves understood by all.

You can find the reason why I want this 'gift of tongues' in the pages of the Gospel, which abound in parables, in examples which materialise the doctrine and illustrate spiritual truths, without debasing or degrading the word of God.

Everyone, both the learned and the less learned, finds it easier to reflect on and understand God's message through these human images.

896 God wants us, now and always, to spread his seed, a divine sowing in all surroundings. But he also wants it to maintain its quality while it gains in quantity.

You, very clearly, have a supernatural mission of helping to ensure that this quality is not lost.

897 Yes, you're right: how base your wretchedness is! By your own efforts, where would you be now, where would you have got to?

You admitted: "Only a Love that was full of mercy could keep on loving me."

Cheer up. He will not deny you his Love or his Mercy, if you go to him.

898 Your aim should be that there be many souls in the midst of the world who love God with all their heart.

It's time to do your sums: how many souls have you helped to discover that Love?

899 The children of God are present and give witness in the world to draw others, not to be drawn by them. They should spread their own atmosphere, the atmosphere of Christ, not let themselves be won over by a different atmosphere.

900 You have a duty to reach those around you, to shake them out of their drowsiness, to open wide new horizons for their selfish, comfortable lives, to make their lives more complicated (in a holy way, that is), to make them forget about themselves and show understanding for the problems of others.

If you do not, you are not a good brother to your brothers in the human race. They need that *gaudium cum pace*, that joy and that peace, which maybe they do not know or have forgotten.

901 No son or daughter of Holy Church can lead a quiet life, without concern for the anonymous masses — a mob, a herd, a flock, as I once wrote. How many noble passions they have within their apparent listlessness! How much potential!

We must serve all, laying our hands on each and every one, as Jesus did, *singulis manus imponens*, to bring them back to life, to enlighten their minds and strengthen their wills: so that they can become useful!

902 I didn't think God would get hold of me the way he did, either. But, let me tell you once again, God doesn't ask our permission to complicate our lives. He just gets in: and that's that!

903 Lord, I will trust in you alone. Help me to be faithful to you. I know that I can look forward to everything as a result of being faithful in your service, abandoning all my cares and worries in your hands.

904 Let us thank God deeply and often for the wonderful calling we have had from him. May our gratitude be deep and genuine, closely joined to humility.

905 The privilege of being numbered among the children of God is the greatest happiness there can be: and it is always undeserved.

906 That cry of the Son of God, lamenting that the harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few, is always relevant. How it tears at our heartstrings.

That cry came from Christ's mouth for you to hear too. How have you responded to it up to now? Do you pray at least daily for that intention of his?

907 To follow Our Lord you need to give yourself once and for all, stoutheartedly and without holding anything back. You need to burn your boats once and for all, so that there is no chance of going back.

908 Don't be scared when Jesus asks you for more, even the happiness of your own family. You must be convinced that from the supernatural point of view he has the right to override all your people, for the sake of his Glory.

909 You say that you want to be an apostle of Christ.

I'm very glad to hear it. I pray that God may give you perseverance. Remember that from our mouths, from our thoughts, from our hearts, no single thing should issue that is not of God, of hunger for souls, of themes that lead us one way or another to God — or at least, that do not take us away from him.

910 The Church needs priests, and always will. Ask the Blessed Trinity for them each day, through Holy Mary.

And pray that they may be cheerful, hard-working, effective; that they may be well trained: and that they may sacrifice themselves joyfully for their brothers, without feeling that they are victims.

911 Turn constantly to the most Holy Virgin, the Mother of God and Mother of the human race; and she, with a Mother's gentleness, will draw down the love of God on the souls you deal with, so that they may make up their minds to be witnesses for Jesus Christ, in their profession, in their ordinary work.

FRUITFULNESS

912 You should correspond to God's love by being faithful, very faithful! And this faithfulness should lead you to transmit the Love you have received to other people, so that they too may rejoice at meeting God.

913 My Lord Jesus, grant that I may feel your grace and second it in such a way that I empty my heart, so that you, my Friend, my Brother, my King, my God, my Love... may fill it!

914 If your prayers, your sacrifices and your actions do not show a constant concern for the apostolate, it is a sure sign that you are not happy, and that you have to be more faithful.

The man who possesses happiness, and the good, will always seek to give it to others.

915 When you really trample on your own self and live for others you will become a good instrument in God's hands.

He called — and is calling — his disciples, commanding them *ut eatis!* — "Go and seek all men."

916 Make up your mind to set the world ablaze — you really can do it — with a love that is pure, and so you will make all mankind happy by bringing them really closer to God.

917 *In modico fidelis!* — faithful in little things. My son, your job is not just to save souls but to bring them to holiness, day after day, giving to each moment — even to apparently ordinary moments — the dynamic echo of eternity.

918 We cannot separate the seed of doctrine from the seed of piety.

The only way to inoculate your work of sowing doctrine against the germs of ineffectiveness is by being sincerely devout.

919 Just as all the powerful machinery in dozens of factories is brought to a standstill and rendered useless when the electricity fails, so does apostolate cease to bear fruit when prayer and mortification fail, for they are what move the Sacred Heart of Christ.

920 If you follow faithfully the promptings of grace, you will yield good fruit, lasting fruit for the glory of God.

To be a saint necessarily entails being effective, even though the saint may not see or be aware of the results.

921 Rectitude of intention consists in seeking "only and in all things" the glory of God.

922 The apostolate — which is a sure sign of spiritual life -means being constantly on the lookout so as to supernaturalize each detail of the day, whether big or small, by putting the love of God into everything one does.

923 As a bookmark for whatever book he happened to be reading, he always used a strip of paper with the following phrase written on it in a bold and energetic hand: *Ure igne Sancti Spiritus!* -Inflame with the fire of the Holy Spirit! You could almost say that, rather than writing the words, he had engraved them.

O Christian, I wish I could leave this divine fire emblazoned upon your soul, burning on your lips and setting alight everything you do.

924 You should try to have the holy shamelessness of a child who knows that his Father God always sends him what is best.

That is why he doesn't worry when even the apparently most essential things are lacking; and with complete serenity he says: At least I still have the Holy Spirit with me.

925 Please say a prayer each day for the following intention: that all of us Catholics may be faithful and determined to struggle to be saints.

It is so obviously reasonable. What else are we to desire for those we love, for those who are bound to us by the strong ties of the faith?

926 When I am told that there are people dedicated to God who are no longer striving with fervour for sanctity, I think that — if there is any truth in this — their lives are heading towards great failure.

927 Qui sunt isti, qui ut nubes volant, et quasi columbae ad fenestras suas? — "Who are these that fly like clouds, and like doves to their nesting places?", asks the Prophet. And a certain author comments: "Clouds come up from the sea and from rivers, and after circling about or following their course for a certain length of time, return once more to their source."

And I say to you that this is what you have to be: a cloud which makes the world fertile, making it live the life of Christ. Those divine waters will bathe and drench the very depths of the earth, and filter out the many impurities without themselves being dirtied. They shall give forth sparkling springs which will later become streams and mighty rivers able to slake the thirst of mankind. Afterwards you shall return to your shelter, to your boundless Sea, to your God, knowing that the fruits will continue to ripen thanks to the supernatural watering done by your apostolate, and to the fruitfulness of the waters of God which will last until the end of time.

928 My child, offer him even the sorrows and sufferings of other people.

929 Woes? Setbacks deriving from one thing or another? Can't you see that this is the will of your Father-God, who is good and who loves you — loves you personally — more than all the mothers in the world can possibly love their children?

930 Sincerely examine the way you are following the Master. Ask yourself if your self-surrender is of a dry, officious type, with a faith that has no sparkle to it; if there is no humility or sacrifice, nor any good works throughout your day; if you are all show and pay no attention to the details of each moment... In a word, if you lack Love.

If this is the case, your ineffectiveness should come as no surprise to you. React right away, and be led by the hand of Our Lady.

931 Whenever you are in need of anything, or are facing difficulties, whether great or small, invoke your Guardian Angel, asking him to sort the matter out with Jesus, or to carry out the particular service you may require.

932 God is right there in the centre of your soul, and mine, and in the soul of everyone who is in a state of grace. He is there for a purpose, that our salt may increase, that we may acquire more light and that from the place we each find ourselves in we may be able to share out these gifts from God to others.

And how can we share out these gifts from God? With humility and piety, and by being very united to our Mother the Church.

Do you not recall the vine and the branches? How fruitful is each branch when united to the vine! What large bunches of grapes! And how sterile the broken-off branch that dries up and becomes lifeless!

933 Jesus, may my poor heart be filled from the ocean of your love, with waves which can cleanse me and expel all my wretchedness. Pour those most pure and ardent waters of your Heart into mine, until my desires for loving you are fully satisfied and I can no longer hold back my response to your divine ardour. My heart shall surely break then, dying for Love, and pour out that Love of yours which, in irresistible and most fertile, life-giving torrents, will reach other hearts that will beat through contact with these living waters, with the pulsating force of Faith and Charity.

934 Practise and live the Holy Mass!

You may be helped by a consideration which that priest, in love, used to repeat to himself: "Is it possible, my God, to take part in the Holy Mass and not be a saint?"

And he would continue, "Each day, in fulfilment of an old promise, I will remain hidden in the Wound of Our Lord's Side!"

Shouldn't you do the same?

935 You can do so much good, and yet also so much harm!

You will do good if you are humble and you give yourself cheerfully, with a spirit of sacrifice: good for yourself and for your fellow men, and for that good Mother of yours, the Church.

But how much harm you will do if you allow yourself to be led by your pride.

936 Please don't let yourself become bourgeois, for if you do, you will be a hindrance. You will become a dead weight for others in the apostolate and, above all, a source of suffering for the Heart of Christ.

You must not stop doing apostolate, nor must you abandon your effort to do your work as best you can, or neglect your life of piety.

God will do the rest.

937 From time to time you have to deal with souls as you would with a fire in the hearth, giving it a good poke to get rid of the embers, which are what shine most but are causing the fire of the love of God to die down.

938 Let us go to Jesus in the Tabernacle where we can get to know him and assimilate his teaching, and then be able to hand out this food to souls.

939 When you hold Our Lord in your breast and you taste the delights of his Love, promise him that you will strive to change the course of your life in whatever way is necessary, so that you can bring him to the masses of people who do not know him, who live without ideals and who, unfortunately, go on behaving like animals.

940 "Where charity and love are found, there is God" we sing in the liturgical hymn. Here is what a certain soul noted down: "Fraternal love is a great and marvellous treasure. It is not simply a consolation — which it certainly often has to be — but it really brings home the certainty of having God close to us, and shows itself in the charity our neighbours have for us and in the charity which we have for them."

941 Shun public display. May your life be known to God, for holiness passes unnoticed, even though it is most effective.

942 Try to ensure that people don't notice when you lend a helping hand; try not to be praised or seen by anyone... so that, being hidden like salt, you may give flavour to your normal surroundings. And thus, as a result of your Christian outlook, you will be helping to give to everything about you a natural, loving and attractive tone.

943 For this world of ours to set its course in a Christian direction — which is the only one worth while — we have to exercise a loyal friendship with all men, based on a prior loyal friendship with God.

944 You have heard me speak many times about the apostolate ad fidem.

I still think the same way. What a marvellous field of work awaits us throughout the world with those who do not know the true faith and who, nonetheless, are noble, generous and cheerful.

945 I often feel like crying out to so many men and women in offices and shops, in the world of the media and in the law courts, in schools, on the factory floor, in mines and on farms and telling them that, with the backing of an interior life and by means of the Communion of Saints, they ought to be bringing God into all these different environments, according to that teaching of the Apostle: "Glorify God by making your bodies the shrines of his presence."

946 Those of us who bear in our hearts the truth of Christ have to put this truth into the hearts, and minds and lives of others. Not to do so would show a love of comfort and bad tactics too.

Think it over once again: Did Christ ask you permission before coming into your soul? He left you free to follow him, but he was the one who sought you out, because he chose to.

947 With our acts of service we can prepare an even greater triumph for the Lord than that of his entry into Jerusalem. For there will be no repetition of the Judas episode, or that of the Garden of Gethsemane, or of that dark night. We will succeed in setting the world alight with the flames of that fire which he came to cast upon the earth. And the light of Truth — which is our Jesus — will enlighten men's minds with a brightness that never fades.

948 Don't look so alarmed. As a Christian you have the right and the duty to provoke a wholesome crisis in souls so that they live their lives with their eyes on God.

949 Pray for everyone, for people of every race and tongue and of every creed, for those who have only a vague idea about religion and for those who do not know the faith at all.

This zeal for souls, which is a sure and a clear sign that we love Jesus, will make Jesus come.

950 When they heard of work with souls in far-off lands, how their eyes sparkled! They seemed ready to cross the ocean in one leap. And indeed the world is very small when Love is great.

951 Not a single soul — not one — can be a matter of indifference to you.

952 A disciple of Christ can never think as follows: "I try to be good; as for others, if that's what they want... let them go to hell."

Such an attitude is not human. Nor is it in keeping with the love of God, or with the charity we owe our neighbour.

953 When a Christian understands what catholicity means and practises it, and he realises the urgent need to proclaim the Good News of salvation to all creatures, he knows that as the Apostle teaches, he has to make himself "all things to all men, that all may be saved."

954 You have to love your fellow men to the point where even their defects, as long as they do not constitute an offence against God, hardly seem to you to be defects at all. If you love only the good qualities you see in others — if you do not know how to be understanding, to make allowances for them and forgive them — you are an egoist.

955 You must not destroy the souls of your fellow human beings through your neglect or your bad example.

In spite of your passions, you have a responsibility for the Christian life of your neighbour, for the spiritual effectiveness of everyone, indeed for their very sanctity.

956 Physically far away and yet feeling very close to them all, "very close to them all" you cheerfully repeated.

You were happy thanks to that communion of charity which I spoke to you about, and which you must not get tired of keeping alive.

957 You asked me what you could do to prevent the loneliness of that friend of yours.

I will tell you what I always say, because we have at our disposal a marvellous weapon which is the answer to everything: prayer. In the first place, you must pray. And then you must do for him what you would like others to do for you if you were in similar circumstances.

Without humiliating him, you must help him in such a way that the things he finds difficult can be made easy for him.

958 Put yourself always in your neighbour's shoes. You will then see the various issues or problems calmly. You will not get annoyed. You will be more understanding. You will be able to make allowances and will correct people when and as required. And you will fill the world with charity.

959 We cannot give way in matters of faith. But don't forget that in order to speak the truth there is no need to ill-treat anyone.

960 When the good of your neighbour is at stake you cannot remain silent. But speak in a kindly way, with due moderation and without losing your temper.

961 It's not possible to comment on events or doctrines without making personal references..., although you are not judging anyone: *qui judicat Dominus est* — it is God who has to judge.

Don't worry, then, if now and again you come across someone who lacks an upright conscience and — either in bad faith or through lack of discernment — takes your words for gossip.

962 Some poor people seem to get annoyed by the good works you are doing, as if a thing ceases to be good when it is not being carried out or organized by themselves.

This lack of understanding cannot be an excuse for you to slacken off in what you are doing. Try to do it even better, right now. When you get no applause on earth, your work will be all the more welcome in Heaven.

963 At times, fifty per cent of the work is lost because of in-fighting stemming from a lack of charity, and from tales and back-biting among brothers. Furthermore, yet another twenty-five per cent of the work is lost by constructing buildings which are unnecessary for the apostolate. Gossip should never be allowed and we shouldn't waste our time building so many houses. People will then be apostles, one hundred per cent.

964 Pray for the priests of today, and for those who are to come, that they may really love their fellow men, every day more and without distinction, and that they may know also how to make themselves loved by them.

965 I have been thinking of all the priests throughout the world. Help me to pray for the fruitfulness of their apostolates.

"My brother in the priesthood, please speak always about God and, when you really do belong to him, your conversations will never be monotonous."

966 Preaching — the preaching of Christ crucified — is the word of God.

Priests need to prepare themselves as best they can before carrying out such a divine ministry, the aim of which is the salvation of souls.

Lay people should listen with very special respect.

967 It made me very happy to hear what they said about that priest: "He preaches with all his soul... and with his body too."

968 Let this be your prayer, apostolic soul: Lord, may I know how to lean on people and get them all to burn like fires of Love, which will then become the driving force of all our undertakings.

969 We Catholics have to go through life being apostles, with God's light and God's salt. We should have no fear, and we should be quite natural; but with so deep an interior life and such close union with Our Lord that we may shine out, preserving ourselves from corruption and from darkness, and spread around us the fruits of serenity and the effectiveness of Christian doctrine.

970 The sower went out to sow, to scatter the seed at all the crossroads of this earth. What a blessed task we have. We have the job of making sure that in all the circumstances of time and place the word of God takes root, springs up and bears fruit.

971 Dominus dabit benignitatem suam et terra nostra dabit fructum suum — the Lord will grant his blessing and the earth will bring forth its fruit.

That blessing is indeed the source of all good fruit, the necessary climate for producing saints, men and women of God, for this world of ours.

Dominus dabit benignitatem — the Lord will grant his blessing. Notice, however, that he goes on to point out that he awaits our fruit — yours and mine. Nor is this crop to be meagre or blighted because we have not really given ourselves completely. He expects abundant fruit since he fills us with his blessings.

972 You saw your vocation like one of those pods that contain the seeds. The moment to expand will come and then the seeds will spread out and take root all at once.

973 You are to be yeast within the great multitudes that make up humanity — remember we are interested in all souls. In this way, with God's grace and your own correspondence to it, you will act as leaven throughout the world, adding quality, flavour and volume to the bread of Christ so that it can nourish the souls of others.

974 The enemies of Jesus — and even some who call themselves his friends — come decked out in the armour of human knowledge and wielding the sword of power. They laugh at us Christians, just as the Philistine laughed at David and despised him.

In our own days too, the Goliath of hatred, the Goliath of falsehood, of dominating power, of secularism and indifferentism, will also come crashing to the ground. And then, once the giant of those false ideologies has been struck down by the apparently feeble weapons of the Christian spirit — prayer, expiation and action —

we shall strip him of his armour of erroneous doctrines, equipping our fellow men instead with true knowledge, with Christian culture and the Christian way of life.

975 In the campaigns against the Church there are many organizations which conspire together, sometimes going hand in hand with those who call themselves good. They influence people through newspapers, leaflets, satire, calumnies and spoken propaganda. They then take people where they wish — to hell itself. They try to turn people into an amorphous mass, as if they had no soul. They are a pitiful sight.

However, since people do have souls, we have to snatch them out of the claws of these organizations of evil and place them at the service of God.

976 Quite a considerable proportion of the people who go to Church read bad publications...

Calmly and with love of God we need to pray and teach them sound doctrine so that they don't go on reading that diabolical stuff, which they claim their families buy — for they are ashamed of it — though perhaps it is they themselves who do so.

977 Defend the truth with charity and firmness when the things of God are at stake. Practise holy shamelessness in denouncing errors, even though at times they are no more than insinuations; at other times they will be odious utterances of the most blatant ignorance, and, normally, a sign of man's frustration at not being able to endure the fruitfulness of the word of God.

978 In times of general confusion it may seem as though God is not listening to your pleading with him on behalf of his souls, and is turning a deaf ear to your calls. You even reach the point of thinking that all your apostolic labours have been in vain. Don't worry! Carry on working with the same cheerfulness, the same energy, the same zeal. Allow me to insist: when you work for God, nothing is unfruitful.

979 My child, all the seas of this world are ours and the places where it is harder to fish are the places where it is all the more necessary.

980 Through your Christian doctrine, your upright life and your work well done, you have to give good example to the people around you — relatives, friends, colleagues, neighbours, pupils — in the way you carry out your profession and fulfil the duties your job entails. You cannot be a shoddy worker.

981 That close intimacy you have with Christ means that you have a duty to bear fruit.

And yours will be a fruit that will satisfy the hunger of men who come up to you in your work, in your day-to-day life and in your family environment.

982 When you carry out your duties in a cheerful and generous way you obtain abundant grace from God for other souls also.

983 Make an effort to spread your Christian spirit to the world about you, so that there may be many friends of the Cross.

984 As well as having given you abundant and effective grace, the Lord has given you a brain, a pair of hands and intellectual powers so that your talents may yield fruit.

God wants to work miracles all the time — to raise the dead, make the deaf hear, restore sight to the blind, enable the lame to walk... — through your sanctified professional work, which you will have turned into a holocaust that is both pleasing to God and useful to souls.

985 The day you no longer strive to draw others closer to God — since you ought to be a burning coal all the time — you will become a contemptible piece of charcoal, or a handful of ashes to be scattered by the slightest puff of wind.

You have to be on fire; you need to be a thing that burns, producing flames of the love of God, of faithfulness and apostolate.

986 Invoke the Blessed Virgin. Keep asking her to show herself a Mother to you — monstra te esse Matrem! As well as drawing down her Son's grace, may she bring the clarity of sound doctrine to your mind, and love and purity to your heart, so that you may know the way to God and take many souls to him.

ETERNITY

987 A son of God fears neither life nor death, because his spiritual life is founded on a sense of divine filiation. So he says to himself: God is my Father and he is the Author of all good; he is all Goodness.

But, you and I, do we really act as sons of God?

988 I was delighted to see that you understood what I had said to you: you and I have to work and live and die like people in love, and we will live in this way for all eternity.

989 God always wins. If you are his instrument, you too will win, because your battles will be his battles.

990 Sanctity consists precisely in this: in struggling to be faithful throughout your life and in accepting joyfully the Will of God at the hour of death.

991 When you receive Our Lord in the Holy Eucharist, thank him from the bottom of your heart for being so good as to be with you.

Have you ever stopped to consider that it took centuries and centuries before the Messiah came? All those patriarchs and prophets praying together with the whole people of Israel: Come, Lord, the land is parched!

If only your loving expectation were like this.

992 Even in our times, despite those who deny God, earth is very close to Heaven.

993 You wrote: "Simile est regnum caelorum — the Kingdom of God is like a treasure... This passage from the Gospel has taken root in my soul. I had read it so many times before, without grasping its meaning, its divine flavour."

Yes, everything. The prudent man has to sell everything to obtain the treasure — the precious pearl of Glory.

994 Talk with Our Lady and tell her trustingly, O Mary, in order to live the ideal which God has set in my heart I need to fly very high — ever so high!

It is not sufficient to detach yourself, with God's help, from the things of this world, recognising them as the merest clay. More is needed: even if you were to put the whole universe in a pile under your feet to get closer to Heaven... it wouldn't suffice!

You have to fly, without the support of anything here on earth, relying on the voice and the inspiration of the Spirit. And you will tell me: But my wings are stained and smeared with the clinging mud of many years.

And I repeat: Turn to Our Lady. Mary, you should say to her again, I can hardly get off the ground. The earth draws me like an accursed magnet. Mary, you can make my soul take off on that glorious and definitive flight which has as its destination the very Heart of God.

Trust in her, for she is listening to you.

995 Think how pleasing to Our Lord is the incense burnt in his honour. Think also how little the things of this earth are worth; even as they begin they are already ending.

In Heaven, instead, a great Love awaits you, with no betrayals and no deceptions. The fulness of love, the fulness of beauty and greatness and knowledge... And it will never cloy: it will satiate, yet still you will want more.

996 With a supernatural outlook, with serenity and peace. That is the way to see things, people and events — from the viewpoint of eternity.

And then, whatever barrier blocks your way — even if it is, humanly speaking, enormous — when you really raise your eyes to Heaven, how tiny it becomes!

997 If we are close to Christ and are following in his footsteps, we will wholeheartedly love poverty, privation and detachment from earthly things.

998 In our spiritual life, we often have to be ready to lose on earth so as to win in Heaven. This way we always end up winning.

999 Men lie when they say "forever" in temporal matters. The only true "forever", in the complete sense, is the forever of eternity.

And that is the way you have to live, with a faith that brings a foretaste of the sweet honey of Heaven whenever you think about that eternity which is truly everlasting.

1000 If this were the only life we had, life would be a cruel joke. It would be hypocrisy, evil, selfishness, betrayal.

1001 Keep going forward cheerfully and trying hard, even though you are so little — nothing at all!

When you are with Him nobody in the world can stop you. Consider, moreover, how everything is good for those who love God. Every problem in this world has a solution, except death, and for us death is Life.

1002 Lord, you died on the Cross to save mankind. And yet for one mortal sin you condemn a man to a hapless eternity of suffering. How much sin must offend you, and how much I ought to hate it!

1003 Saint Teresa assures us that "anyone who doesn't pray doesn't need any devil to tempt him; while whoever prays, even if only for a quarter of an hour each day, will necessarily be saved." This is because our conversation with Our Lord — who is so loving, even in times of difficulty or dryness of soul -enables us to see things in their proper perspective and discover the true proportions of life.

Be a soul of prayer.

1004 "So you are a king?"... Yes, Christ is the King, the King who not only grants you an audience whenever you like, but even in the madness of his love "gives up" — you know what I mean — his magnificent palace in Heaven, which you cannot yet reach, and waits for you in the Tabernacle.

Don't you think it is absurd not to hurry to speak to him, and not to do so more assiduously?

1005 I am every day more convinced that happiness in Heaven is for those who know how to be happy on earth.

1006 With crystal clarity I see the formula, the secret of happiness, both earthly and eternal. It is not just a matter of accepting the Will of God but of embracing it, of identifying oneself with it — in a word, of loving the Divine Will with a positive act of our own will.

This, I repeat, is the infallible secret of joy and peace.

1007 How often you will find yourself inundated, intoxicated with God's grace — and what a sin if you do not respond!

1008 In the hour of temptation, practise the virtue of Hope, saying: For my rest and enjoyment I have the whole of eternity ahead of me. Here and now, full of Faith, I will earn my rest through work and win my joy through suffering. What will Love be like in Heaven!

Better still, you should practise your Love by saying: What I want is to please my God, my Love, by doing his Will in all things, as though there were neither reward nor punishment -simply to please him.

1009 Whenever the worrying thought enters your head that you lack rectitude of intention — sometimes it may come like a flash of lightning, at other times like a filthy pestering fly which you brush off but which keeps coming back — always make acts of right intention straight away, and carry on working calmly for Him and with Him.

At the same time, even though you might feel you are only pronouncing the words mechanically, say slowly: Lord, I want nothing for myself. May everything be for your glory and for your Love.

1010 It is all the same to you, you tell me, to be here or in China.

Well then, try to be always where you are fulfilling the Holy Will of God.

1011 Much depends on you too. If you respond many will remain in darkness no longer, but will walk instead along paths that lead to everlasting life.

1012 Get into the habit of praying to the Guardian Angel of each person you are following up. Their Angel will help them to be good and faithful and cheerful, so that when the time comes they will be able to receive the eternal embrace of Love from God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit and from the Blessed Virgin.

1013 Like the grain of wheat, we too have to die in order to become fruitful.

You and I, with the help of God's grace, want to open up a deep furrow, to blaze a trail. That is why we have to leave behind our poor animal man and launch out into the sphere of the spirit, giving a supernatural meaning to every human undertaking and, at the same time, to all those engaged in them.

1014 Jesus, let my distractions be the other way round. Instead of recalling the world when I am engaged in conversation with you, let me rather recall you when I am engaged in the things of this world.

1015 You became a bit frightened when you saw such dazzling light, so bright that you thought it would be difficult to look, or even to see.

Disregard your obvious weaknesses, and open the eyes of your soul to faith, to hope and to love. Carry on, allowing yourself to be guided by God through whoever directs your soul.

1016 Be generous. Don't ask Jesus for even one consolation!

You ask me why. And I reply, because you know very well that even though this God of ours seems to be far away, he really is seated in the very centre of your soul, imparting a divine character to your whole life.

1017 I was telling you that even people who had not received baptism had been moved to say, "I can well understand that saintly souls must be happy, for they look at events with a vision that is above the things of this world. They see things with the eyes of eternity."

May you not lack that same vision, I added afterwards, so that you can respond to the special love with which the Blessed Trinity has treated you.

1018 I assure you that if we want to, as children of God, we can make a powerful contribution towards lighting up the work and the lives of men with the divine and eternal splendour which it has pleased the Lord to place in our souls.

But "he who says he abides in Jesus ought to walk the same way He walked" as Saint John teaches. It is a path which always leads to glory. But it also always passes through sacrifice.

1019 What a disappointment awaited those who saw the light of the pseudo-apostle, and wishing to come out of their darkness, were drawn to his light. They raced to get there. They may have left shreds of their skin along the way. Some in their eagerness for that light may also have left behind some shreds of their very souls. And now, having reached the pseudo-apostle, they find cold and darkness. Cold and darkness which will eventually congeal the broken hearts of those who for a while had believed in that ideal.

It is an evil deed the pseudo-apostle has done. Those disappointed men who had been ready to give their very flesh in exchange for those glowing fires, for that gleaming ruby of charity, drop once more, instead, back to the earth from which they had come. Down they go, with a saddened heart, with a heart that is a heart no longer — just a chunk of ice shrouded in a darkness which will eventually cloud their minds.

You false paradoxical apostle, see what you have done: because Christ is on your lips but not in your deeds; because you attract with a light which you yourself lack; because there is no warmth of charity in you, and you claim to be concerned about outsiders while all the time you are neglecting your own; because you are a liar, and lying is the daughter of the devil. And so, you are working for the devil, causing bewilderment to those who follow the Master, and even though you may triumph frequently here on earth, woe to you on that day which is approaching when our friend Death will come, and you shall see the anger of the Judge whom you have never deceived. Paradoxes, no, Lord: paradoxes, never.

1020 This is the sure way: through humiliation to the Cross; then, from the Cross, with Christ, to the immortal Glory of the Father.

1021 How much I savoured the epistle of that day! The Holy Spirit through Saint Paul teaches us the secret of immortality and of Glory. All of us human beings yearn to live on.

We would wish to make those moments in our lives when we are happy last forever. We would wish the memory of our deeds to be glorified. We would like our cherished ideals to become immortal. And so it is that when we seem to be happy, when something consoles us in our distress, we all naturally say and desire that it should last forever, forever.

Oh the wisdom of the devil! How well he knew the human heart. You will be like gods, he said to our first parents. That was a cruel deception. Saint Paul in his Epistle to the Philippians teaches us a divine secret by which to attain immortality and Glory: Jesus... emptied himself, taking the form of a slave... He humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on the Cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him a name which is above every other name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in Heaven and on earth and under the earth...

1022 If we are to accompany Christ in his Glory, in his final triumph, we have first of all to share in his holocaust, becoming identified with him, who died on Calvary.

1023 Don't let yourself be distracted, don't give free rein to your imagination. Live the life within you and you will be closer to God.

1024 Help me repeat in the ear of this person and of that other one... and of everyone: a sinner who has faith, even if he were to obtain all the blessings of this earth, will necessarily be unhappy and wretched.

It is true that the motive that leads us (and should lead everyone) to hate sin, even venial sin, ought to be a supernatural one: that God abhors sin from the depths of his infiniteness, with a supreme, eternal and necessary hatred, as an evil opposed to the infinite good. But the first reason I mentioned to you can lead us to this other one.

1025 You will have as much sanctity, as you have mortification done for Love.

1026 Violent persecution had broken out. And that priest prayed: Jesus, may every sacrilegious fire increase in me the fire of Love and Reparation.

1027 When you consider the beauty, the greatness and the effectiveness of apostolic work, you say that your head aches thinking of the amount of ground that still has to be covered -there are so many souls who are waiting! But you feel so happy offering yourself as a slave to Jesus. You have a great desire for his Cross and for suffering, for Love and for souls. Without thinking about it, in an instinctive gesture — which was one of Love — you stretched out your arms and opened the palms of your hands, ready for him to nail you to his Holy Cross. You were ready to be his slave — serviam — which is to reign.

1028 I was moved by the heartfelt petition that came from your lips: My God, my only desire is to be pleasing in your sight; nothing else matters to me. My Mother Immaculate, may I be motivated exclusively by Love.

1029 With your whole heart, ask for death, and a thousand deaths, rather than offend your God.

And not because of the punishment due to sin, which we deserve so much, but because Jesus has been and is so good to you.

1030 My God, when will I love you for yourself? Although when we think about it, Lord, to desire an everlasting reward is to desire you, for you give yourself as our reward.

1031 Taste and see that the Lord is good, the Psalmist says.

Spiritual conquest, which is Love, has to be a desire for the Infinite, a desire for eternity — in big things and small.

1032 Jesus, I don't want to think of what "tomorrow" will be like, for I don't want to put limits on your generosity.

1033 Make those reflections of your friend your own. He wrote: "I was considering how good God was to me and, full of interior joy, I was ready to shout out loud, there in the street, for everyone to know about my filial gratitude: 'Father! Father!' And though not in fact shouting out loud, I kept calling him so - 'Father!' — in a low voice, many times, quite certain that it pleased him.

I seek nothing else. I only want to please him and give him Glory. Everything for him. If I desire my salvation and my sanctification it is because I know that he desires it. If in my Christian life I hunger for souls, it is because I know that he has this great hunger. I say this in all truth: I will never set my sights on the prize. I don't desire a reward: everything for Love!"

1034 How that sick woman whom I tended spiritually loved the Will of God! She saw her many, long-lasting and painful illnesses (not a single part of her body was healthy), as a blessing from Jesus and a sign of his special love. Although in her humility she used to say that she deserved punishment, the terrible sufferings that she felt all over her were not a punishment, but a mercy.

We spoke of death. And of Heaven. And of what she was going to say to Jesus and to Our Lady. And how she would be working much more from up there than she could down here. She was ready to die whenever God wanted... but, she exclaimed, full of joy, "If only it could be today!" She looked forward to death with the same joy as one who knows that when we die we go to meet our Father.

1035 Do not fear death. She is your friend!

Try to get used to the fact of death: peer into your grave often, looking at and smelling, and touching your own rotting corpse there, a week, no more, after your death.

Remember this especially when you are troubled by the impulses of your flesh.

1036 When he bared his soul to me he said, "These days I have been thinking about death as a rest, in spite of my crimes. And I thought that if I was told: 'The time has come for you to die', I would gladly reply: 'The time has come for me to Live'."

1037 To die is a good thing. How can anyone with faith be, at the same time, afraid to die? But as long as the Lord wants to keep you here on earth, it would be

cowardice for you to want to die. You must live, live and suffer and work for Love: that is your task.

1038 At least once a day, cast your mind ahead to the moment of death so that you can consider the events of each day in this light.

I can assure you that you will have a good experience of the peace this consideration brings.

1039 You became very serious when you heard me say: I accept death whenever God wants it, the way he wants it, where he wants it; and at the same time I think it is too easy to die early, because we should want to work many years for him, and because of him, in the service of others.

1040 To die?... That's too easy, I say once more.

Say, just as that holy bishop did when he was old and sick, *non recuso laborem* — Lord, as long as I can be useful, I do not refuse to keep on living and working for you.

1041 You shouldn't want to do things to gain merit, nor out of fear of the punishments of purgatory. From now on, and always, you should make the effort to do everything, even the smallest things, to please Jesus.

1042 Desire ardently that, when that unavoidable good sister of yours, death, comes to render you the service of taking you to God, she will not find you attached to anything on this earth!

1043 If you long to have life — eternal life and happiness -you must not leave the barque of Holy Mother Church. Look, if you go beyond the confines of the ship you end up in the waves of the sea, heading for death, drowned in the ocean. You cease to be with Christ. You lose that friendship of his which you freely chose when you realised that it was he who was offering it to you.

1044 Jesus came down to this earth to suffer... and so that others might avoid sufferings, even earthly ones.

1045 There is no greater self-mastery than to make oneself a servant, the willing servant of all souls!

This is how to gain the greatest honours, both on earth and in Heaven.

1046 In the face of suffering and persecution, a certain soul with supernatural sense said, "I prefer to take a beating down here rather than get it in purgatory."

1047 If I love, there will be no hell for me.

1048 How good it is to live on God's bounty! How good it is to desire nothing other than his Glory.

1049 If you really want to attain eternal life and honour, you must learn in many cases to put aside your own noble ambitions.

1050 Don't keep on talking about your health, your family name, your career, your work, or your next step... How annoying this can be! It would seem you have forgotten that you don't have anything, that everything is His.

When you feel sometimes — perhaps without reason — that you have been humiliated; when you think your opinion should prevail; when you notice that at every moment your "self" keeps cropping up: your this, your that, your something else... convince yourself that you are wasting, killing time, and that what you should be doing is killing your selfishness.

1051 I advise you not to look for praise, even when you deserve it. It is better to pass unnoticed, and to let the most beautiful and noble aspects of our actions, of our lives, remain hidden. What a great thing it is to become little! Deo omnis gloria! -All the glory to God.

1052 In moments of disappointment, that soul said to Our Lord: "My Jesus, what else could I give you apart from my honour, if I had nothing else? If I had had a fortune I would have given it to you. If I had had virtues, I would have built up each one to serve you better. The only thing I had was my honour and I have given it to you. May you be blessed! It's clear that it was safe in your hands!"

1053 It is from clay I come and the earth is the inheritance of all my lineage.

Who but God deserves praise?

1054 When you feel self-love — pride! — stirring within you, making you out to be a superman, it is time to cry out: No! In this way you will savour the joy of the good son of God who goes through life with not a few faults, but doing good.

1055 Sancta Maria, Stella maris — Holy Mary, Star of the sea, be our guide.

Make this firm request, because there is no storm which can shipwreck the most Sweet Heart of Mary. When you see the storm coming, if you seek safety in that firm Refuge which is Mary, there will be no danger of your wavering or going down.

Christ Is Passing By

By Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer

THE CHRISTIAN VOCATION

CHRIST TRIUMPHS THROUGH HUMILITY

MARRIAGE: A CHRISTIAN VOCATION

THE EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD

IN JOSEPH'S WORKSHOP

THE CONVERSION OF THE CHILDREN OF GOD

CHRISTIAN RESPECT FOR PERSONS AND THEIR FREEDOM

INTERIOR STRUGGLE

THE EUCHARIST, MYSTERY OF FAITH AND LOVE

CHRIST'S DEATH IS THE CHRISTIAN'S LIFE

CHRIST'S PRESENCE IN CHRISTIANS

THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD

THE GREAT UNKNOWN

TO JESUS THROUGH MARY

ON THE FEAST OF CORPUS CHRISTI

FINDING PEACE IN THE HEART OF CHRIST

THE BLESSED VIRGIN, CAUSE OF OUR JOY

CHRIST THE KING

THE CHRISTIAN VOCATION

A homily given on 2 December 1961, the first Sunday in Advent

The Apostles were ordinary men

"Now is the hour for us to rise"

The mercy of God

Responding to God

The seasoning of mortification

Belief and reason

Advent is a time for hope

1 The liturgical year is beginning, and the introit of the Mass invites us to consider something closely related to the beginning of our Christian life: the vocation we have all received. "Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths."

We ask the Lord to guide us, to show us his footprints, so we can set out to attain the fullness of his commandments, which is charity.

In considering the circumstances surrounding your decision to make every effort to live your faith, I imagine that you, like me, will thank our Lord. I know too that,

without falling into false humility, this thankfulness will leave you even more convinced that you have merited nothing of this on your own. Usually we learn to invoke God as a young child from our Christian parents. Later, teachers, friends and acquaintances have helped us in many ways not to lose sight of our Lord.

Open your own hearts to Jesus and tell him your story. I don't want to generalize. But one day perhaps an ordinary Christian, just like you, opened your eyes to horizons both deep and new, yet as old as the Gospel. He suggested to you the prospect of following Christ earnestly, seriously, of becoming an apostle of apostles. Perhaps you lost your balance then and didn't recover it. Your complacency wasn't quite replaced by true peace until you freely said "yes" to God, because you wanted to, which is the most supernatural of reasons. And in its wake came a strong, constant joy, which disappears only when you abandon him.

I don't like to speak of someone being singled out to be part of a privileged elect. But it is Christ who speaks, who chooses. It is the language of Holy Scripture: "He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy," St Paul tells us.

I know that such thoughts don't fill you with pride nor lead you to think yourself better than other men. That choice, the root of our vocation, should be the basis of our humility. Do we build monuments to an artist's paintbrush? Granted the brush had a part in creating masterpieces, but we give credit only to the painter. We Christians are nothing more than instruments in the hands of the creator of the world, of the redeemer of all men.

The Apostles were ordinary men

2 I'm greatly encouraged whenever I consider a written precedent for what we have been talking about. We find it, step by step, in the Gospel's account of the vocation of the first twelve. Let's meditate on it slowly, asking those holy witnesses of our Lord to help us follow Christ as they did.

The first Apostles, for whom I have great affection and devotion, were nothing to boast about, humanly speaking. With the exception of Matthew, who probably earned a comfortable living, which he left behind at the behest of Jesus, the Apostles were mere fishermen. They lived a meager existence, fishing all night to keep food on the table.

But social status is unimportant. They weren't educated; they weren't even very bright, if we judge from their reaction to supernatural things. Finding even the most elementary examples and comparisons beyond their reach, they would turn to the Master and ask: "Explain the parable to us."

When Jesus uses the image of the "leaven" of the Pharisees, they think that he's reproaching them for not having purchased bread.

They were poor; they were ignorant. They weren't very simple or open. But they were even ambitious. Frequently they argued over who would be the greatest when — according to their understanding — Christ would definitively restore the

kingdom of Israel. Amid the intimacy of the last supper, during that sublime moment when Jesus is about to immolate himself for all of humanity, we find them arguing heatedly.

Faith? They had little. Jesus Christ himself points this out.

They had seen the dead raised, all kinds of sicknesses cured, bread and fish multiplied, storms calmed, devils cast out. Chosen as the head, St Peter is the only one who reacts quickly: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

But it is a faith beset by limitations, which lead Peter to reproach Jesus Christ for his desire to suffer and die for the redemption of men. And Jesus had to upbraid him: "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me; for you are not on the side of God, but of men."

"Peter was too human in his thinking," St John Chrysostom comments, "and therefore he reasons that those things" — Christ's passion and death — "were unworthy of him, something deplorable. Consequently, Jesus reprimands him and says: No, suffering is not beneath me; you only think so because your mind is limited to human thoughts."

And did these men of little faith at least stand out in their love for Christ? Undoubtedly they loved him, at least in word. At times they were swept away by enthusiasm: "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

But at the moment of truth, they all fled, except for John who truly loved with deeds. Only this adolescent, youngest of the Apostles, can be found next to the cross. The others didn't find within themselves that love as strong as death.

These were the disciples called by our Lord. Such stuff is what Christ chose. And they remain just like that until they are filled with the Holy Spirit and thus become pillars of the Church.

They are ordinary men, complete with defects and shortcomings, more eager to say than to do. Nevertheless, Jesus calls them to be fishers of men, co-redeemers, dispensers of the grace of God.

3 Something similar has happened to us. With little effort we could find among our family, friends and acquaintances — not to mention the crowds of the world — so many worthier persons that Christ could have called. Yes, persons who are simpler and wiser, more influential and important, more grateful and generous.

In thinking along these lines, I feel embarrassed. But I also realize that human logic cannot possibly explain the world of grace. God usually seeks out deficient instruments so that the work can more clearly be seen to be his. It is with trembling that St Paul recalls his vocation: "And last of all, as by one born out of due time, he was seen also by me. For I am the least of the apostles, and am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God." Thus writes Saul of Tarsus, whose personality and drive fill history with awe.

As I said before, we have merited nothing. Before God called us, there was nothing more than personal wretchedness. Let us realize that the lights shining in our soul (faith), the love wherewith we love (charity), and the desire sustaining us (hope) are all free gifts from God. Were we not to grow in humility, we would soon lose sight of the reason for our having been chosen by God: personal sanctity.

If we are humble, we can understand all the marvel of our divine vocation. The hand of Christ has snatched us from a wheat field; the sower squeezes the handful of wheat in his wounded palm. The blood of Christ bathes the seed, soaking it. Then the Lord tosses the wheat to the winds, so that in dying it becomes life and in sinking into the ground it multiplies itself.

"Now is the hour for us to rise"

4 The epistle of today's Mass reminds us that we are to acknowledge this responsibility of apostles with new spirit, with desires, fully awake. "It is now the hour for us to rise from sleep, because now our salvation is nearer than when we came to believe. The night is far advanced; the day is at hand. Let us therefore lay aside the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light."

You might tell me that it isn't easy, and you are right. The enemies of man — the enemies of his sanctity — try to deny him this new life, this putting on of the spirit of Christ. I can find no better summary of the obstacles to Christian fidelity than that of St John. "Because all that is in the world is the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life."

5 Lust of the flesh is not limited to the disordered tendencies of our senses in general, nor to the sexual drive, which ought to be directed and is not bad in itself, since it is a noble human reality that can be sanctified. Note, therefore, that I never speak of impurity, but of purity, because Christ is speaking to all of us when he says: "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God." By divine vocation, some are called to live this purity in marriage. Others, foregoing all human love, are called to correspond solely and passionately to God's love. Far from being slaves to sensuality, both the married and the unmarried are to be masters of their body and heart in order to give themselves unstintingly to others.

Whenever I talk about the virtue of purity, I usually qualify it by calling it holy purity. Christian purity, holy purity, is not the same as priding oneself on feeling "pure", uncontaminated. We must realize we have feet of clay, although the grace of God rescues us day by day from the dangers of the enemy. Those who write or preach almost exclusively on this topic are deforming Christianity, in my view, for they forget other virtues so important to the Christian and also to our life in society.

Holy purity is not the only — nor the principal — Christian virtue. It is, however, essential if we are to persevere in the daily effort of our sanctification. If it is not lived, there can be no apostolic dedication. Purity is a consequence of the love that prompts us to commit to Christ our soul and body, our faculties and senses. It is not something negative; it is a joyful affirmation.

Earlier I said that lust of the flesh is not limited to disordered sensuality. It also means softness, laziness bent on the easiest, most pleasurable way, any apparent shortcut, even at the expense of infidelity to God.

To abdicate in this way is equivalent to letting oneself fall completely under the imperious sway of the law of sin, about which St Paul warned us: "When I wish to do good I discover this law, namely, that evil is at hand for me. For I am delighted with the law of God according to the inner man, but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind and making me prisoner to the law of sin... Unhappy man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death?" But listen to the answer of the Apostle: "The grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord." We can and ought to fight always to overcome the lust of the flesh, because, if we are humble, we will always be granted the grace of our Lord.

6 St John tells us that the other enemy is the lust of the eyes, a deep-seated avariciousness that leads us to appreciate only what we can touch. Such eyes are glued to earthly things and, consequently, they are blind to supernatural realities. We can, then, use this expression of sacred Scripture to indicate that disordered desire for material things, as well as that deformation which views everything around us — other people, the circumstances of our life and of our age — with just human vision.

Then the eyes of our soul grow dull. Reason proclaims itself sufficient to understand everything, without the aid of God. This is a subtle temptation, which hides behind the power of our intellect, given by our Father God to man so that he might know and love him freely. Seduced by this temptation, the human mind appoints itself the centre of the universe, being thrilled with the prospect that "you shall be like gods." So filled with love for itself, it turns its back on the love of God.

In this way does our existence fall prey unconditionally to the third enemy: pride of life. It's not merely a question of passing thoughts of vanity or self-love; it's a state of general conceit. Let's not deceive ourselves, for this is the worst of all evils, the root of every false step. The fight against pride has to be a constant battle, to such an extent that someone once said that pride only disappears twenty-four hours after each of us has died. It is the arrogance of the Pharisee whom God cannot transform because he finds in him the obstacle of self-sufficiency. It is the haughtiness that leads to despising other men, to lording it over them, to mistreating them. For "when pride comes, then comes disgrace."

The mercy of God

7 Today marks the beginning of Advent. And it is good for us to consider the wiles of these enemies of the soul: the disorder of sensuality and easy-going superficiality, the folly of reason that rejects God, the cavalier presumption that snuffs out love for both God and creatures. All these obstacles are real enough, and they can indeed cause us a great deal of trouble. For these very reasons the liturgy invites us to implore divine mercy: "To you, o Lord, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust, let me not be put to shame; let not my enemies exult over me," as we

prayed in the introit. And in the offertory we shall go back to the same idea: "Let none that wait for you be put to shame."

Now that the time of our salvation is approaching, it is consoling to hear from the lips of St Paul that "when the goodness and kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not by the works of justice which we have done, but according to his mercy."

If you leaf through the Holy Scripture, you will discover constant references to the mercy of God. Mercy fills the earth. It extends to all his children, and is "all around us." It "watches over me." It "extends to the heavens" to help us, and has been continually "confirmed". God in taking care of us as a loving father looks on us in his mercy — a mercy that is "tender", welcome as "rain-clouds".

The life of Jesus Christ is a summary and compendium of the story of divine mercy: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." And on another occasion our Lord said: "Be merciful, therefore, even as your Father is merciful." Many other scenes of the Gospel have also made a deep impact on us, such as his forgiveness of the adulterous woman, the parable of the prodigal son, that of the lost sheep, that of the pardoned debtor, the resurrection of the son of the widow at Naim. How many reasons based on justice could Christ have found to work this great wonder! The only son of that poor widow had died, he who gave meaning to her life, he who could help her in her old age. But Jesus didn't perform the miracle out of justice, but out of compassion, because his heart was moved by human suffering.

What security should be ours in considering the mercy of the Lord! "He has but to cry for redress, and I, the ever merciful, will listen to him." It is an invitation, a promise that he will not fail to fulfill. "Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." The enemies of our sanctification will be rendered powerless if the mercy of God goes before us. And if through our own fault and human weakness we should fall, the Lord comes to our aid and raises us up. "You had learned to avoid negligence, to flee from arrogance, to grow in piety, not to be a prisoner of worldly matters, to prefer the eternal to the passing. But since human weakness cannot maintain a steady pace in such a slippery world, the good doctor has prescribed remedies for not getting lost and the merciful judge has not led you to despair of pardon."

Responding to God

8 It is under the "umbrella" of God's mercy that Christian existence should develop. Ever mindful of that, the Christian should strive to behave as a child of God. And what are the principal means to ensure that our vocation takes root? Today let me point out two of them, which are like living supports of Christian conduct: interior life and doctrinal formation, the deep knowledge of our faith.

First of all, interior life. How few really understand this! If they hear about the interior life, they imagine some obscure temple. For more than a quarter of a century I have been saying that such isn't the case. I talk about the interior life of

ordinary Christians who habitually find themselves in the hubbub of the city, in the light of day, in the street, at work, with their families or simply relaxing; they are centered on Jesus all day long. And what is this except a life of continuous prayer? Isn't it true that you have seen the need to become a soul of prayer, to reach an intimacy with God that leads to divinization? Such is the Christian faith as always understood by souls of prayer — "A man becomes God," writes Clement of Alexandria, "because he loves whatever God loves."

At first it will be more difficult. You must make an effort to seek out the Lord, to thank him for his fatherly and practical concern for us. Although it is not a question of sentiment, little by little the love of God makes itself felt like a rustle in the soul. It is Christ who pursues us lovingly: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." How is your life of prayer going? At times don't you feel during the day the impulse to speak more at length with him? Don't you then whisper to him that you will tell him all about it later, in a heart-to-heart conversation?

In the periods expressly reserved for this rendezvous with our Lord, the heart is broadened, the will is strengthened, the mind, helped by grace, fills the world of human reality with supernatural content. The results come in the form of clear, practical resolutions to improve your conduct, to deal more charitably with all men, to spare no efforts — like good athletes — in this Christian struggle of love and peace.

Prayer then becomes continuous, like the beating of our heart, like our pulse. Without this presence of God, there is no contemplative life. And without contemplative life, our working for Christ is worth very little, for vain is the builder's toil if the house is not of the Lord's building.

The seasoning of mortification

9 In order to reach sanctity, an ordinary Christian — who is not a religious — has no reason to abandon the world, since that is precisely where he is to find Christ. He needs no external signs, such as a habit or insignias. All the signs of his dedication are internal: a constant presence of God and a spirit of mortification. As a matter of fact, only one thing is necessary, because mortification is nothing more than prayer of the senses.

The Christian vocation is one of sacrifice, penance, expiation. We must make reparation for our sins — for the many times we turned our face aside so as to avoid the gaze of God — and all the sins of mankind. We must try to imitate Christ, "always carrying about in our body the dying of Christ," his abnegation, his suffering on the cross, "so that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our bodies." Our way is one of immolation and, in this denial, we find *gaudium cum pace*, both joy and peace.

We do not look upon the world with a frown. Some biographers of saints have in the past been interested only in highlighting extraordinary things in the lives of God's servants, from even their earliest days in the cradle. They have, unintentionally perhaps, done a disservice to Christian truth. They even said of

some of them that as babies they did not cry, nor drink their mother's milk on Fridays, out of a spirit of penance. You and I came into this world crying our heads off, and we most assuredly drank our milk in total disregard for fasts and ember days.

Now, we have learned to discover, with the help of God, in the succession of apparently similar days, a time for true penance, and in these moments we resolve to improve our life. This is the way to ready ourselves for the grace and inspirations of the Holy Spirit in our soul. And with that grace, I repeat, comes *gaudium cum pace*: joy, peace and perseverance in our struggle.

Mortification is the seasoning of our life. And the best mortification is that which overcomes the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life in little things throughout the day. Ours should be mortifications that do not mortify others, and which give us more finesse, more understanding and more openness in our dealings with everybody. You are not mortified, if you are touchy; if your every thought is for yourself; if you humiliate others; if you don't know how to give up what is unnecessary and, at times, what is necessary; if you become gloomy because things don't turn out the way you had hoped. On the other hand, you can be sure you are mortified, if you know how to make yourself "all things to all men, in order to save all."

Belief and reason

10 A life of prayer and penance, together with an awareness of our divine filiation, transforms us into Christians whose piety is truly deep. We become little children at the feet of God. Piety is the virtue of children. And if the child is to take refuge in the arms of his father, he must be, and know that he is, small, needy. I have often meditated on this life of spiritual childhood, which is not incompatible with fortitude, because it demands a strong will, proven maturity, an open and firm character.

We are to be pious, then, as pious as children, but not ignorant. Insofar as possible, each of us should study the faith seriously, rigorously — all of which means theology. Ours should be the piety of children and the sure doctrine of theologians.

Our desire to advance in theological knowledge, in sound, firm Christian doctrine is sparked, above all, by the will to know and love God. It likewise stems from the concern of a faithful soul to attain the deepest meaning of the world, seen as coming from the hands of God. Every now and then, monotonously sounding like a broken record, some people try to resurrect a supposed incompatibility between faith and science, between human knowledge and divine revelation. But such incompatibility could only arise — and then only apparently — from a misunderstanding of the elements of the problem.

If the world has come from God, if he has created man in his image and likeness and given him a spark of divine light, the task of our intellect should be to uncover the divine meaning imbedded in all things by their nature, even if this can be

attained only by dint of hard work. And with the light of faith, we also can perceive their supernatural purpose, resulting from the elevation of the natural order to the higher order of grace. We can never be afraid of developing human knowledge, because all intellectual effort, if it is serious, is aimed at truth. And Christ has said, "I am the truth."

The Christian must have a hunger to know. Everything, from the most abstract knowledge to manual techniques, can and should lead to God. For there is no human undertaking which cannot be sanctified, which cannot be an opportunity to sanctify ourselves and to cooperate with God in the sanctification of the people with whom we work. The light of the followers of Jesus Christ should not be hidden in the depths of some valley, but should be placed on the mountain peak, so that "they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."

To work in this way is to pray. To study thus is likewise prayer. Research done with this spirit is prayer too. We are always doing the same thing, for everything can be prayer, all activity can and should lead us to God, nourish our intimate dealings with him, from morning to night. Any honorable work can be prayer and all prayerful work is apostolate. In this way the soul develops a unity of life, which is both simple and strong.

Advent is a time for hope

11 I don't wish to go on any longer on this first Sunday of Advent, when we begin to count the days separating us from the birth of the Savior. We have considered the reality of our Christian vocation: how our Lord has entrusted us with the mission of attracting other souls to sanctity, encouraging them to get close to him, to feel united to the Church, to extend the kingdom of God to all hearts. Jesus wants to see us dedicated, faithful, responsive. He wants us to love him. It is his desire that we be holy, very much his own.

You see within yourselves, on the one hand, pride, sensuality, boredom and selfishness; on the other, love, commitment, mercy, humility, sacrifice, joy. You have to choose. You have been called to a life of faith, hope and charity. You cannot seek lesser goals, condemning yourself to a life of mediocre isolation.

Some time ago I saw an eagle shut up in an iron cage. It was dirty, and half its feathers were missing. In its claws was a piece of carrion. I then thought what would happen to me were I to renounce my vocation from God. I felt sorry for that lonely, fettered bird, born to soar the heavens and gaze at the sun. We too can scale the humble heights of love for God, of service to all men. However, in order to do this, we must make sure that our souls have no nooks or crannies into which the light of Jesus Christ cannot shine. And then Christ will be in your mind, on your lips, in your heart, stamped on your deeds. All of your life will be full of God — in its sentiments, its works, its thoughts and its words.

"Look up, and lift up your heads, because your redemption is at hand," we have just read in the Gospel. This time of Advent is a time for hope. These great horizons

of our Christian vocation, this unity of life built on the presence of God our Father, can and ought to be a daily reality.

Ask our Lady, along with me, to make it come true. Try to imagine how she spent these months, waiting for her Son to be born. And our Lady, Holy Mary, will make of you alter Christus, ipse Christus: another Christ, Christ himself!

CHRIST TRIUMPHS THROUGH HUMILITY

A homily given on 24 December 1963

Perfect God and perfect Man

Why Jesus came to live with us

He went about doing good

He did the will of God his Father

12 "This day shall light shine upon us; for the Lord is born to us." This is the great announcement that moves Christians today. Through them it is addressed to all mankind. God is here. This truth should fill our lives, and every Christmas should be for us a new and special meeting with God, when we allow his light and grace to enter deep into our soul.

We stop in front of Mary, Joseph and the Child, looking at the Son of God who has taken on our flesh. I remember now I made a visit — for a very special reason — to the holy house of Loreto, Italy, on August 15, 1951. I said Mass there. I wanted to say it calmly and reverently, but I hadn't counted on the crowd's fervor. I had forgotten that the faith of the people of the region and their love for the Madonna meant there would be a huge crowd for the feast of the Assumption.

Their piety was not always entirely correct in its expression, at least from the point of view of the Church's liturgical regulations. When I would kiss the altar in accordance with the rubrics, three or four local women would accompany me. It was distracting, but certainly moving. I also noticed that above the altar in that holy house, which tradition says was the home of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, these words were written: "Here the Word was made flesh." Here, on a bit of the earth on which we live, in a house built by men, God dwelt.

Perfect God and perfect Man

13 The Son of God became man, and he is perfectus Deus, perfectus homo: "perfect God and perfect man." There is something in this mystery which should stir Christians. I was and am moved. I should like to go back to Loreto. I go there now in thought and desire, to relive those years of Jesus' childhood and consider once more those words: "Here the Word was made flesh."

Iesus Christus, Deus homo: Jesus Christ, God-man. This is one of "the mighty works of God," which we should reflect upon and thank him for. He has come to bring "peace on earth to men of good Will," to all men who want to unite their wills

to the holy will of God — not just the rich, not just the poor, but everyone: all the brethren. We are all brothers in Jesus, children of God, brothers of Christ. His Mother is our mother.

There is only one race in the world: the race of the children of God. We should all speak the same language, taught us by our Father in heaven — the language Jesus spoke with his Father. It is the language of heart and mind, which you are using now, in your prayer — the language of contemplation, used by men who are spiritual, because they realize they are children of God. This language is expressed in a thousand motions of our will, in the clear insights of our minds, in the affections of our heart, in our commitment to lead a virtuous life, in goodness, happiness and peace.

You must look at the Child in the manger. He is our Love. Look at him, realizing that the whole thing is a mystery. We need to accept this mystery on faith and use our faith to explore it very deeply. To do this, we must have the humble attitude of a Christian soul. Let us not try to reduce the greatness of God to our own poor ideas and human explanations. Let us try to understand that this mystery, for all its darkness, is a light to guide men's lives.

As St John Chrysostom said: "We see that Jesus has come from us, from our human substance, and has been born of a virgin mother; but we don't know how this wonder came about. Let us not waste our energies trying to understand it; rather, accept humbly what God has revealed to us. Don't try to probe what God has kept hidden." If we have this reverence, we will be able to understand and to love. The mystery will be a splendid lesson for us, much more convincing than any human reasoning.

Why Jesus came to live with us

14 Whenever I preach beside the crib, I try to see Christ our Lord as a child wrapped in swaddling clothes lying on straw in a manger. Even though he is only a child, unable to speak, I see him as a master and a teacher. I need to look at him in this way, because I must learn from him. And to learn from him, you must try to know his life — reading the Gospel and meditating on the scenes of the New Testament — in order to understand the divine meaning of his life on earth.

In our own life we must reproduce Christ's life. We need to come to know him by reading and meditating on Scripture, and by praying, as we are doing now in front of the crib. We must learn the lessons which Jesus teaches us, even when he is just a newly born child, from the very moment he opens his eyes on this blessed land of men.

The fact that Jesus grew up and lived just like us shows us that human existence and all the ordinary activity of men have a divine meaning. No matter how much we may have reflected on all this, we should always be surprised when we think of the thirty years of obscurity which made up the greater part of Jesus' life among men. He lived in obscurity, but, for us, that period is full of light. It illuminates our days

and fills them with meaning, for we are ordinary Christians who lead an ordinary life, just like millions of other people all over the world.

That was the way Jesus lived for thirty years, as “the son of the carpenter.” There followed three years of public life, spent among the crowds. People were surprised: “Who is this?” they asked. “Where has he learned these things?” For he was just like them: he had shared the life of ordinary people. He was “the carpenter, the son of Mary.” And he was God; he was achieving the redemption of mankind and “drawing all things to himself.”

15 As with other events in his life, we should never contemplate Jesus’ hidden years without feeling moved. We should realize that they are in themselves a call to shake off our selfishness and asy-going ways. Our Lord knows our limitations, our individualism and our ambition. He knows it is difficult for us to forget ourselves and give ourselves to others. He knows very well what it feels like not to find love and to discover that those who say they follow him only do so in a half-hearted way. Just think of those striking scenes, described to us by the evangelists, in which we see the Apostles full of worldly ambitions and merely human plans. Yet Jesus has chosen them; he keeps them close to him and entrusts them with the mission he has received from his Father.

He has called us too and asks us, as he asked James and John: “Are you ready to drink the cup” — that cup which means giving yourself fully to the will of the Father — “which I am going to drink?” Possumus!: “Yes! We are ready!” Is the reply of John and James. Are you and I really ready to carry out, in everything, the will of our Father God? Have we given our Lord our whole heart, or are we attached to ourselves and our interests and comfort and self-love? Is there anything in our lives out of keeping with our Christianity, something which makes us unwilling to mend our ways? Today we are given a chance to set things straight.

But first of all, we must be convinced that Jesus is putting these questions to us personally. He is the one who asks them, not I. I wouldn’t dare even put them to myself. I am praying aloud, and each of you, silently, is admitting to our Lord: “Lord, how useless I am, what a coward I have been! How many mistakes I’ve made, over and over again.” And we can go further and say: “It’s good, Lord, you have kept me up with your hand; for, left to myself, I am capable of the most disgraceful things. Don’t let me go; keep on treating me as a little child. I want to be strong and brave and manly. But you must help me. I am a clumsy creature. Take me by the hand, Lord, and make sure your Mother is also by my side to guard me. And so, possumus! We can; we will be able to have you as our model.”

It is not presumptuous for us to say possumus. Jesus Christ teaches us this divine way and wants us to follow it, for he has made it human and accessible to our weakness. That is why he lowered himself so. “Here is the reason why he brought himself so low, taking the nature of a slave; he, the Lord, who as God was equal to the Father; he lowered himself in majesty and power — but not in goodness or mercy.”

The goodness of God wants to make the way easy for us. Let us not reject Jesus' invitation; let's not say "no" to him, turning a deaf ear to his voice. There is no excuse; we can no longer think we aren't able. He has shown us by his example. "Therefore, I ask you with all my heart, brothers, not to let this precious example go unheeded: rather, follow him and renew your soul in the spirit."

He went about doing good

16 Do you see how necessary it is to know Jesus and lovingly observe his life? I have often gone to look for a definition or a biography of Jesus in Scripture. And I have found it written by the Holy Spirit: "He went about doing good." Every single day of Jesus Christ's life on earth, from his birth until his death, can be summed up like that: he filled them all doing good. And in another place Scripture says, "He has done all things well," he finished everything well, he did nothing that wasn't good.

What about you and me, then? Let's take a look to see if we have to put anything right. I certainly can find plenty to improve. I know that by myself I am incapable of doing good. And, since Jesus has said that without him we can do nothing, let us, you and me, go to our Lord and ask for his help, through his Mother, in one of those intimate conversations natural to souls who love God. I will say no more, for it's up to each of you to speak to him personally, about your own needs. Do it interiorly, without the noise of words, now — while I for my part apply these counsels to my own sorry state.

17 What did Christ do to pour out so much good, and only good, wherever he went? The Gospels give us the answer with another biography of Jesus: "He was obedient to them." We must especially value obedience in the current environment of disobedience, rebellion and disunity.

Freedom is very close to my heart — that is precisely why I so love the Christian virtue of obedience. We should all realize that we are children of God, and should want to fulfill the will of our Father. We should do things as God wants them done, because we feel like it, which is the most supernatural of reasons.

The spirit of Opus Dei, which I have tried to practice and to teach for more than thirty-five years now, has made me understand and love personal freedom. When God our Lord gives us his grace, when he calls us by a specific vocation, it is as if he were stretching out his hand to us, in a fatherly way. A strong hand, full of love, because he seeks us out individually, as his own sons and daughters, knowing our weakness. The Lord expects us to make the effort to take his hand, his helping hand. He asks us to make an effort and show we are free. To be able to do this, we must be humble and realize we are little children of God. We must love the blessed obedience with which we respond to God's marvelous fatherhood.

We should let our Lord get involved in our lives, admitting him confidently, removing from his way any obstacles or complications. We tend to be on the defensive, to be attached to our selfishness. We always want to be top dog, even if it's only to be on top of our wretchedness. That is why we must go to Jesus, so that

he will make us truly free. Only then will we be able to serve God and all men. This is the only way to realize the truth of St Paul's words: "But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the return you get is sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Let us be forewarned, then, for we will always tend to be selfish, and this temptation can occur in many ways. God wants us to show our faith when we obey, for he doesn't express his will with drums and trumpets. Sometimes he suggests his wishes in a whisper, deep in our conscience; and we must listen carefully to recognize his voice and be faithful.

He often speaks to us through other people. But when we see their defects or doubt whether they are well informed — whether they have grasped all the aspects of the problem — we feel inclined to disobey. All this may have a divine meaning, for God does not impose a blind obedience on us. He wants us to obey intelligently, and we have to feel responsible for helping others with the intelligence we do have. But let's be sincere with ourselves: let's examine, in every case, whether it is love for the truth that moves us or selfishness and attachment to our own judgment. When our ideas separate us from other people, when they weaken our communion, our unity with our brothers, it is a sure sign that we are not doing what God wants.

Let's not forget: we need humility if we are to obey. Look again at the example Christ gives us: he obeys Joseph and Mary. God has come to the world to obey, and to obey creatures. Admittedly they are two very perfect creatures: Holy Mary, our mother, greater than whom God alone; and that most chaste man Joseph. But they are only creatures, and yet Jesus, who is God, obeyed them. We have to love God so as to love his will and desire to respond to his calls. They come to us through the duties of our ordinary life: duties of state, profession, work, family, social life, our own and other people's difficulties, friendship, eagerness to do what is right and just.

18 Every time Christmas comes around, I love to look at representations of the child Jesus. Statues and pictures which show a God who lowered himself remind me that God is calling us. The Almighty wants us to know that he is defenseless, that he needs men's help. From the cradle at Bethlehem, Christ tells you and me that he needs us. He urges us to live a Christian life to the full — a life of self-sacrifice, work and joy.

We will never have genuine joy if we do not really try to imitate Jesus. Like him we must be humble. I repeat: do you see where God's greatness is hidden? In a manger, in swaddling clothes, in a stable. The redemptive power of our lives can only work through humility. We must stop thinking about ourselves and feel the responsibility to help others.

It can sometimes happen that even well intentioned people create personal problems — really serious worries — that have no objective basis whatsoever. These problems arise in persons whose lack of self-knowledge leads to pride and a desire to be the centre of attention, to be favored by everyone. They want to appear

always in a good light, to be personally secure. They are not content simply to do good and disappear. And so, many who could enjoy a wonderful peace of soul and great happiness become, through pride and presumption, unhappy and unfruitful. Christ was humble of heart. Throughout his life he looked for no special consideration or privilege. He began by spending nine months in his Mother's womb, like the rest of men, following the natural course of events. He knew that mankind needed him greatly. He was longing to come into the world to save all souls, but he took his time. He came in due course, just as every other child is born. From conception to birth, no one — except our Lady, St Joseph and St Elizabeth — realized the marvelous truth that God was coming to live among men.

There is a great simplicity also about his birth. Our Lord comes without any fanfare. No one knows about him. On earth only Mary and Joseph share in the divine adventure. And then the shepherds who received the message from the angels. And later on, the wise men from the East. They were the only witnesses of this transcendental event which unites heaven and earth, God and man.

How can our hearts be so hard that we can get used to these scenes? God humbled himself to allow us to get near him, so that we could give our love in exchange for his, so that our freedom might bow, not only at the sight of his power, but also before the wonder of his humility.

The greatness of this Child who is God! His Father is the God who has made heaven and earth and there he is, in a manger, "because there was no room at the inn" — there was nowhere else for the Lord of all creation.

He did the will of God his Father

19 I am not at all stretching the truth when I tell you that Jesus is still looking for a resting-place in our heart. We have to ask him to forgive our personal blindness and ingratitude. We must ask him to give us the grace never to close the door of our soul on him again.

Our Lord does not disguise the fact that his wholehearted obedience to God's will calls for renunciation and self-sacrifice. Love does not claim rights; it seeks to serve. Jesus has led the way. How did he obey? "Unto death, death on a cross." You have to get out of yourself; you have to complicate your life, losing it for love of God and souls. "So you wanted to live a quiet life. But God wanted otherwise. Two wills exist: your will should be corrected to become identified with God's will: you must not bend God's will to suit yours."

It has made me very happy to see so many souls spend their lives — like you, Lord, "even unto death" — fulfilling what God was asking of them. They have dedicated all their yearnings and their professional work to the service of the Church, for the good of all men.

Let us learn to obey, let us learn to serve. There is no better leadership than wanting to give yourself freely, to be useful to others. When we feel pride swell up within us, making us think we are supermen, the time has come to say "no". Our

only triumph will be the triumph of humility. In this way we will identify ourselves with Christ on the cross — not unwillingly or restlessly or sullenly, but joyfully. For the joy that comes from forgetting ourselves is the best proof of love.

20 Let me go back again to the openness and simplicity of Jesus' life, which I have brought to your attention so many times. His hidden years are not without significance, nor were they simply a preparation for the years that were to come after — those of his public life. Since 1928 I have understood clearly that God wants our Lord's whole life to be an example for Christians. I saw this with special reference to his hidden life, the years he spent working side by side with ordinary men. Our Lord wants many people to ratify their vocation during years of quiet, unspectacular living. Obeying God's will always means leaving our selfishness behind, but there is no reason why it should entail cutting ourselves off from the normal life of ordinary men who share the same status, work and social position as we.

I dream — and the dream has come true — of multitudes of God's children, sanctifying themselves as ordinary citizens, sharing the ambitions and endeavors of their colleagues and friends. I want to shout to them about this divine truth: if you are there in the middle of ordinary life, it doesn't mean Christ has forgotten about you or hasn't called you. He has invited you to stay among the activities and concerns of the world. He wants you to know that your human vocation, your profession, your talents, are not omitted from his divine plans. He has sanctified them and made them a most acceptable offering to his Father.

21 To remind a Christian that his life is meaningless unless he obeys God's will does not mean separating him from other men. On the contrary, the commandment God gives us is to love others as he has loved us, which in most cases means living alongside the rest of men and being their equals, giving ourselves to the service of our Lord in the world so as to make everyone know better the love of God, telling them that the divine paths of the world have been opened up.

God has not just said that he loves us. He has proved it with facts. Let's not forget that Jesus Christ became man in order to teach us to live as children of God. Do you remember the introduction to the Acts of the Apostles, where St Luke says: "I have spoken of all the most significant things Jesus did and taught"? He came to teach us, but he taught us by doing things. In teaching us, he was the model, being our teacher and setting us an example with his conduct.

Now, in front of the infant Jesus, we can continue our personal examination of conscience. Are we ready to try to make our life a model and an example to our brothers, the rest of men, our equals? Are we ready to be other Christs? It's not enough to say that we are. I am asking you now — as I ask myself: Can it be said also of you, you who have been called to be another Christ, that you have come to do and to teach, to do things as a son of God would? Are you attentive to the Father's will, so as to be able to encourage everyone else to share the good, noble, divine and human values of the redemption? Are you living the life of Christ, in your everyday life in the middle of the world?

Doing God's work is not just a pretty phrase. It is an invitation to spend ourselves for Love's sake. We have to die to ourselves and be born again to a new life. Jesus Christ obeyed in this way, even unto death on a cross; that is why God exalted him. If we obey God's will, the cross will mean our own resurrection and exaltation. Christ's life will be fulfilled step by step in our own lives. It will be said of us that we have tried to be good children of God, who went about doing good in spite of our weakness and personal shortcomings, no matter how many.

And when death comes as it undoubtedly will, we will greet it with joy, as I have seen so many people greet it in the ordinary circumstances of their life. With joy: for if we have imitated Christ in doing good — in obeying and carrying the cross in spite of our personal deficiencies — we will rise like Christ: "for he has truly risen."

Jesus, who became a child, overcame death. Just think of it. Through his annihilation, through his simplicity and obedience, by divinizing the everyday, common life of men, the Son of God conquered.

That is the triumph of Jesus Christ. He has raised us to his level, the level of children of God, by coming down to our level, the level of the children of men.

MARRIAGE: A CHRISTIAN VOCATION

A homily given during Christmas 1970

The sanctity of human love

Bright and cheerful homes

22 At Christmas our thoughts turn to the different events and circumstances surrounding the birth of the Son of God. As we contemplate the stable in Bethlehem or the home of the holy family in Nazareth, Mary, Joseph and the child Jesus occupy a special place in our hearts. What does the simple, admirable life of the holy family tell us? What can we learn from it?

I would like particularly to comment on one of the many considerations that we might make on this theme. As we read in Holy Scripture, the birth of Jesus means the beginning of the fullness of time. It was the moment God chose to show the extent of his love for men, by giving us his own Son. And God's will is fulfilled in the simplest, most ordinary of circumstances: a woman who gives birth, a family, a home. The power of God and his splendor come to us through a human reality to which they are joined. Since that moment Christians have known that, with God's grace, they can and should sanctify everything that is good in their human lives. There is no human situation, no matter how trivial and ordinary it may seem, which cannot be a meeting-place with Christ and a step forward on our journey toward the kingdom of heaven.

It is only natural that the Church rejoices as it contemplates the modest home of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. We read in the hymn from matins on the feast of the Holy Family: "It is pleasing to recall the lowly house at Nazareth and its slender resources, it is pleasing to tell again in song Jesus' hidden life. Jesus grows up in

hidden seclusion, to be trained in Joseph's lowly trade. The loving Mother sits beside her dear Son, the good wife by her husband, content if her loving attention can ease and comfort them in their weariness."

When I think of Christian homes, I like to imagine them as being full of the light and joy that were in the home of the holy family. The message of Christmas is heard in all its forcefulness: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will." "And may the peace of Christ triumph in your hearts," writes the Apostle. It is a peace that comes from knowing that our Father God loves us, and that we are made one with Christ. It results from being under the protection of the Virgin, our Lady, and assisted by St Joseph. This is the great light that illuminates our lives. In the midst of difficulties and of our own personal failings, it encourages us to keep up our effort. Every Christian home should be a place of peace and serenity. In spite of the small frustrations of daily life, an atmosphere of profound and sincere affection should reign there together with a deep-rooted calm, which is the result of authentic faith that is put into practice.

23 For a Christian marriage is not just a social institution, much less a mere remedy for human weakness. It is a real supernatural calling. A great sacrament, in Christ and in the Church, says St Paul. At the same time, it is a permanent contract between a man and a woman. Whether we like it or not, the sacrament of matrimony, instituted by Christ, cannot be dissolved. It is a permanent contract that sanctifies in cooperation with Jesus Christ. He fills the souls of husband and wife and invites them to follow him. He transforms their whole married life into an occasion for God's presence on earth.

Husband and wife are called to sanctify their married life and to sanctify themselves in it. It would be a serious mistake if they were to exclude family life from their spiritual development. The marriage union, the care and education of children, the effort to provide for the needs of the family as well as for its security and development, the relationships with other persons who make up the community, all these are among the ordinary human situations that Christian couples are called upon to sanctify.

They will achieve this aim by exercising the virtues of faith and hope, facing serenely all the great and small problems that confront any family, and persevering in the love and enthusiasm with which they fulfill their duties. In this way they practice the virtue of charity in all things. They learn to smile and forget about themselves in order to pay attention to others. Husband and wife will listen to each other and to their children, showing them that they are really loved and understood. They will forget about the unimportant little frictions that selfishness could magnify out of proportion. They will do lovingly all the small acts of service that make up their daily life together.

The aim is this: to sanctify family life, while creating at the same time a true family atmosphere. Many Christian virtues are necessary in order to sanctify each day of one's life. First, the theological virtues, and then all the others: prudence, loyalty, sincerity, humility, industriousness, cheerfulness.... But when we talk about

marriage and married life, we must begin by speaking clearly about the mutual love of husband and wife.

The sanctity of human love

24 Their pure and noble love is a sacred thing. As a priest, I bless it with all my heart. Christian tradition has often seen in Christ's presence at the wedding feast in Cana a proof of the value God places on marriage. "Our Savior went to the wedding feast," writes St Cyril of Alexandria, "to make holy the origins of human life."

Marriage is a sacrament that makes one flesh of two bodies. Theology expresses this fact in a striking way when it teaches us that the matter of the sacrament is the bodies of husband and wife. Our Lord sanctifies and blesses the mutual love of husband and wife. He foresees, not only a union of souls, but a union of bodies as well. No Christian, whether or not he is called to the married state, has a right to underestimate the value of marriage.

We have been created by God and endowed with an intelligence that is like a spark of the divine intellect. Together with our free will, another gift of God, it allows us to know and to love. And God has also placed in our body the power to generate, which is a participation in his own creative power. He has wanted to use love to bring new human beings into the world and to increase the body of the Church. Thus, sex is not a shameful thing; it is a divine gift, ordained to life, to love, to fruitfulness.

This is the context in which we must see the Christian doctrine on sex. Our faith does not ignore anything on this earth that is beautiful, noble and authentically human. It simply teaches us that the rule of our life should not be the selfish pursuit of pleasure, because only sacrifice and self-denial lead to true love. God already loves us; and now he invites us to love him and others with the truthfulness and authenticity with which he loves. It is the paradox expressed in St Matthew's Gospel: "He who seeks to keep his life will lose it; and he who loses his life for my sake will find it."

People who are constantly concerned with themselves, who act above all for their own satisfaction, endanger their eternal salvation and cannot avoid being unhappy even in this life. Only if a person forgets himself and gives himself to God and to others, in marriage as well as in any other aspect of life, can he be happy on this earth, with a happiness that is a preparation for, and a foretaste of, the joy of heaven.

As long as we walk on this earth, suffering will always be the touchstone of love. If we were to describe what occurs in the married state, we could say that there are two sides to the coin. On the one hand, there is the joy of knowing that one is loved, the desire and enthusiasm involved in starting a family and taking care of it, the love of husband and wife, the happiness of seeing the children grow up. On the other hand, there are also sorrows and difficulties — the passing of time that

consumes the body and threatens the character with the temptation to bitterness, the seemingly monotonous succession of days that are apparently always the same.

We would have a poor idea of marriage and of human affection if we were to think that love and joy come to an end when faced with such difficulties. It is precisely then that our true sentiments come to the surface. Then the tenderness of a person's gift of himself takes root and shows itself in a true and profound affection that is stronger than death.

25 When love is authentic it demands faithfulness and rectitude in all marital relations. St Thomas Aquinas comments that God has joined to the exercise of the different functions of human life a pleasure or satisfaction, which is, therefore, something good. But if man, inverting the proper order of things, seeks satisfaction as an aim in itself, in contempt of the good to which it is joined and which is its aim, he perverts its true nature and converts it into a sin, or an occasion of sin.

Chastity is not merely continence, but a decisive affirmation on the part of the will in love. It is a virtue that keeps love young in any state in life. There is a kind of chastity that is proper to those who begin to feel the awakening of physical maturity, and a kind of chastity that corresponds to those who are preparing for marriage; there is a chastity for those whom God calls to celibacy, and a chastity for those who have been chosen by him to live in the married state.

I cannot avoid calling to mind the strong and clear counsel given to Tobias by the angel Raphael before the young man's marriage to Sarah: "Then the angel Raphael said to him: Hear me, and I will show you who are those over whom the devil can prevail. For they who enter into matrimony in such a manner as to shut out God from themselves and from their mind, and to give themselves to their lust, as the horse and the mule which have not understanding, are those over whom the devil has power."

Human love — pure, sincere and joyful — cannot subsist in marriage without the virtue of chastity, which leads a couple to respect the mystery of sex and ordain it to faithfulness and personal dedication. I have never talked about impurity, and I have always avoided falling into a distasteful and meaningless casuistry. But I have spoken many times, as I have to do, about chastity, purity and the joyful affirmation of love.

With regard to chastity in married life, I can assure all married couples that they need not be afraid of showing affection for each other. On the contrary, this inclination is at the root of their family life. What our Lord expects from them is that they should respect each other and that they should be loyal to each other; that they should act with refinement, naturalness and modesty. I must also tell them that the dignity of their conjugal relations is a result of the love that is expressed in them. And there will be love if those relations are open to fruitfulness, to bringing children into the world.

To stop up the sources of life is a crime against the gifts that God has granted to mankind. It proves that a person is moved by selfishness, not love. Everything

becomes clouded, because husband and wife begin to look at each other as accomplices, and the dissensions that are produced, if this state is allowed to continue, are almost always impossible to heal.

When there is chastity in the love of married persons, their marital life is authentic; husband and wife are true to themselves, they understand each other and develop the union between them. When the divine gift of sex is perverted, their intimacy is destroyed, and they can no longer look openly at each other.

A married couple should build their life together on the foundation of a sincere and pure affection for each other, and on the joy that comes from having brought into the world the children God has enabled them to have. They should be capable of renouncing their personal comfort; and they should put their trust in the providence of God. To have a large family — if such is the will of God — is a guarantee of happiness and of effectiveness, in spite of everything that the mistaken proponents of a life based on selfish pleasure may say to the contrary.

26 Don't forget that it is impossible for husband and wife to avoid at least some arguments. But never quarrel in front of your children; you would make them suffer, and they would take sides in the argument, contributing unwittingly to the lack of unity between you. But quarrels, so long as they don't happen often, are also a proof of love, and they are almost a need. The occasion of a quarrel — not its motive — is often the tiredness of the husband, worn out by his work, or the fatigue, not to say boredom, of the wife who has had to struggle with the children, with domestic chores, or with her own character, which might be lacking in fortitude. Don't get me wrong: women can be stronger than men, if determined to be so.

Avoid pride. It is the greatest enemy of your married life. In your little quarrels, neither of you is right. Whoever is the calmer should say a word or two to ward off bad temper for a while. Then, later on, when you are alone with each other, go ahead and argue it out — soon afterwards you will make peace anyway.

Wives, you should ask yourselves whether you are not forgetting a little about your appearance. Remember all the sayings about women who should take care to look pretty. Your duty is, and will always be, to take as good care of your appearance as you did before you were married — and it is a duty of justice, because you belong to your husband. And husbands should not forget that they belong to their wives, and that as long as they live they have the obligation to show the same affection as a young man who has just fallen in love. It would be a bad sign if you smile ironically as you hear this; it would mean that your love has turned into cold indifference.

Bright and cheerful homes

27 We cannot talk about marriage without referring to the family, which is the result and continuation of what is begun with marriage. A family includes not only husband and wife, but also the children, and, in different degrees, the grandparents, other relatives, and even the domestic help in those households that

have it. All these persons should in some way share in the warmth of the home and family.

Of course, there are couples to whom our Lord does not grant any children. If this happens, it is a sign that he is asking them to go on loving each other with the same affection and to put their efforts, if they can, into serving and working for the good of other souls. But the normal thing for a couple is to have children, who must always be their first concern.

Being a father or a mother is not simply a matter of bringing children into the world. The capacity for generation, which is a share in the creative power of God, is meant to have a continuation. Parents are called to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in the development of their children into men and women who will be authentic Christians.

The parents are the first persons responsible for the education of their children, in human as well as in spiritual matters. They should be conscious of the extent of their responsibility. To fulfil it, they need prudence, understanding, a capacity to love and a concern for giving good example. Imposing things by force, in an authoritarian manner, is not the right way to teach. The ideal attitude of parents lies more in becoming their children's friends — friends who will be willing to share their anxieties, who will listen to their problems, who will help them in an effective and agreeable way

Parents should find time to spend with their children, to talk with them. They are the most important thing — more important than business or work or rest. In their conversations, parents should make an effort to listen, to pay attention, to understand, to recognize the fact that their children are sometimes partly right — or even completely right — in some of their rebellious attitudes. At the same time, they should help their children to direct their efforts and to carry out their projects properly, teaching them to consider things and to reason them out. It is not a matter of imposing a line of conduct, but rather of showing the human and supernatural motives for it. In a word, parents have to respect their children's freedom, because there is no real education without personal responsibility, and there is no responsibility without freedom.

28 Parents teach their children mainly through their own conduct. What a son or daughter looks for in a father or mother is not only a certain amount of knowledge or some more or less effective advice, but primarily something more important: a proof of the value and meaning of life, shown through the life of a specific person, and confirmed in the different situations and circumstances that occur over a period of time.

If I were to give advice to parents, I would tell them, above all, let your children see that you are trying to live in accordance with your faith. Don't let yourselves be deceived: they see everything, from their earliest years, and they judge everything. Let them see that God is not only on your lips, but also in your deeds; that you are trying to be loyal and sincere, and that you love each other and you really love them too.

This is how you will best contribute to making your children become true Christians, men and women of integrity, capable of facing all life's situations with an open spirit, of serving their fellow men and helping to solve the problems of mankind, of carrying the testimony of Christ to the society of which they will be a part.

29 Listen to your children. Give them your time, even the time that you have reserved for yourselves. Show them your confidence; believe whatever they tell you, even if sometimes they try to deceive you. Don't be afraid when they rebel, because, at their age, you yourselves were more or less rebellious. Go to meet them halfway and pray for them. If you act in this Christian manner, they will come to you with simplicity, instead of trying to satisfy their legitimate curiosity by taking it to some rough or vulgar friend. Your confidence, your friendly dealings with your children, will receive an answer in their sincerity in dealing with you. Then, even if there are quarrels and lack of understanding, they will never amount to much; and this is what peace in the family and a truly Christian life mean.

"How can I describe," says a Christian writer of the early centuries, "the joy of a marriage united by the Church, strengthened by the dedication of husband and wife, sealed with a blessing, proclaimed by the angels, and accepted by God the Father? ... Husband and wife are as brother and sister, servants of each other, and nothing separates them, either in the flesh or in the spirit. For they are truly two in one flesh, and where there is one flesh there should be one spirit... Contemplating such a family, Christ rejoices and sends his peace. Where there are two together, he is also present; and where he is present, there can be no evil."

30 We have tried to mention and comment on some of the characteristics of a family that reflects the light of Christ. As I mentioned before, theirs is a home full of light and cheerfulness. The unity between the parents is transmitted to their children, to the whole family, and to everyone who is involved in their life. In this way, every truly Christian family reproduces in some way the mystery of the Church, chosen by God and sent to be the guide of the world.

To every Christian, whatever his state in life — priest or layman, married or single — we can apply fully the words of the Apostle, which we read precisely on the feast of the Holy Family: "...chosen by God, holy and beloved." This is what we all are, each one in his place and position in the world, despite our errors and in the midst of the struggle to conquer them: men and women chosen by God to give witness to Christ and to bring all those who surround us the joy of knowing that we are God's children.

It is very important that the idea of marriage as a real call from God never be absent, either from the pulpit and the religion class or from the conscience of those whom God wishes to follow this way. Couples should be convinced that they are really and truly called to take part in the fulfilment of God's plan for the salvation of all men.

For this reason, there is perhaps no better model for a Christian couple than that of the Christian families of apostolic times: the centurion Cornelius, who obeyed

the will of God and in whose home the Church was made accessible to the gentiles; Aquila and Priscilla, who spread Christianity in Corinth and Ephesus, and who cooperated in the apostolate of St Paul; Tabitha, who out of charity attended to the needs of the Christians in Joppe. And so many other homes and families of Jews and Gentiles, Greeks and Romans, in which the preaching of our Lord's first disciples began to bear fruit. Families who lived in union with Christ and who made him known to others. Small Christian communities, which were centers for the spreading of the Gospel and its message. Families no different from other families of those times, but living with a new spirit, which spread to all those who were in contact with them. This is what the first Christians were, and this is what we have to be: sowers of peace and joy, the peace and joy that Jesus has brought to us.

THE EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD

A homily given on 6 January 1956, feast of the Epiphany

The way of faith

Firmness in your vocation

A good shepherd and a good guide

Gold, incense and myrrh

Holy Mary, star of the East

31 Not too long ago I saw a marble bas-relief representing the adoration of the child Jesus by the Magi. The central figures were surrounded by four angels, each one bearing a symbol: a crown, an orb surmounted by the cross, a sword and a scepter. The artist had chosen symbols with which we are all familiar to illustrate the event we commemorate today. Some wise men whom tradition describes as kings come to pay homage to a child, after having been to Jerusalem to ask "Where is he that is born king of the Jews?"

Moved by this question, I too now contemplate Jesus "lying in a manger," in a place fit only for animals. Lord, where is your kingship, your crown, your sword, your scepter? They are his by right, but he does not want them. He reigns wrapped in swaddling clothes. Our king is unadorned. He comes to us as a defenseless little child. Can we help but recall the words of the Apostle: "He emptied himself, taking the nature of a slave"?

Our Lord became man to teach us the Father's will. And this he is already doing as he lies there in the manger. Jesus Christ is seeking us — with a call that is a vocation to sanctity — so that we may carry out the redemption with him. Let us reflect on this first lesson of his. We are to co-redeem, by striving to triumph not over our neighbor, but over ourselves. Like Christ we need to empty ourselves, to consider ourselves as the servants of others, and so to bring them to God.

Where is the king? Could it be that Jesus wants to reign above all in men's hearts, in your heart? That is why he has become a child, for who can help loving a little

baby? Where then is the king? Where is the Christ whom the Holy Spirit wants to fashion in our souls? He cannot be present in the pride that separates us from God, nor in the lack of charity that cuts us off from others. Christ cannot be there. In that loveless state man is left alone.

As you kneel at the feet of the child Jesus on the day of his Epiphany and see him a king bearing none of the outward signs of royalty, you can tell him: "Lord, take away my pride; crush my self-love, my desire to affirm myself and impose myself on others. Make the foundation of my personality my identification with you."

The way of faith

32 We want to identify ourselves with Christ. It is not an easy goal. But it is not difficult either, if we live as our Lord has taught us to live, if we have recourse to his word every day, if we fill our lives with the sacramental reality, the Eucharist, which he has given us for our nourishment. Then the Christian's path proves to be viable. God has called us clearly and unmistakably. Like the Magi we have discovered a star: a light and a guide in the sky of our soul.

"We have seen his star in the East and have come to worship him." We have had the same experience. We too noticed a new light shining in our soul and growing increasingly brighter. It was a desire to live a fully Christian life, a keenness to take God seriously. If each one of you were to tell aloud the intimate details of how his vocation made itself felt, the rest of us would conclude immediately that it was all God's doing. Let us give thanks to God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, and to Holy Mary, through whom all blessings from heaven come to us, for this gift which, along with our faith, is the greatest the Lord can bestow on any of his creatures. It is a clear desire to attain the fullness of charity, the conviction that sanctity is not only possible but necessary in the midst of our social and professional tasks.

Look how gently the Lord invites us. His words have human warmth; they are the words of a person in love: "I have called you by your name. You are mine." God, who is beauty and greatness and wisdom, declares that we are his, that we have been chosen as the object of his infinite love. We need a strong life of faith to appreciate the wonder his providence has entrusted to us. A faith like that of the Magi, a conviction that neither the desert, nor the storms, nor the quiet of the oases will keep us from reaching our destination in the eternal Bethlehem: our definitive life with God.

33 A life of faith is a life of sacrifice. Our Christian vocation does not take us away from our place in the world, but it requires us to cast aside anything that would get in the way of God's will. The light that has just begun to shine is only the beginning. We have to follow it if we want it to shine as a star, and then like the sun. St John Chrysostom writes: "While the Magi were in Persia, they saw only a star. But when they left their homes behind, they saw the Sun of justice. We can say that they would not have continued to see the star if they had remained in their own country. Let us then hasten too; and even if everyone stands in our way, let us run to that child's home."

Firmness in your vocation

"We have seen his star in the East, and have come to adore him.' When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled and all Jerusalem with him." This scene is still repeated today. Faced with the greatness of God or with a person who has made up his mind — with a decision both deeply human and profoundly Christian — to live up to the demands of his faith, there are people who find it strange and in their surprise they even get scandalized. It seems they are unable to countenance a way of life which does not fit into their limited earthly horizons. They smirk at the generous actions of those who have heard God's call. They are frightened by such dedication, and in some cases that appear frankly pathological, they do all in their power to thwart the holy determination of those who with complete freedom have given themselves to God.

On some occasions I have witnessed what could be called a general mobilization against those committed to dedicating their whole lives to the service of God and souls. Some people think that our Lord ought to ask their permission before choosing others for his service. Apparently they believe man is not free to say an unequivocal yes or no to this proposal of Love. To people who think that way, the supernatural life of each soul is something secondary. They do believe it has to be reckoned with, but only after petty comforts and human selfishness have been accommodated. If this were the case, what would be left of Christianity? Are the loving but demanding words of Jesus only to be heard? Or are they rather to be heard and put into practice? Did he not say, "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect"?

Our Lord asks all men to come out to meet him, to become saints. He calls not only the Magi, the wise and powerful. Before that he had sent, not a star, but one of his angels to the shepherds in Bethlehem. Rich or poor, wise or less so, all of us have to foster in our hearts a humble disposition that will allow us to listen to the word of God.

Take the case of Herod. He ranked among the powerful of this world and had the opportunity of availing himself of the help of the learned. "And assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born." His power and knowledge do not lead him to recognize God. In his hardened heart, power and knowledge are instruments for evil. His futile desire is to annihilate God, and he has only contempt for the life of innocent children.

Let us turn again to the Gospel. "They told him, In Bethlehem of Judah; for so it is written by the prophet: And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah, are by no means the least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will govern my people Israel." We should not overlook these expressions of God's mercy. He who was to redeem the world is born in an insignificant little village. And the reason is, as Scripture tells us again and again, that God is not a respecter of persons. When he invites a soul to live a life fully in accordance with the faith, he does not set store by merits of fortune, nobility, blood or learning. God's call

precedes all merits. "The star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came to rest where the child was."

Vocation comes first. God loves us before we even know how to go toward him, and he places in us the love with which we can correspond to his call. God's fatherly goodness comes out to meet us. Our Lord is not only just. He is much more: he is merciful. He does not wait for us to go to him. He takes the initiative, with the unmistakable signs of paternal affection.

A good shepherd and a good guide

34 If vocation comes first, if the star shines ahead to start us along the path of God's love, it is illogical that we should begin to doubt if it chances to disappear from view. It might happen at certain moments in our interior life — and we are nearly always to blame — that the star disappears, just as it did to the wise kings on their journey. We have already realized the divine splendor of our vocation, and we are convinced about its definitive character, but perhaps the dust we stir up as we walk our miseries — forms an opaque cloud that cuts off the light from above.

What should we do if this happens? Follow the example of those wise men and ask. Herod made use of knowledge to act unjustly. The Magi use it to do good. But we Christians have no need to go to Herod nor to the wise men of this world. Christ has given his Church sureness in doctrine and a flow of grace in the sacraments. He has arranged things so that there will always be people to guide and lead us, to remind us constantly of our way. There is an infinite treasure of knowledge available to us: the word of God kept safe by the Church, the grace of Christ administered in the sacraments and also the witness and example of those who live by our side and have known how to build with their good lives a road of faithfulness to God.

Allow me to give you a piece of advice. If ever you lose the clear light, always turn to the good shepherd. And who is the good shepherd? "He who enters by the door" of faithfulness to the Church's doctrine and does not act like the hireling "who sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees;" whereupon "the wolf snatches them and scatters them." Reflect on these divine words, which are not said in vain, and on the insistence of Christ who so affectionately speaks of shepherds and sheep, of sheepfold and flock, as a practical proof of the need that our soul has of good guidance.

"If there be no bad shepherds," says St Augustine speaking about the good shepherd, "he would not have described the hireling, who sees the wolf and flees. He seeks his own glory, not Christ's glory. He does not dare to rebuke sinners with freedom of spirit. The wolf catches a sheep by the neck, the devil induces a man to commit adultery. And you are silent and do not rebuke. Then you are a hireling because you have seen the wolf and have fled. Perhaps you might say: No, I'm here; I haven't fled. I answer: You have fled because you have been silent, and you have been silent because you were afraid."

The holiness of Christ's Spouse has always been shown — as it can be seen today — by the abundance of good shepherds. But our Christian faith, which teaches us to be simple, does not bid us be simple-minded. There are hirelings who keep silent, and there are hirelings who speak with words that are not those of Christ. That is why, if the Lord allows us to be left in the dark even in little things, if we feel that our faith is not firm, we should go to the good shepherd. He enters by the door as of right. He gives his life for others and wants to be in word and behavior a soul in love. He may be a sinner too, but he trusts always in Christ's forgiveness and mercy.

If your conscience tells you that you have committed a fault — even though it does not appear to be serious or if you are in doubt — go to the sacrament of penance. Go to the priest who looks after you, who knows how to demand of you a steady faith, refinement of soul and true Christian fortitude. The Church allows the greatest freedom for confessing to any priest, provided he has the proper faculties; but a conscientious Christian will go — with complete freedom — to the priest he knows is a good shepherd, who can help him to look up again and see once more, on high, the Lord's star.

Gold, incense and myrrh

35 Such was their sentiment that the Gospel almost repeats itself: "When they saw the star again they rejoiced with exceeding great joy." Why were they so happy? Because those who never doubted receive proof from the Lord that the star had not disappeared. They had ceased to contemplate it visibly, but they had kept it always in their soul. Such is the Christian's vocation. If we do not lose faith, if we keep our hope in Jesus Christ who will be with us "until the consummation of the world," then the star reappears. And with this fresh proof that our vocation is real, we are conscious of a greater joy that increases our faith, hope and love.

"Going into the house they saw the child with Mary, his Mother, and they fell down and worshipped him." We also kneel down before Jesus, God hidden in humanity. We tell him once more that we do not want to turn our backs on his divine call, that we shall never separate ourselves from him, that we shall remove from our path all that may be an obstacle to our fidelity and that we sincerely wish to be docile to his inspirations. You, in your own heart, and I in mine — because I am praying intimately with deep silent cries — are telling the child Jesus that we desire to fulfill our duties as well as the servants of the parable, so that we too may hear the response: "Well done, good and faithful servant."

"Then opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, of gold, frankincense and myrrh." Let us pause here a while to understand this passage of the holy Gospel. How is it possible that we, who are nothing and worth nothing, can make an offering to God? We read in the Scriptures: "Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above." Man does not even manage to discover fully the depth and beauty of the Lord's gifts. "If you knew the gift of God!" Jesus exclaims to the Samaritan woman. Jesus Christ has taught us to expect everything from the

Father and to seek first of all the kingdom of God and his justice, and everything else will be given to us in addition, for he knows well what we need.

In the economy of salvation our Father looks after each soul with loving care: "Each has his own special gift from God, one of one kind and one of another." It would, therefore, seem useless to be concerned about presenting to the Lord something that he has no need of. As debtors who have nothing with which to pay, our gifts would be like those of the old law that are no longer acceptable to God: "Sacrifices and oblations and holocausts for sin you have not desired: neither are they pleasing to you."

But the Lord knows full well that giving is a vital need for those in love, and he himself points out what he desires from us. He does not care for riches, nor for the fruits or the beasts of the earth, nor for the sea or the air, because they all belong to him. He wants something intimate, which we have to give him freely: "My son, give me your heart." Do you see? God is not satisfied with sharing. He wants it all. It's not our things he wants. It is ourselves. It is only when we give ourselves that we can offer other gifts to our Lord.

Let us give him gold. The precious gold we receive when in spirit we are detached from money and material goods. Let us not forget that these things are good, for they come from God. But the Lord has laid down that we should use them without allowing our hearts to become attached to them, putting them to good use for the benefit of all mankind.

Earthly goods are not bad, but they are debased when man sets them up as idols, when he adores them. They are ennobled when they are converted into instruments for good, for just and charitable Christian undertakings. We cannot seek after material goods as if they were a treasure. Our treasure is here, in a manger. Our treasure is Christ and all our love and desire must be centered on him, "for where our treasure is, there will our hearts be also."

36 We offer frankincense that rises up to the Lord: our desire to live a noble life that gives off the "aroma of Christ." To impregnate our words and actions with his aroma is to sow understanding and friendship. We should accompany others so that no one is left, or can feel, abandoned. Our charity has to be affectionate, full of human warmth.

That is what Jesus Christ teaches us. Mankind awaited the coming of the Savior for centuries. The prophets had announced his coming in a thousand ways. Even in the farthest corners of the earth, where a great part of God's revelation to men was perhaps lost through sin or ignorance, the longing for God, the desire to be redeemed, had been kept alive.

When the fullness of time comes, no philosophical genius, no Plato or Socrates appears to fulfill the mission of redemption. Nor does a powerful conqueror, another Alexander, take over the earth. Instead a child is born in Bethlehem. He it is who is to redeem the world. But before he speaks he loves with deeds. It is no magic formula he brings, because he knows that the salvation he offers must pass

through human hearts. What does he first do? He laughs and cries and sleeps defenseless, as a baby, though he is God incarnate. And he does this so that we may fall in love with him, so that we may learn to take him in our arms.

We realize once again that this is what Christianity is all about. If a Christian does not love with deeds, he has failed as a Christian, besides failing as a person. You cannot think of others as if they were digits, or rungs on a ladder on which you can rise, or a multitude to be harangued or humiliated, praised or despised, according to circumstances. Be mindful of what others are — and first of all those who are at your side: children of God, with all the dignity that marvellous title entails.

We have to behave as God's children toward all God's sons and daughters. Our love has to be a dedicated love, practiced every day and made up of a thousand little details of understanding, hidden sacrifice and unnoticed self-giving. This is the "aroma of Christ" that made those who lived among our first brothers in the faith exclaim: See how they love one another!

The ideal is not out of reach. A Christian is no Tartarin of Tarascon, a literary character bent on hunting lions in the corridors of his home, where they were not to be found. I always speak about real daily life, about the sanctification of work, of family bonds, of friendships. If we aren't Christian in these things, where will we be Christian? The pleasant smell of incense comes from some small, hidden grains of incense placed upon the burning charcoal. Likewise is the "aroma of Christ" noticed among men — not in a sudden burst of flame, but in the constant red-hot embers of virtues such as justice, loyalty, faithfulness, understanding, generosity and cheerfulness.

37 Together with the Magi we also offer myrrh, the spirit of sacrifice that can never be lacking in a Christian life. Myrrh reminds us of the passion of our Lord. On the cross he is offered wine mingled with myrrh. And it was with myrrh that his body was anointed for burial. But do not think that to meditate on the need for sacrifice and mortification means to add a note of sadness to this joyful feast we celebrate today.

Mortification is not pessimism or bitterness. Mortification is useless without charity. That is why we must seek mortifications that, while helping us develop a proper dominion over the things of this earth, do not mortify those who live with us. A Christian has no warrant to act as torturer, nor should he allow himself to be treated as a feeble wretch. A Christian is a man who knows how to love with deeds and to prove his love on the touchstone of suffering.

But, I must remind you, mortification does not usually consist of great renunciations, for situations requiring great self-denial seldom occur. Mortification is made up of small conquests, such as smiling at those who annoy us, denying the body some superfluous fancy, getting accustomed to listening to others, making full use of the time God allots us... and so many other details. We find it in the apparently trifling problems, difficulties and worries that arise without our looking for them in the course of each day.

Holy Mary, star of the East

38 I will finish repeating some words from today's Gospel: "Going into the house they saw the child with Mary, his Mother." Our Lady is always by her Son. The Magi are not received by a king on a high throne, but by a child in the arms of his Mother. Let us ask the Mother of God, who is our Mother, to prepare for us the way that leads to the fullness of love. *Cor Mariae dulcissimum, iter para tutum*: "Most Sweet Heart of Mary, prepare a safe way!" Her sweet heart knows the surest path for finding Christ.

The three kings had their star. We have Mary, Star of the Sea, Star of the East. We say to her today: Holy Mary, Star of the Sea, Morning Star, help your children. Our zeal for souls must know no frontiers, for no one is excluded from Christ's love. The three kings were the first among the gentiles to be called. But once the redemption had been accomplished, "there is neither male nor female" — there is no discrimination of any type — "for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

We Christians cannot exclude anyone; we cannot segregate or classify souls. "Many will come from the East and West." All find a place in Christ's heart. His arms, as we admire him again in the manger, are those of a child; but they are the same arms that will be extended on the cross drawing all men to himself.

And a last thought for that just man, our father and lord St Joseph, who apparently has a very minor role in the Epiphany — as usual. I can imagine him recollected in prayer, lovingly protecting the Son of God made man who has been entrusted to his paternal care. With the marvelous refinement of one who does not live for himself, the holy patriarch spends himself in silent prayer and effective service.

We have talked today about practicing a life of prayer and concern for apostolate. Who could be a better teacher for us than St Joseph? If you want my advice, which I have never tired of repeating these many years, *Ite ad Ioseph*: "Go to Joseph." He will show us definite ways, both human and divine, to approach Jesus. And soon you will dare, as he did, "to take up in his arms, kiss, clothe and look after" this child God who has been born unto us. As an homage of their veneration, the Magi offered gold, frankincense and myrrh to Jesus. Joseph gave his whole youthful and loving heart.

IN JOSEPH'S WORKSHOP

A homily given on 19 March 1963, the feast of St Joseph

St Joseph in the Gospel

Joseph's faith, hope and love

Sanctify work and it will sanctify you and others

If you want to be useful, serve

How Joseph relates to Jesus

39 The whole Church recognizes St Joseph as a patron and guardian. For centuries many different features of his life have caught the attention of believers. He was a man ever faithful to the mission God gave him. That is why, for many years now, I have liked to address him affectionately as “our father and lord.”

St Joseph really is a father and lord. He protects those who revere him and accompanies them on their journey through this life — just as he protected and accompanied Jesus when he was growing up. As you get to know him, you discover that the holy patriarch is also a master of the interior life — for he teaches us to know Jesus and share our life with him, and to realize that we are part of God’s family. St Joseph can teach us these lessons, because he is an ordinary man, a family man, a worker who earned his living by manual labor — all of which has great significance and is a source of happiness for us.

As we celebrate his feast day, I should like to remind you of him, and of what the Gospel says about him. This will help us find out what God is telling us through the simple life of Mary’s husband.

St Joseph in the Gospel

40 Both St Matthew and St Luke tell us that Joseph came from a noble line — the house of David and Solomon, kings of Israel. The details of his ancestry are not quite clear. We don’t know which of the Gospel’s two genealogies refers to Joseph, Jesus’ father according to Jewish law, and which to Mary, his Mother according to the flesh. Nor do we know if Joseph came from Bethlehem, where he went for the census, or Nazareth, where he lived and worked.

On the other hand, we do know that he was not well to do: he was just a worker, like so many millions of people throughout the world. He worked at the same demanding and humble job that God chose for himself when he took our flesh and came to live just like the rest of us for thirty years.

Scripture tells us St Joseph was a craftsman. Some Fathers of the Church add that he was a carpenter. When talking of the life of Jesus, St Justin says that he made ploughs and yokes. Perhaps that’s why St. Isidore of Seville concludes that St Joseph was a blacksmith. In any event, he was a workman who supplied the needs of his fellow citizens with a manual skill acquired through years of toil and sweat.

The Gospels give us a picture of Joseph as a remarkably sound man who was in no way frightened or shy of life. On the contrary, he faced up to problems, dealt with difficult situations and showed responsibility and initiative in whatever he was asked to do.

I don’t agree with the traditional picture of St Joseph as an old man, even though it may have been prompted by a desire to emphasize the perpetual virginity of Mary. I see him as a strong young man, perhaps a few years older than our Lady, but in the prime of his life and work.

You don’t have to wait to be old or lifeless to practice the virtue of chastity. Purity comes from love; and the strength and gaiety of youth are no obstacle for noble

love. Joseph had a young heart and a young body when he married Mary, when he learned of the mystery of her divine motherhood, when he lived in her company, respecting the integrity God wished to give the world as one more sign that he had come to share the life of his creatures. Anyone who cannot understand a love like that knows very little of true love and is a complete stranger to the Christian meaning of chastity.

Joseph was, we have said, a craftsman from Galilee, just one man among many. What had life to offer to someone from a forgotten village like Nazareth? Nothing but work: work every day, with the same constant effort. And at the end of the day, a poor little house in which to rest and regain energy for the next day.

But the name Joseph, in Hebrew, means "God will add." God adds unsuspected dimensions to the holy lives of those who do his will. He adds the one important dimension that gives meaning to everything, the divine dimension. To the humble and holy life of Joseph he added — if I may put it this way — the lives of the Virgin Mary and of Jesus, our Lord. God does not allow himself to be outdone in generosity. Joseph could make his own the words of Mary, his wife: "He has looked graciously upon the lowliness of his handmaid... because he who is mighty, he whose name is holy, has wrought for me his wonders."

St Joseph was an ordinary sort of man on whom God relied to do great things. He did exactly what the Lord wanted him to do, in each and every event that went to make up his life. That is why Scripture praises Joseph as "a just man." And in Hebrew a just man means a good and faithful servant of God, someone who fulfils the divine will, or who is honorable and charitable toward his neighbor. So a just man is someone who loves God and proves his love by keeping God's commandments and directing his whole life toward the service of his brothers, his fellow men.

Joseph's faith, hope and love

41 To be just is not simply a matter of obeying rules. Goodness should grow from the inside; it should be deep and vital — for "the just man lives by faith." These words, which later became a frequent subject of St Paul's meditation, really did apply in the case of St Joseph. He didn't fulfill the will of God in a routine or perfunctory way; he did it spontaneously and wholeheartedly. For him the law, which every practicing Jew lived by, was not a code or a cold list of precepts, but an expression of the will of the living God. So he knew how to recognize the Lord's voice when it came to him so unexpectedly and so surprisingly.

St Joseph's life was simple, but it was not easy. After considerable soul-searching, he learned that the son of Mary had been conceived through the Holy Spirit. And this child, the Son of God, the descendant of David according to the flesh, was born in a cave. Angels celebrated his birth, and distinguished people from distant countries came to adore him. But the King of Judea wanted to kill him, and they had to flee. The Son of God was, it appeared, a defenseless child who would live in Egypt.

42 When relating these events in his Gospel, St Matthew continually emphasizes Joseph's faithfulness. He kept the commandments of God without wavering, even though the meaning of those commandments was sometimes obscure or their relation to the rest of the divine plan hidden from him.

The Fathers of the Church and other spiritual writers frequently emphasise the firmness of Joseph's faith. Referring to the angel's command to fly from Herod and take refuge in Egypt, St John Chrysostom comments: "On hearing this, Joseph was not shocked nor did he say: This is strange. You yourself made it known not long ago that he would save his people, and now you are incapable even of saving him — we have to flee, to set out on a long journey and spend a long while in a strange place; that contradicts your promise. Joseph does not think in this way, for he is a man who trusts God. Nor does he ask when he will return, even though the angel left it so vague: Stay there, until I tell you to return. Joseph does not object; he obeys and believes and joyfully accepts all the trials."

Joseph's faith does not falter; he obeys quickly and to the letter. To understand this lesson better, we should remember that Joseph's faith is active, that his docility is not a passive submission to the course of events. For the Christian's faith has nothing whatever to do with conformity, inertia or lack of initiative.

Joseph entrusted himself unreservedly to the care of God, but he always reflected on events and so was able to reach that level of understanding of the works of God which is true wisdom. In this way he learned little by little that supernatural plans have a logic that at times upsets human plans.

In the different circumstances of his life, St Joseph never refuses to think, never neglects his responsibilities. On the contrary, he puts his human experience at the service of faith. When he returns from Egypt, "learning that Archelaus had succeeded his father Herod as ruler of Judea, he was afraid to go there." In other words, he had learned to work within the divine plan. And to confirm that he was doing the right thing, Joseph received an instruction to return to Galilee.

That's the way St Joseph's faith was: full, confident, complete. And it expressed itself in an effective dedication to the will of God and an intelligent obedience. With the faith went love. His faith nurtured his love of God, who was fulfilling the promises made to Abraham, Jacob and Moses, and his affection for Mary his wife and her Son. This faith, hope and love would further the great mission which God was beginning in the world through, among others, a carpenter in Galilee: the redemption of man.

43 Faith, hope, love: these are the supports of Joseph's life and of all Christian lives. Joseph's self-giving is an interweaving of faithful love, loving faith and confident hope. His feast is thus a good opportunity for us to renew our commitment to the Christian calling God has given each of us.

When you sincerely desire to live by faith, hope and love, the renewal of your commitment is not a matter of picking up again something neglected. When there really is faith, hope and love, renewal means staying in God's hands, despite our

personal faults, mistakes and defects. It is a confirmation of our faithfulness. Renewing our commitment means renewing our fidelity to what God wants of us: it means expressing our love in deeds.

Love has certain standard features. Sometimes we speak of love as if it were an impulse to self-satisfaction or a mere means to selfish fulfillment of one's own personality. But that's not love. True love means going out of oneself, giving oneself. Love brings joy, but a joy whose roots are in the shape of a cross. As long as we are on earth and have not yet arrived at the fullness of the future life, we can never have true love without sacrifice and pain. This pain becomes sweet and lovable; it is the source of interior joy. But it is an authentic pain, for it involves overcoming one's own selfishness and taking Love as the rule of each and every thing we do.

44 Anything done out of love is important, however small it might appear. God has come to us, even though we are miserable creatures, and he has told us that he loves us: "My delight is to be among the sons of men." Our Lord tells us that everything is valuable — those actions which from a human point of view we regard as extraordinary and those which seem unimportant. Nothing is wasted. No man is worthless to God. All of us are called to share the kingdom of heaven — each with his own vocation: in his home, his work, his civic duties and the exercise of his rights.

St Joseph's life is a good example of this: it was simple, ordinary and normal, made up of years of the same work, of days — just one day after another — which were monotonous from a human point of view. I have often thought about this, meditating on St Joseph's life; it is one of the reasons for having a special devotion to him.

When Pope John XXIII closed the first session of Vatican Council II and announced that the name of St Joseph was going to be included in the canon of the Mass, a very important churchman telephoned me to say, "Congratulations. Listening to the Pope's announcement, I thought immediately of you and of how happy you'd be." And indeed I was happy, for in that conciliar gathering, which represented the whole Church brought together in the Holy Spirit, there was proclaimed the great supernatural value of St Joseph's life, the value of an ordinary life of work done in God's presence and in total fulfillment of his will.

Sanctify work and it will sanctify you and others

45 In describing the spirit of the association to which I have devoted my life, Opus Dei, I have said that it hinges upon ordinary work, professional work carried out in the midst of the world. God's calling gives us a mission: it invites us to share in the unique task of the Church, to bear witness to Christ before our fellow men and so draw all things toward God.

Our calling discloses to us the meaning of our existence. It means being convinced, through faith, of the reason for our life on earth. Our life, the present, past and future, acquires a new dimension, a depth we did not perceive before. All

happenings and events now fall within their true perspective: we understand where God is leading us, and we feel ourselves borne along by this task entrusted to us.

God draws us from the shadows of our ignorance, our groping through history, and, no matter what our occupation in the world, he calls us with a strong voice, as he once called Peter and Andrew: "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men."

He who lives by faith may meet with difficulty and struggle, suffering and even bitterness, but never depression or anguish, because he knows that his life is worthwhile, he knows why he has been born. "I am the light of the world," Christ exclaimed. "He who follows me does not walk in the darkness, but will have the light of life."

To deserve this light from God, we must love. We must be humble enough to realize we need to be saved, and we must say with Peter: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of life everlasting, and we have come to believe and to know that you are the Christ, the Son of God." If we really do this, if we allow God's word to enter our hearts, we can truly say that we do not walk in darkness, for the light of God will shine out over our weakness and our personal defects, as the sun shines above the storm.

46 Christian faith and calling affect our whole existence, not just a part of it. Our relations with God necessarily demand giving ourselves, giving ourselves completely. The man of faith sees life, in all its dimensions, from a new perspective: that which is given us by God.

You, who celebrate with me today this feast of St Joseph, are men who work in different human professions; you have your own homes, you belong to so many different countries and have different languages. You have been educated in lecture halls or in factories and offices. You have worked in your profession for years, established professional and personal friendships with your colleagues, helped to solve the problems of your companies and your communities.

Well then: I remind you once again that all this is not foreign to God's plan. Your human vocation is a part — and an important part — of your divine vocation. That is the reason why you must strive for holiness, giving a particular character to your human personality, a style to your life; contributing at the same time to the sanctification of others, your fellow men; sanctifying your work and your environment: the profession or job that fills your day, your home and family and the country where you were born and which you love.

47 Work is part and parcel of man's life on earth. It involves effort, weariness, exhaustion: signs of the suffering and struggle which accompany human existence and which point to the reality of sin and the need for redemption. But in itself work is not a penalty or a curse or a punishment: those who speak of it that way have not understood sacred Scripture properly.

It is time for us Christians to shout from the rooftops that work is a gift from God and that it makes no sense to classify men differently, according to their

occupation, as if some jobs were nobler than others. Work, all work, bears witness to the dignity of man, to his dominion over creation. It is an opportunity to develop one's personality. It is a bond of union with others, the way to support one's family, a means of aiding in the improvement of the society in which we live and in the progress of all humanity.

For a Christian these horizons extend and grow wider. For work is a participation in the creative work of God. When he created man and blessed him, he said: "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and conquer it. Be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven and all living animals on the earth." And, moreover, since Christ took it into his hands, work has become for us a redeemed and redemptive reality. Not only is it the background of man's life, it is a means and path of holiness. It is something to be sanctified and something that sanctifies.

48 It is well to remember that the dignity of work is based on Love. Man's great privilege is to be able to love and to transcend what is fleeting and ephemeral. He can love other creatures, pronounce an "I" and a "you" which are full of meaning. And he can love God, who opens heaven's gates to us, makes us members of his family and allows us also to talk to him in friendship, face to face.

This is why man ought not to limit himself to material production. Work is born of love; it is a manifestation of love and is directed toward love. We see the hand of God, not only in the wonders of nature, but also in our experience of work and effort. Work thus becomes prayer and thanksgiving, because we know we are placed on earth by God, that we are loved by him and made heirs to his promises. We have been rightly told, "In eating, in drinking, in all that you do, do everything for God's glory."

49 Professional work is also an apostolate, an opportunity to give ourselves to others, to reveal Christ to them and lead them to God the Father — all of which is the overflow of the charity which the Holy Spirit pours into our hearts. When St Paul explained to the Ephesians how their conversion to Christianity should affect their lives, one of the things he said was: "Anyone who was a thief must stop stealing; he should try to find some useful manual work instead and be able to do some good by helping others that are in need." Men need earthly bread to sustain them in their lives on earth; they also need bread from heaven to enlighten their minds and inflame their hearts. With your work, taking advantage of the opportunities it offers, in your conversations and your dealings with others, you can and should carry out this apostolic precept.

If we work with this attitude, our life, despite its human limitations, will be a foretaste of the glory of heaven, of that communion with God and his saints where self-giving, faithfulness, friendship and joy reign supreme. Your ordinary professional work will provide the true, solid, noble material out of which you will build a truly Christian life. You will use your work to make fruitful the grace that comes to us from Christ.

Faith, hope and charity will come into play in your professional work done for God. The incidents, the problems, the friendships that your work brings with it, will give

you food for prayer. The effort to improve your own daily occupation will give you the chance to experience the cross that is essential for a Christian. When you feel your weakness, the failures that arise even in human undertakings, you will gain in objectivity, in humility and in understanding for others. Successes and joys will prompt you to thanksgiving and to realize that you do not live for yourself, but for the service of others and of God.

If you want to be useful, serve

50 If we want to live this way, sanctifying our profession or job, we really must work well, with human and supernatural intensity. I would like to remind you now, by way of contrast, of a story from the apocryphal gospels: "Jesus' father, who was a carpenter, made ploughs and yokes. Once," the story continues, "a certain important person asked him to make a bed. But it happened that one of the shafts was shorter than the other, so Joseph did not know what to do. Then, the child Jesus said to his father: Put the two shafts on the ground and make them even at one end. And Joseph did so. Jesus got at the other end, took the shorter beam of wood and stretched it until it was the same length as the other. Joseph, his father, was full of astonishment at this miracle and showered embraces and kisses on the Child, saying: How fortunate I am that God has given me this Child!"

Joseph would give God no such thanks; he would never work in this way. He was not one for easy solutions and little miracles, but a man of perseverance, effort and, when needed, ingenuity. The Christian knows that God works miracles, that he did them centuries ago, that he has continued doing them since, and that he still works them now, because "the Lord's hand is not shortened." But miracles are a sign of the saving power of God, not a cure for incompetence nor an easy way to dodge effort. The "miracle" which God asks of you is to persevere in your Christian and divine vocation, sanctifying each day's work: the miracle of turning the prose of each day into heroic verse by the love that you put into your ordinary work. God waits for you there. He expects you to be a responsible person, with the zeal of an apostle and the competence of a good worker.

And so, as the motto of your work, I can give you this one: If you want to be useful, serve. For, in the first place, in order to do things properly, you must know how to do them. I cannot see the integrity of a person who does not strive to attain professional skills and to carry out properly the task entrusted to his care. It's not enough to want to do good; we must know how to do it. And, if our desire is real, it will show itself in the effort we make to use the right methods, finishing things well, achieving human perfection.

51 But human service and technique, our knowledge of our job, should have a feature which was basic to St Joseph's work and should be so for every Christian: the spirit of service, the desire to contribute to the well-being of other people. Joseph's work was not self-centered, even though his active life made him a strong and forceful personality. When he worked, he was aware that he was carrying out God's will; he was thinking of his people, of Jesus and Mary, and of everyone in Nazareth.

Joseph was one of the few craftsmen in Nazareth, if not the only one — a carpenter perhaps. But, as normally happens in villages, he must have felt called upon to turn his attention to other things: fixing a mill that was not working or, with the coming of winter, repairing the tiles of a roof. I am sure Joseph knew how to lend a hand in many difficulties, with work well done. His skilled work was in the service of others, to brighten the lives of other families in the town; and with a smile, a friendly word, a passing quip, he would restore confidence and happiness to those in danger of losing them.

52 Sometimes, in the case of people poorer than himself, Joseph would charge only a little — just enough for his customer to feel that he had paid. But normally he would charge a reasonable amount — not too much or too little. He would demand what was justly owed him, for faithfulness to God cannot mean giving up rights which in fact are duties. St Joseph had to be properly paid, since this was his means of supporting the family that God had entrusted to him.

We should demand our rights, but not for selfish reasons. We do not love justice if we do not wish to see it fulfilled in the lives of others. In the same way, it is wrong to shut oneself up in comfortable religiosity, forgetting the needs of others. The man who wishes to be just in God's eyes also tries to establish the reign of justice among men. And not only for the good of God's name, but because to be a Christian means to work at fulfilling all the noble yearnings of men. Paraphrasing a well-known text of St John, we can say that the man who says he acts justly toward God, but does not do so with other men, is a liar: and there is no truth in him.

Like all Christians at that time, I too was happy and grateful at the Church's decision to declare a liturgical feast in honor of St Joseph the Worker. This feast, which ratifies the divine value of work, shows how the Church publicly echoes central truths of the Gospel that God wishes men to meditate, especially in our own time.

53 I have often spoken of it before, but let me insist once again on the naturalness and simplicity of St Joseph's life, which was in no way remote from that of his neighbors, and which raised no artificial obstacles to his dealings with them.

So, though it may be proper to some periods or situations, I do not like to talk of catholic workers, catholic engineers, catholic doctors and so on, as if describing a species within a genus, as if Catholics formed a little group separate from others. That creates the impression that there is a chasm between Christians and the rest of society. While respecting the contrary opinion, I think it more correct to speak of workers who are Catholics, or Catholics who are workers or engineers. For a man of faith who practices a profession, whether intellectual, technical or manual, feels himself and is in fact at one with others; he is the same as others, with the same rights and obligations, the same desire to improve, the same interest in facing and solving common problems.

The Catholic who is prepared to live in this way will, through his daily life, give a proof of his faith, hope and charity: a simple and normal testimony without need of

pomp and circumstance. The vitality of his life will show the constant presence of the Church in the world, since all Catholics are themselves the Church, because they are members in their own right of the one People of God.

How Joseph relates to Jesus

54 For some time now I have enjoyed using a moving invocation to St Joseph, which the Church has offered us, in the preparatory prayers of the Mass: "Joseph, blessed and happy man, who was permitted to see and hear the God whom many kings wished in vain to see and hear, and not only to see and hear him, but carry him in your arms, kiss him, clothe him and care for him: pray for us." This prayer will help us to begin the last topic on which I would like to touch today: Joseph's affectionate dealings with Jesus.

The life of Jesus was, for St Joseph, a recurring discovery of his own vocation. We recalled earlier those first years full of contrasting circumstances: glorification and flight, the majesty of the wise men and the poverty of the manger, the song of the angels and the silence of mankind. When the moment comes to present the child in the temple, Joseph, who carries the modest offering of a pair of doves, sees how Simeon and Anna proclaim Jesus as the Messiah: "His father and mother listened with wonder," says St Luke. Later, when the child stays behind in Jerusalem, unknown to Mary and Joseph, and they find him again after three days' search, the same evangelist tells us, "They were astonished."

Joseph is surprised and astonished. God gradually reveals his plans to him, and he tries to understand them. As with every soul who wishes to follow Jesus closely, he soon discovers that here is no laggard's pace, no room for the half-hearted. For God is not content with our achieving a certain level and staying there. He doesn't want us to rest on our laurels. God always asks more: his ways are not the ways of men. St Joseph, more than anyone else before or since, learned from Jesus to be alert to recognize God's wonders, to have his mind and heart awake.

55 But if Joseph learned from Jesus to live in a divine way, I would be bold enough to say that, humanly speaking, there was much he taught God's Son. There is something I do not quite like in that title of foster father which is sometimes given to Joseph, because it might make us think of the relationship between Joseph and Jesus as something cold and external. Certainly our faith tells us that he was not his father according to the flesh, but this is not the only kind of fatherhood.

"Joseph," we read in a sermon of St Augustine, "not only claims the name of father, but he has a greater claim to it than any other." And then he adds: "How was he father? All the more effectively, the more chaste the paternity. Some thought that he was the father of our Lord Jesus Christ in the same way as other fathers who beget sons carnally and do not receive them only as the fruit of a spiritual love. This is why St Luke says: People thought he was the father of Jesus. Why does he say only they thought? Because this thought and human judgment refer to what is usual among men. And our Lord was not born of the seed of Joseph. Yet of the piety and charity of Joseph a son was born to him, of the Virgin Mary, and this was the Son of God."

Joseph loved Jesus as a father loves his son and showed his love by giving him the best he had. Joseph, caring for the child as he had been commanded, made Jesus a craftsman, transmitting his own professional skill to him. So the neighbors of Nazareth will call Jesus both *faber* and *fabri filius*: the craftsman and the son of the craftsman. Jesus worked in Joseph's workshop and by Joseph's side. What must Joseph have been, how grace must have worked through him, that he should be able to fulfill this task of the human upbringing of the Son of God!

For Jesus must have resembled Joseph: in his way of working, in the features of his character, in his way of speaking. Jesus' realism, his eye for detail, the way he sat at table and broke bread, his preference for using everyday situations to give doctrine — all this reflects his childhood and the influence of Joseph.

It's not possible to ignore this sublime mystery: Jesus who is man, who speaks with the accent of a particular district of Israel, who resembles a carpenter called Joseph, is the Son of God. And who can teach God anything? But he is also truly man and lives a normal life: first, as a child, then as a boy helping in Joseph's workshop, finally as a grown man in the prime of life. "Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and grace before God and men."

56 In human life, Joseph was Jesus' master in their daily contact, full of refined affection, glad to deny himself to take better care of Jesus. Isn't that reason enough for us to consider this just man, this holy patriarch, in whom the faith of the old covenant bears fruit, as a master of interior life? Interior life is nothing but continual and direct conversation with Christ, so as to become one with him. And Joseph can tell us many things about Jesus. Therefore, never neglect devotion to him — *Ite ad Ioseph*: "Go to Joseph" — as Christian tradition puts it in the words of the Old Testament.

A master of interior life, a worker deeply involved in his job, God's servant in continual contact with Jesus: that is Joseph. *Ite ad Ioseph*. With St Joseph, the Christian learns what it means to belong to God and fully to assume one's place among men, sanctifying the world. Get to know Joseph and you will find Jesus. Talk to Joseph and you will find Mary, who always sheds peace about her in that attractive workshop in Nazareth.

THE CONVERSION OF THE CHILDREN OF GOD

A homily given on 2 March 1952, the first Sunday of Lent

The risky security of Christians

Here is the time of pardon

Christ is tempted

Children of God

57 We are at the beginning of Lent: a time of penance, purification and conversion. It is not an easy program, but then Christianity is not an easy way of life. It is not

enough just to be in the Church, letting the years roll by. In our life, in the life of Christians, our first conversion — that unique moment which each of us remembers, when we clearly understood everything the Lord was asking of us — is certainly very significant. But the later conversions are even more important, and they are increasingly demanding. To facilitate the work of grace in these conversions, we need to keep our soul young; we have to call upon our Lord, know how to listen to him and, having found out what has gone wrong, know how to ask his pardon.

"If you call upon me, I will listen to you," we read in this Sunday's liturgy. Isn't it wonderful how God cares for us and is always ready to listen to us — waiting for man to speak? He hears us at all times, but particularly now. Our heart is ready and we have made up our minds to purify ourselves. He hears us and will not disregard the petition of a "humble and contrite heart."

The Lord listens to us. He wants to intervene and enter our lives to free us from evil and fill us with good. "I will rescue him and honor him," he says of man. So we must hope for glory. Here again we have the beginning of the interior movement that makes up our spiritual life. Hope of glory increases our faith and fosters our charity; the three theological virtues, godly virtues that make us like our Father God, have been set in motion.

What better way to begin Lent? Let's renew our faith, hope and love. The spirit of penance and the desire for purification come from these virtues. Lent is not only an opportunity for increasing our external practices of self-denial. If we thought it were only that, we would miss the deep meaning it has in Christian living, for these external practices are — as I have said — the result of faith, hope and charity.

The risky security of Christians

58 "He that dwells in the aid of the Most High, shall abide under the protection of the God of heaven." This is the risky security of the Christian. We must be convinced that God hears us, that he is concerned about us. If we are, we will feel completely at peace. But living with God is indeed a risky business, for he will not share things: he wants everything. And if we move toward him, it means we must be ready for a new conversion, to take new bearings, to listen more attentively to his inspirations — those holy desires that he provokes in every soul — and to put them into practice.

Since our first conscious decision really to follow the teaching of Christ, we have no doubt made good progress along the way of faithfulness to his word. And yet isn't it true that there is still much to be done? Isn't it true, particularly, that there is still so much pride in us? We need, most probably, to change again, to be more loyal and humble, so that we become less selfish and let Christ grow in us, for "He must become more and more, I must become less and less."

We cannot stay still. We must keep going ahead toward the goal St Paul marks out: "It is not I who live, it is Christ that lives in me." This is a high and very noble ambition, this identification with Christ, this holiness. But there is no other way if

we are to be consistent with the divine life God has sown in our souls in baptism. To advance we must progress in holiness. Shying away from holiness implies refusing our Christian life its natural growth. The fire of God's love needs to be fed. It must grow each day, gathering strength in our soul; and a fire is maintained by burning more things. If we don't feed it, it may die.

Remember what St Augustine said: "If you say 'enough,' you are lost. Go further, keep going. Don't stay in the same place, don't go back, don't go off the road." Lent should suggest to us these basic questions: Am I advancing in my faithfulness to Christ, in my desire for holiness, in a generous apostolate in my daily life, in my ordinary work among my colleagues?

Each one of us, silently, should answer these questions, and he will see that he needs to change again if Christ is to live in him, if Jesus' image is to be reflected clearly in his behavior. "If any man has a mind to come my way, let him renounce self, and take up his cross daily and follow me." Christ is saying this again, to us, whispering it in our ears: the cross each day. As St Jerome puts it: "Not only in time of persecution or when we have the chance of martyrdom, but in all circumstances, in everything we do and think, in everything we say, let us deny what we used to be and let us confess what we now are, reborn as we have been in Christ."

It's an echo of St Paul's words: "Once you were all darkness. Now, in the Lord, you are all daylight. You must live as children of the light. Where light has its effect, men walk in all goodness, holiness and truth, seeking those things which please God."

Conversion is the task of a moment; sanctification is the work of a lifetime. The divine seed of charity, which God has sown in our souls, wants to grow, to express itself in action, to yield results that continually coincide with what God wants. Therefore, we must be ready to begin again, to find again — in new situations — the light and the stimulus of our first conversion. And that is why we must prepare with a deep examination of conscience, asking our Lord for his help, so that we'll know him and ourselves better. If we want to be converted again, there's no other way.

Here is the time of pardon

59 "We entreat you not to offer God's grace an ineffectual welcome." Yes, God's grace can fill us this Lent, provided we do not close the doors of our heart. We must be well disposed, we must really want to change; we cannot play with God's grace.

I don't like to speak of fear, for the Christian is moved by the charity of God, which has been shown to us in Christ and teaches us to love all men and the whole of creation. However, we should speak about being responsible, being serious. "Make no mistake about it; you cannot cheat God," the Apostle Paul warns us.

We must decide. It's wrong to have two candles lighted — one to St Michael and another to the devil. We must snuff out the devil's candle: we must spend our life completely in the service of the Lord. If our desire for holiness is sincere, if we are docile enough to place ourselves in God's hands, everything will go well. For he is always ready to give us his grace, especially at a time like this — grace for a new conversion, a step forward in our lives as Christians.

We cannot regard this Lent as just another liturgical season that has simply happened to come around again. It is a unique time: a divine aid, which we should accept. Jesus is passing by and he hopes that we will take a great step forward — today, now.

"Here is the time of pardon; the day of salvation has come already." Once again we hear the voice of the good shepherd calling us tenderly: "I have called you by your name." He calls each of us by our name, the familiar name used only by those who love us. Words cannot describe Jesus' tenderness toward us.

Just think about the wonder of God's love. Our Lord comes out to meet us, he waits for us, he's by the roadside where we cannot but see him, and he calls each of us personally, speaking to us about our own things — which are also his. He stirs us to sorrow, opens our conscience to be generous; he encourages us to want to be faithful, so that we can be called his disciples. When we hear these intimate words of grace, which are by way of an affectionate reproach, we realize at once that our Lord has not forgotten us during all the time in which, through our fault, we did not see him. Christ loves us with all the inexhaustible charity of God's own heart.

Look how he keeps insisting: "I have answered your prayer in a time of pardon, I have brought you help in a day of salvation." Since he promises you glory, his love, and gives it to you at the right time; since he calls us, what are you in turn going to give to the Lord, how are you going to respond, and how will I respond, to this love of Jesus who has come out to meet us?

The day of salvation is here before us. The call of the good shepherd has reached us: "I have called you by your name." Since love repays love, we must reply: "Here I am, for you called me." I have decided not to let this Lent go by like rain on stones, leaving no trace. I will let it soak into me, changing me. I will be converted; I will turn again to the Lord and love him as he wants to be loved.

"You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart and your whole soul and your whole mind." And St Augustine comments: "What is left of your heart for loving yourself? What is left of your soul, of your mind? He says 'the whole.' He who made you requires you to give yourself completely."

60 After this affirmation of love, we must behave as lovers of God. "In everything we do, let us behave as servants of the Lord." If you give yourself as he wishes, the influence of grace will be apparent in your professional conduct, in your work, in your effort to divinize human things — be they great or small. For Love gives a new dimension to everything.

But during this Lent, let us not forget that to be servants of God is no easy matter. The text from this Sunday's epistle continues: "As God's ministers we have to show great patience, in times of affliction, of need, of difficulty; under the lash, in prison, in the midst of tumult; when we are tired out, sleepless and fasting. We have to be pure-minded, enlightened, forgiving and gracious to others; we have to rely on the Holy Spirit, on unaffected love, on the truth of our message, on the power of God."

In the most varied activities of our day, in all situations, we must act as God's servants, realizing that he is with us, that we are his children. We must be aware of the divine roots burrowing into our life and act accordingly.

These words of the Apostle should make you happy, for they are, as it were, a ratification of your vocation as ordinary Christians in the middle of the world, sharing with other men — your equals — the enthusiasms, the sorrows and the joys of human life. All this is a way to God. What God asks of you is that you should, always, act as his children and servants.

But these ordinary circumstances of life will be a divine way only if we really change ourselves, if we really give ourselves. For St Paul uses hard words. He promises that the Christian will have a hard life, a life of risk and of constant tension. How we disfigure Christianity if we try to turn it into something nice and comfortable! But neither is it true to think that this deep, serious way of life, which is totally bound up with all the difficulties of human existence, is something full of anguish, oppression or fear.

The Christian is a realist. His supernatural and human realism helps him appreciate all the aspects of his life: sorrow and joy, his own and other people's suffering, certainty and doubt, generosity and selfishness. The Christian experiences all this, and he confronts it all, with human integrity and with the strength he receives from God.

Christ is tempted

61 Lent commemorates the forty days Jesus spent in the desert in preparation for his years of preaching, which culminated in the cross and in the triumph of Easter. Forty days of prayer and penance. At the end: the temptations of Christ, which the liturgy recalls for us in today's Gospel.

The whole episode is a mystery which man cannot hope to understand: God submitting to temptation, letting the evil one have his way. But we can meditate upon it, asking our Lord to help us understand the teaching it contains.

Jesus Christ being tempted... tradition likes to see Christ's trials in this way: our Lord, who came to be an example to us in all things, wants to suffer temptation as well. And so it is, for Christ was perfect man, like us in everything except sin. After forty days of fasting, with perhaps no food other than herbs and roots and a little water, he feels hungry — he is really hungry, as anyone would be. And when the devil suggests he turn stones into bread, our Lord not only declines the food which

his body requires, but he also rejects a greater temptation: that of using his divine power to solve, if we can express it so, a personal problem.

You have noticed how, throughout the Gospels, Jesus doesn't work miracles for his own benefit. He turns water into wine for the wedding guests at Cana; he multiplies loaves and fish for the hungry crowd. But he earns his bread, for years, with his own work. And later, during his journeys through the land of Israel, he lives with the help of those who follow him.

St John tells how after a long journey when Jesus arrived at the well of Sichar, he sent his disciples into town to buy food. And when he sees the Samaritan woman coming, he asks her for water, since he has no way of getting it. His body, worn out from a long journey, feels weary. On other occasions he has to yield to sleep to regain his strength. How generous our Lord is in humbling himself and fully accepting his human condition! He does not use his divine power to escape from difficulties or effort. Let's pray that he will teach us to be tough, to love work, to appreciate the human and divine nobility of savoring the consequences of self-giving.

In the second temptation, when the devil suggests Jesus throw himself off the temple tower, Christ again rejects the suggestion to make use of his divine power. Christ isn't looking for vainglory, for show. He teaches us not to stage God as the backdrop for our own excellence. Jesus Christ wants to fulfill the will of his Father without anticipating God's plans, without advancing the time for miracles; he simply plods the hard path of men, the lovable way of the cross.

Something very similar happens in the third temptation: he is offered kingdoms, power and glory. The devil tries to extend to human ambitions that devotion which should be reserved wholly for God; he promises us an easy life if we fall down before him, before idols. Our Lord insists that the only true end of adoration is God; and he confirms his will to serve: "Away with you, Satan; it is written, you shall worship the Lord your God, and serve none but him."

62 We should learn from Jesus' attitude in these trials. During his life on earth he did not even want the glory that belonged to him. Though he had the right to be treated as God, he took the form of a servant, a slave. And so the Christian knows that all glory is due to God and that he must not make use of the sublimity and greatness of the Gospel to further his own interests or human ambitions.

We should learn from Jesus. His attitude in rejecting all human glory is in perfect balance with the greatness of his unique mission as the beloved Son of God who takes flesh to save men. He has a mission that the Father affectionately guides with tender care: "You are my son; I have begotten you this day. Only ask, and you shall have the nations for your patrimony."

And the Christian who, following Christ, has this attitude of complete adoration of the Father, also experiences our Lord's loving care: "He trusts in me, mine it is to rescue him; he acknowledges my name, from me he shall have protection."

63 Jesus says “no” to the devil, the prince of darkness. And immediately all is light. “Then the devil left him alone; and thereupon angels came and ministered to him.” Jesus has stood up to the test. And it was a real test, because, as St Ambrose comments: “He did not act as God, using his power. If he had, what use would his example have been? No. As a man he uses those aids which he shared with us.”

The devil, with twisted intention, quoted the Old Testament: God will send his angels to protect the just man wherever he goes. But Jesus refuses to tempt his Father; he restores true meaning to this passage from the Bible. And, as a reward for his fidelity, when the time comes, ministers of God the Father appear and wait upon him.

It's worth thinking about the method Satan uses with our Lord Jesus Christ: he argues with texts from the sacred books, twisting and distorting their meaning in a blasphemous way. Jesus doesn't let himself be deceived: the Word made flesh knows well the divine word, written for the salvation of men — not their confusion and downfall. So, we can conclude that anyone who is united to Jesus Christ through Love will never be deceived by manipulation of the holy Scripture, for he knows that it is typical of the devil to try to confuse the Christian conscience, juggling with the very words of eternal wisdom, trying to turn light into darkness.

Let us look for a moment at this appearance of angels in Jesus' life, for it will help us to better understand their role — their angelic mission — in all human life. Christian tradition describes the guardian angels as powerful friends, placed by God alongside each one of us, to accompany us on our way. And that is why he invites us to make friends with them and get them to help us.

In suggesting that we meditate on these passages of the life of Christ, the Church reminds us that during Lent, when we recognize our sins, our wretchedness and our need for purification, there is also room for joy. Lent is a time for both bravery and joy; we have to fill ourselves with courage, for the grace of God will not fail us. God will be at our side and will send his angels to be our traveling companions, our prudent advisers along the way, our cooperators in all that we take on. The angels “will hold you up with their hands lest you should chance to trip on a stone,” as the psalm says.

We must learn to speak to the angels. Turn to them now, tell your guardian angel that these spiritual waters of Lent will not flow off your soul but will go deep, because you are sorry. Ask them to take up to the Lord your good will, which, by the grace of God, has grown out of your wretchedness like a lily grown on a dunghill. Holy angels, our guardians: “defend us in battle so that we do not perish at the final judgment.”

Children of God

64 How do you explain this confident prayer — this knowledge that we shall not perish in the battle? It is a conviction rooted in something that is always a cause of wonder to me: our divine filiation. Our Lord, who during this Lent is asking us to change, is not a tyrannical master or a rigid and implacable judge: he is our

Father. He speaks to us about our lack of generosity, our sins, our mistakes; but he does so in order to free us from them, to promise us his friendship and his love. Awareness that God is our Father brings joy to our conversion: it tells us that we are returning to our Father's house.

This divine filiation is the basis of the spirit of Opus Dei. All men are children of God. But a child can look upon his father in many ways. We must try to be children who realize that the Lord, by loving us as his children, has taken us into his house, in the middle of the world, to be members of his family, so that what is his is ours, and what is ours is his, and to develop that familiarity and confidence which prompts us to ask him, like children, for the moon!

A child of God treats the Lord as his Father. He is not obsequious and servile, he is not merely formal and well mannered: he is completely sincere and trusting. Men do not scandalise God. He can put up with all our infidelities. Our Father in heaven pardons any offence when his child returns to him, when he repents and asks for pardon. The Lord is such a good Father that he anticipates our desire to be pardoned and comes forward to us, opening his arms laden with grace.

Now I'm not inventing anything. Remember the parable that Jesus told to help us understand the love of our Father who is in heaven: the parable of the prodigal son. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and took pity on him; running up, he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him." That's what the sacred text says: he covered him with kisses. Can you put it more humanly than that? Can you describe more graphically the paternal love of God for men?

When God runs toward us, we cannot keep silent, but with St Paul we exclaim: Abba, Pater: "Father, my Father!", for, though he is the creator of the universe, he doesn't mind our not using high-sounding titles, nor worry about our not acknowledging his greatness. He wants us to call him Father; he wants us to savor that word, our souls filling with joy.

Human life is in some way a constant returning to our Father's house. We return through contrition, through the conversion of heart, which means a desire to change, a firm decision to improve our life and which, therefore, is expressed in sacrifice and self-giving. We return to our Father's house by means of that sacrament of pardon in which, by confessing our sins, we put on Jesus Christ again and become his brothers, members of God's family.

God is waiting for us, like the father in the parable, with open arms, even though we don't deserve it. It doesn't matter how great our debt is. Just like the prodigal son, all we have to do is open our heart, to be homesick for our Father's house, to wonder at and rejoice in the gift which God makes us of being able to call ourselves his children, of really being his children, even though our response to him has been so poor.

65 What a strange capacity man has to forget even the most wonderful things, to become used to mystery! Let's remind ourselves, this Lent, that the Christian cannot be superficial. While being fully involved in his everyday work, among other

men, his equals; busy, under stress, the Christian has to be at the same time totally involved with God, for he is a child of God.

Divine filiation is a joyful truth, a consoling mystery. It fills all our spiritual life, it shows us how to speak to God, to know and to love our Father in heaven. And it makes our interior struggle overflow with hope and gives us the trusting simplicity of little children. More than that: precisely because we are children of God, we can contemplate in love and wonder everything as coming from the hands of our Father, God the Creator. And so we become contemplatives in the middle of the world, loving the world.

In Lent, the liturgy recalls the effect of Adam's sin in the life of man. Adam did not want to be a good son of God; he rebelled. But we also hear the echoing chant of that *felix culpa*: "O happy fault," which the whole Church will joyfully intone at the Easter vigil.

God the Father, in the fullness of time, sent to the world his only-begotten Son, to re-establish peace; so that by his redeeming men from sin, "we might become sons of God," freed from the yoke of sin, capable of sharing in the divine intimacy of the Trinity. And so it has become possible for this new man, this new grafting of the children of God, to free all creation from disorder, restoring all things in Christ, who has reconciled them to God.

It is, then, a time of penance, but, as we have seen, this is not something negative. Lent should be lived in the spirit of filiation, which Christ has communicated to us and which is alive in our soul. Our Lord calls us to come nearer to him, to be like him: "Be imitators of God, as his dearly beloved children," cooperating humbly but fervently in the divine purpose of mending what is broken, of saving what is lost, of bringing back order to what sinful man has put out of order, of leading to its goal what has gone astray, of re-establishing the divine balance of all creation.

66 At times the Lenten liturgy, with its emphasis on the consequences of man's abandonment of God, has a suggestion of tragedy, but that is not all. It is God who has the last word — and it is the word of his saving and merciful love and, therefore, the word of our divine filiation. Therefore, I repeat to you today, with St John: "See how greatly the Father has loved us; that we should be counted as God's children, should be indeed his children." Children of God, brothers of the Word made flesh, of him of whom it was said, "In him was life, and that life was the light of man." Children of the light, brothers of the light: that is what we are. We bear the only flame capable of setting fire to hearts made of flesh.

I'm going to stop now and continue the Mass, and I want each of us to consider what God is asking of him, what resolution, what decisions grace wants to encourage in him. And as you note these supernatural and human demands of self-giving and continuing struggle, remember that Jesus Christ is our model. And that Jesus, being God, allowed himself to be tempted, so that we might be in better spirits and feel certain of victory. For God does not lose battles, and if we are united to him, we will never be overcome. On the contrary, we can call ourselves victors and indeed be victors: good children of God.

Let us be happy. I am happy. I shouldn't be, looking at my life, making that personal examination of conscience which Lent requires. But I do feel happy, for I see that the Lord is seeking me again, that the Lord is still my Father. I know that you and I will surely see, with the light and help of grace, what things must be burned and we will burn them; what things must be uprooted and we will uproot them; what things have to be given up and we will give them up.

It's not easy. But we have a clear guide, which we should not and cannot do without. We are loved by God, and we will let the Holy Spirit act in us and purify us, so that we can embrace the Son of God on the cross, and rise with him, because the joy of the resurrection is rooted in the cross.

Mary, our Mother, "help of Christians, refuge of sinners": intercede with your Son to send us the Holy Spirit, to awaken in our hearts the decision to go ahead confidently, making us hear deep in our soul the call which filled with peace the martyrdom of one of the first Christians: "Come, return to your Father," he is waiting for you.

CHRISTIAN RESPECT FOR PERSONS AND THEIR FREEDOM

A homily given on 15 March 1961

Judging on impulse

Right to privacy

A salve for our eyes

Respect and charity

67 We have just read in this holy Mass a text from St John's Gospel: the scene of the miraculous cure of the man born blind. I imagine that all of us have once again been moved by the power and mercy of God, who cannot look indifferently upon human misfortune. But I should like to fix our attention on other considerations. Specifically, let us try to see that, when there is love of God, a Christian cannot be indifferent to the lot of other men. He must show respect in his dealings with all men. For he knows that when love shrinks, there arises the danger of thoughtlessly, mercilessly invading the conscience of others.

"And Jesus saw," says the holy Gospel, "as he passed on his way, a man who had been blind from his birth." Jesus is passing by. How often have I marveled at this simple way of describing divine mercy! Jesus is headed somewhere, yet he is not too busy to spot human suffering. Consider, on the other hand, how different was the reaction of his disciples. They ask him: "Master, was this man guilty of sin, or was it his parents, that he should have been born blind?"

Judging on impulse

We cannot be surprised that many persons, even those who think themselves Christians, act in the same way. Their first impulse is to think badly of someone or

something. They don't need any proof they take it for granted. And they don't keep it to themselves, they air their snap judgments to the winds.

Trying to be benevolent about it, we could call the disciples' behavior shortsighted. Then as now, for little has changed, there were others, the Pharisees, who consistently adopted this attitude. Remember how Jesus Christ denounced them? "When John came, he would neither eat nor drink, and they say of him that he is possessed. When the Son of Man came, he ate and drank with them, and of him they said: Here is a glutton; he loves wine; he is a friend of publicans and sinners."

Jesus suffered a campaign of slurs on his name, defamation of his irreproachable conduct, biting and wounding criticism. It is not unusual for some people to accord the same treatment to those who wish to follow the Master while fully conscious of their natural shortcomings and personal mistakes which, given human weakness, are so common and even inevitable. But our experience of human limitations cannot lead us to condone sins and injustices against the good name of anyone, even though their authors try to cover their tracks by just "wondering" aloud. Jesus says that if the father of the family has been labeled Beelzebub, members of the household cannot expect to fare any better. But he also adds, "Whoever calls his brother a fool shall be in danger of hell fire."

Where does this unjust, carping attitude come from? It almost seems as though some people are now wearing glasses that disfigure their vision. In principle, they reject the possibility of a virtuous life or, at least, the constant effort to do the right thing. Everything they take in is colored by their own previous deformation. For them, even the most noble and unselfish actions are only hypocritical contortions designed to appear good. "When they clearly discover goodness," writes St Gregory the Great, "they scrutinize it in the hope of finding hidden defects."

68 When such a deformation has become almost second nature it is difficult to help people to see that it is both more human and more truthful to think well of others. St Augustine recommends the following rule-of-thumb: "Try to acquire the virtues you believe lacking in your brothers. Then you will no longer see their defects, for you will no longer have them yourselves." Some would find this way of acting naive. They are wiser, more "realistic."

Setting their prejudices up as criteria, they are quick to criticize anybody and slow to listen. Afterwards perhaps, out of "open-mindedness" or "fair play," they extend to the accused the possibility of defending himself. Flying in the face of the most elementary justice and morality — for he who accuses must bear the burden of proof — they "grant" the innocent party the "privilege" of proving himself blameless.

I must confess that these thoughts are not borrowed from textbooks on law or moral theology. They are based on the experience of many people who have borne these blows. Time and again, over a number of years, they, like many others, have served as a bull's-eye for the target-practice of those who specialize in gossip, defamation and calumny. The grace of God and a nature little given to recrimination have spared them from the slightest trace of bitterness. "To me it is a very small thing to be judged by you," they could say with St Paul. Using a more

common expression, they could have added that the whole thing was just a storm in a teacup. And that's the truth.

Nonetheless, I can't deny that I am saddened by those who unjustly attack the integrity of others, for the slanderer destroys himself. And I suffer, too, for all those who, in the face of arbitrary and outrageous accusations, do not know where to turn. They are frightened. They do not believe it is possible, they wonder if the whole thing is not a nightmare.

Several days ago we read in the epistle of the holy Mass the story of Susanna, that chaste woman so falsely accused of wrongdoing by two lustful old men. "Susanna groaned deeply; There is no escape for me, she said, either way. It is death if I consent, and if I refuse I shall be at your mercy." How often does the trickery of those moved by envy and intrigue force many noble Christians into the same corner? They are offered only one choice: offend God or ruin their reputation. The only acceptable and upright solution is, at the same time, highly painful. Yet they must decide: "Let me rather fall into your power through no act of mine, than commit sin in the Lord's sight."

Right to privacy

69 Let us return to the scene of the curing of the blind man. Jesus Christ answered his disciples by pointing out that the blind man's misfortune is not the result of sin, but an occasion to manifest God's power. And with marvelous simplicity, he decides to give the blind man his sight.

Thereupon begins that poor man's happiness, but also his anguish. People simply will not leave him alone. First it is his "neighbors and those who had been accustomed to see him begging." The Gospel doesn't say that they even bothered to rejoice; they couldn't bring themselves to believe it, in spite of the fact that the once blind man claimed that he was the man who before couldn't see and now does. Rather than let him enjoy in peace his newfound fortune, they drag him to the Pharisees, who again inquire how this could have come about. And once again he replies: "He put clay on my eyes; and then I washed, and now I can see."

And the Pharisees seek to show that what has happened — a great favor and miracle — didn't happen. Some of them turn to petty, hypocritical, illogical arguments — this man has cured on the Sabbath and, since working on the Sabbath is unlawful, they deny the wonder. Others start taking what today we would call a poll. They first approach the parents of the blind man: "Is this your son, who, you say, was born blind? How then does he now see?" Fearing the authorities, his parents give an answer that is technically correct: "We can tell you that this is our son, and that he was blind when he was born. We cannot tell how he is able to see now. We have no means of knowing who opened his eyes for him. Ask the man himself; he is of age. Let him tell you his own story."

Those taking the poll cannot believe, because they have chosen not to believe. "So once more they summoned the man who had been blind and said to him... This man — Jesus Christ — to our knowledge, is a sinner."

In a few words St John's account illustrates in a typical way an unscrupulous assault upon a basic natural right of all men, that of being treated with respect.

This way of acting is not a thing of the past. It would be no trouble at all to point out present-day cases of aggressive curiosity that pries morbidly into the private lives of others. A minimum of justice demands that, even when actual wrongdoing is suspected, an investigation of this sort be carried out with caution and moderation, lest mere possibility be converted into certainty. It is clear that an unhealthy curiosity to perform autopsies on actions that are not illicit but positively good should be ranked under the heading of perversion.

Faced with traders in suspicion who prey on the intimacy of others, we must defend the dignity of every person, his right to peace. All honest men, Christians or not, agree on the need for this defense, for a common value is at stake: the legitimate right to be oneself, to avoid ostentation, to keep within the family its joys, sorrows and difficulties. We are defending, no less, the right to do good without publicity, to help the disadvantaged out of pure love, without feeling obliged to publicize one's efforts to serve others, much less to bare the intimacy of one's soul to the indiscreet and twisted gaze of persons who know nothing and want to know nothing of disinterested generosity, except to mock it mercilessly.

But how difficult it is to be free of this meddlesome sleuthing! The means invented to prevent man from being left alone have multiplied. I am referring not only to the technical means, but also to accepted forms of argument, which are so cunning that one endangers his reputation if he but answers them. Thus, for example, a familiar way of arguing assumes that everyone acts from motives that leave something to be desired. Following this gratuitous train of thought, one is obliged to pronounce a mea culpa over his own actions, to indulge in self-criticism. And if someone does not sling a ton of mud upon himself, his critics immediately assume that, in addition to being a devious villain, he is also hypocritical and arrogant.

On other occasions, a different procedure is followed. The writer or speaker, with libelous intent, "admits" that you are an upright individual; but, he says, other people won't be willing to admit this and they might argue that you are a thief. Now how do you prove that you are not a thief? Another example: "You are always claiming that your conduct is clean, noble and upright. Would you mind examining the matter again to see if, on the contrary, it might not be dirty, twisted and ignoble?"

70 I haven't pulled these examples out of the hat. I am absolutely convinced that any person or moderately well known institution could greatly add to the list. A mistaken idea has arisen in certain environments that grants to the public or the media or whatever they wish to call it, the right to know and to judge the most intimate details of the lives of others.

May I mention something close to my heart? For more than thirty years I have said and written in thousands of different ways that Opus Dei does not seek any worldly or political aims, that it only and exclusively seeks to foster — among all races, all social conditions, all countries — the knowledge and practice of the saving

teachings of Christ. It only wants to contribute to there being more love of God on earth and, therefore, more peace and justice among all men, children of a common Father.

Many thousands and millions of people throughout the world have understood this. Some apparently have not, for a variety of reasons. If my heart goes out more to those who understand, still I honor and love the others too, for their dignity is worthy of respect and esteem, just as all of them are likewise called to the glory of being children of God.

But there will always be a partisan minority who are ignorant of what I and so many of us love. They would like us to explain Opus Dei in their terms, which are exclusively political, foreign to supernatural realities, attuned only to power plays and pressure groups. If they do not receive an explanation that suits their erroneous and twisted taste they continue to allege that here you have deception and sinister designs.

Let me assure you that, when I am faced with such situations, I become neither sad nor concerned. I should add that I would almost be amused, if I could legitimately overlook the fact that they have committed an injustice and a sin, which cries out to heaven for redress. I am from a region of Spain known for its frankness, and even humanly speaking I place great store on sincerity. I instinctively react against anything that resembles deceit. When accused, I have always tried to tell the truth, without pride or disdain, even if those who vilified me were uncouth, arrogant, hostile, bereft of a minimum of humanity.

A salve for our eyes

71 To my mind frequently comes the reply of the man born blind who was asked by the Pharisees for the umpteenth time how the miracle had taken place: "I have told you already, and you would not listen to me. Why must you hear it over again? Would you too become his disciples?"

The sin of the Pharisees did not consist in not seeing God in Christ, but in voluntarily shutting themselves up within themselves, in not letting Jesus, who is the light, open their eyes. This closed-mindedness immediately affects our relations with others. The Pharisee, who believes himself to be light and does not let God open his eyes, will treat his neighbor unjustly, pridefully: "I thank you, God, that I am not like the rest of men, who steal and cheat and commit adultery, or like this publican here." Thus does he pray. And they hurl insults upon the once blind man, who persists in his truthful account of the miraculous cure: "What, they answered, are we to have lessons from you, all steeped in sin from your birth? And they cast him out from their presence."

Among those who do not know Christ, there are many honest persons who have respect for others and know how to conduct themselves properly and are sincere, cordial and refined. If neither they nor we prevent Christ from curing our blindness, if we let our Lord apply the clay that, in his hands, becomes a cleansing salve, we shall come to know earthly realities and we shall look upon the divine

realities with new vision, with the light of faith. Our outlook will have become Christian.

This is the vocation of a Christian. We are called to the fullness of charity, which “is patient, is kind. Charity feels no envy; charity is never perverse or proud, never insolent; does not claim its rights, cannot be provoked, does not brood over an injury; takes no pleasure in wrongdoing, but rejoices at the victory of truth; sustains, believes, hopes, endures, to the last.”

The charity of Christ is not merely a benevolent sentiment for our neighbor; it is not limited to a penchant for philanthropy. Poured out in our soul by God, charity transforms from within our mind and will. It provides the supernatural foundation for friendship and the joy of doing what is right.

Contemplate the scene of the cure of the paralytic, as told to us in the Acts of the Apostles. Peter and John were going up to the temple, and on their way they came across a man seated at the gate. It turns out he had been lame from birth. Everything resembles the cure of the blind man. But now the disciples no longer think that the misfortune is due to the paralytic's sins or to the faults of his parents. And they say to him: “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.” Before they poured out scorn, now mercy. Before they had judged contemptuously, now they cure miraculously in the name of the Lord.

Christ is always passing by! Christ continues to pass through the streets and squares of the world, in the person of his Apostles and disciples. And I fervently beg him to pass through the souls of you who are listening to me now.

Respect and charity

72 At the beginning we were surprised at the attitude of Jesus' disciples toward the man born blind. They were consistent with that unfortunate saying: “Think badly and you'll be right.” Afterwards, as they come to know the Master better, and realize what it means to be a Christian, their thoughts are gradually tempered by understanding.

“In any man,” writes St Thomas Aquinas, “there is an aspect under which others can consider him superior to themselves, according to the Apostle's words, ‘Each of you must have the humility to think others better men than himself’ (Phil 2:3). It is in this spirit that all men should honor one another.” Humility is the virtue that teaches us that the signs of respect for others — for their good name, their good faith, their privacy — are not external conventions, but the first signs of charity and justice.

Christian charity cannot be limited to giving things or money to the needy. It seeks, above all, to respect and understand each person for what he is, in his intrinsic dignity as a man and child of God. Consequently, those who impugn the reputation and honor of others show that they are ignorant of some truths of our Christian faith and, in any case, lacking in an authentic love of God. “The charity by which

we love God and our neighbor is the same virtue, for God is the reason for our loving our neighbor, and we love God when we love our neighbor with charity."

I hope we will be able to derive some very practical consequences from this conversation with God. Let us especially resolve not to judge others, not to doubt their good will, to drown evil in an abundance of good, sowing loyal friendship, justice and peace all around us.

And let us resolve never to become sad if our upright conduct is misunderstood by others; if the good which, with the continuous help of our Lord, we try to accomplish is misinterpreted by others, who delight in unjustly guessing at our motives and accuse us of wicked designs and deceitful behavior.

Let us forgive always, with a smile on our lips. Let us speak clearly, without hard feelings, when in conscience we think we ought to speak. And let us leave everything in the hands of our Father God, with a divine silence — "Jesus was silent" — if we are confronted with personal attacks, no matter how brutal and shameful they might be. Let us concern ourselves only with doing good deeds. God will see to it that they "shine before men."

INTERIOR STRUGGLE

A homily given on 4 April 1971, Palm Sunday

Peace on earth

Struggle: a demand of love and justice

An unceasing struggle

The interior struggle

The sacraments of divine grace

Pastors' responsibility

Now as before

73 Like every Christian celebration, today's is one of peace. The palm branches, with their ancient symbolism, recall a scene of the book of Genesis: "After waiting seven more days, Noah again sent out the dove from the ark. In the evening, the dove came back to him and there was a new olive branch in its beak. So Noah realized that the waters were receding from the earth." Today we remember that the alliance between God and his people is confirmed and established in Christ, for "he is our peace." In the liturgy of our holy catholic Church — which so wonderfully unites and sums up the old in the new — we read today the joyful words which remind us of how Jesus was greeted at his birth in Bethlehem: "The sons of the Hebrews, raising olive branches, went out to meet the Lord, crying out, Glory in high heaven." As he moved off, St Luke tells us, "people spread their cloaks in the road, and now, as he was approaching the downward slope of the Mount of Olives, the whole group of disciples joyfully began to praise God at the top of their voices

for all the miracles they had seen. They cried out: Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord, peace in heaven and glory in the highest heaven."

Peace on earth

Peace in heaven. But let's take a look at the earth. Why is there no peace in the world? That's right, there is no peace, only a certain appearance of peace: a balance created by fear and precarious compromises. There is no peace even in the Church. It is rent by tensions that tear the white robe of the Spouse of Christ. And there is no peace in many hearts that vainly strive to make up for their intranquility of soul by continuous activity, by seeking a thin satisfaction in things that do not fill them but only leave a bitter aftertaste of sorrow.

"The palm leaves," writes St Augustine, "symbolize homage, for they stand for victory. Our Lord is on the point of conquering by dying on the cross. Under the sign of the cross, he is about to triumph over the devil, the prince of death." Christ is our peace because he is the victor. He has won the victory because he has fought, in a hard struggle, against the accumulated evil of human hearts.

Christ, who is our peace, is also the way. If we seek peace we have to follow his footsteps. Peace is a consequence of war, of struggle, of the intimate ascetical struggle that each Christian must keep up against everything in his life which does not belong to God. He is called to overcome pride, sensuality, selfishness, superficiality and meanness of heart. It is useless to call for exterior calm if there is no calm in men's consciences, in the centre of their souls, for "from the heart come evil intentions: murder, adultery, fornication, theft, perjury, slander."

Struggle: a demand of love and justice

74 But is not this rather an old-fashioned way of talking? Has it not been replaced by a more contemporary language, a language which cloaks personal defects in pseudo-scientific terms? Surely people tacitly agree that the really valuable things are money which buys everything; influence; shrewdness which leaves you always on top; human maturity which defines itself as "adult," thinking it has outgrown the sacred?

I am not and never have been a pessimist, for the faith teaches me that Christ has conquered once and for all. He has given us, as a pledge of his victory, a commandment that is also a commitment: "Fight." We Christians have a commitment of love to the calling of divine grace, which we have freely accepted, an obligation that urges us to fight tenaciously. We know that we are as weak as other men, but we cannot forget that if we use the means available to us, we will become salt and light and leaven of the world; we will be the consolation of God. Our determination to persevere in this resolution of Love is, moreover, an obligation of justice. This obligation — common to all Christians — implies a constant battle. The entire tradition of the Church has described Christians as milites Christi: soldiers of Christ. Soldiers who bring serenity to others while continually fighting against their own bad inclinations. Sometimes because we are short on supernatural outlook, in effect short on faith, we do not want to hear any talk of life

on earth as a kind of war. We maliciously insinuate that if we think of ourselves as milites Christi, there is a danger that we might use the faith for earthly purposes, bringing pressure to bear, creating little isolated groups. This very naive line of thought is completely illogical and usually goes hand in hand with cowardice and love of comfort.

There is nothing further from the Christian faith than fanaticism — that unholy alliance of the sacred and the profane, whatever guise it takes. That danger just does not exist if we understand our struggle as Christ has taught us to: as a war each of us makes on himself. It is a constantly renewed effort to love God better, to root out selfishness, to serve all men. Turning your back on this conflict, no matter what the excuse, means surrendering before you have begun to fight. Anyone who does so is brought low, without faith, depressed in his heart, blown this way and that by miserable pleasures.

Our spiritual combat in the presence of God and of all our brothers in the faith is a necessary result of being a Christian. So if you do not fight, you are betraying Jesus Christ and the whole Church, his mystical body.

An unceasing struggle

75 A Christian's struggle must be unceasing, for interior life consists in beginning and beginning again. This prevents us from proudly thinking that we are perfect already. It is inevitable that we should meet difficulties on our way. If we did not come up against obstacles, we would not be creatures of flesh and blood. We will always have passions that pull us downwards; we will always have to defend ourselves against more or less self-defeating urges.

We should not be surprised to find, in our body and soul, the needle of pride, sensuality, envy, laziness and the desire to dominate others. This is a fact of life, proven by our personal experience. It is the point of departure and the normal context for winning in this intimate sport, this race toward our Father's house. St Paul says: "That is how I run, intent on winning; that is how I fight, not beating the air. I treat my body hard and make it obey me for, having preached to others, I do not want to be disqualified."

To begin or sustain this conflict a Christian should not wait for external signs or nice inner feelings. Interior life does not consist in feelings but in divine grace, willingness and love. All the disciples were quite capable of following Christ on the day of his triumph in Jerusalem, but almost all of them left him at the shameful hour of the cross.

If you are really going to love, you have to be strong and loyal; your heart has to be firmly anchored in faith, hope and charity. Only people who are inconstant and superficial change the object of their love from one day to the next: that's not love at all, it's the pursuit of selfishness. When love exists there is a kind of wholeness — a capacity for self-giving, sacrifice and renunciation. In the midst of that self-denial, along with painful difficulties, we find joy and happiness, a joy that nothing and no one can take away from us.

In this adventure of love we should not be depressed by our falls, not even by serious falls, if we go to God in the sacrament of penance contrite and resolved to improve. A Christian is not a neurotic collector of good behavior reports. Jesus Christ our Lord was moved as much by Peter's repentance after his fall as by John's innocence and faithfulness. Jesus understands our weakness and draws us to himself on an inclined plane. He wants us to make an effort to climb a little each day. He seeks us out, just as he did the disciples of Emmaus, whom he went out to meet. He sought Thomas, showed himself to him and made him touch with his fingers the open wounds in his hands and side. Jesus Christ is always waiting for us to return to him; he knows our weakness.

The interior struggle

76 "Put up with your share of difficulties, like a good soldier of Jesus Christ," St Paul tells us. A Christian's life is a fight, a war, a beautiful war of peace and completely different from human warfare which results from division and often hatred. The war of the sons of God is a war against their own selfishness. It is based on unity and love. "Though we live in the world, we are not carrying on a worldly war, for the weapons of our warfare are not worldly but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God." The Apostle is referring to our relentless fight against pride, against our tendency to do evil and our exaltation of self.

On this Palm Sunday, when our Lord begins the week which is so decisive for our salvation, let us put aside the more superficial aspects of the question and go right to the core, to what is really important. Look: what we have to try to do is to get to heaven. If we don't, nothing is worthwhile. Faithfulness to Christ's doctrine is absolutely essential to our getting to heaven. To be faithful it is absolutely essential to strive doggedly against anything that blocks our way to eternal happiness.

I know that the moment we talk about fighting we recall our weakness and we foresee falls and mistakes. God takes this into account. As we walk along it is inevitable that we will raise dust; we are creatures and full of defects. I would almost say that we will always need defects. They are the shadow that shows up the light of God's grace and our resolve to respond to God's kindness. And this chiaroscuro will make us human, humble, understanding and generous.

Let's not deceive ourselves: in our life we will find vigor and victory and depression and defeat. This has always been true of the earthly pilgrimage of Christians, even of those we venerate on the altars. Don't you remember Peter, Augustine, Francis? I have never liked biographies of saints which naively — but also with a lack of sound doctrine — present their deeds as if they had been confirmed in grace from birth. No. The true-life stories of Christian heroes resemble our own experience: they fought and won; they fought and lost. And then, repentant, they returned to the fray.

We should not be surprised to find ourselves defeated relatively often, usually or even always in things of little importance which we tend to take seriously. If we love

God and are humble, if we persevere relentlessly in our struggle, the defeats will never be very important. There will also be abundant victories that bring joy to God's eyes. There is no such thing as failure if you act with a right intention, wanting to fulfill God's will and counting always on his grace and your own nothingness.

77 However, a powerful enemy is lying in wait for us, an enemy which counters our desire to incarnate Christ's doctrine in our lives. This enemy is pride, which grows if we do not reach out for the helping and merciful hand of God after each failure and defeat. In that case the soul remains in the shadows, in an unhappy darkness, and thinks it is lost. Its imagination creates all sorts of obstacles that have no basis in fact, which would disappear if it just looked at them with a little humility. Prompted by pride and a wild imagination, the soul sometimes creates painful Calvaries for itself. But Christ is not on these Calvaries, for joy and peace always accompany our Lord even when the soul is nervous and surrounded by darkness.

There is another hypocritical enemy of our sanctification: the idea that this interior struggle has to be against extraordinary obstacles, against fire-belching dragons. This is another sign of pride. We are ready to fight, but we want to do it noisily, with the clamor of trumpets and the waving of standards. We must convince ourselves that the worst enemy of a rock is not a pickaxe or any other such implement, no matter how sharp it is. No, its worst enemy is the constant flow of water that, drop by drop, enters the crevices until it ruins the rock's structure. The greatest danger for a Christian is to underestimate the importance of fighting skirmishes. The refusal to fight the little battles can, little by little, leave him soft, weak and indifferent, insensitive to the accents of God's voice.

Let's listen to our Lord: "He who is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and he who is dishonest in very little is dishonest also in much." It is as if he were saying to us: "Fight continuously in the apparently unimportant things which are to my mind important; fulfill your duty punctually; smile at whoever needs cheering up, even though there is sorrow in your soul; devote the necessary time to prayer, without haggling; go to the help of anyone who looks for you; practice justice and go beyond it with the grace of charity.

These and many others are the inspirations we feel inside us every day, little silent reminders encouraging us to outdo ourselves in the supernatural sport of overcoming our self. May the light of God show us the way to understand his directions. May he help us to fight and be with us in victory. May he not leave us when we fall but always help us to get up and return to the struggle.

We cannot take it easy. Our Lord wants us to fight more, on a broader front, more intensely each day. We have an obligation to outdo ourselves, for in this competition the only goal is to arrive at the glory of heaven. And if we did not reach heaven, the whole thing would have been useless.

The sacraments of divine grace

78 Anyone who wants to fight has to use the available means, which have not changed in twenty centuries of Christianity. They are prayer, mortification and frequent use of the sacraments. Since mortification is also prayer — prayer of the senses — we can sum up these means in two words: prayer and sacraments.

I would like us to reflect now on the sacraments, which are foundations of divine grace. They are a wonderful proof of God's loving kindness. Just meditate calmly on the Catechism of Trent's definition: "Certain sensible signs which cause grace and at the same time declare it by putting it before our eyes." God our Lord is infinite; his love is inexhaustible; his clemency and tenderness toward us are limitless. He grants us his grace in many other ways, but he has expressly and freely established, as only he can do, seven effective signs to enable men to share in the merits of the redemption in a stable, simple and accessible way.

If the sacraments are abandoned, genuine Christian life disappears. Yet we should realize that particularly today there are many people who seem to forget about the sacraments and who even scorn this redeeming flow of Christ's grace. It is painful to have to speak of this sore in a so-called Christian society, but we must do so for it will encourage us to approach these sources of sanctification more gratefully and more lovingly.

Without the slightest scruple people decide to postpone the baptism of newly born children. Yet by doing so they seriously go against justice and charity by depriving children of the grace of faith, of the incalculable treasure of the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity in a soul which comes into the world stained by original sin. They also try to change the true nature of the sacrament of confirmation, which tradition has unanimously seen as a strengthening of the spiritual life. By giving more supernatural strength to the soul, through a quiet and fruitful outpouring of the Holy Spirit, confirmation enables the Christian to fight as milites Christi, as a soldier of Christ, in his intimate battle against selfishness and lust of all sorts.

If you lose sensitivity for the things of God, it is very difficult to appreciate the sacrament of penance. Sacramental confession is not a human but a divine dialogue. It is a tribunal of divine justice and especially of mercy, with a loving judge who "has no pleasure in the death of the wicked; I desire that the wicked turn back from his way and live."

The tenderness of our Lord is truly infinite. See how gently he treats his sons. He has made marriage a holy bond, the image of the union of Christ and his Church, a great sacrament on which is based the Christian family that has to be, with God's grace, a place of peace and harmony, a school of sanctity. Parents are the cooperators of God. That is the reason why children have the obligation of loving them. It is quite right to describe, as I wrote many years ago, the fourth commandment as the sweetest precept of the Decalogue. If you live marriage as God wishes you to, in a holy way, your house will be a bright and cheerful home, full of peace and joy.

79 In the sacrament of holy orders our Father God has made it possible for some members of the faithful, by virtue of a further and ineffable communication of the

Holy Spirit, to receive an indelible character on their soul which configures them to Christ the priest so that they can act in the name of Jesus Christ, head of his mystical body. By virtue of this ministerial priesthood — which differs essentially and not only in degree from the common priesthood of the faithful — the sacred ministers can consecrate the body and blood of Christ, offering God the holy sacrifice. They can pardon sins in sacramental confession and carry out the ministry of teaching the peoples “about everything that refers to God” — and nothing more.

A priest should be exclusively a man of God. He should reject any desire to shine in areas where other Christians do not need him. A priest is not a psychologist or a sociologist or an anthropologist. He is another Christ, Christ himself, who has to look after the souls of his brothers. It would be a sad thing if a priest thought himself equipped to pontificate on dogmatic or moral theology on the basis of some human science — which if he were really dedicated to his priestly work he could only know as an amateur or an observer. This would only show his double ignorance — in human science and theological science — even though a superficial air of wisdom might deceive a few naive readers or listeners.

It is public knowledge that some ecclesiastics today seem to want to create a new Church. By doing so they betray Christ, for they change spiritual aims — the salvation of souls, one by one — into temporal aims. If they do not resist this temptation, they will leave their sacred ministry unfulfilled, lose the confidence and respect of the people, and create havoc in the Church. Moreover, by interfering intolerably with the political freedom of Christians and other men, they will sow confusion in civil society and make themselves dangerous. Holy orders is the sacrament of supernatural service of one's brothers in the faith; some seem to be trying to turn it into the earthly instrument of a new despotism.

80 But let's continue contemplating the marvel of the sacraments. In the anointing of the sick, as extreme unction is now called, we find a loving preparation for the journey that ends in the Father's house. And in the Eucharist, which we might call the sacrament of divine extravagance, God gives his grace and himself to us: Jesus Christ, who is always really present — not just during Mass — with his body, with his soul, with his blood and with his divinity.

I think very often about the responsibility that lies with priests to preserve the divine channel of the sacraments for all Christians. God's grace comes to the aid of every soul, for every person needs specific, personal help. You cannot treat souls en masse! It is not right to offend human dignity and the dignity of the sons of God by not going personally to the aid of each one. The priest must do just that, with the humility of a man who knows he is only an instrument, the vehicle of Christ's love. For every soul is a wonderful treasure; every man is unique and irreplaceable. Every single person is worth all the blood of Christ.

We were talking previously about the need to fight. But fighting calls for training, a proper diet, urgent medical attention in the case of illness, bruises and wounds. The sacraments are the main medicine the Church has to offer. They are not

luxuries. If you voluntarily abandon them, it is impossible to advance on the road, to follow Jesus Christ. We need them as we need air to breathe, the circulation of the blood, and light to appreciate at every moment what our Lord wants of us.

A Christian's asceticism requires strength, which is found in the Creator. We are darkness and he is radiant light. We are infirmity and he is robust good health. We are poverty and he is infinite wealth. We are weakness and he sustains us, "for you are, O God, my strength." Nothing on earth is capable of stemming the impatient gushing forth of the redeeming blood of Christ. Yet human limitations can veil our eyes so that we do not notice the grandeur of God. Hence the responsibility of all the faithful, especially those who have the role of governing — serving — the People of God spiritually, of not blocking the sources of grace, of not being ashamed of Christ's cross.

Pastors' responsibility

81 In the Church of Christ, everyone is obliged to make a tenacious effort to remain loyal to the teaching of Christ. No one is exempt. If the shepherds do not themselves strive to acquire a sensitive conscience and to remain faithful to dogma and moral teaching — which make up the deposit of faith and the inheritance of all — then the prophetic words of Ezechiel will be borne out: "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, thus says the Lord God: Ho, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat of the sheep, you clothe yourselves with the wool... the weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the crippled you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them."

This is a strong reproof, but the offence against God is even worse when those who have received the task of promoting the spiritual welfare of everyone abuse souls instead, depriving them of the crystal water of baptism, which regenerates the soul; of the soothing oil of confirmation, which strengthens it; of the tribunal which pardons; of the food which gives eternal life.

Such is the result when one abandons the war of peace. Anyone who does not put up a fight exposes himself to one or other of the slaveries which can chain hearts of flesh — the slavery of a purely human outlook, the slavery of a zealous desire for temporal influence and prestige, the slavery of vanity, the slavery of money, the slavery of sensuality...

Should God permit you to undergo this test, should you come across shepherds unworthy of the name, do not be scandalized. Christ has promised his Church infallible and unfailing help, but he has not guaranteed the fidelity of the men who compose it. They will never be short of grace, abundant and generous grace, if they do the little God asks of them: if they strive with the help of God's grace to remove the obstacles which get in the way of holiness. If that effort is missing, even he who seems to be very high up, may be very low in God's eyes. "I know your works; you have the name of being alive, and you are dead. Awake, and strengthen what

remains of your flock, which is on the point of death, for I have not found your works perfect in the sight of my God. Remember then what you have received and heard; keep that and repent."

This exhortation, which comes from St John in the first century, is addressed to the person in charge of the church in the city of Sardis. So, a weakening of some shepherds' sense of responsibility is not a modern phenomenon. You find it also at the time of the Apostles, in the very century in which our Lord Jesus Christ lived on earth. It is simply that no one is safe if he ceases to strive against himself. Nobody can save himself by his own efforts. Everyone in the Church needs specific means to strengthen himself: humility that disposes us to accept help and advice; mortifications that temper the heart and allow Christ to reign in it; the study of abiding, sound doctrine that leads us to conserve and spread our faith.

Now as before

82 The liturgy of Palm Sunday puts these words on our lips: "Swing back, doors, higher yet; reach higher, immemorial gates, to let the king enter in triumph!" Anyone who barricades himself in the citadel of his own selfishness will never come down onto the battlefield. But if he raises the gates of his fortress and lets in the king of peace, then he will go out with the king to fight against all that misery which blurs the eyes and numbs the conscience. "Reach higher, immemorial gates." The fact that Christianity requires us to fight is nothing new. It has always been that way. If we do not fight, we will not win and if we do not win, we will not obtain peace. Without peace human joy is illusory, fake, barren, and it is not translated into service of men, or works of charity and justice, of pardon and mercy, or the service of God.

Today, inside and outside the Church, high and low, one gets the impression that many people have given up the struggle — that personal war against one's own weaknesses — and have surrendered bag and baggage to slaveries that debase the soul. It is a danger that always confronts Christians.

That is why we must insistently go to the Holy Trinity asking God to have compassion on everyone. When talking about this subject, I hesitate to refer to God's justice. I appeal to his mercy, his compassion, so that he will not look at our sins but will rather see the merits of Christ and of his holy Mother, who is also our mother, the merits of the patriarch St Joseph whom he made his father, and the merits of the saints.

A Christian can rest completely assured that if he wants to fight, God will take him by the right hand, as we read in today's Mass. It is Jesus the king of peace who says on entering Jerusalem astride a miserable donkey: "The kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence and the violent are taking it by storm." This violence is not directed against others. It is a violence used to fight your own weaknesses and miseries, a fortitude that prevents you from camouflaging your own infidelities, a boldness to own up to the faith even when the environment is hostile.

Today, as yesterday, heroism is expected of the Christian. A heroism in great struggles, if the need arises. Normally, however, heroism in the little skirmishes of each day. When you put up a continuous fight, with love, in apparently insignificant things, the Lord is always present at your side, as a loving shepherd: "I myself pasture my sheep, I myself will show them where to rest — it is the Lord Yahweh who speaks. I shall look for the lost one, bring back the stray, bandage the wounded, and make the weak strong.... They will feel safe in their own pastures. And men will learn that I am Yahweh when I break their yoke straps and release them from their captivity."

THE EUCHARIST, MYSTERY OF FAITH AND LOVE

A homily given on 14 April 1960, Holy Thursday

The joy of Holy Thursday

The Eucharist and the mystery of the Trinity

Holy Mass in the Christian's life

Contact with Jesus

83 "Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." The reader of this verse from St John's Gospel is brought to understand that a great event is about to take place. The introduction, full of tender affection, is similar to that which we find in St Luke: "I have earnestly desired," says our Lord, "to eat this Passover with you before I suffer."

Let us begin by asking the Holy Spirit, from this moment on, to give us the grace to understand every word and gesture of Christ. Because we want to live a supernatural life, because our Lord has shown his desire to give himself to us as nourishment for our soul, and because we acknowledge that only he has "words of eternal life."

Faith makes us profess in the words of Peter that "we have come to believe and to know that you are the Christ, the Son of God." It is this faith, together with our devotion, that leads us to emulate the daring of John, to come close to Jesus and to rest on the breast of the Master, who loved those who were with him ardently, and who was to love them, as we have just read, to the end.

Any words we might use to explain the mystery of Holy Thursday are inadequate. But it is not hard to imagine the feelings of Jesus' heart on that evening, his last evening with his friends before the sacrifice of Calvary.

Think of the human experience of two people who love each other, and yet are forced to part. They would like to stay together forever, but duty — in one form or another — forces them to separate. They are unable to fulfill their desire of remaining close to each other, so man's love — which, great as it may be, is limited — seeks a symbolic gesture. People who make their farewells exchange gifts or

perhaps a photograph with a dedication so ardent that it seems almost enough to burn that piece of paper. They can do no more, because a creature's power is not so great as its desire.

What we cannot do, our Lord is able to do. Jesus Christ, perfect God and perfect man, leaves us, not a symbol, but a reality. He himself stays with us. He will go to the Father, but he will also remain among men. He will leave us, not simply a gift that will make us remember him, not an image that becomes blurred with time, like a photograph that soon fades and yellows, and has no meaning except for those who were contemporaries. Under the appearances of bread and wine, he is really present, with his body and blood, with his soul and divinity.

The joy of Holy Thursday

84 How well we understand the song that Christians of all times have unceasingly sung to the sacred host: "Sing, my tongue, the mystery of the glorious body and of the precious blood, that the king of all nations, born of the generous womb of the Virgin, has offered for the redemption of the world." We must adore devoutly this God of ours, hidden in the Eucharist — it is Jesus himself, born of the Virgin Mary, who suffered and gave his life in the sacrifice of the cross; Jesus, from whose side, pierced by a lance, flowed water and blood.

This is the sacred banquet, in which we receive Christ himself. We renew the memory of his passion, and through him the soul is brought to an intimate relationship with God and receives a promise of future glory. The liturgy of the Church has summarized, in a few words, the culminating points of the history of our Lord's love for us.

The God of our faith is not a distant being who contemplates indifferently the fate of men — their desires, their struggles, their sufferings. He is a Father who loves his children so much that he sends the Word, the Second Person of the most Blessed Trinity, so that by taking on the nature of man he may die to redeem us. He is the loving Father who now leads us gently to himself, through the action of the Holy Spirit who dwells in our hearts.

This is the source of the joy we feel on Holy Thursday — the realization that the creator has loved his creatures to such an extent. Our Lord Jesus Christ, as though all the other proofs of his mercy were insufficient, institutes the Eucharist so that he can always be close to us. We can only understand up to a point that he does so because Love moves him, who needs nothing, not to want to be separated from us. The Blessed Trinity has fallen in love with man, raised to the level of grace and made "to God's image and likeness." God has redeemed him from sin — from the sin of Adam, inherited by all his descendants, as well as from his personal sins — and desires ardently to dwell in his soul: "If anyone love me, he will keep my word; and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him."

The Eucharist and the mystery of the Trinity

85 The Blessed Trinity's love for man is made permanent in a sublime way through the Eucharist. Many years ago, we all learned from our catechism that the Eucharist can be considered as a sacrifice and as a sacrament; and that the sacrament is present to us both in communion and as a treasure on the altar, in the tabernacle. The Church dedicates another feast to the Eucharistic mystery — the feast of the body of Christ, Corpus Christi, present in all the tabernacles of the world. Today, on Holy Thursday, we can turn our attention to the holy Eucharist as our sacrifice and as our nourishment, in the holy Mass and in communion.

I was talking to you about the love of the Blessed Trinity for man. And where can we see this more clearly than in the Mass? The three divine Persons act together in the holy sacrifice of the altar. This is why I like to repeat the final words of the collect, secret and post communion: "Through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord," we pray to God the Father, "who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen."

In the Mass, our prayer to God the Father is constant. The priest represents the eternal high priest, Jesus Christ, who is, at the same time, the victim offered in this sacrifice. And the action of the Holy Spirit in the Mass is truly present, although in a mysterious manner. "By the power of the Holy Spirit," writes St John Damascene, "the transformation of the bread into the body of Christ takes place."

The action of the Holy Spirit is clearly expressed when the priest invokes the divine blessing on the offerings: "Come, Sanctifier, almighty and eternal God, and bless this sacrifice prepared in honor of your holy name" — the holocaust that will give to the holy name of God the glory that is due. The sanctification we pray for is attributed to the Paraclete, who is sent to us by the Father and the Son. And we also recognize the active presence of the Holy Spirit in this sacrifice, as we say, shortly before communion: "Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the will of the Father, with the cooperation of the Holy Spirit, by your death have brought life to the world..."

86 The three divine Persons are present in the sacrifice of the altar. By the will of the Father, with the cooperation of the Holy Spirit, the Son offers himself in a redemptive sacrifice. We learn how to personalize our relationship with the most Blessed Trinity, one God in three Persons: three divine Persons in the unity of God's substance, in the unity of his love and of his sanctifying action.

Immediately after the Lavabo, the priest prays: "Receive, Holy Trinity, this offering that we make in memory of the passion, resurrection and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ." And, at the end of the Mass, there is another prayer of homage to the Trinity of God: "May the tribute of my service be pleasing to you, o Holy Trinity; and grant the sacrifice that I, who am unworthy, have offered to your majesty, may be acceptable to you; and that through your mercy it may bring forgiveness to me and to all those for whom I have offered it." The Mass is, I insist, an action of God, of the Trinity. It is not a merely human event. The priest who celebrates fulfils the desire of our Lord, lending his body and his voice to the divine action. He acts, not in his own name, but in persona et in nomine Christi: in the Person of Christ and in his name.

Because of the Blessed Trinity's love for man, the presence of Christ in the Eucharist brings all graces to the Church and to mankind. This is the sacrifice announced by the prophet Malachy: "From the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and a fragrant sacrifice and a pure offering is made to me in all places." It is the sacrifice of Christ, offered to the Father with the cooperation of the Holy Spirit — an offering of infinite value, which perpetuates the work of the redemption in us and surpasses the sacrifices of the old law.

Holy Mass in the Christian's life

87 The holy Mass brings us face to face with one of the central mysteries of our faith, because it is the gift of the Blessed Trinity to the Church. It is because of this that we can consider the Mass as the centre and the source of a Christian's spiritual life.

It is the aim of all the sacraments. The life of grace, into which we are brought by baptism, and which is increased and strengthened by confirmation, grows to its fullness in the Mass. "When we participate in the Eucharist," writes St Cyril of Jerusalem, "we are made spiritual by the divinizing action of the Holy Spirit, who not only makes us share in Christ's life, as in baptism, but makes us entirely Christ-like, incorporating us into the fullness of Christ Jesus."

This pouring out of the Holy Spirit unites us to Christ and makes us acknowledge that we are children of God. The Paraclete, who is Love, teaches us to saturate our life with the virtue of charity. Thus consummati in unum: "made one with Christ," we can be among men what the Eucharist is for us, in the words of St Augustine: "a sign of unity, a bond of love."

I will not surprise anyone if I say that some Christians have a very poor concept of the holy Mass. For them it is a purely external rite, if not a mere social convention. This is because our poor hearts are capable of treating the greatest gift of God to man as routine. In the Mass, in this Mass that we are now celebrating, the most Holy Trinity intervenes, I repeat, in a very special way. To correspond to such great love, we must give ourselves completely, in body and in soul. We hear God, we talk to him, we see him, we taste him. And when words are not enough, we sing, urging our tongue — Pange, lingua! — to proclaim to all mankind the greatness of the Lord.

88 To "live" the holy Mass means to pray continually, and to be convinced that, for each one of us, this is a personal meeting with God. We adore him, we praise him, we give thanks to him, we atone for our sins, we are purified, we experience a unity with Christ and with all Christians.

We may have asked ourselves, at one time or another, how we can correspond to the greatness of God's love. We may have wanted to see a program for Christian living clearly explained. The answer is easy, and it is within reach of all the faithful: to participate lovingly in the holy Mass, to learn to deepen our personal relationship with God in the sacrifice that summarizes all that Christ asks of us.

Let me remind you of what you have seen on so many occasions: the succession of prayers and actions as they unfold before our eyes at Mass. As we follow them, step by step, our Lord may show us aspects of our lives in which each one of us must improve, vices we must conquer, and the kind of brotherly attitude that we should develop with regard to all men.

The priest draws near to the altar of God, "of God who gives joy to our youth." The holy Mass begins with a song of joy, because God is here. It is the joy that is shown, together with love and gratitude, as the priest kisses the altar, symbol of Christ and reminder of the saints — a small surface, sanctified because this is where the sacrament of infinite worth is made present to us.

The Confiteor makes us aware of our unworthiness; not an abstract reminder of guilt, but the actual presence of our sins and weaknesses. This is why we repeat: Kyrie, eleison, Christe, eleison: Lord, have mercy, Christ, have mercy. If the forgiveness we need had to be won by our own merits, we would only be capable of a bitter sadness. But, because of God's goodness, forgiveness comes from his mercy, and we praise him — Gloria!: "for you alone are the holy one, you alone are Lord, you alone, O Jesus Christ, are the most high, with the Holy Spirit in the glory of God the Father."

89 We now listen to the word of Scripture, the epistle and the gospel — light from the Holy Spirit, who speaks through human voices so as to make our intellect come to know and contemplate, to strengthen our will and make our desire for action effective. And because we are one people, "gathered together in the unity of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," we recite the Creed, affirming the unity of our faith.

Then, the offering: the bread and wine of men. It is very little, but it is accompanied by prayer: "Lord God, we ask you to receive us and be pleased with the sacrifice we offer you with humble and contrite hearts: and that the sacrifice which today we offer you, o God, our Lord, may be brought to your presence and be made acceptable." Again, a reminder of our smallness and of the desire to cleanse and purify all that is offered to God: "I will wash my hands... I have loved the beauty of your house..."

A moment ago, just before the Lavabo, we invoked the Holy Spirit, asking him to bless the sacrifice offered to his holy name. After washing his hands, the priest, in the name of all those present, prays to the Holy Trinity — Suscipe, Sancta Trinitas — to accept our offering in memory of the life of Christ and of his passion, resurrection and ascension; and in honor of Mary, ever Virgin, and of all the saints.

May this offering be effective for the salvation of all men — Orate, fratres, the priest invites the people to pray — because this sacrifice is yours and mine, it is the sacrifice of the whole Church. Pray, brethren, although there may not be many present, although materially there may be only one person there, although the celebrant may find himself alone; because every Mass is a universal sacrifice, the redemption of every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

Through the communion of the saints, all Christians receive grace from every Mass that is celebrated, regardless of whether there is an attendance of thousands of persons, or whether it is only a boy with his mind on other things who is there to serve. In either case, heaven and earth join with the angels of the Lord to sing: Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus...

I adore and praise with the angels — it is not difficult, because I know that, as I celebrate the holy Mass, they surround me, adoring the Blessed Trinity. And I know that in some way the Blessed Virgin is there, because of her intimate relationship with the most Blessed Trinity and because she is the Mother of Christ, of his flesh and blood — the Mother of Jesus Christ, perfect God and perfect man. Jesus was conceived in the womb of Mary most holy, not through the intervention of man, but by the power of the Holy Spirit alone. In his veins runs the blood of his Mother, the blood that is offered in the sacrifice of the redemption, on Calvary and in the Mass.

90 Thus we begin the canon, with the confidence of children of God, calling him our most loving Father: clementissime. We pray for the Church and for all those who are a part of the Church — the pope, our families, our friends and companions. And a Catholic, with his heart open to all men, will pray for all men, because no one can be excluded from his love. We ask God to hear our prayers. We call on the memory of the glorious ever-Virgin Mary and of a handful of men who were among the first to follow Christ and to die for Him, and we recall our union with them.

Quam oblationem... the moment of the consecration draws near. Now, in the Mass, it is Christ who acts again, through the priest: "This is my body"... "This is the cup of my blood." Jesus is with us! The transubstantiation is a renewal of the miracle of God's infinite love. When that moment takes place again today, let us tell our Lord, without any need for words, that nothing will be able to separate us from him; that, as he puts himself into our hands, defenseless, under the fragile appearances of bread and wine, he has made us his willing slaves. "Make me live always through you, and taste the sweetness of your love."

More prayers, because we human beings almost always feel the need to ask for things — prayers for our deceased brothers, for ourselves. We have brought all our weaknesses, our lack of faithfulness. The weight is heavy, but he wants to bear it for us and with us. The canon ends with another invocation to the Blessed Trinity: Per Ipsum, et cum Ipso, et in Ipso...: Through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ, who is all our love, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all honor and glory is yours, almighty Father, for ever and ever.

91 Jesus is the way, the mediator. In him are all things; outside of him is nothing. In Christ, taught by him, we dare to call God our Father — he is the Almighty who created heaven and earth, and he is a loving Father who waits for us to come back to him again and again, as the story of the prodigal son repeats itself in our lives.

Ecce, Agnus Dei... Domine, non sum dignus... We are going to receive our Lord. On this earth, when we receive an important person, we bring out the best — lights, music, formal dress. How should we prepare to receive Christ into our soul? Have

we ever thought about how we would behave if we could only receive him once in a lifetime?

When I was a child, frequent communion was still not a widespread practice. I remember how people used to prepare to go to communion. Everything had to be just right, body and soul: the best clothes, hair well-combed — even physical cleanliness was important — maybe even a few drops of cologne... These were manifestations of love, full of finesse and refinement, on the part of manly souls who knew how to repay Love with love.

With Christ in our soul, we end the holy Mass. The blessing of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit accompanies us all day long, as we go about our simple, normal task of making holy all honest human activity.

As you attend Mass, you will learn to deepen your friendship with each one of the three divine Persons: the Father who begets the Son; the Son, begotten by the Father; the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. When we approach any one of the divine Persons, we approach the one God. And when we come close to all three Persons — Father, Son and Holy Spirit — again we come into the presence of the one true God. Love the Mass, my children, love the Mass. And be hungry to receive our Lord in communion, although you may be cold inside, although your emotions may not correspond to your desires. Receive communion with faith, with hope, with burning charity.

Contact with Jesus

92 A man who fails to love the Mass fails to love Christ. We must make an effort to “live” the Mass with calm and serenity, with devotion and affection. Those who love acquire a finesse, a sensitivity of soul that makes them notice details that are sometimes very small, but that are important because they express the love of a passionate heart. This is how we should attend the holy Mass. And this is why I have always suspected that those who want the Mass to be over quickly show, with this insensitive attitude, that they have not yet realized what the sacrifice of the altar means.

If we love Christ, who offers himself for us, we will feel compelled to find a few minutes after Mass for an intimate personal thanksgiving, which will prolong in the silence of our hearts that other thanksgiving which is the Eucharist. How are we to approach him, what are we to say, how should we behave?

Christian life is not made up of rigid norms, because the Holy Spirit does not guide souls collectively, but inspires each one with resolutions, inspirations and affections that will help it to recognize and fulfill the will of the Father. Still, I feel that, on many occasions, the central theme of our conversation with Christ, in our thanksgiving after holy Mass, can be the consideration that our Lord is our king, physician, teacher and friend.

93 He is our king. He desires ardently to rule our hearts, because we are children of God. But we should not try to imagine a human sort of rule — Christ does not

dominate or seek to impose himself, because he "has not come to be served but to serve."

His kingdom is one of peace, of joy, of justice. Christ our king does not expect us to spend our time in abstract reasoning; he expects deeds, because "not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord!, shall enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of my Father in heaven shall enter the kingdom of heaven."

He is our physician, and he heals our selfishness, if we let his grace penetrate to the depths of our soul. Jesus has taught us that the worst sickness is hypocrisy, the pride that leads us to hide our own sins. We have to be totally sincere with him. We have to tell the whole truth, and then we have to say: "Lord, if you will" — and you are always willing — "you can make me clean." You know my weaknesses; I feel these symptoms; I suffer from these failings. We show him the wound, with simplicity, and if the wound is festering, we show the pus too. Lord, you have cured so many souls; help me to recognize you as the divine physician, when I have you in my heart or when I contemplate your presence in the tabernacle.

He is a teacher, with a knowledge that only he possesses — the knowledge of unlimited love for God, and, in God, for all men. In Christ's teaching we learn that our existence does not belong to us. He gave up his life for all men and, if we follow him, we must understand that we cannot take possession of our own lives in a selfish way, without sharing the sorrows of others. Our life belongs to God. We are here to spend it in his service, concerning ourselves generously with souls, showing, through our words and our example, the extent of the Christian dedication that is expected of us.

Jesus expects us to nourish the desire to acquire this knowledge, so that he can repeat to us: "If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink." And we answer: teach us to forget ourselves, so that we may concern ourselves with you and with all souls. In this way, our Lord will lead us forward with his grace, just as when we were learning to write. Do you remember that childish scrawl, guided by the teacher's hand? And we will begin to taste the joy of showing our faith, which is yet another gift from God, and showing it with clear strokes of Christian conduct, in which all will be able to read the wonders of God.

He is our friend, the Friend: "I have called you friends," he says. He calls us his friends; and he is the one who took the first step, because he loved us first. Still, he does not impose his love — he offers it. He shows it with the clearest possible sign: "Greater love than this no one has, that one lay down his life for his friends." He was Lazarus' friend. He wept for him when he saw him dead, and he raised him from the dead. If he sees us cold, unwilling, rigid perhaps with the stiffness of a dying interior life, his tears will be our life — "I say to you, my friend, arise and walk," leave that narrow life which is no life at all.

94 Our Holy Thursday meditation draws to a close. If our Lord has helped us — and he is always ready to do so, as long as we open our hearts to him — we will feel the need to correspond in what is most important, and that is love. And we will know how to spread that love among other men, with a life of service. "I have given

you an example," he tells his disciples after washing their feet, on the night of the last supper. Let us reject from our hearts any pride, any ambition, any desire to dominate; and peace and joy will reign around us and within us, as a consequence of our personal sacrifice.

Finally, a loving thought directed to Mary, Mother of God and our Mother. Forgive me if I go back to another childhood memory — a picture that became very common in my own country when St Pius X was encouraging the practice of frequent communion. It represented Mary adoring the sacred host. Today, as in those days and as always, our Lady teaches us to come to Jesus, to recognize him and to find him in all the different situations of our day. And nowhere is she more a teacher than in the supreme moment of the holy sacrifice of the Mass, where time blends with eternity. Jesus, with the gesture of a high priest, attracts all things to himself and places them, with the breath of the Holy Spirit, in the presence of God the Father.

CHRIST'S DEATH IS THE CHRISTIAN'S LIFE

A homily given on 15 April 1960, Good Friday

Christ's death calls us to a fuller Christian life

The Christian and human history

Understanding Christ's death

95 During this week that Christians traditionally call Holy Week, we are given another chance to reflect on and to re-live the last hours of Jesus' life. All the things brought to our mind by the different expressions of piety that characterize these days are of course directed to the resurrection, which is, as St Paul says, the basis of our faith. But we should not tread this path too hastily, lest we lose sight of a very simple fact that we might easily overlook. We will not be able to share in our Lord's resurrection unless we unite ourselves with him in his passion and death. If we are to accompany Christ in his glory at the end of Holy Week, we must first enter into his holocaust and be truly united to him, as he lies dead on Calvary.

Christ's generous self-sacrifice is a challenge to sin. We find it hard to accept the reality of sin, although its existence is undeniable. Sin is the *mysterium iniquitatis*: the mystery of evil, the inexplicable evil of the creature whose pride leads him to rise up against God. The story is as old as mankind. It began with the fall of our first parents; then came the unending depravities that punctuate the behavior of mankind down the ages; and, finally, our own personal rebellions. It is very difficult to realize just how perverse sin is and to understand what our faith tells us. We should remember that even in the human context the scale of an offence is frequently determined by the importance of the injured party — his social standing, his qualities. But with sin man offends God; the creature repudiates his creator.

But "God is love." The abyss of malice which sin opens wide has been bridged by his infinite charity. God did not abandon men. His plans foresaw that the sacrifices of the old law would be insufficient to repair our faults and re-establish the unity

that had been lost. A man who was God would have to offer himself up. To help us grasp in some measure this unfathomable mystery, we might imagine the Blessed Trinity taking counsel together in its uninterrupted intimate relationship of infinite love. As a result of its eternal decision, the only-begotten Son of God the Father takes on our human condition and bears the burden of our wretchedness and sorrows, to end up sewn with nails to a piece of wood.

Christ's whole life, from his birth in Bethlehem, was filled with a burning desire to carry out the saving decree of God the Father. Throughout the three years his disciples lived with him, they constantly heard him say that his food was to do the will of him who sent him. And so it was, right up to the afternoon of the first Good Friday when his sacrifice was completed. "Bowing his head, he gave up his spirit." That is how St John the Apostle describes Christ's death. Jesus dies on the cross beneath the weight of all the faults of men, crushed by the sheer force and wickedness of our sins.

Let us meditate on our Lord, wounded from head to foot out of love for us. Using a phrase that approaches the truth, although it does not express its full reality, we can repeat the words of an ancient writer: "The body of Christ is a portrait in pain." At the sight of Christ bruised and broken — just a lifeless body taken down from the cross and given to his Mother — at the sight of Jesus destroyed in this way, we might have thought he had failed utterly. Where are the crowds that once followed him, where is the kingdom he foretold? But this is victory, not defeat. We are nearer the resurrection than ever before; we are going to see the triumph that he has won with his obedience.

Christ's death calls us to a fuller Christian life

96 We have just been reliving the drama of Calvary, which I would dare to describe as the first, the original Mass, celebrated by Jesus Christ. God the Father delivers his Son up to death. Jesus, the only Son of God, embraces the cross on which they have condemned him to die, and his sacrifice is accepted by his Father. As a result of that sacrifice, the Holy Spirit is poured out upon mankind.

The tragedy of the passion brings to fulfillment our own life and the whole of human history. We can't let Holy Week be just a kind of commemoration. It means contemplating the mystery of Jesus Christ as something that continues to work in our souls. The Christian is obliged to be *alter Christus*, *ipse Christus*: another Christ, Christ himself. Through baptism all of us have been made priests of our lives, "to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." Everything we do can be an expression of our obedience to God's will and so perpetuate the mission of the God-man.

Once we realize this, we are immediately reminded of our wretchedness and our personal failings. But they should not dishearten us; we should not become pessimistic and put our ideals aside. Our Lord is calling us, in our present state, to share his life and make an effort to be holy. I know holiness can sound like an empty word. Too many people think it is unattainable, something to do with ascetical theology — but not a real goal for them, a living reality. The first

Christians didn't think that way. They often used the word "saints" to describe each other in a very natural manner: "greetings to all the saints;" "my greetings to every one of the saints in Jesus Christ."

Take a look now at Calvary. Jesus has died and there is as yet no sign of his glorious triumph. It is a good time to examine how much we really want to live as Christians, to be holy. Here is our chance to react against our weaknesses with an act of faith. We can trust in God and resolve to put love into the things we do each day. The experience of sin should lead us to sorrow. We should make a more mature and deeper decision to be faithful and truly identify ourselves with Christ, persevering, no matter what it costs, in the priestly mission that he has given every single one of his disciples. That mission should spur us on to be the salt and light of the world.

97 So, in thinking about Christ's death, we find ourselves invited to take a good hard look at our everyday activities and to be serious about the faith we profess. Holy Week cannot be a kind of "religious interlude"; time taken out from a life that is completely caught up in human affairs. It must be an opportunity to understand more profoundly the love of God, so that we'll be able to show that love to other people through what we do and say.

But for this our Lord lays down certain conditions. We cannot ignore his words that St Luke recorded for us: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple." They are hard words. True, "hate" in English does not exactly express what Jesus meant. Yet he did put it very strongly, because he doesn't just mean "love less," as some people interpret it in an attempt to tone down the sentence. The force behind these vigorous words does not lie in their implying a negative or pitiless attitude, for the Jesus who is speaking here is none other than that Jesus who commands us to love others as we love ourselves and who gives up his life for mankind. These words indicate simply that we cannot be half-hearted when it comes to loving God. Christ's words could be translated as "love more, love better," in the sense that a selfish or partial love is not enough — we have to love others with the love of God.

That's the key. Jesus says we must also hate our life, our very soul — that is what our Lord is asking of us. If we are superficial, if the only thing we care about is our own personal well-being, if we try to make other people, and even the world, revolve around our own little self, we have no right to call ourselves Christians or think we are disciples of Christ. We have to give ourselves really, not just in word but in deed and truth. Love for God invites us to take up the cross and feel on our own shoulders the weight of humanity. It leads us to fulfill the clear and loving plans of the Father's will in all the circumstances of our work and life. In the passage we've just read Jesus goes on to say: "Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple."

Let us accept God's will and be firmly resolved to build all our life in accordance with what our faith teaches and demands. We can be sure this involves struggle

and suffering and pain, but if we really keep faith we will never feel we have lost God's favor. In the midst of sorrow and even calumny, we will experience a happiness that moves us to love others, to help them share in our supernatural joy.

The Christian and human history

98 Being a Christian is not simply a way to personal contentment; it implies a mission. We have already recalled that God invites all Christians to be the salt and light of the world. Echoing that commandment and using texts from the old testament, St Peter spells out its implications in forthright language: "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

Being a Christian is not something incidental; it is a divine reality that takes root deep in our life. It gives us a clear vision and strengthens our will to act as God wants. So we learn that the Christian's pilgrimage in the world must express itself in a continuous service in all kinds of ways, varying with each person's circumstances, but always motivated by love of God and of our neighbor. Being a Christian means forgetting petty objectives of personal prestige and ambition and even possibly nobler aims, like philanthropy and compassion for the misfortunes of others. It means setting our mind and heart on reaching the fullness of love that Jesus Christ showed by dying for us.

Let me give you an example of the kind of attitude that develops if one is unable to penetrate this mystery of Jesus. Some people tend to see Christianity as a collection of devout practices, failing to realize the relation between them and the circumstances of ordinary life, including the urgency to meet the needs of other people and remedy injustice. I would say that anyone who has that attitude has not yet understood the meaning of the incarnation. The Son of God has taken the body and soul and voice of a man; he has shared our fate, even to the extent of experiencing the excruciating anguish of death. Yet perhaps without wanting to, some people regard Christ as a stranger in the world of man.

Others tend to imagine that in order to remain human we need to play down some central aspects of Christian dogma. They act as if the life of prayer, continual relationship with God, implied fleeing from responsibilities and forsaking the world. But they forget that it was none other than Jesus who showed us the extreme to which we should go in love and service. Only if we try to understand the mystery of God's love — a love which went as far as death — will we be able to give ourselves totally to others and not let ourselves be overcome by difficulties or indifference.

99 What illuminates our conscience is faith in Christ, who has died and risen and is present in every moment of life. Faith moves us to play our full part in the changing situations and in the problems of human history. In this history, which began with the creation of the world and will reach its fulfillment at the end of time, the Christian is no expatriate. He is a citizen of the city of men, and his soul longs for God. While still on earth he has glimpses of God's love and comes to recognize it as the goal to which all men on earth are called.

If my own personal experience is of any help, I can say that I have always seen my work as a priest and shepherd of souls as being aimed at helping each person to face up to all the demands of his life and to discover what God wants from him in particular — without in any way limiting that holy independence and blessed personal responsibility which are the features of a Christian conscience. This way of acting and this spirit are based on respect for the transcendence of revealed truth and on love for the freedom of the human person. I might add that they are also based on a realization that history is undetermined and open to a variety of human options — all of which God respects.

Following Christ does not mean taking refuge in the temple, shrugging one's shoulders at social development, ignoring the achievements and aberrations alike of men or nations. On the contrary, Christian faith makes us see the world as God's creation and appreciate all its nobility and beauty, recognizing the dignity of each person made in the image of God. It makes us admire the splendid gift of freedom which gives us power over our own actions and enables us — with heaven's grace — to build our eternal destiny. You would belittle the faith if you reduced it to a human ideology, if you raised a political-religious standard to condemn — on who knows what divine authority — those who think differently from you in matters which by their very nature can be solved in a wide variety of ways.

Understanding Christ's death

100 The only purpose of the digression I have just made was to emphasize a central truth: I wanted to remind you that Christian life finds its meaning in God. Men have not been created just to build the best possible world. We have been put here on earth for a further purpose: to enter into communion with God himself. Jesus has promised us not a life of ease or worldly achievement, but the house of his Father God, which awaits us at the end of the way.

The liturgy of Good Friday contains a wonderful hymn, *Crux fidelis*. It invites us to sing and celebrate the glorious struggle of our Lord, the victory of the cross, the splendid triumph of Christ. The redeemer of the universe is sacrificed and triumphs. God, the Lord of all creation, does not make his presence felt by force of arms or by the temporal power of his followers, but by the nobility of his infinite love.

The Lord does not destroy man's freedom; it is precisely he who has made us free. That is why he does not want to wring obedience from us. He wants our decisions to come from the depths of our heart. And he wants Christians to live in such a way that the people we deal with will find in our conduct — despite our weaknesses, faults and failings — an echo of the drama of love that was Calvary. Everything we have comes from God; he wants us to be salt that flavors and light that brings the happy news that he is a Father who loves without measure. The Christian is the salt and light of the world, not because he conquers or triumphs, but because he bears witness to God's love. And he won't be salt if he can't give

flavor. Nor will he be light if he doesn't bear witness to Jesus through his example and word, if he loses sight of the purpose of his life.

101 It is good for us to try to understand better the meaning of Christ's death. We must get beyond external appearances and clichés. We need to put ourselves really and truly into the scenes which we are re-living during these days: Jesus' sorrow, his Mother's tears, the disciples' flight, the courage of the holy women, the daring of Joseph and Nicodemus who ask Pilate for the body of our Lord.

Let us, above all, come close to Jesus in his death and to his cross, which stands out in silhouette above the summit of Golgotha. But we must approach him sincerely and with the interior recollection that is a sign of Christian maturity. The divine and human events of the passion will then pierce our soul as words spoken to us by God to uncover the secrets of our heart and show us what he expects of our lives.

Many years ago I saw a painting that made a deep impression on me. It showed the cross of Christ with three angels beside it. One was weeping disconsolately one held a nail in his hand, as if trying to convince himself it was true; and the third was rapt in prayer. Here we have a program for each of us: to cry, believe and pray.

Here before the cross, we should have sorrow for our sins and for those of all men, for they are responsible for Jesus' death. We should have faith to penetrate deep into this sublime truth that surpasses our understanding and to fill ourselves with amazement at God's love. And we should pray so that Christ's life and death may become the model and motivation for our own life and self-giving. Only thus will we earn the name of conquerors: for the risen Christ will conquer in us, and death will be changed into life.

CHRIST'S PRESENCE IN CHRISTIANS

A homily given on 26 March 1967, Easter Sunday

Jesus, the source of Christian living

Contemplating Christ's life

Turning to our everyday life

102 "Christ is alive." This is the great truth that fills our faith with meaning. Jesus, who died on the cross, has risen. He has triumphed over death; he has overcome sorrow, anguish and the power of darkness. "Do not be terrified" was how the angels greeted the women who came to the tomb. "Do not be terrified. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here." "This is the day which the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."

Easter is a time of joy — a joy not confined to this period of the liturgical year, but to be found really and fully in the Christian's heart. For Christ is alive. He is not someone who has gone, someone who existed for a time and then passed on, leaving us a wonderful example and a great memory.

No, Christ is alive. Jesus is the Emmanuel: God with us. His resurrection shows us that God does not abandon his own. He promised he would not: "Can a woman forget her baby that is still unweaned, pity no longer the son she bore in her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you." And he has kept his promise. His delight is still to be with the sons of men.

Christ is alive in his Church. "I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you." That was what God planned: Jesus, dying on the cross, gave us the Spirit of truth and life. Christ stays in his Church, its sacraments, its liturgy, its preaching — in all that it does.

In a special way Christ stays with us in the daily offering of the holy Eucharist. That is why the Mass is the centre and source of Christian life. In each and every Mass the complete Christ, head and body, is present. *Per Ipsum et cum Ipso et in Ipso*. For Christ is the way; he is the mediator; in him we find everything. Outside of him our life is empty. In Jesus Christ, and taught by him, "we dare to say: Our Father." We dare to call the Lord of heaven and earth our Father. The presence of the living Christ in the host is the guarantee, the source and the culmination of his presence in the world.

103 Christ is alive in Christians. Our faith teaches us that man, in the state of grace, is divinized — filled with God. We are men and women, not angels. We are flesh and blood, people with sentiments and passions, with sorrows and joys. And this divinization affects everything human; it is a sort of foretaste of the final resurrection. "Christ has risen from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man also comes resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made to live."

Christ's life is our life, just as he promised his Apostles at the last supper: "If anyone love me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." That is why a Christian should live as Christ lived, making the affections of Christ his own, so that he can exclaim with St Paul: "It is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me."

Jesus, the source of Christian living

104 I wanted to review with you, briefly, some of the ways in which Christ is alive today — "Jesus Christ, yesterday and today, yes and forever" — because this is the basis of all Christian living. If we take a look at the course of human history, we will see progress and advances. Science has made man more aware of his power. Technology today controls the world much more than in the past, helping men to reach their dream of a greater level of culture, unity and material well being.

Some people are perhaps inclined to tone down this optimism, reminding us that men still suffer from injustice and wars, at times worse than those of the past. They may well be right. But, above and beyond these considerations, I prefer to remember that in the religious sphere man is still man and God is still God. In this

sphere the peak of progress has already been reached. And that peak is Christ, alpha and omega, the beginning of all things and their end.

In the spiritual life, there is no new era to come. Everything is already there, in Christ who died and rose again, who lives and stays with us always. But we have to join him through faith, letting his life show forth in ours to such an extent that each Christian is not simply alter Christus: another Christ, but ipse Christus: Christ himself!

105 St Paul gave a motto to the Christians at Ephesus: *Instaurare omnia in Christo*: to fill everything with the spirit of Jesus, placing Christ at the centre of everything. "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself." Through his incarnation, through his work at Nazareth and his preaching and miracles in the land of Judea and Galilee, through his death on the cross, and through his resurrection, Christ is the centre of the universe, the firstborn and Lord of all creation.

Our task as Christians is to proclaim this kingship of Christ, announcing it through what we say and do. Our Lord wants men and women of his own in all walks of life. Some he calls away from society, asking them to give up involvement in the world, so that they remind the rest of us by their example that God exists. To others he entrusts the priestly ministry. But he wants the vast majority to stay right where they are, in all earthly occupations in which they work: the factory, the laboratory, the farm, the trades, the streets of the big cities and the trails of the mountains.

In this connection I like to think of Christ's conversation with the disciples going to Emmaus. As he is walking along, he meets two men who have nearly lost all hope. They are beginning to feel that life has no meaning for them. Christ understands their sorrow; he sees into their heart and communicates to them some of the life he carries within himself.

When they draw near the village, he makes as if he is going on, but the two disciples stop him and practically force him to stay with them. They recognize him later when he breaks the bread. The Lord, they exclaimed, has been with us! "And they said to each other: Was not our heart burning within us while he was speaking on the road and explaining to us the Scripture?" Every Christian should make Christ present among men. He ought to act in such a way that those who know him sense "the fragrance of Christ." Men should be able to recognize the Master in his disciples.

106 A Christian knows that he is grafted onto Christ through baptism. He is empowered to fight for Christ through confirmation, called to act in the world sharing the royal, prophetic and priestly role of Christ. He has become one and the same thing with Christ through the Eucharist, the sacrament of unity and love. And so, like Christ, he has to live for other men, loving each and every one around him and indeed all humanity.

Faith helps us recognize that Christ is God; it shows that he is our Savior; it brings us to identify ourselves with him and to act as he acted. When the risen Christ frees the apostle Thomas from his doubts, showing him his wounds, Jesus exclaims: "Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed." And St Gregory the Great comments that "he is referring in particular to us, for we possess spiritually him whom we have not seen in the body. He is referring to us, provided our behavior agrees with our faith. A person does not truly believe unless he puts into practice what he believes. That is why St Paul says of those whose faith is limited to words: They profess recognition of God, but in their behavior they deny him."

You cannot separate the fact that Christ is God from his role as redeemer. The Word became flesh and came into the world "to save all men." With all our personal defects and limitations, we are other Christs, Christ himself, and we too are called to serve all men. We must hear and hear again his command which remains new throughout the centuries. "Beloved," writes St John, "I am writing you no new commandment but an old commandment which you had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard. Yet I am writing you a new commandment, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. He who says he is in the light and hates his brother is in the darkness still. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and in it there is no cause for stumbling."

Our Lord has come to bring peace, good news and life to all men. Not only to the rich, nor only to the poor. Not only to the wise nor only to the simple. To everyone, to the brothers, for brothers we are, children of the same Father, God. So there is only one race, the race of the children of God. There is only one color, the color of the children of God. And there is only one language, the language that speaks to the heart and to the mind, without the noise of words, making us know God and love one another.

Contemplating Christ's life

107 This is the love of Christ which each of us should try to practice in his own life. But to be Christ himself, we must see ourselves in him. It's not enough to have a general idea of the spirit of Jesus' life; we have to learn the details of his life and, through them, his attitudes. And, especially, we must contemplate his life, to derive from it strength, light, serenity, peace.

When you love someone, you want to know all about his life and character, so as to become like him. That is why we have to meditate on the life of Jesus, from his birth in a stable right up to his death and resurrection. In the early years of my life as a priest, I used to give people presents of copies of the Gospel and books about the life of Jesus. For we do need to know it well, to have it in our heart and mind, so that at any time, without any book, we can close our eyes and contemplate his life, watching it like a movie. In this way the words and actions of our Lord will come to mind in all the different circumstances of our life.

In this way we become involved in his life. It is not a matter of just thinking about Jesus, of recalling some scenes of his life. We must be completely involved and play a part in his life. We should follow him as closely as Mary his Mother did, as closely as the first twelve, the holy women, the crowds that pressed about him. If we do this without holding back, Christ's words will enter deep into our soul and will really change us. For "the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of the soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

If we want to bring other men and women to our Lord, we must first go to the Gospel and contemplate Christ's love. We could take the central events of his passion, for, as he himself said: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." But we can also look at the rest of his life, his everyday dealings with the people he met.

In order to bring men his message of salvation and show them God's love, Christ, who was perfect God and perfect man, acted in a human and a divine way. God comes down to man's level. He takes on our nature completely, except for sin.

108 It makes me very happy to realize that Christ wanted to be fully a man, with flesh like our own. I am moved when I contemplate how wonderful it is for God to love with a man's heart. Let us choose some events from the Gospel, beginning with Jesus' relationships with the twelve. St John the Apostle, who pours into his narrative so much that is first-hand, tells of his first unforgettable conversation with Christ. "Master, where are you staying? He said to them, Come and see. They went and saw where he was staying; and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour."

This divine and human dialogue completely changed the life of John and Andrew, and Peter and James and so many others. It prepared their hearts to listen to the authoritative teaching which Jesus gave them beside the Sea of Galilee. "As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And he said to them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. Immediately they left their nets and followed him."

During the next three years, Jesus shared his life with his disciples; he came to know them; he answered their questions and resolved their doubts. He is indeed the rabbi, the Master who speaks with authority, the Messiah sent by God. But he is also accessible; he is close to them. One day Jesus went off to pray and the disciples were near him, perhaps staring at him and trying to make out what he was saying. When Jesus came back, one of them said: "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples. And he told them, When you pray, say, Father, hallowed be thy name..." In the same way, with the authority of God and the affection of a human heart, our Lord meets the Apostles who were amazed at the fruits of their first mission and eager to tell him about the immediate results of their apostolate: "Come away by yourselves to a lonely place, and rest a while."

There is a similar scene toward the end of Jesus' life on earth, just before his ascension: "Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Young men, have you any fish? Jesus asked them." He asks the question as any man would, and then he speaks as God: "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some. So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, for the quantity of fish. The disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter: It is the Lord."

And God is waiting for them on the shore. "When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish lying on it, and bread. Bring some of the fish that you have just caught, Jesus said to them. So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three of them; and although there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them: Come and have breakfast. Now none of the disciples dared ask him: Who are you? They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish."

Jesus shows this refinement and affection not only to a small group of disciples, but to everyone: to the holy women, to representatives of the Sanhedrin, like Nicodemus, to tax collectors like Zachaeus; he shows it to sick and healthy people, to teachers of the law and pagans, to individuals and crowds.

The Gospels tell us that Jesus had no place to rest his head, but they also tell us that he had many good, close friends, eager to have him stay in their homes when he was in the vicinity. They tell us of his compassion for the sick, of his sorrow for those who were ignorant or in error, his anger at the moneychangers who profaned the temple; his heart was touched by the sorrow of the widow at Naim.

109 All this human behavior is the behavior of God. "For in him dwells all the fullness of the godhead bodily." Christ is God become man: a complete, perfect man. And through his human nature, he shows us what his divine nature is.

Recalling this human refinement of Christ, who spent his life in the service of others, we are doing much more than describing a pattern of human behavior; we are discovering God. Everything Christ did has a transcendental value. It shows us the nature of God and beckons us to believe in the love of God who created us and wants us to share his intimate life. "I have manifested your name to the men whom you gave me out of the world; yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you."

Jesus' dealings with men go much further than words or superficial attitudes. Jesus takes them seriously and wants to make known to them the divine meaning of their life. Jesus knows how to be demanding, how to direct men to face up to their duties. If we listen to him, he weans us from comfort and conformity, and brings us to know the thrice-holy God. For Jesus is moved by hunger and sorrow, but what moves him most is ignorance. "As he landed he saw a great throng, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things."

Turning to our everyday life

110 We have gone to the Gospel to contemplate Jesus' dealings with men and to learn to bring him to our fellow men, being ourselves other Christs. Let's apply this lesson to everyday life, to our own life. For the ordinary life of a man among his fellows is not something dull and uninteresting. It is there that the Lord wants the vast majority of his children to achieve sanctity.

It is important to keep reminding ourselves that Jesus did not address himself to a privileged set of people; he came to reveal the universal love of God to us. God loves all men, and he wants all to love him — everyone, whatever his personal situation, his social position, his work. Ordinary life is something of great value. All the ways of the earth can be an opportunity to meet Christ, who calls us to identify ourselves with him and carry out his divine mission — right where he finds us.

God calls us through what happens during our day: through the suffering and happiness of the people we live with, through the human interests of our colleagues and the things that make up our family life. He also calls us through the great problems, conflicts and challenges of each period of history, which attract the effort and idealism of a large part of mankind.

111 It is easy to understand the impatience, anxiety and uneasiness of people whose naturally Christian soul stimulates them to fight the personal and social injustice that the human heart can create. So many centuries of men living side by side and still so much hate, so much destruction, so much fanaticism stored up in eyes that do not want to see and in hearts that do not want to love!

The good things of the earth, monopolized by a handful of people; the culture of the world, confined to cliques. And, on the outside, hunger for bread and education. Human lives — holy, because they come from God — treated as mere things, as statistics. I understand and share this impatience. It stirs me to look at Christ, who is continually inviting us to put his new commandment of love into practice.

All the circumstances in which life places us bring a divine message, asking us to respond with love and service to others. "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left.

"Then the King will say to those at his right hand, Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me. Then the righteous will answer him, Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you? And the King will

answer them, Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me."

We must learn to recognize Christ when he comes out to meet us in our brothers, the people around us. No human life is ever isolated. It is bound up with other lives. No man or woman is a single verse; we all make up one divine poem, which God writes with the cooperation of our freedom.

112 Nothing can be foreign to Christ's care. If we enter into the theology of it instead of limiting ourselves to functional categories, we cannot say that there are things — good, noble or indifferent — which are exclusively worldly. This cannot be after the Word of God has lived among the children of men, felt hunger and thirst, worked with his hands, experienced friendship and obedience and suffering and death. "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross."

We must love the world and work and all human things. For the world is good. Adam's sin destroyed the divine balance of creation; but God the Father sent his only Son to re-establish peace, so that we, his children by adoption, might free creation from disorder and reconcile all things to God.

Each human situation is unique; it is the result of a unique vocation that should be lived intensely, giving expression to the spirit of Christ. And so, living among our equals in a Christian way, we will be Christ present among men. And we will do this in a natural way consistent with our faith.

113 When we consider the dignity of the vocation God calls us to, we might become proud and presumptuous. If that happens, we have a wrong idea of the Christian mission. Our error prevents us from realizing that we are made of clay, that we are dust and wretchedness. We forget that there is evil not only around us, but right inside ourselves, nestled deep in our hearts, which makes us capable of vileness and selfishness. Only the grace of God is sure ground, we are sand, quicksand.

If we look at the history of mankind or at the present situation of the world, it makes us sad to see that after twenty centuries there are so few who claim to be Christians and fewer still who are faithful to their calling. Many years ago, a man with a good heart but who had no faith, said to me, pointing to a map of the world: "Look how Christ has failed! So many centuries trying to give his teaching to men, and there you have the result: there are no Christians."

There are many people nowadays who still think that way. But Christ has not failed. His word and his life continue to enrich the world. Christ's work, which his Father entrusted to him, is being carried out. His power runs right through history, bringing true life with it, and "when all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to every one."

God wants us to cooperate with him in this task that he is carrying out in the world. He takes a risk with our freedom. I am deeply moved by the Jesus born in Bethlehem: a defenseless, powerless child, incapable of offering any resistance. God gives himself up to men; he comes close to us, down to our level.

"Though he was in the form of God, he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant." God respects and bows down to our freedom, our imperfection and wretchedness. He agrees to have his divine treasures carried in vessels of clay; he lets us make them known; God is not afraid of mixing his strength with our weaknesses.

114 Experience of sin, then, should not make us doubt our mission. True, our sins can make it difficult to recognize Christ. That is why we must face up to our personal miseries and seek to purify ourselves. But in doing this, we must realize that God has not promised us a complete victory over evil in this life. Instead he asks us to fight. "My grace is sufficient for you," our Lord replied to St Paul, when he wanted to be freed of the "thorn in his flesh" which humiliated him.

The power of God is made manifest in our weakness and it spurs us on to fight, to battle against our defects, although we know that we will never achieve total victory during our pilgrimage on earth. The Christian life is a continuous beginning again each day. It renews itself over and over.

Christ gives us his risen life, he rises in us, if we become sharers in his cross and his death. We should love the cross, self-sacrifice and mortification. Christian optimism is not something sugary, nor is it a human optimism that things will "work out well." No, its deep roots are awareness of freedom and faith in grace. It is an optimism that makes us be demanding with ourselves. It gets us to make a real effort to respond to God's call.

Not so much despite our wretchedness but in some way through it, through our life as men of flesh and blood and dust, Christ is shown forth: in our effort to be better, to have a love which wants to be pure, to overcome our selfishness, to give ourselves fully to others — to turn our existence into a continuous service.

115 I don't want to finish without another consideration. When a Christian makes Christ present among men by being Christ himself, it is not only a matter of being a considerate, loving person, but of making the Love of God known through his human love. Jesus saw all his life as a revelation of this love. As he said to one of his disciples, "He who has seen me has seen the Father."

St John applies this teaching when he tells Christians that, since they have come to know the love of God, they should show it in their deeds: "Beloved, let us love one another since love comes from God, and everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God.

"He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we love God but that he loved us

and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."

116 So, our faith must be living — a faith that makes us really believe in God and keep up a continuous conversation with him. A Christian life should be one of constant prayer, trying to live in the presence of God from morning to night and from night to morning. A Christian can never be a lonely man, since he lives in continual contact with God, who is both near us and in heaven.

"Pray constantly," the Apostle tells us. And Clement of Alexandria reminds us of this commandment: "He tells us to praise and honor the Word whom we know to be Savior and king; and, through him, the Father, not on special days as some people do, but continually, right through all our life and in every kind of way."

In the middle of his daily work, when he has to overcome his selfishness, when he enjoys the cheerful friendship of other people, a Christian should rediscover God. Through Christ and in the Holy Spirit, a Christian has access to the intimacy of God the Father, and he spends his life looking for the Kingdom which is not of this world, but which is initiated and prepared in this world.

We must seek Christ in the word and in the bread, in the Eucharist and in prayer. And we must treat him as a friend, as the real, living person he is — for he is risen. Christ, we read in the Epistle to the Hebrews, "holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently he is able for all time to save those who draw near to God, since he always lives to make intercession for them."

Christ, the risen Christ, is our companion and friend. He is a companion whom we can see only in the shadows — but the fact that he is really there fills our whole life and makes us yearn to be with him forever. "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him who hears say, Come. And let him who is thirsty come, let him who desires take the water of life without price... He who testifies to these things says, Surely I am coming soon. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."

THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD

A homily given on 19 May 1966, the feast of the Ascension

Christ in the Bread and in the Word

A life of prayer

Apostolate: redeeming with our Lord

The wheat and the weeds

Sowers of peace and joy

What awaits us

117 Once more the liturgy reminds us of the final moment in Jesus' life among men, his ascension into heaven. Many things have happened since our Lord was

born in Bethlehem. We have thought of him in the manger, worshipped by the shepherds and the Magi; we have contemplated those long years of unpretentious work in Nazareth; we have gone with him all through the land of Palestine, as he preached the kingdom of God to men and went about doing good to all. And later on, during the days of his passion, we have suffered on seeing him accused and ill treated and crucified.

Then, sorrow gave way to the joy and light of the resurrection. What a clear and firm foundation for our faith! But perhaps, like the Apostles in those days, we are still weak, and on the day of the ascension we ask Christ: "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom of Israel?" Is it now that we can expect all our perplexity and all our weakness to vanish forever?

Our Lord answers by going up to heaven. Like the Apostles, we remain partly perplexed and partly saddened at his departure. It is not easy, in fact, to get accustomed to the physical absence of Jesus. I am moved when I think that, in an excess of love, he has remained with us, even when he has gone away. He has gone to heaven and, at the same time, he gives himself to us as our nourishment in the sacred host. Still, we miss his human speech, his way of acting, of looking, of smiling, of doing good. We would like to go back and regard him closely again, as he sits down at the edge of the well, tired from his journey; as he weeps for Lazarus; as he prays for a long time; as he feels pity for the crowd.

It has always seemed logical to me that the most holy humanity of Christ should ascend to the glory of the Father. The ascension has always made me very happy. But I think that the sadness that is particular to the day of the ascension is also a proof of the love that we feel for Jesus Christ, our Lord. He is God made man, perfect man, with flesh like ours, with blood like ours in his veins. Yet he leaves us and goes up to heaven. How can we help but miss his presence?

Christ in the Bread and in the Word

118 If we have learned to contemplate the mystery of Christ, if we make an effort to see him clearly, we will realize that now we can come very near Jesus too, in body and soul. Christ has pointed out the way to us clearly. We can be with him in the bread and in the word, receiving the nourishment of the Eucharist and knowing and fulfilling all that he came to teach us, as we meet and deal with him in our prayer. "He who eats my flesh, and drinks my blood, abides in me and I in him." "He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. But he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him."

These are not mere promises. They are something real, the essence of a true life, the life of grace that leads us to deal with God personally and directly. "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, as I also have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love." These words that Jesus said at the last supper are the best introduction to the day of the ascension. Christ knew that he had to go away, because, in a mysterious way that we cannot fully understand, after the ascension, a new outpouring of God's love would bring the presence of the

Third Person of the Blessed Trinity. "I speak the truth to you: it is expedient for you that I depart. For if I do not go, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you."

Jesus has gone away. He sends us the Holy Spirit, who directs and sanctifies our souls. The action of the Paraclete within us confirms what Christ had announced — that we are children of God, that we "have not received a spirit of bondage so as to be again in fear, but... a spirit of adoption as sons, by virtue of which we cry: Abba! Father!"

You see? This is the action of the Blessed Trinity in our souls. A Christian always has access to God, who dwells in the innermost part of his being, if he corresponds to the grace that leads us to become one with Christ, in the bread and in the word, in the sacred host and in prayer. On two other occasions in the liturgical year — Holy Thursday and Corpus Christi — the Church sets aside important feast days to commemorate the reality of this living bread, which we are reminded of every day. On this feast of the ascension, let us turn our mind to conversation with our Lord. Let us attentively listen to his word.

A life of prayer

119 "A prayer to my living God." If God is life for us, we should not be surprised to realize that our very existence as Christians must be interwoven with prayer. But don't imagine that prayer is an action to be carried out and then forgotten. The just man "delights in the law of the Lord, and meditates on his law day and night." "Through the night I meditate on you" and "my prayer comes to you like incense in the evening." Our whole day can be a time for prayer — from night to morning and from morning to night. In fact, as Holy Scripture reminds us, even our sleep should be a prayer.

Remember what the Gospels tell us about Jesus. At times he spent the whole night in an intimate conversation with his Father. The Apostles were filled with love when they saw Christ pray; and, after seeing this constant attitude in their master, they asked him: "Lord, teach us to pray" in this way. St Paul spreads the living example of Christ everywhere when he urges the faithful to be "constant in prayer." And St Luke portrays the behavior of the first Christians with a phrase that is like the touch of an artist's brush: "they all, with one mind, continued steadfastly in prayer."

A good Christian acquires his mettle, with the help of grace, in the training-ground of prayer. But prayer, our life-giving nourishment, is not limited to one form alone. Our heart will find an habitual expression in words, in the vocal prayers taught us by God himself — the Our Father — or by his angels — the Hail Mary. On other occasions, we will use the time-proven words that have expressed the piety of millions of our brothers in the faith: prayers from the liturgy — *lex orandi*; or others whose source is the love of an ardent heart, like the antiphons to our Lady: *Sub tuum praesidium, Memorare, Salve, Regina...*

There will be other occasions on which all we'll need will be two or three words, said with the quickness of a dart, *iaculata* — ejaculatory prayers, aspirations that we learn from a careful reading of Christ's life: "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean." "Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you." "Lord, I do believe, but help my unbelief," strengthen my faith. "Lord, I am not worthy." "My Lord and my God!"... or other short phrases, full of affection, that spring from the soul's intimate fervor and correspond to the different circumstances of each day.

Besides these occasions, our life of prayer should also be based on some moments that are dedicated exclusively to our conversation with God, moments of silent dialogue, before the tabernacle if possible, in order to thank our Lord for having waited for us — so often alone — for twenty centuries. This heart-to-heart dialogue with God is mental prayer, in which the whole soul takes part; intelligence, imagination, memory and will are all involved. It is a meditation that helps to give supernatural value to our poor human life, with all its normal, everyday occurrences.

Thanks to these moments of meditation and to our vocal prayer and aspirations, we will be able to turn our whole day into a continuous praise of God, in a natural way and without any outward display. Just as people in love are always thinking about each other, we will be aware of God's presence. And all our actions, down to the most insignificant, will be filled with spiritual effectiveness.

This is why, as a Christian sets out on his way of uninterrupted dealing with our Lord, his interior life grows and becomes strong and secure. And he is led to engage in the demanding yet attractive struggle to fulfill completely the will of God. I might add that this is not a path for a privileged few; it is a way open to everyone.

It is through our life of prayer that we can understand the other aspect of today's feast: the apostolate, the carrying out of the commission Jesus gave to the disciples shortly before the ascension: "You shall be witnesses for me in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and even to the very ends of the earth."

Apostolate: redeeming with our Lord

120 With the amazing naturalness of the things of God, the contemplative soul is filled with apostolic zeal. "My heart was warmed within me, a fire blazed forth from my thoughts." What could this fire be if not the fire that Christ talks about: "I have come to cast fire upon the earth, and what will I but that it be kindled?" An apostolic fire that acquires its strength in prayer. There is no better way than this to carry on, throughout the whole world, the battle of peace to which every Christian is called, to fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ.

Jesus has gone up to heaven, as we have seen. But a Christian can deal with him, in prayer and in the Eucharist, as the twelve Apostles dealt with him. The Christian can come to burn with an apostolic fervor that will lead him to serve, to redeem with Christ, to sow peace and joy wherever he goes. To serve, that is what apostolate is all about. If we count on our own strength alone, we will achieve nothing in the supernatural order. But if we are God's instruments, we will achieve

everything. "I can do all things in him who gives me strength." God, in his infinite goodness, has chosen to use inadequate instruments; and so, the apostle has no other aim than to let the Lord work in him and through him, to put himself totally at God's disposition, allowing him to carry out his work of salvation through creatures, through that soul whom he has chosen.

An apostle — that is what a Christian is, when he knows that he has been grafted onto Christ, made one with Christ, in baptism. He has been given the capacity to carry on the battle in Christ's name, through confirmation. He has been called to serve God by his activity in the world, because of the common priesthood of the faithful, which makes him share in some way in the priesthood of Christ. This priesthood — though essentially distinct from the ministerial priesthood — gives him the capacity to take part in the worship of the Church and to help other men in their journey to God, with the witness of his word and his example, through his prayer and work of atonement.

Each of us is to be ipse Christus: Christ himself. He is the one mediator between God and man. And we make ourselves one with him in order to offer all things, with him, to the Father. Our calling to be children of God, in the midst of the world, requires us not only to seek our own personal holiness, but also to go out onto all the ways of the earth, to convert them into roads that will carry souls over all obstacles and lead them to the Lord. As we take part in all temporal activities, as ordinary citizens, we are to become leaven acting on the dough.

Christ has gone up to heaven, but he has given to all honest human things a specific capacity to be redeemed. St Gregory the Great expresses this reality in a striking way: "Thus Jesus went away to where he had come from, and came back from the place he continued to dwell; for, in the very moment in which he went up to heaven, he brought together, by his activity, heaven and earth. On today's feast we should proclaim solemnly that the decree of our condemnation has been suppressed, and the judgment that made us subject to corruption has been lifted. That nature which heard the words, "You are dust, and to dust you shall return," that same nature has gone up to heaven today with Christ."

And so I keep on repeating to you that the world can be made holy. We Christians have a special role to play in sanctifying it. We are to cleanse it from the occasions of sin with which we human beings have soiled it. We are to offer it to our Lord as a spiritual offering, presented to him and made acceptable through his grace and with our efforts. Strictly speaking, we cannot say that there is any noble human reality that does not have a supernatural dimension, for the divine Word has taken on a complete human nature and consecrated the world with his presence and with the work of his hands. The great mission that we have received in baptism is to redeem the world with Christ. We are urged on by the charity of Christ to take upon our shoulders a part of this task of saving souls.

121 Look. The redemption was consummated when Jesus died on the cross, in shame and glory, "to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Gentiles foolishness." But the redemption will, by the will of God, be carried out continually until our

Lord's time comes. It is impossible to live according to the heart of Jesus Christ and not to know that we are sent, as he was, "to save all sinners," with the clear realization that we ourselves need to trust in the mercy of God more and more every day. As a result, we will foster in ourselves a vehement desire to live as co-redeemers with Christ, to save all souls with him, because we are, we want to be, ipse Christus: Christ himself, and "He gave himself as a ransom for all."

A great task awaits us. We cannot remain inactive, because our Lord has told us clearly, "Trade till I come." As long as we are awaiting the Lord's return, when he will come to take full possession of his kingdom, we cannot afford to relax. Spreading the kingdom of God isn't only an official task of those members of the Church who represent Christ because they have received sacred powers from him. "You are also the body of Christ," says the Apostle, with a specific command to fulfil.

There is so much to be done. Is it because in twenty centuries nothing has been done? In these two thousand years much work has been done. I don't think it would be fair or objective to discount, as some people want to do, the accomplishments of those who have gone before us. In two thousand years a great task has been accomplished, and it has often been accomplished very well. On other occasions there have been mistakes, making the Church lose ground, just as today there is loss of ground, fear and a timid attitude on the part of some, and at the same time no lack of courage and generosity in others. But, whatever the situation, the human race is being continually renewed. In each generation it is necessary to go on with the effort to help men realize the greatness of their vocation as children of God, to teach them to carry out the commandment of love for God and neighbor.

122 Christ has taught us in a definitive way how to make this love for God real. Apostolate is love for God that overflows and communicates itself to others. The interior life implies a growth in union with Christ, in the bread and in the word. And apostolate is the precise and necessary outward manifestation of interior life. When one tastes the love of God, one feels burdened with the weight of souls. There is no way to separate interior life from apostolate, just as there is no way to separate Christ, the God-man, from his role as redeemer. The Word chose to become flesh in order to save men, to make them one with him. This is why he came to the world; he came down from heaven "for us men and for our salvation," as we say in the creed.

For a Christian apostolate is something instinctive. It is not something added onto his daily activities and his professional work from the outside. I have repeated it constantly, since the day that our Lord chose for the foundation of Opus Dei! We have to sanctify our ordinary work, we have to sanctify others through the exercise of the particular profession that is proper to each of us, in our own particular state in life.

For a Christian apostolate is like breathing. A child of God cannot live without this supernatural life-force. Today's feast reminds us that our concern for souls is a

response to a command of love given to us by our Lord. As he goes up to heaven, Jesus sends us out as his witnesses throughout the whole world. Our responsibility is great, because to be Christ's witness implies first of all that we should try to behave according to his doctrine, that we should struggle to make our actions remind others of Jesus and his most lovable personality. We have to act in such a way that others will be able to say, when they meet us: this man is a Christian, because he does not hate, because he is willing to understand, because he is not a fanatic, because he is willing to make sacrifices, because he shows that he is a man of peace, because he knows how to love.

The wheat and the weeds

123 I have been describing to you, not my own idea, but Christ's doctrine on the Christian's ideal. You can see that it is demanding, sublime, attractive. Still some might ask: "Is it possible to live this way in today's society?"

Our Lord has called us, it is true, in a time when everyone talks about peace, and there is no peace — whether in souls or in institutions or in social life or among nations. Everyone talks about equality and democracy, and what we see all around are closed and impenetrable castes. He has called us in a time when everyone demands understanding, and understanding is conspicuous only by its absence, even among persons who act in good faith and want to be charitable. Don't forget that charity, more than in giving, consists in understanding.

We are living in a period of time when the fanatics and the intransigent — those incapable of listening to the reasons of other people — use the device of accusing their victims of being violent and aggressive. Our Lord has called us, finally, in a time when we can hear all kinds of talk about unity, and it would be hard to imagine a greater disunion among Catholics themselves, not to speak of people in general.

I never make political remarks; that's not my job. If I were to describe the present situation of the world as a priest, all I need is to think again about one of our Lord's parables, that of the wheat and the weeds. "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men were asleep, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away." The situation is clear — the field is fertile and the seed is good; the Lord of the field has scattered the seed at the right moment and with great skill. He even has watchmen to make sure that the field is protected. If, afterwards, there are weeds among the wheat, it is because men have failed to respond, because they — and Christians in particular — have fallen asleep and allowed the enemy to approach.

When the careless servants ask the Lord why weeds have grown in his field, the explanation is obvious: "an enemy has done this." We Christians should have been on guard to make sure that the good things placed in this world by the creator were developed in the service of truth and good. But we have fallen asleep — a sad thing, that sluggishness of our heart! — while the enemy and all those who serve him acted without stopping. You can see how the weeds have grown abundantly everywhere.

My vocation is not that of a prophet of misfortune. With these words I do not wish to make you see a desolate and hopeless picture of reality. I do not want to complain about this time in which the Lord's providence has placed us. We love this time of ours because it is in this time when we are called to achieve our personal sanctification. We will not admit naive longings that lead nowhere — the world has never been any better. From the very beginning, from the cradle of the Church, in the times when the twelve Apostles were still preaching, violent persecutions had already begun, the first heresies were springing up, lies were being spread and hatred was unleashed.

Still, it cannot be denied that evil seems to have prospered. Weeds have grown in this whole field of God, which is the earth, the inheritance of Christ. Not only have they grown, they are abundant. We cannot allow ourselves to be deceived by the myth of constant and irreversible progress. Progress, in an orderly manner, is good, and God wants it to take place. But people seem to consider more another kind of progress, which is false and blinds many persons, who often fail to realize that, in some of its movements, the human race moves backward and loses some of the ground it had conquered.

Our Lord, I insist, has given us the world for our inheritance. It is up to us to keep our souls and our minds wide awake. We have to be realistic, without being defeatist. Only a person with a callous conscience, made insensitive by routine or dulled by a frivolous attitude, can allow himself to think that evil — offence to God and harm, at times irreparable harm, to souls — does not exist in the world he sees. We have to be optimistic, but our optimism should come from our faith in the power of God who does not lose battles, and not from any human sense of satisfaction, from a stupid and presumptuous complacency.

Sowers of peace and joy

124 What are we to do? I have told you that I was not trying to describe social or political crises or cultural declines or disruptions. Looking at the world from the point of view of Christian faith, I am referring to evil in its precise meaning, as an offence against God. Christian apostolate is not a political program or a cultural alternative. It implies the spreading of good, infecting others with a desire to love, sowing peace and joy. There is no doubt that this apostolate will produce spiritual benefits for all: more justice, more understanding and a greater mutual respect among men.

There are many souls all around us, and we have no right to be an obstacle to their eternal happiness. We have the obligation of leading a fully Christian life, of becoming saints, of not betraying God and all those who expect a Christian to be an example and a source of truth.

Our apostolate has to be based on understanding. I insist, as I have done before, on the fact that charity, more than in giving, consists in understanding. I cannot deny the fact that I have learned by my own experience what it means not to be understood. I have always tried to make myself understood, but there have been people who were bent on not understanding. This gives me one more reason, and a

very practical one, for trying to be understanding toward everyone. But it is not this type of incidental reason that should prompt us to have a heart that is great, universal, catholic. The understanding we must show is a proof of Christian charity on the part of a good child of God. Our Lord wants us to be present in all the honest pursuits of the earth, so that there we may sow, not weeds, but the good seed of brotherhood, of forgiveness, of charity and of peace. Never consider yourself anybody's enemy.

A Christian has to be ready to share his life with everyone at all times, giving to everyone the chance to come nearer to Christ Jesus. He has to sacrifice his own desires willingly for the sake of others, without separating people into watertight compartments, without pigeon-holing them or putting tags on them as though they were merchandise or dried-up insects. A Christian cannot afford to separate himself from others, because, if he did that, his life would be miserably selfish. He must become "all things to all men, in order to save all men."

If only we lived like this, if only we knew how to saturate our behavior with the good seed of generosity, with a desire for understanding and peace! We would encourage the rightful independence of all men. Each person would take on his own responsibility for the tasks that correspond to him in temporal matters. Each Christian would defend other people's freedom in the first place, so that he could defend his own as well. His charity would lead him to accept others as they are — because everyone, without any exception, has his weaknesses and makes his mistakes. He would help them, with God's grace and his own human refinement, to overcome evil, to remove the weeds, so that we can all help each other in living according to our dignity as human beings and as Christians.

What awaits us

125 The apostolic task that Christ entrusted to all his disciples leads to specific results in social matters. It is inconceivable that a Christian, in order to fulfill his task, should have to turn his back on the world and become a defeatist with regard to human nature. Everything, even the smallest occurrence, has a human and a divine meaning. Christ, who is perfect man, did not come to destroy what is human, but to raise it up. He took on himself our human nature, except for sin. He came to share all man's concerns, except for the sad experience of willful evil.

A Christian has to be ready, at all times, to sanctify society from within. He is fully present in the world, but without belonging to the world, when it denies God and opposes his lovable will of salvation, not because of its nature, but because of sin.

126 The feast of our Lord's ascension also reminds us of another fact. The same Christ, who encourages us to carry out our task in the world, awaits us in heaven as well. In other words, our life on earth, which we love, is not definitive. "We do not have a permanent dwelling-place here, but we seek that which is to come," a changeless home, where we may live forever.

Still, we must be careful not to interpret the Word of God within limits that are too narrow. Our Lord does not expect us to be unhappy in our life on earth and await a

reward only in the next life. God wants us to be happy on earth too, but with a desire for the other, total happiness that only he can give.

In this life, the contemplation of supernatural reality, the action of grace in our souls, our love for our neighbor as a result of our love for God — all these are already a foretaste of heaven, a beginning that is destined to grow from day to day. We Christians cannot resign ourselves to leading a double life our life must be a strong and simple unity into which all our actions converge.

Christ awaits us. We are "citizens of heaven," and at the same time fully-fledged citizens of this earth, in the midst of difficulties, injustices and lack of understanding, but also in the midst of the joy and serenity that comes from knowing that we are children of God. Let us persevere in the service of our God, and we will see the growth in numbers and in sanctity of this Christian army of peace, of this co-redeeming people. Let us be contemplative souls, carrying on an unceasing dialogue with our Lord at all hours — from the first thought of the day to the last, turning our heart constantly toward our Lord Jesus Christ, going to him through our Mother, Holy Mary, and through him to the Father and the Holy Spirit.

If, in spite of everything, Jesus' ascension into heaven leaves a certain taste of sadness in our souls, let us go to his Mother, as the Apostles did. "They returned to Jerusalem... and they prayed with one mind... together with Mary, the Mother of Jesus."

THE GREAT UNKNOWN

A homily given on 25 May 1969, Pentecost Sunday

Pentecost today

God's strength and our weakness

Making Christ known

Getting to know the Holy Spirit

127 Having just read in the Acts of the Apostles about Pentecost, the day when the Holy Spirit came down on the Lord's disciples, we are conscious of being present at the great display of God's power with which the Church's life began to spread among all nations. The victory Christ achieved through his obedience, his offering of himself on the cross and his resurrection — his triumph over death and sin — is revealed here in all its divine splendor.

The disciples, witnesses of the glory of the risen Christ, were filled with the strength of the Holy Spirit. Their minds and hearts were opened to a new light. They had followed Christ and accepted his teachings with faith, but they were not always able to fathom the full meaning of his words. The Spirit of truth, who was to teach them all things, had not yet come. They knew that Jesus alone could give them words of eternal life, and they were ready to follow him and to give their lives for him. But they were weak, and in the time of trial, they fled and left him alone.

On Pentecost all that is a thing of the past. The Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of strength, has made them firm, strong, daring. The word of the Apostles resounds forcefully through the streets of Jerusalem.

The men and women who have come to the city from all parts of the world listen with amazement. "Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, Jews as well as proselytes, Cretans and Arabs, we have heard them speaking in our own languages of the wonderful works of God." These wonders, which take place before their own eyes, lead them to listen to the preaching of the Apostles. The Holy Spirit himself, who is acting through our Lord's disciples, moves the hearts of their listeners and leads them to the faith.

St Luke tells us that after St Peter had spoken and proclaimed Christ's resurrection, many of those present came up to him and asked: "Brethren, what shall we do?" The apostle answered: "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." And on that day, the sacred text tells us, about three thousand were added to the Church.

The solemn coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost was not an isolated event. There is hardly a page in the Acts of the Apostles where we fail to read about him and the action by which he guides, directs and enlivens the life and work of the early Christian community. It is he who inspires the preaching of St Peter, who strengthens the faith of the disciples, who confirms with his presence the calling of the gentiles, who sends Saul and Barnabas to the distant lands where they will open new paths for the teaching of Jesus. In a word, his presence and doctrine are everywhere.

Pentecost today

128 The profound reality which we see in the texts of Holy Scripture is not a remembrance from the past, from some golden age of the Church which has since been buried in history. Despite the weaknesses and the sins of every one of us, it is the reality of today's Church and the Church of all time. "I will ask the Father," our Lord told his disciples, "and he will give you another Counsellor to dwell with you forever." Jesus has kept his promise. He has risen from the dead, and in union with the eternal Father, he sends us the Holy Spirit to sanctify us and to give us life.

The strength and the power of God light up the face of the earth. The Holy Spirit is present in the Church of Christ for all time, so that it may be, always and in everything, a sign raised up before all nations, announcing to all men the goodness and the love of God. In spite of our great limitations, we can look up to heaven with confidence and joy: God loves us and frees us from our sins. The presence and the action of the Holy Spirit in the Church are a foretaste of eternal happiness, of the joy and peace for which we are destined by God.

Like the men and women who came up to Peter on Pentecost, we too have been baptized. In baptism, our Father God has taken possession of our lives, has made us share in the life of Christ, and has given us the Holy Spirit. Holy Scripture tells us that God has saved us "through the baptism of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit; whom he has abundantly poured out upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior, in order that, justified by his grace, we may be heirs in hope to life everlasting."

The experience of our weakness and of our failings, the painful realization of the smallness and meanness of some who call themselves Christians, the apparent failure or aimlessness of some works of apostolate, all these things which bring home to us the reality of sin and human limitation, can still be a trial of our faith. Temptation and doubt can lead us to ask: where are the strength and the power of God? When that happens we have to react by practicing the virtue of hope with greater purity and forcefulness, and striving to be more faithful.

129 Let me tell you about an event of my own personal life which happened many years ago. One day I was with a friend of mine, a man with a good heart but who did not have faith. Pointing toward a globe he said, "Look, from North to South, from East to West." "What do you want me to look at?" I asked. His answer was: "The failure of Christ. For twenty centuries people have been trying to bring his doctrine to men's lives, and look at the result." I was filled with sadness. It is painful to think that many people still don't know our Lord, and that among those who do know him, many live as though they did not. But that feeling lasted only a moment. It was shortly overcome by love and thankfulness because Jesus has wanted every man to cooperate freely in the work of redemption. He has not failed. His doctrine and life are effective in the world at all times. The redemption carried out by him is sufficient, and more than sufficient.

God does not want slaves, but children. He respects our freedom. The work of salvation is still going on, and each one of us has a part in it. It is Christ's will, St Paul tells us in impressive words, that we should fulfill in our flesh, in our life, what is lacking in his passion, "for the good of his body, which is the Church."

It is worthwhile putting our lives on the line, giving ourselves completely, so as to answer to the love and the confidence that God has placed in us. It is worthwhile, above all, to decide to take our Christian life seriously. When we recite the creed, we state that we believe in God the Father Almighty, in his Son Jesus Christ, who died and rose again, and in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life. We affirm that the Church, one, holy, catholic and apostolic, is the body of Christ, enlivened by the Holy Spirit. We rejoice in the forgiveness of sins and in the hope of the resurrection. But do those words penetrate to the depths of our own heart? Or do they remain only on our lips? The divine message of victory, the joy and the peace of Pentecost, should be the unshakeable foundation for every Christian's way of thinking and acting and living.

God's strength and our weakness

130 "The arm of the Lord has not been shortened." God is no less powerful today than he was in other times; his love for man is no less true. Our faith teaches us that all creation, the movement of the earth and the other heavenly bodies, the good actions of creatures and all the good that has been achieved in history, in short everything, comes from God and is directed toward him.

The action of the Holy Spirit can pass unnoticed, because God does not reveal to us his plans, and because man's sin clouds over the divine gifts. But faith reminds us that God is always acting. He has created us and maintains us in existence and he leads all creation by his grace toward the glorious freedom of the children of God.

For this reason, Christian tradition has summarized the attitude we should adopt toward the Holy Spirit in just one idea: docility. That means we should be aware of the work of the Holy Spirit all around us, and in our own selves we should recognize the gifts he distributes, the movements and institutions he inspires, the affections and decisions he provokes in our hearts. The Holy Spirit carries out in the world the works of God. He is, as we read in a liturgical hymn, the giver of grace, the light of our hearts, the soul's guest, our rest in work, our consolation in sorrow. Without his help there is nothing innocent or valuable in man, since he is the one who cleanses the soiled, heals what is sick, sets on fire what is cold, straightens what is bent and guides men toward the safe harbor of salvation and eternal joy.

But our faith in the Holy Spirit must be complete. It is not a vague belief in his presence in the world, but a grateful acceptance of the signs and realities into which he has poured forth his power in a special way. When the Spirit of truth comes, our Lord tells us, "he will glorify me, for he will take of what is mine and declare it to you." The Holy Spirit is the Spirit sent by Christ to carry out in us the work of holiness that our Lord merited for us on earth.

And so, there cannot be faith in the Holy Spirit if there is not faith in Christ, in his sacraments, in his Church. A man cannot act in accordance with his Christian faith, cannot truly believe in the Holy Spirit, unless he loves the Church and trusts it. He cannot be a coherent Christian if he limits himself to pointing out the deficiencies and limitations of some who represent the Church, judging her from the outside, as though he were not her son. Moreover, consider the extraordinary importance and abundance of the Paraclete when the priest renews the sacrifice of Calvary by celebrating Mass on our altars.

131 We Christians carry the great treasures of grace in vessels of clay. God has entrusted his gifts to the weakness and fragility of human freedom. We can be certain of the help of God's power, but our lust, our love of comfort and our pride sometimes cause us to reject his grace and to fall into sin. For more than twenty-five years when I have recited the creed and asserted my faith in the divine origin of the Church: "One, holy, catholic and apostolic," I have frequently added, "in spite of everything." When I mention this custom of mine and someone asks me what I mean, I answer, "I mean your sins and mine."

All this is true, but it does not authorize us in any way to judge the Church in a human manner, without theological faith. We cannot consider only the greater or lesser merits of certain churchmen or of some Christians. To do this would be to limit ourselves to the surface of things. What is most important in the Church is not how we humans react but how God acts. This is what the Church is: Christ present in our midst, God coming toward men in order to save them, calling us with his revelation, sanctifying us with his grace, maintaining us with his constant help, in the great and small battles of our daily life.

We might come to mistrust other men, and each one of us should mistrust himself and end each of his days with a *mea culpa*, an act of contrition that is profound and sincere. But we have no right to doubt God. And to doubt the Church, its divine origin and its effectiveness for our salvation through its doctrine and its sacraments, would be the same as doubting God himself, the same as not fully believing in the reality of the coming of the Holy Spirit.

"Before Christ was crucified," writes St John Chrysostom, "there was no reconciliation. And while there was no reconciliation, the Holy Spirit was not sent... The absence of the Holy Spirit was a sign of the anger of God. Now that you see him sent in fullness, do not doubt the reconciliation. But what if people should ask: Where is the Holy Spirit now? We can talk of his presence when the miracles took place, when the dead were raised and the lepers were healed. But how are we to know that he is truly present now? Do not be concerned. I will show you that the Holy Spirit is present among us now as well.

"If the Holy Spirit were not present, we would not be able to say, 'Jesus is the Lord,' for no one can invoke Jesus as the Lord unless it is in the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:3). If the Holy Spirit were not present, we would not be able to pray with confidence. For when we pray, we say, 'Our Father, who art in heaven' (Matt 6:9). If the Holy Spirit were not present, we could not call God our Father. How do we know this? Because the Apostle teaches us: 'And, because you are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba! Father!' (Gal 4:6).

"When we call on God the Father, remember that it is the Spirit who, with his motion in your soul, has given you this prayer. If the Holy Spirit were not present, there would be no word of wisdom or knowledge in the Church; for it is written, 'The word of wisdom is given through the Spirit' (1 Cor 12:8)... If the Holy Spirit were not present, the Church would not exist. But if the Church exists, there is no doubt of the presence of the Holy Spirit."

Beyond all human deficiencies and limitations, the Church is the sign and in a certain sense, though not in the strict sense in which the Church has defined the nature of the seven sacraments of the new law, the universal sacrament of the presence of God in the world. To be a Christian is to be reborn of God and sent to men to announce the news of salvation. If we had a strong and manly faith, a living faith, if we were bold in making Christ known to others, we would see with our own eyes miracles such as those that took place in the times of the Apostles.

Today too blind men, who had lost the ability to look up to heaven and contemplate the wonderful works of God, recover their sight. Lame and crippled men, who were bound by their passions and whose hearts had forgotten love, recover their freedom. Deaf men, who did not want to know God are given back their hearing. Dumb men, whose tongues were bound because they did not want to acknowledge their defeats, begin to talk. And dead men, in whom sin had destroyed life, come to life again. We see once more that "the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword." And just as the first Christians did, we rejoice when we contemplate the power of the Holy Spirit and see the results of his action on the mind and will of his creatures.

Making Christ known

132 I see all the circumstances of life — those of every individual person's existence as well as, in some way, those of the great cross-roads of history — as so many calls that God makes to men, to bring them face to face with truth, and as occasions that are offered to us Christians, so that we may announce, with our deeds and with our words strengthened by grace, the Spirit to whom we belong.

Every generation of Christians needs to redeem, to sanctify its own time. In order to do this, it must understand and share the desires of other men — one's equals — in order to make known to them, with a gift of tongues, how they are to correspond to the action of the Holy Spirit, to that permanent outflow of rich treasures that comes from our Lord's heart. We Christians are called upon to announce, in our own time, to this world to which we belong and in which we live, the message — old and at the same time new — of the Gospel.

It is not true that everyone today — in general — is closed or indifferent to what our Christian faith teaches about man's being and destiny. It is not true that men in our time are turned only toward the things of this earth and have forgotten to look up to heaven. There is no lack of narrow ideologies, it is true, or of persons who maintain them. But in our time we find both great desires and base attitudes, heroism and cowardice, zeal and disenchantment: men who dream of a new world, more just and more human, and others who, discouraged perhaps by the failure of their youthful idealism, hide themselves in the selfishness of seeking only their own security or remaining immersed in their errors.

133 To all these men and women, wherever they may be, in their more exalted moments or in their crises and defeats, we have to bring the solemn and unequivocal message of St Peter in the days that followed Pentecost: Jesus is the cornerstone, the redeemer, the hope of our lives. "For there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

Among the gifts of the Holy Spirit, I would say that there is one that we all need in a special way: the gift of wisdom. It makes us know God and rejoice in his presence, thereby placing us in a perspective from which we can judge accurately the situations and events of this life. If we were consistent with our faith when we looked around us and contemplated the world and its history, we would be unable to avoid feeling in our own hearts the same sentiments that filled the heart of our

Lord: "Seeing the crowds, he was moved with compassion for them, because they were bewildered and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd."

Not that the Christian should neglect to see all that is good in humanity, appreciate its healthy joys or participate in its enthusiasm and ideals. On the contrary, a true Christian will vibrate in unison with all the good he finds in the world. And he will live in the midst of it with a special concern, since he knows, better than anyone, the depth and the richness of the human spirit.

A Christian's faith does not diminish his spirit or limit the noble impulses of his soul — rather it makes them grow with the realization of their true and authentic meaning. We do not exist in order to pursue just any happiness. We have been called to penetrate the intimacy of God's own life, to know and love God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, and to love also — in that same love of the one God in three divine Persons — the angels and all men.

This is the great boldness of the Christian faith: to proclaim the value and dignity of human nature and to affirm that we have been created to achieve the dignity of children of God, through the grace that raises us up to a supernatural level. An incredible boldness it would be, were it not founded on the promise of salvation given us by God the Father, confirmed by the blood of Christ, and reaffirmed and made possible by the constant action of the Holy Spirit.

We must live by faith. We must grow in faith — up to the point when it will be possible to describe any one of us, or any Christian, in the terms used by one of the great Doctors of the eastern Church: "In the same way as transparent bodies, upon receiving a ray of light, become resplendent and shine out, so the souls that are borne and illuminated by the Holy Spirit become themselves spiritual and carry to others the light of grace. From the Holy Spirit comes knowledge of future events, understanding of mysteries, comprehension of hidden truths, giving of gifts, heavenly citizenship, conversation with the angels. From him comes never-ending joy, perseverance in God, likeness to God, and the most sublime state that can be conceived, becoming God-like."

Together with humility, the realization of the greatness of man's dignity — and of the overwhelming fact that, by grace, we are made children of God — forms a single attitude. It is not our own forces that save us and give us life; it is the grace of God. This is a truth that can never be forgotten. If it were, the divinization of our life would be perverted and would become presumption, pride. And this would lead, sooner or later, to a breakdown of spiritual life, when the soul came face to face with its own weakness and wretchedness.

"And shall I dare to say, I am holy?" asks St Augustine. "If I mean by 'holy' that I bring holiness and that I need no one to make me holy, I would be a liar and full of pride. But if by 'holy' I understand one who is made holy, as we read in Leviticus, You will be holy, because I, God, am holy, then the whole body of Christ, down to the last man living at the ends of the earth, may dare to say, together with its head and under him, I am holy."

Love the Third Person of the most Blessed Trinity. Listen in the intimacy of your being to the divine motions of encouragement or reproach you receive from him. Walk through the earth in the light that is poured out in your soul. And the God of hope will fill us with all peace, so that this hope may grow in us more and more each day, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Getting to know the Holy Spirit

134 To live according to the Holy Spirit means to live by faith and hope and charity — to allow God to take possession of our lives and to change our hearts, to make us resemble him more and more. A mature and profound Christian life cannot be improvised, because it is the result of the growth of God's grace in us. In the Acts of the Apostles we find the early Christian community described in a single sentence, brief but full of meaning: "and they continued steadfastly in the teaching of the apostles and in the communion of the breaking of the bread and in prayers."

This is how the early Christians lived, and this is how we too should live: meditating the doctrine of our faith until it becomes a part of us; receiving our Lord in the Eucharist; meeting him in the personal dialogue of our prayer, without trying to hide behind an impersonal conduct, but face to face with him. These means should become the very substance of our attitude. If they are lacking we will have; perhaps, the ability to think in an erudite manner, an activity that is more or less intense, some practices and devotions. But we will not have an authentically Christian way of life, because we are all equally called to sanctity. There are no second-class Christians, obliged to practice only a "simplified version" of the Gospel. We have all received the same baptism, and although there is a great variety of spiritual gifts and human situations, there is only one Spirit who distributes God's gifts, only one faith, only one hope, only one love.

And so we can apply to ourselves the question asked by the Apostle: "Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" And we can understand it as an invitation to deal with God in a more personal and direct manner. For some, unfortunately, the Paraclete is the Great Stranger, the Great Unknown. He is merely a name that is mentioned, but not Someone, not one of the three persons in the one God, with whom we can talk and with whose life we can live.

We have to deal with him simply and trustingly, as we are taught by the Church in its liturgy. Then we will come to know our Lord better, and at the same time, we will realize more fully the great favor that has been granted us when we became Christians. We will see all the greatness and truth of the divinization to which I referred before, which is a sharing in God's own life.

"The Holy Spirit is not an artist who draws the divine substance in us, as though he were alien to it. It is not in this way that he leads us to a resemblance with God — but rather, being God and proceeding from God, he himself marks the hearts of those who receive him as a seal upon wax. In this way, by the communication of his own life and resemblance, he restores nature according to the beauty of the divine model, and returns to man his resemblance with God."

135 Let us see how this truth applies to our daily lives. Let us describe, at least in general, the way of life which will bring us to deal in a familiar manner with the Holy Spirit, and together with him, the Father and the Son.

We can fix our attention on three fundamental points: docility, life of prayer, and union with the cross.

First of all docility, because it is the Holy Spirit who, with his inspirations, gives a supernatural tone to our thoughts, desires and actions. It is he who leads us to receive Christ's teaching and to assimilate it in a profound way. It is he who gives us the light by which we perceive our personal calling and the strength to carry out all that God expects of us. If we are docile to the Holy Spirit, the image of Christ will be formed more and more fully in us, and we will be brought closer every day to God the Father. "For whoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the children of God."

If we let ourselves be guided by this life-giving principle, who is the Holy Spirit in us, our spiritual vitality will grow. We will place ourselves in the hands of our Father God, with the same spontaneity and confidence with which a child abandons himself to his father's care. Our Lord has said: "Unless you become like little children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." This is the old and well-known "way of childhood," which is not sentimentality or lack of human maturity. It is a supernatural maturity, which makes us realize more deeply the wonders of God's love, while leading us to acknowledge our own smallness and identify our will fully with God's will.

136 In the second place a life of prayer, because the giving of one's self, the obedience and meekness of a Christian, are born of love and lead to love. And love leads to a personal relationship, to conversation and friendship. Christian life requires a constant dialogue with God, one in three persons, and it is to this intimacy that the Holy Spirit leads us. "For who among men knows the things of a man save the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so, the things of God no one knows but the Spirit of God." If we have a constant relationship with the Holy Spirit, we will become spiritual ourselves, we will realize that we are Christ's brothers and children of God, and we will not hesitate to call upon our Father at any time.

Let us acquire the habit of conversation with the Holy Spirit, who is the one who will make us holy. Let us trust in him and ask his help and feel his closeness to us. In this way our poor heart will grow; we will have a greater desire to love God and to love all creatures for God's sake. And our lives will reproduce that final vision of the Apocalypse: the Spirit and the Spouse, the Holy Spirit and the Church — and every Christian — calling on Jesus Christ to come and be with us forever.

137 And finally, union with the cross, because in the life of Christ the resurrection and Pentecost were preceded by Calvary. This is the order that must be followed in the life of any Christian. We are, as St Paul tells us, "heirs indeed of God and joint heirs with Christ, provided, however, we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified with him." The Holy Spirit comes to us as a result of the cross — as a

result of our total abandonment to the will of God, of seeking only his glory and renouncing ourselves completely.

Only when a man is faithful to grace and decides to place the cross in the centre of his soul, denying himself for the love of God, detaching himself in a real way from all selfishness and false human security, only then — when a man lives by faith in a real way — will he receive the fullness of the great fire, the great light, the great comfort of the Holy Spirit.

It is then, too, that the soul begins to experience the peace and freedom which Christ has won for us, and which are given to us with the grace of the Holy Spirit. "But the fruit of the Spirit is: charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, long-suffering, mildness, faith, modesty, continence, chastity," and "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

138 In the midst of the limitations that accompany our present life, in which sin is still present in us to some extent at least, we Christians perceive with a particular clearness all the wealth of our divine filiation, when we realize that we are fully free because we are doing our Father's work, when our joy becomes constant because no one can take our hope away. It is then that we can admire at the same time all the great and beautiful things of this earth, can appreciate the richness and goodness of creation, and can love with all the strength and purity for which the human heart was made. It is then that sorrow for sin does not degenerate into a bitter gesture of despair or pride, because sorrow and knowledge of human weakness lead us to identify ourselves again with Christ's work of redemption and feel more deeply our solidarity with other men.

It is then, finally, that we Christians experience in our own life the sure strength of the Holy Spirit, in such a way that our own failures do not drag us down. Rather they are an invitation to begin again, and to continue being faithful witnesses of Christ in all the moments of our life — in spite of our own personal weaknesses, which, in such a case, are normally no more than small failings that hardly perturb the soul. And even if they were grave sins, the sacrament of penance, received with true sorrow, enables us to recover our peace with God and to become again a good witness of his mercy.

Such is the brief summary, which can barely be expressed in human language, of the richness of our faith and of our Christian life, if we let ourselves be guided by the Holy Spirit. That is why I can only end these words in one way: by voicing the prayer, contained in one of the liturgical hymns for the feast of Pentecost, which is like an echo of the unceasing petition of the whole Church: "Come, creating Spirit, to the minds of those who belong to you, and fill the hearts that you have created with grace from above... Grant that through you we may know the Father and become acquainted with the Son; may we believe in you, the Spirit who proceeds from the Father and Son, forever. Amen."

TO JESUS THROUGH MARY

A homily given on 4 May 1957

Mother of Christ, Mother of Christians

Getting to know our Lady

Becoming children in God's love

Mary makes us feel brothers

Being an apostle of apostles

139 If we look at the world, at the People of God, during this month of May, we will see devotion to our Lady taking the form of many old and new customs practiced with great love. It makes me very happy to see that this devotion is always alive, awakening in Christians a supernatural desire to act as "members of God's household."

Seeing how so many Christians express their affection for the Virgin Mary, surely you also feel more a part of the Church, closer to those brothers and sisters of yours. It is like a family reunion. Grown-up children, whom life has separated, come back to their mother for some family anniversary. And even if they have not always got on well together, today things are different; they feel united, sharing the same affection.

Mary continually builds the Church and keeps it together. It is difficult to have devotion to our Lady and not feel closer to the other members of the mystical body and more united to its visible head, the pope. That's why I like to repeat: All with Peter to Jesus through Mary! By seeing ourselves as part of the Church and united to our brothers in the faith, we understand more deeply that we are brothers of all mankind, for the Church has been sent to all the peoples of the earth.

My own experience and yours are proof of the effects of sincere devotion to our Lady. I remember how in 1933 I went to visit a shrine in Spain, the shrine of our Lady of Sonsoles. It wasn't a pilgrimage in the normal sense: nothing noisy or elaborate, just three of us. I respect and love public demonstrations of devotion, but I must admit I prefer to offer Mary the same affection, the same enthusiasm, in private visits or with very few people — a more intimate sort of thing.

During that visit to Sonsoles I was told the origin of the name of the shrine. The statue had been hidden during the wars between Christians and Moslems in Spain, and after a number of years it was found by shepherds. According to the story, when they saw it they exclaimed: "What beautiful eyes; they are suns!" (in Spanish: son soles).

Mother of Christ, Mother of Christians

140 Since 1933, during many visits to shrines of our Lady, I have often reflected and meditated on the wonderful affection that so many Christians have for the Mother of Jesus. And I have always seen it as a response of love, of filial love and thanksgiving to our Lady, a sign of a child's affection. For Mary is closely tied to the greatest sign of God's love — the Word made flesh who took upon himself our sins

and weakness. Faithful to the divine purpose for which she was born, Mary continues to spend herself in the service of men, who are all called to be brothers of her son Jesus. The Mother of God is also truly the mother of men.

Our Lord wanted it to be this way. So that future generations might know it, the Holy Spirit inspired St John to write:

"Now there were standing by the cross of Jesus his mother and his mother's sister, Mary of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus, therefore, saw his mother and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he said to his mother 'Woman, behold your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his home."

John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, brought Mary into his home, into his life. Spiritual writers have seen these words of the Gospel as an invitation to all Christians to bring Mary into their lives. Mary certainly wants us to invoke her, to approach her confidently, to appeal to her as our mother, asking her to "show that you are our mother."

But she is a mother who anticipates our requests. Knowing our needs, she comes quickly to our aid. If we recall that God's mercies come to us through the hands of our Lady, each of us can find many reasons for feeling that Mary is our mother in a very special way.

141 The Gospel passages about our Lady show her as the Mother of Jesus, following her Son step by step, playing a part in his redemptive mission, rejoicing and suffering with him, loving those whom Jesus loves, looking after all those around her with maternal care.

Just think, for example, of the marriage at Cana. Our Lady was a guest at one of those noisy country weddings attended by crowds of people from many different villages. But she was the only one who noticed the wine was running out. Don't these scenes from Christ's life seem familiar to us? The greatness of God lives at the level of ordinary things. It is natural for a woman, a housewife, to notice something was lacking, to look after the little things that make life pleasant. And that is how Mary acted. Notice also that it is John who tells the story of Cana. He is the only evangelist who has recorded this example of our mother's concern for us. St John wants us to remember that Mary was present at the beginning of the public life of our Lord. He alone has appreciated the importance of that fact. Jesus knew to whom he was entrusting his Mother — to a disciple who had learned to understand and love her as his own mother.

Let's turn now to the days between the ascension and Pentecost. As a result of the triumph of Christ's resurrection, the disciples are full of faith; they eagerly await the promised Holy Spirit. They want to stay close to one another, and so we find them "with Mary, the mother of Jesus," praying as a single family.

It was St Luke who related this fact, the evangelist who gave us the longest account of Jesus' childhood. It is as if he wanted us to understand that just as Mary had a

major role in the incarnation of the Word, she was intimately involved in the beginning of the Church, Christ's body.

From the first moment of the Church all Christians who have sought the love of God — that love revealed in Jesus Christ — have encountered our Lady and experienced her motherly care. She can truly be called the Mother of Christians. As St Augustine puts it: "With her charity she cooperates in the birth of faithful to the Church and they are members of a head, of which she is effectively Mother in the flesh."

It is not surprising then that one of the oldest witnesses to this devotion to Mary is confident prayer: "We gather under your protection, holy Mother of God. Do not reject the prayers we say to you in our need, but save us from all dangers, O glorious and blessed Virgin."

Getting to know our Lady

142 In a very natural way we start wanting to speak to the Mother of God, who is also our mother. We want to treat her as someone who is alive. For death has not triumphed over her; she is body and soul in the presence of God the Father, her Son, and the Holy Spirit.

If we want to understand Mary's role in the Christian's life and to feel attracted to her, to be in her company, we don't need to go into the theological theory, even though it is an inexhaustible mystery that she is the Mother of God.

The catholic faith sees Mary as a sign of God's special love. God calls us his friends; his grace acts in us, winning us from sin, enabling us to reflect in some way the features of Christ, even though we are still wretched dirt. We are not stranded people whom God has promised to save. His salvation is already at work in us. In our relationship to God, we are not blind men yearning for light and crying in anguished darkness. We are children who know our Father loves us.

Mary tells us about this warmth and security. That's why her name goes straight to our heart. Our relationship with our own mother may show us how to deal with Mary the Lady of the Sweet Name. We have to love God with the same heart with which we love our parents, our brothers and sisters, the other members of our family, our friends. And we must love Mary with that same heart, too.

How does a normal son or daughter treat his mother? In different ways, of course, but always affectionately and confidently, never coldly. In an intimate way, through small, commonplace customs. And a mother feels hurt if we omit them: a kiss or an embrace when leaving or coming home, a little extra attention, a few warm words.

In our relationship with our mother in heaven, we should act in very much the same way. Many Christians have the custom of wearing the scapular; or they have acquired the habit of greeting those pictures — a glance is enough — which are found in every Christian home and in many public places; or they recall the central events in Christ's life by saying the rosary, never getting tired of repeating its words, just like people in love; or they mark out a day of the week for her —

Saturday, which is today — doing some special little thing for her and thinking particularly about her motherhood.

There are many other Marian devotions, which I needn't mention here. A Christian doesn't need to live them all. (Growing in supernatural life is not a matter of piling one devotion on top of another.) I would say, however, that anyone who doesn't live some of them, who doesn't express his love for Mary in some way, does not possess the fullness of the faith.

Those who think that devotions to our Lady are a thing of the past seem to have lost sight of the deep Christian meaning they contain. They seem to have forgotten the source from which they spring: faith in God the Father's saving will; love for God the Son who really became man and was born of a woman; trust in God the Holy Spirit who sanctifies us with his grace. It is God who has given us Mary, and we have no right to reject her. We should go to her with a son's love and joy.

Becoming children in God's love

143 Let's think about this. It can help us to understand some very important things. The mystery of Mary helps us see that in order to approach God we must become little. As Christ said to his disciples "Believe me, unless you become like little children again, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven."

To become children we must renounce our pride and self-sufficiency, recognizing that we can do nothing by ourselves. We must realize that we need grace, and the help of God our Father to find our way and keep to it. To be little, you have to abandon yourself as children do, believe as children believe, beg as children beg.

And we learn all this through contact with Mary. Devotion to our Lady is not something soft and sentimental. It fills the soul with consolation and joy to precisely the extent that it means a deep act of faith making us go outside ourselves and put our hope in the Lord. "The Lord is my shepherd," says one of the psalms, "how can I lack anything? He gives me a resting-place where there is green pasture, leads me out to the cool water's brink, refreshed and content. As in honor pledged, by sure paths he leads me; dark be the valley about my path, hurt I fear none while he is with me."

Because Mary is our mother, devotion to her teaches us to be authentic sons: to love truly, without limit; to be simple, without the complications which come from selfishly thinking only about ourselves; to be happy, knowing that nothing can destroy our hope. "The beginning of the way, at the end of which you will find yourself completely carried away by love for Jesus, is a trusting love for Mary." I wrote that many years ago, in the introduction to a short book on the rosary, and since then I have often experienced the truth of those words. I am not going to complete that thought here with all sorts of reasons. I invite you to discover it for yourself, showing your love for Mary, opening your heart to her, confiding to her your joys and sorrows, asking her to help you recognize and follow Jesus.

144 If you seek Mary, you will find Jesus. And you will learn a bit more about what is in the heart of a God who humbles himself, discarding all manifestations of his power and majesty to take the form of a servant. Speaking in human terms, we could say that God outdoes himself, because he goes much further than he need in order to save us. The only way to measure what he does is to say that it cannot be measured; it comes from a madness of love that leads him to take on our flesh and bear the weight of our sins.

Can we realize that God loves us and not be overcome with love ourselves? We must let these truths of faith fill our soul until they change our life. God loves us! The Almighty who made heaven and earth!

God is interested even in the smallest events in the lives of his creatures — in your affairs and mine — and he calls each of us by our name. This certainty, which the faith gives, enables us to look at everything in a new light. And everything, while remaining exactly the same becomes different, because it is an expression of God's love. Our life is turned into a continuous prayer, we find ourselves with good humor and a peace which never ends, and everything we do is an act of thanksgiving running through all our day. "My soul magnifies the Lord," Mary sang, "and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior; because he has regarded the lowliness of his handmaid; for, behold, henceforth all generations shall call me blessed; because he who is mighty has done great things for me."

Our prayer can accompany and imitate this prayer of Mary. Like her, we feel the desire to sing, to acclaim the wonders of God, so that all mankind and all creation may share our joy.

Mary makes us feel brothers

145 If we have this filial contact with Mary, we won't be able to think just about ourselves and our problems. Selfish personal problems will find no place in our mind. Mary brings us to Jesus, and Jesus is "the firstborn among many brothers." And so, if we know Jesus, we realize that we can live only by giving ourselves to the service of others. A Christian can't be caught up in personal problems; he must be concerned about the universal Church and the salvation of all souls.

Concern for one's own spiritual improvement is not really a personal thing, for sanctification is completely bound up with apostolate. We must, therefore, develop our interior life and the Christian virtues with our eyes upon the good of the whole Church. We cannot do good and make Christ known, if we're not making a sincere effort to live the teachings of the Gospel.

If we are imbued with this spirit, our conversations with God eventually aid other men, even though they may begin on an apparently personal level. And if we take our Lady's hand, she will make us realize more fully that all men are our brothers — because we are all sons of that God whose daughter, spouse and mother she is.

Our neighbors' problems must be our problems. Christian fraternity should be something very deep in the soul, so that we are indifferent to no one. Mary, who

brought up Jesus and accompanied him through his life and is now beside him in heaven, will help us recognize Jesus as he crosses our path and makes himself present to us in the needs of our fellow men.

146 On our way to visit the shrine of Sonsoles, which mentioned earlier, we passed some wheat fields. The wheat shone as it waved in the breeze, and I remembered a part of the Gospel where Jesus said to his disciples: "Do you not say, There are yet four months and then comes the harvest? Well, I say to you: lift up your eyes and behold that the fields are already white for the harvest." And I realized again that our Lord wanted to put the same yearning into our hearts as he had in his own. And I left the road to pluck some ears of grain to keep as souvenirs.

We have to open our eyes; we have to look around us and recognize how God is calling us through the people at our side. We cannot turn our backs on others, ignoring them, because we are caught up in our own little world. That wasn't how Jesus lived. The Gospel often speaks of his mercy, his ability to feel the sorrow and share the needs of others. He consoled the widow of Naim; he wept at the death of Lazarus; he felt compassion for the crowds that followed him with nothing to eat; he also had pity on sinners, on those who go through life without knowing light or truth. "And when he landed, Jesus saw a large crowd, and had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things."

When we are truly sons of Mary, we understand this attitude of our Lord, and our heart expands and becomes tender. We feel the sufferings, doubts, loneliness and sorrow of all other men, our brothers. And we urgently want to help them and speak to them about God, so that they can treat him as their Father and understand the motherly care which Mary is offering them.

Being an apostle of apostles

147 Filling the world with light, being the salt and light — that was how our Lord described the mission of his disciples. To bring to the ends of the earth the good news of God's love. All of us Christians should devote our life to doing this, in one way or another.

I'll go further than that. We have to yearn not to be alone. We have to encourage others to help in this divine task of bringing joy and peace to men's hearts. As St Gregory the Great says: "Insofar as you progress, attract others to go along with you, desire to have companions on the road to the Lord."

But bear in mind that, as our Lord tells us in a parable, the sower of weeds came "while men slept." We so easily allow ourselves to be carried away by the torpor of selfishness and superficiality, getting wrapped up in thousands of passing experiences, that we avoid coming to grips with the real meaning of the world and life. A bad thing that lethargy, which smothers man's dignity and makes him a slave of sadness!

There is one case that we should be especially sorry about: that of Christians who could do more and don't. Christians who could live all the consequences of their vocation as children of God but refuse to do so through lack of generosity. We are partly to blame, for the grace of faith has not been given us to hide but to share with other men. We cannot forget that the happiness of these people, in this life and in the next, is at stake. The Christian life is a divine wonder with immediate promises of satisfaction and serenity — but on condition that we know how to recognize the gift of God and be generous, not counting the cost.

So we have to awaken the people who have fallen into the dangerous sleep our Lord mentioned. We must remind them that life is not something to play with — it is a divine treasure which must grow. We must also show the way to those who have good will and good desires, but don't know how to put them into practice. Christ urges us. Each one of us has to be not only an apostle, but an apostle of apostles, bringing others along, so that they in turn will encourage others to make Jesus Christ known to everyone.

148 Perhaps someone will ask how we are to bring this knowledge of Christ to others. And I reply: naturally, simply, living as you live in the middle of the world, devoted to your professional work and to the care of your family, sharing the noble interests of men, respecting the rightful freedom of every man.

For over thirty years God has been putting into my heart the desire to help people of every condition and background to understand that ordinary life can be holy and full of God. Our Lord is calling us to sanctify the ordinary tasks of every day, for the perfection of the Christian is to be found precisely there. Let's consider it once more as we contemplate Mary's life.

We can't forget that Mary spent nearly every day of her life just like millions of other women who look after their family, bring up their children and take care of the house. Mary sanctifies the ordinary everyday things — what some people wrongly regard as unimportant and insignificant: everyday work, looking after those closest to you, visits to friends and relatives. What a blessed ordinariness, that can be so full of love of God!

For that's what explains Mary's life — her love. A complete love—so complete that she forgets herself and is happy just to be there where God wants her, fulfilling with care what God wants her to do. That is why even her slightest action is never routine or vain but, rather, full of meaning. Mary, our mother, is for us both an example and a way. We have to try to be like her, in the ordinary circumstances in which God wants us to live.

If we act in this way, we give those around us the example of a simple and normal life that is consistent, even though it has all the limitations and defects that are part and parcel of the human condition. And when they see that we live the same life as they do, they will ask us: Why are you so happy? How do you manage to overcome selfishness and comfort seeking? Who has taught you to understand others, to live well and to spend yourself in the service of others? Then we must disclose to them the divine secret of Christian existence. We must speak to them

about God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, Mary. The time has come for us to use our poor words to communicate the depth of God's love which grace has poured into our souls.

149 In his Gospel St John has recorded a wonderful phrase of our Lady. At the wedding of Cana she turned to the waiters and said: "Do whatever he tells you." That's what it's all about — getting people to face Jesus and ask him: "Lord, what do you want me to do?"

The Christian apostolate — and I'm talking about an ordinary Christian living as just one more man or woman among equals — is a great work of teaching. Through real, personal, loyal friendship, you create in others a hunger for God and you help them to discover new horizons — naturally, simply. With the example of your faith lived to the full, with a loving word that is full of the force of divine truth.

Be daring. Count on the help of Mary, queen of apostles. Without ceasing to be a mother, our Lady is able to get each of her children to face his own responsibilities. Mary always does the immense favor of bringing to the cross, of placing face to face with the example of the Son of God, those who come close to her and contemplate her life. It is in this confrontation that Christian life is decided. And here Mary intercedes for us so that our behavior may lead to a reconciliation of the younger brother — you and me — with the firstborn Son of the Father.

Many conversions, many decisions to give oneself to the service of God have been preceded by an encounter with Mary. Our Lady has encouraged us to look for God, to desire to change, to lead a new life. And so the "Do whatever he tells you" has turned into real self-giving, into a Christian vocation, which from then on enlightens all our personal life.

This conversation in our Lord's presence, in which we have thought about devotion to and affection for his Mother and ours, can really give new vigor to our faith. The month of May is beginning. Our Lord wants us to make good use of this opportunity to increase in his love through dealing with his Mother. Let's try each day to show her, through little things, little attentions, that we, her children, love her, that our holiness and apostolate are becoming something real, that we are making a constant effort to contribute to the salvation which Christ has brought to the world.

Sancta Maria, spes nostra, ancilla Domini, sedes Sapientiae, ora pro nobis! Holy Mary, our hope, handmaid of the Lord, seat of Wisdom, pray for us!

ON THE FEAST OF CORPUS CHRISTI

A homily given on 28 May 1964, the feast of Corpus Christi

The bread of eternal life

A new life

The richness of the Eucharist

Christian optimism

150 Today, on the feast of Corpus Christi, we come together to consider the depths of our Lord's love for us, which has led him to stay with us, hidden under the appearances of the Blessed Sacrament. It almost seems as if we can physically hear him teaching the multitude: "A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they had not much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose they were scorched; and since they had no root they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."

It is a vivid scene. The divine sower is also sowing his seed today. The work of salvation is still going on, and our Lord wants us to share that work. He wants Christians to open to his love all the paths of the earth. He invites us to spread the divine message, by both teaching and example, to the farthest corners of the earth. He asks us, as citizens of both ecclesial and civil society, to be other Christs by fulfilling our duties conscientiously, sanctifying our everyday work and the responsibilities of our particular walk of life.

If we look around, if we take a look at the world, which we love because it is God's handiwork, we will find that the parable holds true. The word of Jesus Christ is fruitful; it stirs many souls to dedication and fidelity. The life and conduct of those who serve God have changed history. Even many of those who do not know our Lord are motivated, perhaps unconsciously, by ideals that derive from Christianity.

We can also see that some of the seed falls on barren ground or among thorns and thistles; some hearts close themselves to the light of faith. Ideals of peace, reconciliation and brotherhood are widely accepted and proclaimed, but all too often the facts belie them. Some people are futilely bent on smothering God's voice. To drown it out they use brute force or a method that is subtler but perhaps more cruel because it drugs the spirit: indifference.

The bread of eternal life

151 When thinking about all this, I should like us to take stock of our mission as Christians. Let's turn our eyes to the holy Eucharist, toward Jesus. He is here with us, he has made us a part of himself: "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it." God has decided to stay in the tabernacle to nourish us, strengthen us, make us divine and give effectiveness to our work and efforts. Jesus is at one and the same time the sower, the seed and the final result of the sowing: the bread of eternal life.

The miracle of the holy Eucharist is being continually renewed and it has all Jesus' personal traits. Perfect God and perfect man, Lord of heaven and earth, he offers himself to us as nourishment in the most natural and ordinary way. Love has been awaiting us for almost two thousand years. That's a long time and yet it's not, for when you are in love time flies.

I remember a lovely poem, one of the songs collected by Alfonso X, the Wise. It's a legend about a simple monk who begged our Lady to let him see heaven, even if only for a moment. Our Lady granted him his wish and the good monk found himself in paradise. When he returned, he could not recognize the monastery — his prayer, which he had thought very short, lasted three centuries. Three centuries are nothing to a person in love. That's how I explain Christ waiting in the Eucharist. It is God waiting for us, God who loves man, who searches us out, who loves us just as we are — limited, selfish, inconstant, but capable of discovering his infinite affection and of giving ourselves fully to him.

Motivated by his own love and by his desire to teach us to love, Jesus came on earth and has stayed with us in the Eucharist. "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end": that's how St John begins his account of what happened on the eve of the Passover when Jesus "took bread and after he had given thanks, broke it, and said, This is my body which is given up for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying: This is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

A new life

152 It is the simple and solemn moment of the establishment of the new alliance. Jesus dissolves the old economy of the law and reveals to us that he himself will be the content of our prayer and life. Just look at the joy that invades today's liturgy: "Let the anthem be clear and strong and full of joy." It is a great Christian celebration that sings about a new era: "The old pasch is by the new replaced; the substance hath the shadow chased and rising day dispels the night."

This is a miracle of love. "This is truly the bread for God's children." Jesus, the first son of the eternal Father, offers us himself as food. And the same Jesus is waiting to receive us in heaven as "his guests, his co-heirs and his fellows," for "those who are nourished by Christ will die the earthly death of time, but they will live eternally because Christ is life everlasting."

Eternal happiness begins now for the Christian who is comforted with the definitive manna of the Eucharist. The old life has gone forever. Let us leave everything behind us so that everything will be new, "our hearts, our words and our actions."

This is the Good News. News, because it speaks to us of a deep love which we never could have dreamed of. Good, because there is nothing better than uniting ourselves to God, the greatest Good of all. It is Good News, because in an inexplicable way it gives us a foretaste of heaven.

153 Jesus hides in the Blessed Sacrament of the altar because he wants us to dare to approach him. He wants to nourish us so we become one single thing with him. When he said, "Apart from me you can do nothing," he was not condemning Christians to ineffectiveness or obliging them to seek him by a difficult and arduous route. On the contrary. He has stayed here with us, he is totally available to us.

When we meet together around the altar to celebrate the holy sacrifice of the Mass, when we contemplate the sacred host in the monstrance or adore it hidden in the tabernacle, our faith should be strengthened; we should reflect on this new life which we are receiving and be moved by God's affection and tenderness.

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and the prayers." That is how the Scriptures describe the life of the early Christians. They were brought together by the faith of the Apostles in perfect unity, to share in the Eucharist and to pray with one mind. Faith, bread, word.

In the Eucharist Jesus gives us a sure pledge of his presence in our souls; of his power, which supports the whole world; of his promises of salvation, which will help the human family to dwell forever in the house in heaven when time comes to an end. There we shall find God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit: the Blessed Trinity, the one and only God. Our whole faith is brought into play when we believe in Jesus, really present under the appearances of bread and wine.

154 I cannot see how anyone could live as a Christian and not feel the need for the constant friendship of Jesus in the word and in the bread, in prayer and in the Eucharist. And I easily understand the ways in which successive generations of faithful have expressed their love for the Eucharist, both with public devotions making profession of the faith and with silent, simple practices in the peace of a church or the intimacy of their hearts.

The important thing is that we should love the Mass and make it the center of our day. If we attend Mass well, surely we are likely to think about our Lord during the rest of the day, wanting to be always in his presence, ready to work as he worked and love as he loved. And so we learn to thank our Lord for his kindness in not limiting his presence to the time of the sacrifice of the altar. He has decided to stay with us in the host, which is reserved in the tabernacle.

For me the tabernacle has always been a Bethany, a quiet and pleasant place where Christ resides. A place where we can tell him about our worries, our sufferings, our desires, our joys, with the same sort of simplicity and naturalness as Martha, Mary and Lazarus. That is why I rejoice when I stumble upon a church in town or in the country: it's another tabernacle, another opportunity for the soul to escape and join in intention our Lord in the Sacrament.

The richness of the Eucharist

155 When our Lord instituted the Eucharist during the last supper, night had already fallen. This indicated, according to St John Chrysostom, that "the times had run their course." The world had fallen into darkness, for the old rites, the old signs of God's infinite mercy to mankind, were going to be brought to fulfillment. The way was opening to a new dawn — the new Passover. The Eucharist was instituted during that night, preparing in advance for the morning of the resurrection.

We too have to prepare for this new dawn. Everything harmful, worn out or useless has to be thrown away — discouragement, suspicion, sadness, cowardice. The holy Eucharist gives the sons of God a divine newness and we must respond “in the newness of your mind,” renewing all our feelings and actions. We have been given a new principle of energy, strong new roots grafted onto our Lord. We must not return to the old leaven, for now we have the bread that lasts forever.

156 On this feast of Corpus Christi in cities and towns throughout the world, Christians accompany our Lord in procession. Hidden in the host he moves through the streets and squares — just as during his earthly life — going to meet those who want to see him, making himself available to those who are not looking for him. And so, once more, he comes among his own people. How are we to respond to this call of his?

The external signs of love should come from the heart and find expression in the testimony of a Christian life. If we have been renewed by receiving our Lord’s body, we should show it. Let us pray that our thoughts be sincere, full of peace, self-giving and service. Let us pray that we be true and clear in what we say — the right thing at the right time — so as to console and help and especially bring God’s light to others. Let us pray that our actions be consistent and effective and right, so that they give off “the good fragrance of Christ,” evoking his way of doing things.

The Corpus Christi procession makes Christ present in towns and cities throughout the world. But his presence cannot be limited to just one day, a noise you hear and then forget. It should remind us that we have to discover our Lord in our ordinary everyday activity. Side by side with this solemn procession, there is the simple, silent procession of the ordinary life of each Christian. He is a man among men, who by good fortune has received the faith and the divine commission to act so that he renews the message of our Lord on earth. We are not without defects; we make mistakes and commit sins. But God is with us and we must make ourselves ready to be used by him, so that he can continue to walk among men.

Let us ask our Lord then to make us souls devoted to the blessed Eucharist, so that our relationship with him brings forth joy and serenity and a desire for justice. In this way we will make it easier for others to recognize Christ; we will put Christ at the centre of all human activities. And Jesus’ promise will be fulfilled: “I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.”

157 Jesus, as we were saying, is the sower, and he goes about his task by means of us Christians. Christ presses the grain in his wounded hands, soaks it in his blood, cleans it, purifies it, and throws it into the furrows, into the world. He plants the seeds one by one so that each Christian in his own setting can bear witness to the fruitfulness of the death and resurrection of the Lord.

If we are in Christ’s hands, we should absorb his saving blood and let ourselves be cast on the wind. We should accept our life as God wants it. And we should be convinced that the seed must be buried and die if it is to be fruitful. Then the shoots start to appear, and the grain. And from the grain, bread is made which is changed by God into the body of Christ. In this way we once more become united

with Jesus, our sower. "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread."

We should always remember that if there is no sowing there is no harvest. That is why we need to sow the word of God generously, to make Christ known to men so that they hunger for him. Corpus Christi — the feast of the bread of life — is a good opportunity to reflect on the hunger which people suffer: hunger for truth, for justice, for unity and for peace. To meet the hunger for peace we have to repeat what St Paul said: Christ is our peace, *pax nostra*. The desire for truth should remind us that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. Those who aspire to unity should be shown Christ who prays that we will all be consummati in unum: "made perfectly one." Hunger for justice should lead us to the original source of harmony among mankind: the fact that we are, and know ourselves to be, sons of the Father, brothers.

Peace, truth, unity, justice. How difficult it often seems to eliminate the barriers to human harmony! And yet we Christians are called to bring about that miracle of brotherhood. We must work so that everyone with God's grace can live in a Christian way, "bearing one another's burdens," keeping the commandment of love which is the bond of perfection and the essence of the law.

158 We cannot deny that a great deal remains to be done. On one occasion, when he was looking perhaps at the swaying wheat fields, Jesus said to his disciples: "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." Now, as then, laborers are needed to bear "the burden of the day and the scorching heat." And if we, the laborers, are not faithful, there will come to pass what was described by the prophet Joel: "The fields are laid waste, the ground mourns; because the grain is destroyed, the wine fails, the oil languishes. Be confounded, o tillers of the soil, wail, o vinedressers, for the wheat and the barley, because the harvest of the field has perished."

There is no harvest if we are not ready for constant, generous work, which can be long and tiring: plowing the land, sowing the seed, weeding the fields, reaping and threshing... The kingdom of God is fashioned in history, in time. Our Lord has entrusted this task to us, and no one can feel exempt. Today, as we adore Christ in the Eucharist, let us remember that the time has not yet come for resting. The day's work must go on.

It is written in the book of Proverbs: "He who tills his land will have plenty of bread." Let us apply this passage to our spiritual life. If we do not work God's land, are not faithful to the divine mission of giving ourselves to others, helping them recognize Christ, we will find it very difficult to understand what the Eucharistic bread is. No one values something that does not cost an effort. In order to value and love the holy Eucharist, we must follow Jesus' way. We must be grain; we must die to ourselves and rise full of life and give an abundant yield: a hundredfold!

Christ's way can be summed up in one word: love. If we are to love, we must have a big heart and share the concerns of those around us. We must be able to forgive and understand; we must sacrifice ourselves, with Jesus Christ, for all souls. If we

love Christ's heart, we shall learn to serve others and we shall defend the truth clearly, lovingly. If we are to love in this way, we need to root out of our individual lives everything which is an obstacle to Christ's life in us: attachment to our own comfort, the temptation to selfishness, the tendency to be the centre of everything. Only by reproducing in ourselves the word of Christ can we transmit it to others. Only by experiencing the death of the grain of wheat can we work in the heart of the world, transforming it from within, making it fruitful.

Christian optimism

159 We may sometimes be tempted to think that this is very nice but an impossible dream. I have spoken to you about renewing your faith and your hope. Let us not get used to the miracles which are happening before our eyes, especially the wonderful fact that our Lord comes down each day into the priest's hands. Jesus wants us to remain wide awake, so that we are convinced of his power and can hear once more his promise: "Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men"; you will be effective and attract souls to God. We should therefore trust our Lord's words: get into the boat, take the oars, hoist the sails and launch out into this sea of the world that Christ gives us as an inheritance. "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch."

The apostolic zeal that Christ has put in our hearts must not be diminished or extinguished by a false humility. Maybe we experience the dead weight of our personal failings, but our Lord takes into account our mistakes. In his merciful gaze he realizes that we are creatures with limitations, weaknesses and imperfections, that we are inclined to sin. But he tells us to fight, to acknowledge our weaknesses, not to be afraid, but to repent and foster a desire to improve.

We must also remember that we are only instruments. "What is Apollo? What is Paul? They are servants who brought the faith to you. Even the different ways in which they brought it were assigned to them by the Lord. I did the planting, Apollo the watering, but God gave the growth." The teaching, the message that we have to communicate, has in its own right an infinite effectiveness that comes not from us, but from Christ. It is God himself who is bent on bringing about salvation, on redeeming the world.

160 We must, then, have faith and not be dispirited. We must not be stopped by any kind of human calculation. To overcome the obstacles we have to throw ourselves into the task so that the very effort we make will open up new paths. Personal holiness, giving oneself to God, is the one cure that overcomes any difficulty.

Being holy means living exactly as our Father in heaven wants us to live. You will say that it is difficult. It is. The ideal is a very high one. And yet it is also easy. It is within our reach. When a person becomes ill, there may be no appropriate medicine. But in supernatural affairs, it is not like that. The medicine is always at hand. It is Jesus Christ, present in the holy Eucharist, and he also gives us his grace in the other sacraments that he established.

Let us say again, in word and in action: "Lord, I trust in you; your ordinary providence, your help each day, is all I need." We do not have to ask God to perform great miracles. Rather, we have to beg him to increase our faith, to enlighten our intellect and strengthen our will. Jesus always stays by our side and is always himself.

Ever since I began to preach, I have warned people against a certain mistaken sense of holiness. Don't be afraid to know your real self. That's right, you are made of clay. Don't be worried. For you and I are sons of God — and that is the right way of being made divine. We are chosen by a divine calling from all eternity: "The Father chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him." We belong especially to God, we are his instruments in spite of our great personal shortcomings. And we will be effective if we do not lose this awareness of our own weakness. Our temptations give us the measure of our own weakness.

If you feel depressed when you experience, perhaps in a very vivid way, your own pettiness, then is the time to abandon yourself completely and obediently into God's hands. There is a story about a beggar meeting Alexander the Great and asking him for alms. Alexander stopped and instructed that the man be given the government of five cities. The beggar, totally confused and taken aback, exclaimed: "I didn't ask for that much." And Alexander replied: "You asked like the man you are: I give like the man I am."

Even in moments when we see our limitations clearly, we can and should look at God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, and realize that we share in God's own life. There is never reason to look back. The Lord is at our side. We have to be faithful and loyal; we have to face up to our obligations and we will find in Jesus the love and the stimulus we need to understand other people's faults and overcome our own. In this way even depression — yours, mine, anyone's — can also be a pillar for the kingdom of Christ.

Let us recognize our infirmity but confess the power of God. The Christian life has to be shot through with optimism, joy and the strong conviction that our Lord wishes to make use of us. If we feel part of the Church, if we see ourselves sustained by the rock of Peter and by the action of the Holy Spirit, we will decide to fulfill the little duty of every moment. We will sow a little each day, and the granaries will overflow.

161 We must finish these minutes of prayer. Savoring in the intimacy of your soul the infinite goodness of God, realize that Christ is going to make himself really present in the host, with his body, his blood, his soul and his divinity. Adore him reverently, devoutly; renew in his presence the sincere offerings of your love. Don't be afraid to tell him that you love him. Thank him for giving you this daily proof of his tender mercy, and encourage yourself to go to communion in a spirit of trust. I am awed by this mystery of Love. Here is the Lord seeking to use my heart as a throne, committed never to leave me, provided I don't run away.

Comforted by Christ's presence and nourished by his body, we will be faithful during our life on earth and then we will be victors with Jesus and his Mother in heaven. "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?... Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

FINDING PEACE IN THE HEART OF CHRIST

A homily given on 17 June 1966, the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

True devotion to the Sacred Heart

Bringing others to Christ's love

The peace Christ brings

162 God our Father has seen fit to grant us, in the heart of his Son, "infinite treasures of love," mercy and affection. If we want to find evidence that God loves us — that he not only listens to our prayers but anticipates them — we need only follow the same line of thought as St Paul: "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things in him?"

Grace renews a man from within and converts a sinner and rebel into a good and faithful servant. The source of all grace is God's love for us, and he has revealed this not just in words but also in deeds. It was divine love which led the second Person of the holy Trinity, the Word, the Son of God the Father, to take on our flesh, our human condition, everything except sin. And the Word, the Word of God, is the Word from which Love proceeds.

Love is revealed to us in the incarnation, the redemptive journey that Jesus Christ made on our earth, culminating in the supreme sacrifice of the cross. And on the cross it showed itself through a new sign: "One of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water." This water and blood of Jesus speak to us of a self-sacrifice brought to the last extreme: "It is finished" — everything is achieved, for the sake of love.

Today when we consider once more the central mysteries of our faith, we are surprised to see how very human gestures are used to express the deepest truths: the love of God the Father who gives up his Son, and the Son's love which calmly leads him to Calvary. God does not approach us in power and authority. No, he "takes the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of man." Jesus is never distant or aloof, although sometimes in his preaching he seems very sad, because he is hurt by the evil men do. However, if we watch him closely, we will note immediately that his anger comes from love. It is a further invitation for us to leave infidelity and sin behind. "Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, says the Lord God, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?" These words explain Christ's whole life. They allow us to understand why he has come to us with a heart made of flesh, a heart like ours. This is a convincing proof of his love and a constant witness to the mystery of divine charity.

163 I must confide to you something which makes me very sorry and spurs me on to action: the thought of all those people who do not yet know Christ, who do not even suspect the great good fortune which awaits us in heaven. They live like blind men looking for a joy whose real name they don't know, lost on roads that take them away from true happiness. How well one understands what Paul the Apostle must have felt that night in Troas when he had a vision in a dream: "A man of Macedonia was standing beseeching him and saying Come over to Macedonia and help us. And when he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on to Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them."

Don't you also feel that God is calling us? Through the things that happen around us he is urging us to proclaim the good news of the coming of Jesus. Yet sometimes we Christians turn our calling into something very paltry. We become superficial and waste our time in dissension and jealousy. Or, worse still, some people are artificially scandalized by the way others choose to live certain aspects of the faith. Instead of doing all they can to help others, they set out to destroy and criticise. It is true that sometimes you find serious shortcomings in Christians' lives. But the important thing is not ourselves and our shortcomings. The only thing that matters is Jesus. It is Christ we must talk about, not ourselves.

These reflections have been provoked by suggestions that there is a crisis in devotion to the sacred heart of Jesus. But there is no crisis. True devotion to the sacred heart has always been and is still truly alive, full of human and supernatural meaning. It has led and still leads to conversion, self-giving, fulfillment of God's will and a loving understanding of the mysteries of the redemption.

However, we must distinguish this genuine devotion from displays of useless sentimentality, a veneer of piety devoid of doctrine. No less than you, I dislike sugary statues, figures of the Sacred Heart that are incapable of inspiring any trace of devotion in people who have the common sense and supernatural outlook of a Christian. But it is bad logic to turn these particular abuses — which are disappearing anyway — into some sort of doctrinal, theological problem.

If a crisis does exist, it is a crisis in men's hearts. Men are shortsighted, selfish and narrow-minded. They fail to appreciate the great depth of Christ's love for us. Ever since the holy Church instituted today's feast, the liturgy has offered us the nourishment of true piety by including among the readings a text from St Paul. In it he proposes to us a whole program of contemplative life — knowledge and love, prayer and life — beginning with this devotion to the heart of Jesus. God himself invites us in the Apostle's words to follow this way: "May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith; may you, being rooted and grounded in love, have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."

The fullness of God is revealed and given to us in Christ, in the love of Christ, in Christ's heart. For it is the heart of him in whom "the whole fullness of deity dwells

bodily." Were one to lose sight of this great plan of God — the overflow of love in the world through the incarnation, the redemption and Pentecost — he could not understand the refinement with which our Lord deals with us.

True devotion to the Sacred Heart

164 Let us realize all the richness hidden in the words "the sacred heart of Jesus." When we speak of a person's heart, we refer not just to his sentiments, but to the whole person in his loving dealings with others. In order to help us understand divine things, Scripture uses the expression "heart" in its full human meaning, as the summary and source, expression and ultimate basis, of one's thoughts, words and actions. A man is worth what his heart is worth...

To the heart belongs joy: "let my heart rejoice in your saving help"; repentance: "my heart is like wax, it is melted within my breast"; praise of God: "my heart overflows with a goodly theme"; the decision to listen to the Lord: "my heart is ready, Lord"; loving vigilance: "I slept, but my heart was awake"; and also doubt and fear: "let not your hearts be troubled, believe in me."

The heart not only feels, it knows and understands. God's law is received in the heart and remains written there. Scripture also adds: "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." Our Lord reproaches the scribes: "Why do you think evil in your hearts?" And, summing up all the sins man might commit, he says: "Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander and blasphemy."

When Holy Scripture refers to the heart, it does not refer to some fleeting sentiment of joy or tears. By heart it means the personality which directs its whole being, soul and body, to what it considers its good, as Jesus himself indicated: "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

So when we talk about the heart of Jesus, we stress the certainty of God's love and the truth of his commitment to us. When we recommend devotion to the sacred heart, we are recommending that we should give our whole self to Jesus, to the whole Jesus — our soul, our feelings and thoughts, our words and actions, our joys.

That is what true devotion to the heart of Jesus means. It is knowing God and ourselves. It is looking at Jesus and turning to him, letting him encourage and teach and guide us. The greatest superficiality that can beset this devotion would be a lack of humanity, a failure to understand the reality of an incarnate God.

165 Jesus on the cross, with his heart overflowing with love for men, is such an eloquent commentary on the value of people and things that words only get in the way. Men, their happiness and their life, are so important that the very Son of God gave himself to redeem and cleanse and raise them up. "Who will not love this heart so wounded?" a contemplative asks in this connection. "Who will not return love for love? Who will not embrace a heart so pure? We, who are made of flesh, will repay love with love. We will embrace our wounded one, whose hands and feet

ungodly men have nailed; we will cling to his side and to his heart. Let us pray that we be worthy of linking our heart with his love and of wounding it with a lance, for it is still hard and impenitent."

These are thoughts, affections and conversations which souls in love with Jesus have offered him from the beginning. But if we are to understand this language, if we are really to know the heart of man, Christ's heart and the love of God, we need both faith and humility. We need the faith and humility that prompted St Augustine to write: "You have made us for you, O Lord, and restless will our heart be until it rests in you."

If a man is not humble, he will try to make God his own, but not in the divine way which Christ made possible when he said: "Take, eat; this is my body." The proud man tries to confine the grandeur of God within human limits. Then reason, the cold, blind reason that is so different from the mind imbued with faith and even from the well-directed mind of someone capable of enjoying and loving things, becomes irrational in a person's attempt to reduce everything to his cramped human experience. Thus is superhuman truth impoverished, and man's heart develops a crust that makes it insensitive to the action of the Holy Spirit. Our limited intelligence would be completely at a loss then if the merciful power of God did not break down the barriers of our wretchedness. "A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh." Only with God's help will the soul see again and be filled with joy on hearing the promises of sacred Scripture.

"I know the plans I have for you, plans for peace and not affliction," was God's promise through Jeremiah. The liturgy applies these words to Jesus, for in him we are clearly shown that God does love us in this way. He did not come to condemn us, to accuse us of meanness and smallness. He came to save us, pardon us, excuse us, bring us peace and joy. If only we realize the wonderful way in which God deals with his children, our hearts must change. We will see opening up before us an absolutely new panorama, full of relief, depth and light.

Bringing others to Christ's love

166 But note that God does not say: "In exchange for your own heart, I will give you a will of pure spirit." No, he gives us a heart, a human heart, like Christ's. I don't have one heart for loving God and another for loving people. I love Christ and the Father and the Holy Spirit and our Lady with the same heart with which I love my parents and my friends. I shall never tire of repeating this. We must be very human, for otherwise we cannot be divine.

Human love, the love we experience on earth when it is really genuine, helps us to savour divine love. That is how we grasp the love by which we rejoice in God and which we will share in heaven when the Lord is "everything to everyone." If we begin to understand God's love, we will feel impelled to become increasingly more compassionate, more generous, more dedicated.

We must give what we receive, we must teach what we learn. Very simply, without any kind of conceit, we must help others to share in the knowledge of God's love. As you go about your work, doing your job in society, each of you can and should turn your occupation into a real service. Your work should be done well, mindful of others' needs, taking advantage of all advances in technology and culture. Such work fulfils a very important function and is useful to the whole of humanity, if it is motivated by generosity, not selfishness, and directed to the welfare of all, not our own advantage, if it is filled with the Christian sense of life.

Through your work, through the whole network of human relations, you ought to show the charity of Christ and its concrete expression in friendship, understanding, human affection and peace. Just as Christ "went about doing good" throughout Palestine, so must you also spread peace in your family circle, in civil society, on the job, and in your cultural and leisure activities. This will be the best proof that the kingdom of God has reached your heart. As St John wrote: "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren."

But no one can live out this love unless he is taught in the school of the heart of Jesus. Only if we watch and contemplate the heart of Jesus will we ensure that our heart is freed from hatred and indifference. Only in this way will we know how to react as Christians to the pain and sufferings of others.

Do you remember the scene St Luke depicts when Jesus is approaching Naim? Jesus crosses paths again with a crowd of people. He could have passed by or waited until they called him. But he didn't. He took the initiative, because he was moved by a widow's sorrow. She had just lost all she had, her son.

The evangelist explains that Jesus was moved. Perhaps he even showed signs of it, as when Lazarus died. Jesus Christ was not, and is not, insensitive to the suffering that stems from love. He is pained at seeing children separated from their parents. He overcomes death so as to give life, to reunite those who love one another. But at the same time, he requires that we first admit the pre-eminence of divine love, which alone can inspire genuine Christian living.

Christ knows he is surrounded by a crowd that will be awed by the miracle and that will tell the story all over the countryside. But he does not act artificially, merely to make an effect. Quite simply he is touched by that woman's suffering and cannot keep from consoling her. So he goes up to her and says, "Do not weep." It is like saying: "I don't want to see you crying; I have come on earth to bring joy and peace." And then comes the miracle, the sign of the power of Christ who is God. But first came his compassion, an evident sign of the tenderness of the heart of Christ the man.

167 If we don't learn from Jesus, we will never love. If, like some people, we were to think that to keep a clean heart, a heart worthy of God, means "not mixing it up, not contaminating it" with human affection, we would become insensitive to other people's pain and sorrow. We would be capable only of an "official charity," something dry and soulless. But ours would not be the true charity of Jesus Christ, which involves affection and human warmth. In saying this, I am not supporting

the mistaken theories — pitiful excuses — that misdirect hearts away from God and lead them into occasions of sin and perdition.

On today's feast we should ask our Lord to give us a good heart, capable of having compassion for other people's pain. Only with such a heart can we realize that the true balm for the suffering and anguish in this world is love, charity. All other consolations hardly even have a temporary effect and leave behind them bitterness and despair.

If we want to help others, we must love them — I insist — with a love clothed in understanding, dedication, affection and voluntary humility. Then we will understand why our Lord summed up the whole law in that double commandment, which is really just one: love of God, and love of one's neighbor, with all our heart.

Maybe you are thinking that sometimes Christians — not just other people, you and I — forget the most elementary applications of this duty. Perhaps you bring to mind all the injustices which cry for redress, all the abuses that go uncorrected, the discrimination passed on from one generation to the next with no attempt to find permanent solutions.

I cannot propose to you a particular way to solve problems of this kind, there is no reason why I should. But, as a priest of Jesus Christ, it is my duty to remind you of what sacred Scripture says. Meditate on the scene of the judgment which Jesus himself has described: "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food; I was thirsty and you gave me no drink; naked and you did not clothe me; sick and in prison and you did not visit me."

A man or a society that does not react to suffering and injustice and makes no effort to alleviate them is still distant from the love of Christ's heart. While Christians enjoy the fullest freedom in finding and applying various solutions to these problems, they should be united in having one and the same desire to serve mankind. Otherwise their Christianity will not be the word and life of Jesus; it will be a fraud, a deception of God and man.

The peace Christ brings

168 But I have still a further consideration to put before you. We have to fight vigorously to do good, precisely because it is difficult for us men to resolve seriously to be just, and there is a long way to go before human relations are inspired by love and not hatred or indifference. We should also be aware that even if we achieve a reasonable distribution of wealth and a harmonious organization of society, there will still be the suffering of illness, of misunderstanding, of loneliness, of the death of loved ones, of the experience of our own limitations.

Faced with the weight of all this, a Christian can find only one genuine answer, a definitive answer: Christ on the cross, a God who suffers and dies, a God who gives us his heart opened by a lance for the love of us all. Our Lord abominates injustice and condemns those who commit it. But he respects the freedom of each

individual. He permits injustice to happen because, as a result of original sin, it is part and parcel of the human condition. Yet his heart is full of love for men. Our suffering, our sadness, our anguish, our hunger and thirst for justice... he took all these tortures on himself by means of the cross.

Christian teaching on pain is not a series of facile considerations. It is, in the first place, a call to accept the suffering inseparable from all human life. I cannot hide from you the fact that there has often been pain in my life and more than once I have wanted to cry. I tell you this joyfully, because I have always preached and tried to live the truth that Christ, who is love, is to be found on the cross. At other times, I have felt a great revulsion to injustice and evil, and I have fought against the frustration of not being able to do anything — despite my desire and my effort — to remedy those unjust situations.

When I speak to you about suffering, I am not just talking theory. Nor do I limit myself to other people's experience when I tell you that the remedy is to look at Christ, if when faced with suffering, you at some time feel that your soul is wavering. The scene of Calvary proclaims to everyone that afflictions have to be sanctified, that we are to live united to the cross.

If we bear our difficulties as Christians, they are turned into reparation and atonement. They give us a share in Jesus' destiny and in his life. Out of love for men he volunteered to experience the whole gamut of pain and torment. He was born, lived and died poor. He was attacked, insulted, defamed, slandered and unjustly condemned. He knew treachery and abandonment by his disciples. He experienced isolation and the bitterness of punishment and death. And now the same Christ is suffering in his members, in all of humanity spread throughout the earth, whose head and firstborn and redeemer he is.

Suffering is part of God's plans. This is the truth, however difficult it may be for us to understand it. It was difficult for Jesus Christ the man to undergo his passion: "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but yours be done." In this tension of pleading and acceptance of the Father's will, Jesus goes calmly to his death, pardoning those who crucify him.

This supernatural acceptance of suffering was, precisely, the greatest of all conquests. By dying on the cross Jesus overcame death. God brings life from death. The attitude of a child of God is not one of resignation to a possibly tragic fate; it is the sense of achievement of someone who has a foretaste of victory. In the name of this victorious love of Christ, we Christians should go out into the world to be sowers of peace and joy through everything we say and do. We have to fight — a fight of peace — against evil, against injustice, against sin. Thus do we serve notice that the present condition of mankind is not definitive. Only the love of God, shown in the heart of Christ, will attain the glorious spiritual triumph of men.

169 Previously we referred to what happened at Naim. We could recall other examples, for the Gospel is full of such scenes. Each incident reveals not only the sincere gesture of a man who suffers when his friends suffer, but above all the

immense charity of our Lord. Jesus' heart is the heart of God made flesh, the heart of Emmanuel, God with us.

"The Church, united to Christ, is born of a wounded heart." From this heart, opened wide, life is transmitted to us. Here we must, even if only in passing, recall the sacraments through which God works in us and makes us sharers in the redeeming strength of Christ. How can we not recall with particular gratitude the Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist, the holy sacrifice of Calvary and its constant bloodless renewal in our Mass? Jesus actually gives himself to us as food. Because he comes to us, everything is changed. Our being acquires new strength — the assistance of the Holy Spirit — that fills our soul, affects all our actions, our way of thinking and feeling. Christ's heart means peace for Christians.

The source of the self-giving which our Lord asks of us is not merely our own desire or effort, often feeble and inconstant. This life is supported primarily by the graces won for us by the loving heart of God made man. That is why we can and should keep going in our interior life as children of our Father God who is in heaven, without giving way to discouragement or depression. I like to ask people to consider how a Christian, in his ordinary daily life, in the simplest details, can put faith, hope and charity into practice. There lies the essence of the conduct of a man who relies on divine help. And in the practice of these theological virtues he will find joy, strength and peace.

These are the fruits of the peace of Christ, the peace brought to us by his sacred heart. Let us say it once again: the love of Jesus for men is an unfathomable aspect of the divine mystery, of the love of the Son for the Father and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, the bond of love between the Father and the Son, encounters in the Word a human heart.

It is impossible to speak of these central facts of our faith without feeling the limitations of our minds and the greatness of revelation. Yet even if we cannot fully grasp these truths that overawe our reason, we believe them humbly and firmly, backed by the testimony of Christ, we know they are true. We know that Love in the depths of the Trinity is poured out on men by the love in the heart of Christ.

170 Living in Christ's heart, being closely united to him means, therefore, that we become a dwelling place of God. "He who loves me, my Father will also love," our Lord told us. And Christ and the Father in the Holy Spirit come to the soul and make their home there.

Even if we only give a little thought to these basic ideas, our whole attitude changes. We become hungry for God, and we make our own the words of the psalm: "My God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where no water is." And Jesus, who has encouraged this feeling of emptiness in us, comes out to meet us and says: "If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink." He offers us his heart, so that we can find there both rest and strength. If we accept his invitation, we will see that his words are true. And our hunger and thirst will increase to the point that we desire God really to inhabit our soul and never to take his light and warmth away from us.

"I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled." We have approached the fire of the love of God. Let us allow that fire to burn our lives. Let us feed the desire to spread that divine fire throughout the world, making it known to all the people around us. They too can experience the peace of Christ and find happiness there. A Christian who lives united to Christ's heart can have no goals but these: peace in society, peace in the Church, peace in his soul, the peace of God which will reach its climax when his kingdom comes.

Mary, you are queen of peace, because you had faith and believed that what the angel announced would in fact happen. Help us to grow in the faith, to have a firm hope and a deeper love. For that is what your Son wants of us this day, that is why he shows us his sacred heart.

THE BLESSED VIRGIN, CAUSE OF OUR JOY

A homily given on 15 August 1961, the feast of the Assumption

A mystery of love

The mystery of silent sacrifice

Imitating Mary

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Teacher of apostles

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Christian joy

171 "Mary has been taken up to heaven by God in body and soul, and the angels rejoice." Joy overtakes both angels and men. Why is it that we feel today this intimate delight, with our heart brimming over, with our soul full of peace? Because we are celebrating the glorification of our mother, and it is only natural that we her children rejoice in a special way upon seeing how the most Blessed Trinity honors her.

It was on Calvary that Christ, her most blessed Son and our brother, gave her to us as our mother, when he said to St John: "Behold your mother." And we received her, along with the beloved disciple, in that moment of supreme grief. The blessed Virgin embraced us in her suffering, as the ancient prophecy was fulfilled: "And a sword shall pierce your own soul." We are all her children, she is the Mother of all mankind. And now, the whole human race commemorates her ineffable assumption. Mary is welcomed to heaven: the Daughter of God the Father, Mother of God the Son, Spouse of God the Holy Spirit. Greater than she no one but God.

A mystery of love

We face here a mystery of love. Human reason barely begins to comprehend. Only faith can shed some light on how a creature can be raised to such great heights,

becoming a loving target for the delights of the Trinity. We know this is a divine secret. Yet because our Mother is involved, we feel we can understand it more — if we are entitled to speak this way — than other truths of our faith.

How would we have acted, if we could have chosen our own mother? I'm sure we would have chosen the one we have, adorning her with every possible grace. That is what Christ did. Being all-powerful, all wise, Love itself, his power carried out his will.

See how Christians discovered long ago this train of thought. St John Damascene writes: "It was fitting that she who in childbirth preserved intact her virginity should preserve without corruption her body after the conclusion of her earthly life. It was fitting that she who bore in her womb the creator become a babe should dwell in the divine mansion. It was fitting that the spouse of God be taken to the heavenly home. It was fitting that she who witnessed her Son on the cross, suffering in her heart then the pain she was spared in childbirth, should contemplate him seated at the right hand of the Father. It was fitting that the Mother of God come to possess what belongs to her Son and that she be honored as Mother and Servant of God by all creatures."

Theologians have frequently come up with similar reasons to explain in some way the meaning of the abundant graces showered upon Mary and culminating in her assumption to heaven. They put it this way: "It was fitting; God could do so; therefore he did." This is the clearest reason why our Lord granted his Mother, from the very moment of her immaculate conception, all possible privileges. She was free from the power of Satan. She is beautiful, spotless and pure in soul and body.

The mystery of silent sacrifice

172 But don't forget: if God exalted his Mother, it is equally true that he did not spare her pain, exhaustion in her work or trials of her faith. A village woman one day broke into praise for Jesus exclaiming: "Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nourished you." Jesus said in reply: "Rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it." It was a compliment to his Mother on her fiat, her "be it done." She lived it sincerely, unstintingly, fulfilling its every consequence, but never amid fanfare, rather in the hidden and silent sacrifice of each day.

As we meditate on these truths, we come to understand better the logic of God. We come to realize that the Supernatural value of our life does not depend on accomplishing great undertakings suggested to us by our overactive imagination. Rather it is to be found in the faithful acceptance of God's will, in welcoming generously the opportunities for small, daily sacrifice.

To become God-like, to be divinized, we must begin by being very human, accepting from God our condition as ordinary men and sanctifying its apparent worthlessness. Thus did Mary live. She who is full of grace, the object of God's pleasure, exalted above all the angels and the saints, lived an ordinary life.

Mary is as much a creature as we are, with a heart like ours, made for joy and mirth as well as suffering and tears. Before Gabriel communicates to her God's plan, our Lady does not know she has been chosen from all eternity to be the Mother of the Messiah. She sees herself a humble creature. That is why she can acknowledge, with full humility, that "he who is mighty has done great things" in her.

The purity, humility and generosity of Mary are in sharp contrast to our wretchedness and selfishness. To the extent that we realize this, we should feel moved to imitate her. We, too, are creatures of God, and if we strive to imitate her fidelity, God will surely do great things in us. Our little worth is no obstacle, because God chooses what is of little value so that the power of his love be more manifest.

Imitating Mary

173 Our mother is a model of correspondence to grace. If we contemplate her life, our Lord will give us the light we need to divinize our everyday existence. Throughout the year when we celebrate feasts dedicated to Mary and frequently on other days, we Christians can think of the Virgin. If we take advantage of these moments, trying to imagine how she would conduct herself in our circumstances, we will make steady progress. And in the end we will resemble her, as children come to look like their mother.

First, let us imitate her love. Charity cannot be content with just nice feelings; it must find its way into our conversations and, above all, into our deeds. The Virgin did not merely pronounce her fiat; in every moment she fulfilled that firm and irrevocable decision. So should we. When God's love gets through to us and we come to know what he desires, we ought to commit ourselves to be faithful, loyal — and then be so in fact. Because "not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven."

We must imitate her natural and supernatural refinement. She is a privileged creature in the history of salvation, for in Mary "the Word became flesh and dwelled among us." But she is a reserved, quiet witness. She never wished to be praised, for she never sought her own glory. Mary is present at the mysteries surrounding the infancy of her Son, but these are "normal" mysteries, so to speak. When the great miracles take place and the crowds acclaim them in amazement, she is nowhere to be found. In Jerusalem when Christ, riding a little donkey, is proclaimed king, we don't catch a glimpse of Mary. But after all have fled, she reappears next to the cross. This way of acting bespeaks personal greatness and depth, the sanctity of her soul.

Following her example of obedience to God, we can learn to serve delicately without being slavish. In Mary we don't find the slightest trace of the attitude of the foolish virgins, who obey, but thoughtlessly. Our Lady listens attentively to what God wants, ponders what she doesn't fully understand and asks about what she doesn't know. Then she gives herself completely to doing the divine will: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to your word." Isn't that

marvelous? The blessed Virgin, our teacher in all we do, shows us here that obedience to God is not servile, does not bypass our conscience. We should be inwardly moved to discover the "freedom of the children of God."

The school of prayer

174 The Lord will grant you the ability to discover many other aspects of the faithful response to grace of the blessed Virgin. And to know these facets of her life is to want to imitate them: her purity, her humility, her fortitude, her generosity, her fidelity... But now I want to speak to you of an aspect that in a way encompasses all the others because it is a condition for spiritual growth. I'm speaking of her life of prayer.

To take advantage of the grace that our mother offers us today and to second at any time the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, the shepherd of our souls, we ought to be seriously committed to dealing with God. We cannot take refuge in the anonymous crowd. If interior life doesn't involve personal encounter with God, it doesn't exist — it's as simple as that. There are few things more at odds with Christianity than superficiality. To settle down to routine in our Christian life is to dismiss the possibility of becoming a contemplative soul. God seeks us out, one by one. And we ought to answer him, one by one: "Here I am, Lord, because you have called me."

We all know that prayer is to talk with God. But someone may ask, "What should I talk about?" What else could you talk about but his interests and the things that fill your day? About the birth of Jesus, his years among us, his hidden life, his preaching, his miracles, his redemptive passion and death, his resurrection. And in the presence of the Triune God, invoking Mary as our mediatrix and beseeching St Joseph, our father and lord, to be our advocate, we will speak of our everyday work, of our family, of our friendships, of our big plans and little shortcomings.

The theme of my prayer is the theme of my life. That's the way I speak to God. As I consider my situation, there comes to mind a specific and firm resolution to change, to improve, to be more docile to the love of God. It should be a sincere and concrete resolution. And we cannot forget to ask the Holy Spirit, with as much urgency as confidence, not to abandon us, because "you, Lord, are my strength."

We are ordinary Christians. We work at the most varied professions. All our activity takes place amid everyday circumstances. Everything follows a customary rhythm in our lives. The days seem the same, even monotonous. But don't forget that our condition, which is apparently so common, has a divine value. God is interested in everything we do, because Christ wishes to become incarnate in our things, to vivify from within even our most insignificant actions.

This thought is a clear, objective, supernatural reality. It is not a pious consideration to comfort those of us who will never get our names inscribed in the annals of history. Christ is interested in the work we do — whether once or thousands of times — in the office, in the factory, in the shop, in the classroom, in the fields, in the exercise of any manual or intellectual occupation. He is likewise

interested in the hidden sacrifices we make to keep our bad humor or temper to ourselves.

Review in your prayer these thoughts. Take occasion of them to tell Jesus that you adore him. And thus you have a formula to become contemplatives in the middle of the world, amid the noises of the street, at all times and in all places. This is the first lesson we should learn in the school of intimacy with Christ. And in this school, Mary is the best teacher, because the Virgin always kept this attitude of faith, of supernatural vision, regardless of what happened around her: "And his mother kept all these words in her heart."

Let us ask the blessed Virgin to make us contemplatives, to teach us to recognize the constant calls from God at the door of our heart. Let us ask her now: Our mother, you brought to earth Jesus, who reveals the love of our Father God. Help us to recognize him in the midst of the cares of each day. Stir up our mind and will so that we may listen to the voice of God, to the calls of grace.

Teacher of apostles

175 But let's not think only of ourselves. Expand your heart until it takes in all mankind. Above all, think of those near you — relatives, friends, colleagues — and see how you can get them to appreciate a deeper friendship with our Lord. If they are upright and noble, capable of being habitually close to God, commend them specifically to our Lady. And ask also for all those souls you don't know, because we have embarked together on a single voyage.

Be loyal, generous. We form part of a single body, the mystical body of Christ, the holy Church, to which are called those who seek the whole truth. Consequently, we are strictly obliged to manifest to others the quality and depth of the love of Christ. A Christian cannot be selfish. If he were, he would betray his vocation. Far from Christ are those content with keeping their soul in peace — and a false peace at that — while ignoring the good of others.

If we have accepted the authentic meaning of human life, which is revealed to us in faith, we cannot remain peacefully on the sidelines. If in a practical and concrete way we aren't drawing others to God, we can't be at all satisfied with our behavior.

There is a real obstacle to apostolate. It takes the form of false respect, the fear of touching on spiritual subjects, lest the conversation prove upsetting to certain people. It is a reluctance to take the risk of hurting feelings. How often is this reasoning the mask of selfishness. It's not a question of hurting, but of helping. Although we might be personally deficient, the grace of God converts us into useful instruments for aiding others. Regardless of our shortcomings, we are called to share with others the good news that "God wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of truth."

And what right do I have to involve myself in the lives of others? Because they need it. Without asking our permission, Christ has entered our lives. He did the same with the first disciples: "Walking along the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his

brother Andrew casting their nets into the water, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them: Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Each one of us retains the freedom, the false freedom, to say no to God, like the rich young man mentioned by St Luke. But in obedience to Christ's words, "Go and teach," we have the right and duty to speak about God, of this great human theme, because the desire for God comes from the deepest recesses of the heart of man.

Holy Mary, "Queen of Apostles," queen of all those who desire to make the love of your Son known, you understand our miseries so well. Ask Jesus' forgiveness for our shabby lives — for what could have been fire and has been ashes, for the lights that have gone out, for the salt that has turned insipid. Mother of God, you are omnipotent in your petition. Obtain for us, along with forgiveness, the strength to live truly a life of faith and love, so we can share our faith in Christ with others.

The only prescription: personal sanctity

176 The best remedy against losing apostolic daring, which comes from effective hunger to serve all men, is none other than the fullness of faith, hope and love. In a word: sanctity. I can find no other prescription than personal sanctity.

Today, in union with the whole Church, we celebrate the triumph of the Mother, Daughter and Spouse of God. And just as we rejoiced at the resurrection of our Lord three days after his death, we are now happy that Mary, after accompanying Jesus from Bethlehem to the cross, is next to her Son in body and soul, glorious forever.

Behold the mystery of the divine economy. Our Lady, a full participant in the work of our salvation, follows in the footsteps of her Son: the poverty of Bethlehem, the everyday work of a hidden life in Nazareth, the manifestation of his divinity in Cana of Galilee, the tortures of his passion, the divine sacrifice on the cross, the eternal blessedness of paradise.

All of this affects us directly, because this supernatural itinerary is the way we are to follow. Mary shows us that we can walk this path with confidence. She has preceded us on the way of imitating Christ, her glorification is the firm hope of our own salvation. For these reasons we call her "our hope, cause of our joy."

We can never lose hope of becoming holy, of accepting the invitations of God, of persevering until the very end. God, who has begun in us the work of our sanctification, will bring it to completion. Because if the Lord "is with us, who can be against us? After having not spared his very own Son, but rather turned him over to death for us, after having thus given us his Son, can he fail to give us every good thing?"

On this feast, everything points to joy. The firm hope of our personal sanctification is a gift from God, but man cannot remain passive. Remember the words of Christ: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his daily cross and follow me." Do you see? The daily cross. No day without a cross; not a single day in which we are not to carry the cross of the Lord, in which we are not to accept his

yoke. Let this opportunity serve to remind us again that the joy of the resurrection is a consequence of the suffering of the cross.

But don't fear. Our Lord himself has told us, "Come unto me all you who are burdened and labour, for I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is sweet and my burden light." And St John Chrysostom comments: "Come, not to give an account but to be freed of your sins. Come, because I don't need the glory you can give me: I need your salvation... Don't fear if you hear me talk of a yoke, it is sweet; don't fear if I speak about a burden, it is light."

The way to our personal sanctification should daily lead us to the cross. This way is not a sorrowful one, because Christ himself comes to our aid, and in his company there is no room for sadness. I like to repeat with my soul filled with joy, there is not a single day without a cross — the Cross.

Christian joy

177 Let us pick up again the subject proposed to us by the Church: Mary has gone to heaven in both body and soul, and the angels rejoice. I can imagine, too, the delight of St Joseph, her most chaste spouse, who awaited her in paradise. Yet what of us who remain on earth? Our faith tells us that here below, in our present life, we are pilgrims, wayfarers. Our lot is one of sacrifices, suffering and privations. Nonetheless, joy must mark the rhythm of our steps.

"Serve the Lord with joy" — there is no other way to serve him. "God loves a cheerful giver," the man who gives himself entirely with wholehearted sacrifice, because there is absolutely no reason to be disheartened.

We could think perhaps that this optimism is excessive. Are we not well acquainted with our shortcomings and failures? We are no strangers to suffering, tiredness, ingratitude, even hate. If we Christians are made of the same stuff as other men, how can we shake off the retinue of misery that constantly accompanies our human nature?

It would be naive to ignore the suffering and discouragement, the sadness and loneliness that meet us relentlessly as we go through life. But our faith has taught us with absolute certainty to see that life's disagreeable side is not due to blind fate, that the destiny of the creature is not to rid himself of his desires for happiness. Faith teaches us that everything around and in us is impregnated with divine purpose, that all things echo the call beckoning us to the house of our Father.

This supernatural understanding of earthly existence does not oversimplify the complexity of human life. Rather, it assures us that this complexity can be shot through with the love of God, that beyond the disagreeable surface can be discovered the strong and indestructible link that binds our life on earth with our definitive life in heaven.

The feast of the assumption of our Lady prompts us to acknowledge the basis for this joyful hope. Yes, we are still pilgrims, but our mother has gone on ahead, where she points to the reward of our efforts. She tells us that we can make it. And, if we are faithful, we will reach home. The blessed Virgin is not only our model, she is the help of Christians. And as we besiege her with our petitions — “Show that you are our Mother” — she cannot help but watch over her children with motherly care.

178 For a Christian, joy is a treasure. Only by offending God do we lose it, because sin is the fruit of selfishness, and selfishness is the root of sadness. Even then, a bit of joy survives under the debris of our soul: the knowledge that neither God nor his Mother can ever forget us. If we repent, if an act of sorrow springs from our heart, if we purify ourselves in the holy sacrament of penance, God comes out to meet and forgive us. Then there can be no sadness whatsoever. Then there is every right “to rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come back to life, was lost and has been found.”

These words are taken from the marvelous ending of the parable of the prodigal son, which we shall never tire of meditating. “Behold [the Father] comes out to meet you. He will bend down to greet you. He will give you a kiss as a sign of love and tenderness. He will order the servants to bring you new clothing, a ring, shoes for your feet. You still fear reproach and he returns your dignity. You fear punishment and he gives you a kiss. You dread a harsh word and he prepares for you a banquet.”

The love of God is unfathomable. If he is so generous with those who have offended him, what won't he do to honor his immaculate Mother, the most holy Virgin, faithful always?

If the love of God can achieve such great results when the response from our human heart, which is frequently a traitor, is so small, how much more will it accomplish in the heart of Mary, who never resisted in the slightest the will of God?

See how the liturgy of today's feast reveals the impossibility of understanding divine mercy by human reasons alone. More than explaining, the liturgy sings. It arouses the imagination, so that each of us can add enthusiasm to praise. Yet, when all is said and done, we will fall short. “A great marvel appeared in the heaven: a woman, dressed with the sun, with the moon at her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.” “The king has fallen in love with your beauty. How resplendent is the daughter of the king, with her robe spun from gold!”

The liturgy draws to a close with some words of Mary, in which the greatest humility is combined with the greatest glory: “All generations shall call me blessed, because he who is mighty has done great things in me.”

Cor Mariae Dulcissimum, iter para tutum: Most Sweet Heart of Mary, prepare a safe way. Guide our steps on earth with strength and security. Become for us the path we are to follow, since you in your love know the way, a sure short cut, to the love of Jesus Christ.

CHRIST THE KING

A homily given on 22 November 1970, the feast of Christ the King

Opposition to Christ

The Lord of the world

His reign in our soul

To reign by serving

179 The liturgical year is coming to a close and in the holy sacrifice of the altar we renew the offering of the victim to the Father — the offering of Christ, the king of justice, love and peace, as we shall read shortly in the preface. You all experience a great joy in your souls as you consider the sacred humanity of our Lord. He is a king with a heart of flesh, like yours; he is the author of the universe and of every creature, but he does not lord it over us. He begs us to give him a little love, as he silently shows us his wounds.

Why then do so many people not know him? Why do we still hear that cruel protest: "We do not want this man to reign over us"? There are millions of people in the world who reject Jesus Christ in this way; or rather they reject his shadow, for they do not know Christ. They have not seen the beauty of his face, they do not realize how wonderful his teaching is. This sad state of affairs makes me want to atone to our Lord. When I hear that endless clamor — expressed more in ignoble actions than in words — I feel the need to cry out, "He must reign!"

Opposition to Christ

Many people will not accept that Christ should reign. They oppose him in thousands of ways: in their attitude toward their circumstances, in their approach to human society, in morality, in science and the arts. Even in the Church itself! "I am not referring," says St Augustine, "to those scoundrels who blaspheme against Christ with their tongues. There are very many who blaspheme against him through their own conduct."

Some people are even annoyed by the expression "Christ the king." They take naive objection to the word, as if Christ's kingship could be thought of in political terms. Or they refuse to admit that Christ is king, because that would involve accepting his law. And law they will not accept, not even the wonderful precept of charity, for they do not want to reach out to God's love. Their ambition is to serve their own selfishness.

For many years now, our Lord has urged me to repeat a silent cry, *Serviam*: "I will serve!" Let us ask him to strengthen our desire to give ourselves, to be faithful to his calling — with naturalness, without fuss or noise — in the middle of everyday life. Let us thank him from the depth of our heart. We will pray to him as his subjects, as his sons! And our mouth will be filled with milk and honey. We will

find great pleasure in speaking of the kingdom of God, a kingdom of freedom, a freedom he has won for us.

The Lord of the world

180 This Christ, whose birth we witnessed at Bethlehem, this adorable child, is the Lord of the universe. Let us meditate upon this fact. Everything in heaven and on earth was created by him. He has reconciled all things to the Father. He has re-established peace between heaven and earth, through the blood he shed on the cross. Today Christ is king, at the right hand of the Father. As the two angels in white robes said to the disciples who were gazing into heaven after our Lord's ascension: "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." Through him kings hold power, although kings — that is, human political authority — do not last. Yet the kingdom of Christ "will remain forever." "His is an everlasting dominion and his kingdom endures from generation to generation."

Christ's kingdom is not just a figure of speech. Christ is alive; he lives as a man, with the same body he took when he became man, when he rose after his death, the glorified body which subsists in the person of the Word together with his human heart. Christ, true God and true man, lives and reigns. He is the Lord of the universe. Everything that lives is kept in existence only through him. Why, then, does he not appear to us in all his glory? Because his kingdom is "not of this world," though it is in this world. Jesus replied to Pilate: "I am a king. For this I was born and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice." Those who expected the Messiah to have visible temporal power were mistaken. "The kingdom of God does not mean food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." Truth and justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. That is the kingdom of Christ: the divine activity which saves men and which will reach its culmination when history ends and the Lord comes from the heights of paradise finally to judge men.

When Christ began to preach on earth he did not put forward a political program. He said: "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand." He commissioned his disciples to proclaim this good news and he taught them to pray for the coming of the kingdom. The kingdom of God and his justice — a holy life: that is what we must first seek, that is the only thing really necessary.

The salvation that our Lord Jesus Christ preaches is an invitation that he addresses to every person: "A king gave a marriage feast for his son, and he sent his servants to call those who were invited to the marriage feast." Therefore, our Lord shows that "the kingdom of God is in the midst of you." No one is excluded from salvation, if he responds freely to the loving demands of Christ: to be born again; to become like children, in simplicity of spirit; to avoid everything that separates us from God. Jesus wants deeds, not just words. And he wants us to make a determined effort, because only those who fight will merit the eternal inheritance.

His kingdom will not achieve its perfection on earth. The definitive judgment of salvation or condemnation will not be made here. It is rather like sowing seed, like the growth of the grain of mustard seed. At its finish it will be like the net full of fish — they are all thrown out on the sand and sorted into those who led a just life and those who did evil. But as long as we live here the kingdom can be compared to yeast that a woman took and mixed with three measures of flour so that the whole batch was leavened.

Anyone who understands the kingdom Christ proposes realizes that it is worth staking everything to obtain it. It is the pearl the merchant gets by selling all his property; it is the treasure found in the field. The kingdom of heaven is difficult to win. No one can be sure of achieving it, but the humble cry of a repentant man can open wide its doors. One of the thieves who was crucified with Jesus pleaded with him: "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And Jesus said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."

His reign in our soul

181 Our Lord and our God: how great you are! It is you who give our life supernatural meaning and divine vitality. For love of your Son, you cause us to say with all our being, with our body and soul: "He must reign!" And this we do against the background of our weakness, for you know that we are creatures made of clay — and what creatures! Not just feet of clay, but heart and head too. Only through you can we live a divine life.

Christ should reign first and foremost in our soul. But how would we reply if he asked us: "How do you go about letting me reign in you?" I would reply that I need lots of his grace. Only that way can my every heartbeat and breath, my least intense look, my most ordinary word, my most basic feeling be transformed into a hosanna to Christ my king.

If we are trying to have Christ as our king we must be consistent. We must start by giving him our heart. Not to do that and still talk about the kingdom of Christ would be completely hollow. There would be no real Christian substance in our behavior. We would be making an outward show of a faith that simply did not exist. We would be misusing God's name to human advantage.

If Jesus' reign in my soul, in your soul, meant that he should find it a perfect dwelling place, then indeed would we have reason to despair. But "fear not, daughter of Sion; beloved, your king is coming, sitting on an ass' colt." Don't you see? Jesus makes do with a poor animal for a throne. I don't know about you; but I am not humiliated to acknowledge that in the Lord's eyes I am a beast of burden: "I am like a donkey in your presence, but I am continually with you. You hold my right hand," you take me by the bridle.

Try to remember what a donkey is like — now that so few of them are left. Not an old, stubborn, vicious one that would give you a kick when you least expected, but a young one with his ears up like antennae. He lives on a meager diet, is hardworking and has a quick, cheerful trot. There are hundreds of animals more

beautiful, more deft and strong. But it was a donkey Christ chose when he presented himself to the people as king in response to their acclamation. For Jesus has no time for calculations, for astuteness, for the cruelty of cold hearts, for attractive but empty beauty. What he likes is the cheerfulness of a young heart, a simple step, a natural voice, clean eyes, attention to his affectionate word of advice. That is how he reigns in the soul.

To reign by serving

182 If we let Christ reign in our soul, we will not become authoritarian. Rather we will serve everyone. How I like that word: service! To serve my king and, through him, all those who have been redeemed by his blood. I really wish we Christians knew how to serve, for only by serving can we know and love Christ and make him known and loved. And how will we show him to souls? By our example. Through our voluntary service of Jesus Christ, we should be witnesses to him in all our activities, for he is the Lord of our entire lives, the only and ultimate reason for our existence. Then, once we have given this witness of service, we will be able to give instruction by our word.

Friends of God

By Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer

Foreword

THE RICHNESS OF ORDINARY LIFE

FREEDOM, A GIFT FROM GOD

TIME IS A TREASURE

WORKING FOR GOD

HUMAN VIRTUES

HUMILITY

DETACHMENT

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF CHRIST

GETTING TO KNOW GOD

OPEN TO GOD AND MEN

FOR THEY SHALL SEE GOD

LIVING BY FAITH

THE CHRISTIAN'S HOPE

THE STRENGTH OF LOVE

A LIFE OF PRAYER

THAT ALL MAY BE SAVED

MOTHER OF GOD AND OUR MOTHER

Foreword

God knows best. We men understand so little of his gentle fatherly way of leading us to himself. When I wrote the foreword to "Christ is passing by" in 1973, I just could not have imagined that the holy priest who was its author would be going so soon to his heavenly home. Thousands of us, men and women all over the world, children of his prayer, his sacrifice and his generous abandonment to the Will of God, can apply to him, with immense gratitude, the same words of heartfelt praise that St Augustine wrote of our Father and Lord St Joseph: 'he accomplished the fatherhood of the heart better than anyone else accomplished that of the flesh.'

He departed this life on Thursday, June 26, 1975, at midday, in this city of Rome he loved so well because it is the see of Peter, the centre of Christendom and head of the universal charity of the holy Church. As the bells of the Angelus were still echoing in our ears, the Founder of Opus Dei heard the words "amice, ascende superius," friend, come unto the joy of Heaven, hearing them this time with their full and eternal meaning.

He left this world on an ordinary day, going about his priestly work, fully immersed in conversation with Him who is Life itself. This is why he has not died, but is there at God's side. While he was busy caring for souls, there came to him the 'sweet and gentle surprise' (as he puts it in his homily "Towards holiness" of finding himself face to face with Christ, able at last to contemplate the beautiful Face he had longed so much to see: "Vultum tuum, Domine, requiram!"

From the very first moments of his birth into his heavenly home, I began to receive testimonies from countless men and women, who had known his saintly life. They expressed, and continue to do so, feelings that now need no holding back. Previously, they had kept silent, out of respect for the humility of a man who considered himself 'a sinner who is madly in love with Jesus Christ.' I had the consolation of hearing directly from the lips of the Holy Father Pope Paul VI one of his many warm expressions of praise for the Founder of Opus Dei. Innumerable newspapers and magazines all over the world have published articles of appreciation, written by people nourished in the Christian faith and also by others who do not yet profess to believe in Christ but who have begun to discover him through the words and deeds of Monsignor Escrivá de Balaguer.

'As long as I have strength to breathe, I will continue to preach that it is vitally necessary that we be souls of prayer "at all times", at every opportunity and in the most varied of circumstances, because God never abandons us.' That was his one and only concern: to pray and to encourage others to do likewise. That was why he brought about in the midst of the world a wonderful 'mobilisation of people,' as he

liked to call it, 'who are ready to commit themselves to live Christian lives,' by developing their filial relationship with God our Father. We are many who have learned, from this thoroughly priestly priest, 'the great secret of God's mercy: that we are children of God.'

In this second volume of homilies we have gathered together some texts that were published while Msgr. Escrivá de Balaguer was still with us here on earth, and others from the many which he left for later publication, because he worked unhurriedly and kept working to the end. He never set out to be an "author", though he figures among the leading teachers of Christian spirituality. His teaching is both attractive and forceful, and is meant to be lived in the midst of our work, at home, in our dealings with other people, everywhere in fact. He had the art, humanly speaking as well, of giving more generously than one had bargained for. How well he reads! The directness of his expressions, the liveliness of his images, make him accessible to one and all, regardless of differences of mentality and culture. He did his schooling in the Gospel. It is here where he derives his clarity, his ability to strike at the depths of the soul, and his special gift for not going out of fashion, because he never bowed to fashion.

These eighteen homilies present a broad picture of the basic human and Christian virtues for all who wish to follow closely in the footsteps of Our Lord. They are neither a theoretical treatise, nor potted hints for acquiring spiritual good manners. They contain living doctrine and combine a theologian's depth with the evangelical clarity of a good shepherd of souls. With Msgr. Escrivá de Balaguer words turn into a colloquy with God — prayer — but without ceasing to be a heartfelt conversation completely in tune with the concerns and hopes of his listeners. The homilies are, therefore, a lesson in doctrine and in Christian life in which God is not only spoken of but spoken to. Perhaps it is in this that the secret of his great power of communication lies, because he always refers to the love of God as 'looking at God without needing rest or feeling tired.'

Right from the first of these homilies we are reminded of one of the constant themes of Msgr. Escrivá de Balaguer's preaching, which is that God calls all men to be saints. Echoing the words of St Paul, 'this is the will of God, your sanctification,' he points out: 'We have to become saints, as they say in my part of the world, "down to the last whisker", Christians who are truly and genuinely such, the kind that could be canonized. If not, we shall have failed as disciples of the one and only Master.' Further on he specifies what he means: 'the holiness that Our Lord demands of you is to be achieved by carrying out with love of God your work and your daily duties, and these will almost always consist of small realities.'

What basis, what grounds do Christians have, for nurturing such amazing aspirations in their lives? The answer comes as a sort of refrain, again and again, right through these homilies: it is the humble sense of daring 'of the person who, knowing himself to be poor and weak, knows also that he is a son of God.'

Msgr. Escrivá de Balaguer sees a clear alternative facing every human being: 'slavery or divine sonship, this is the dilemma we face. Children of God or slaves to

pride.' Aided by the holy example of the faithful and heroic dedication of the Founder of Opus Dei, I have thought and prayed about this truth with even greater intensity since that day when Our Lord took to his side the person I most dearly loved, that without the humility and simplicity of a child we cannot take a single step forward along the path of serving God. 'Humility means looking at ourselves as we really are, honestly and without excuses. And when we realize that we are worth hardly anything, we can then open ourselves to God's greatness: it is there our greatness lies.'

'He must become more and more, I must become less and less.' This was what John the Baptist, the Precursor, taught. And Our Lord said, 'Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart.' Humility does not mean being timid or inhibited. The humility preached by the Founder of Opus Dei is something alive and deeply felt, because 'it means acknowledging our littleness in the eyes of God: a little child, a son.' Msgr. Escrivá de Balaguer has encapsulated this idea in an expression which may have been invented by him, when he speaks of 'dynamism in our humility:' because when a child, accepting his littleness, is helped by the all powerful protection of his Father, God, there is a dynamism in him which overflows into works of faith, of hope, of love, and of all the other virtues that the Holy Spirit infuses into his soul.

At no time does Msgr. Escrivá de Balaguer move away from the context chosen for his first homily, which is ordinary life, normal situations, things that happen every day. In all the virtues he speaks of he is always referring to Christians who live in the world because 'this is their place, the place where God has wished them to be.' It is here that the human virtues come into play: prudence, truthfulness, serenity, justice, magnanimity, hard work, temperance, sincerity, fortitude, and so forth. These virtues are both human and Christian, because, to take the virtue of temperance as an example, we see it is brought to perfection by a spirit of penance and mortification; and the human virtue which encourages the strict fulfillment of one's duty is enriched by the divine touch of charity, 'which is like a generous overflowing of justice.' We live in close contact with the things we use, but detached from them, keeping our hearts pure.

Since 'for those who busy themselves in affairs of souls, time' — more than gold — 'is glory!' the Christian has to learn to use time diligently, in order to show his love for God and for his fellow men through 'sanctifying his work, sanctifying himself in his work and sanctifying others through his work.' He has to pay careful attention to small things, that is to say, he must avoid useless daydreaming and must seek to practice the silent heroism, which is both natural and supernatural at the same time, of the one who lives his daily life with Christ. 'Nowhere is it written that Christians should be strangers to the world. Our Lord Jesus by his deeds and by his teaching has bestowed praise on another human virtue which is particularly dear to me, the virtue of naturalness or simplicity. (...) What happens is that people tend to get used to what is plain and ordinary and, without realizing it, they begin to look for what is showy and artificial. You will have come across examples of this, as I have, as when for instance you remark on the beauty of some freshly cut roses,

with delicately fragrant petals, and someone comments "They look so perfect, they must be artificial!"

These words of the Founder of Opus Dei come to us with all the freshness of newly cut roses, yet they are the fruit of a whole lifetime spent in conversation with God and in carrying out an apostolate as vast as a 'boundless ocean.' Together with a great simplicity, there runs through all these writings the constant counterpoint of a passionate, expansive love. We feel 'our hearts profoundly shaken,' urging us to 'be in a hurry to fall in love,' because 'a whole lifetime would be little, to spend expanding the frontiers of your charity.'

And so we come to another of the great themes dealt with in his meditations: 'the divine interlacing of the three theological virtues which form the backing upon which the true life of every Christian man or woman has to be woven.' He refers to this constantly: 'let us live by faith; let us persevere with hope; let us remain very close to Jesus; let us really, really, really love him;' 'the certainty I derive from feeling — from knowing — that I am a son of God fills me with real hope;' 'the time has come, amid your ordinary occupations, to exercise your faith, awaken your hope and revive your love.'

The three homilies on faith, hope and charity are followed by one on prayer, although the need for us to have a close relationship with God in our lives is evident right from the very first pages. 'Prayer ought to take root and grow in the soul little by little,' naturally, simply and trustingly, because we 'children of God don't need a method, an artificial system, to talk with our Father.' Prayer is the thread of the fabric of the three theological virtues. All the things we do become one single thing: our whole life takes on a divine tone and our 'union with Our Lord does not cut us off from the world we live in. It does not make us strange beings, out of touch with what is going on around us.'

His precise and apt commentaries on Sacred Scripture and his frequent recourse to the treasury of Christian Tradition are punctuated by expressions of love, breaking through like a river that has burst its banks. 'How great is the love, the mercy of our Father! Whenever I think of his divine extravagance for us his children, I wish I had a thousand tongues, a thousand hearts and more, with which to be constantly praising God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.'

Why was his love so strong? Because God infused it in his heart, and also because he himself with his free will did all he could to make it grow and to pass it on to thousands of other souls. He loved and he wanted to love; he wanted to respond to the graces that Our Lord had placed in his soul. His love was so free that it became a passion: 'I opt for God because I want to, freely, without compulsion of any kind. And I undertake to serve, to convert my whole life into a means of serving others, out of love for my Lord Jesus. It is this freedom which moves me to cry out that nothing on earth can separate me from the love of Christ.'

The path to sanctity which Msgr. Escrivá de Balaguer invites us to take, is paved with a deep respect for freedom. The Founder of Opus Dei relishes the words of St Augustine where the great Bishop of Hippo stresses that God 'judged that his

servants would be better if they served him freely.' This route to Heaven is, moreover, very appropriate for people leading ordinary lives in the midst of society, with a professional job of work to do, in environments which are sometimes indifferent or even hostile to the law of Christ. The Founder of Opus Dei is not addressing people who lead sheltered lives, but those who are fighting out in the open, in the most varied situations in life. In such circumstances, using their freedom, they come to the decision to serve God and love him above all things. Freedom is something they cannot do without. Through it, their love grows firm and develops roots: 'People are not born holy. Holiness is forged through a constant interplay of God's grace and the correspondence of man.'

As a way of getting close to God, therefore, two passions are fostered, the passion of love and that of freedom. Their forces combine when freedom opts for the Love of God. The resulting torrent of graces, freely responded to, is so strong that it can withstand all difficulties: the 'psychological terrorism' which those who wish to be faithful to the Lord are subjected to; our own wretched failings which never disappear but which, through the freedom which repentance wins, can be converted into ways of reaffirming our love; the difficulties in our environment, which we can overcome by 'sowing peace and joy around us.'

In the course of his comments on this divine and human interplay between freedom and love, there are moments when one catches a glimpse of the sufferings which were a constant feature of Msgr. Escrivá de Balaguer's life. They were sufferings brought on by his love-sorrow for the lack of response on man's part to the mercy of God. When one met him, it was difficult to detect that he suffered. Few people have gone through life as cheerfully or as good humouredly as he, with his sense of youthfulness and his ability to get the most out of every instant. He felt nostalgia for nothing, except the Love of God. But he did really suffer. Many of his children who knew him at close quarters later commented to me: 'How was our Father able to suffer so much? We always found him so happy, so attentive even to the smallest details, giving himself entirely to us all.'

He has given us the answer, indirectly, in some of these homilies: 'Do not forget that being with Jesus means we shall most certainly meet with his Cross. When we abandon ourselves into God's hands, he frequently permits us to taste sorrow, loneliness, opposition, slander, defamation, ridicule, coming both from within and from outside. This is because he wants to mould us into his image and likeness. He even tolerates that we be called lunatics and be taken for fools.'

Because he had learned to embrace Our Lord's Cross passionately, Msgr. Escrivá de Balaguer was able to say 'my life has led me to realize in a special way that I am a son of God and I have experienced the joy of getting inside the heart of my Father, to rectify, to purify myself, to serve him, to understand others and find excuses for them, on the strength of his love and my own lowliness.' He was always docile to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, in order that his own conduct might reflect the beautiful image of Christ. His faith was such that he took the Master's words quite literally, and he was often under attack from people who seemed unable to bear the thought that one can live by faith, with hope and with love. 'Perhaps someone will

think I am naive. It doesn't worry me. Although I may be labelled as such, because I still believe in charity, I assure you I will believe in it, always! And, while God gives me life, I shall continue, as a priest of Jesus Christ, to work for unity and peace among those who are brothers, by the very fact that they are children of the same Father, God. I shall continue to work with the aim of getting men to understand each other, and to share the same ideal, the ideal of the Faith!

The passion of love and freedom and the conviction that we are meant to operate in the divine atmosphere of faith and hope, lead on to the apostolate. One of the homilies — That all may be saved — is entirely dedicated to the subject. 'We find Jesus by the Lake of Genesareth, with the crowds pressing upon him, eager "to hear the word of God" (Luke 5:1). Just as they do today! Can't you see? They want to hear God's message, even though outwardly they may not show it. Some perhaps have forgotten Christ's teachings. Others, through no fault of their own, have never known them and they think that religion is something odd. But of this we can be sure, that in every man's life there comes a time sooner or later when his soul draws the line. He has had enough of the usual explanations. The lies of the false prophets no longer satisfy. Even though they may not admit it at the time, such people are longing to quench their thirst with the teachings of Our Lord.'

A living spirit of apostolate, which is a passionate communication of God's impatient love for mankind, runs through every page of this book. Our task is to 'bring peace, genuine peace, to souls' and to 'transform the earth.' To emphasize this Msgr. Escrivá de Balaguer constantly turns his attention to Our Lord, who taught men to speak of everlasting happiness by treading our earthly paths with his divine footsteps. I cannot resist quoting a passage from *Towards holiness*, in which the Founder of Opus Dei comments on a Gospel scene he loved so much, the one describing the apostolate that Jesus carried out on the road to Emmaus with the two disciples who seemed to have lost all hope.

'They were walking along at a normal pace, like so many other travellers on that road. And there, without any fuss, Jesus appears to them and walks with them, his conversation helping to alleviate their tiredness. I can well imagine the scene, just as dusk was falling. A gentle breeze was blowing. All around were fields ripe with wheat, and venerable olive trees, their branches shimmering in the soft glowing light.'

Christ is passing by. The two men, when they saw that Jesus was making as if to continue on his journey, said to him, 'Stay with us, it is towards evening, and it is far on in the day.' 'That's just like us. Always short on daring, perhaps because we are insincere, or because we feel embarrassed. Deep down, what we are really thinking is: "Stay with us, because our souls are shrouded in darkness and You alone are the light. You alone can satisfy this longing which consumes us."'

This longing for God, which we all have within us, offers Christians daily opportunities for doing apostolate. We men are crying out for God, and we look for him even among doubting consciences and outlooks which are fixed on earthly things. 'And Jesus stays. Our eyes are opened, as were those of Cleophas and his

companion, when Christ breaks the bread; and, though he vanishes once more from our sight, we too will find strength to start out once more — though night is falling — to tell the others about him, because so much joy cannot be kept in one heart alone.'

I go back with my memory to a day that is ever present for me, I never forget it, to that June 26, 1975, the day Msgr. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer was born in a definitive way to the Love of God, because his heart by then needed an eternal Emmaus, where he could be for ever close to Christ. In the homily "Towards holiness" he had written, 'A thirst for God is born in us, a longing to understand his tears, to see his smile, his face. (...) The soul goes forward immersed in God, divinized: the Christian becomes a thirsty traveler who opens his mouth to the waters of the fountain.' Further on he says, 'I love to speak of paths and ways, because we are travelers, journeying to our home in Heaven, our Father's land.'

He dwells there with the most Blessed Trinity; with Mary, the Holy Mother of God and our Mother; and with St Joseph, whom he loved so well. Many of us, all over the world, entrust our prayers to him, in the sure knowledge that God, Our Lord, will listen favorably to someone who desired to be, and indeed was throughout his life on earth, a 'good and faithful servant.'

The writings of the Founder of Opus Dei published to date, notably *The Way*, *Holy Rosary*, *Christ is passing by* and *Conversations*, run to more than five million copies and they have been translated into more than thirty languages. This second volume of homilies is being published with the same purpose in mind: to help souls draw closer to God. The Church is going through difficult times and the Holy Father never tires of urging his children to pray, to have a supernatural outlook, to be faithful to the sacred deposit of the Faith, to have brotherly understanding and to promote peace. In these circumstances we cannot be disheartened; it is time to put into practice, even to the point of heroism, the virtues which define and express the true image of the Christians, of the children of God who strive that 'our heads should indeed be touching heaven, but our feet should be firmly on the ground,' as we walk through the earthly city.

The life of the Christian who decides to behave in accordance with the greatness of his vocation is so to speak a prolonged echo of those words of Our Lord, 'I do not speak of you any more as my servants; a servant is one who does not understand what his master is about, whereas I have made known to you all that my Father has told me; and so I have called you my friends.' When we decide to be docile and follow the Will of God, hitherto unimagined horizons open up before us. Msgr. Escrivá de Balaguer delights in emphasizing this beautiful paradox: 'there is nothing better than recognizing that Love has made us slaves of God. From the moment we recognize this we cease being slaves and become friends, sons.'

Sons of God, Friends of God; this is the great truth that Msgr. Escrivá de Balaguer wanted to engrave on the hearts of those who knew him. His preaching is a constant effort to stop souls thinking of 'friendship with God only as a last resort.' Jesus Christ is truly God and truly Man, he is our Brother and our Friend. If we

make the effort to get to know him well, 'we will share in the joy of being God's friends.' If we do all we can to keep him company, from Bethlehem to Calvary, sharing his joys and sufferings, we will become worthy of entering into loving conversation with him. As the Liturgy of the Hours sings, *calicem Domini biberunt, et amici Dei facti sunt*, they drank the chalice of the Lord and so became friends of God.

Being his children and being his friends are two inseparable realities for those who love God. We go to him as children, carrying on a trusting dialogue that should fill the whole of our lives; and we go to him as friends, because 'we Christians are in love with Love.' In the same way our divine sonship urges us to translate the overflow of our interior life into apostolic activity, just as our friendship with God leads us to place ourselves at 'the service of all men. We are called to use the gifts God has given us as instruments to help others discover Christ.'

Those who see a rift between ordinary life, temporal affairs, the events of history on the one hand, and the Love of God on the other are simply deceiving themselves. Our Lord is eternal; the world is of his own making, and he has put us here so that we may pass through it doing good, until we reach our final homeland. Everything is important in the life of a Christian because everything can be an occasion for meeting Our Lord and can therefore acquire everlasting value. 'Men lie when they say "for ever" about things on earth. The only true, totally true "for ever" is that which we say with reference to God. This is how you ought to live your life, with a faith that will help you to taste the honey, the sweetness of heaven whenever you think about eternal life which is indeed "for ever".'

Msgr. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer now has direct knowledge of this sweetness and beauty of God. He has entered into eternity. His words, including those of the homilies in this volume, have now taken on an even greater force, if one can say this; they penetrate more deeply into our hearts and are more compelling. I shall finish with a quotation that can help to win us over to another of his dominant passions:

'Love the Church; serve the Church with the conscious gladness of one who has committed himself to this service for Love's sake. And if we should see any one traveling without hope, like the two men on the road to Emmaus, let us approach them full of faith — not in our own name but in Christ's name — to reassure them that Jesus' promises cannot fail, for he is always watching over his Spouse and he will never abandon her. The darkness will pass away, because we are children of the light (cf. Eph 5:8) and have been called to life everlasting.'

Alvaro del Portillo

THE RICHNESS OF ORDINARY LIFE

A homily given on 11 March 1960

God wants us to be saints

Little things and the life of childhood

Genuinely Christian lives

Sincerity in spiritual direction

Seeking God's presence

In Christ's boat

1 I remember, many years ago now, I was going along a road in Castile with some friends, when we noticed something in a field far away which made a deep impression on me at the time and has since often helped me in my prayer. A group of men were hammering some wooden stakes into the ground, which they then used to support netting to form a sheep pen. Then shepherds came along with their sheep and their lambs. They called them by their names and one by one lambs and sheep went into the pen, where they would be all together, safe and sound.

Today, Lord, my thoughts go back specially to those shepherds and their sheepfold, because all of us who are gathered here to converse with you — and many others the world over — we all know that we have been brought into your sheepfold. You yourself have told us so: 'I am the Good Shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me.' You know us well. You know that we wish to hear, to listen ever attentively to your gentle whistling as our Good Shepherd, and to heed it, because 'eternal life is knowing you, who are the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.'

The image of Christ with his sheep at his right and left means so much to me that I had it depicted in the oratory where I normally celebrate Holy Mass. Elsewhere, as a reminder of God's presence, I have had engraved Jesus' words, *cognosco oves meas et cognoscunt me meae*, to help us consider constantly that he is at our side, reproaching us, instructing us and teaching us as does a shepherd with his flock. The Castilian scene I have recalled is very much to the point.

God wants us to be saints

2 You and I belong to Christ's family, for 'he himself has chosen us before the foundation of the world, to be saints, to be blameless in his sight, for love of him, having predestined us to be his adopted children through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his Will.' We have been chosen gratuitously by Our Lord. His choice of us sets us a clear goal. Our goal is personal sanctity, as St Paul insistently reminds us, *haec est voluntas Dei: sanctificatio vestra*, 'this is the Will of God: your sanctification.' Let us not forget, then, that we are in our Master's sheepfold in order to achieve that goal.

3 Another thing I have never forgotten, though it took place a long time ago, was once when I had gone into the Cathedral in Valencia to pray and I passed by the tomb of the Venerable John Ridaura. I was told that whenever this priest, already very advanced in years, was asked how many years he had lived, he would reply with great conviction, in his Valencian dialect, *Poquets*, 'Very few! Only those I have spent serving God.' For many of you here, the fingers of one hand are still sufficient to count the years since you made up your minds to follow Our Lord closely, to

serve him in the midst of the world, in your own environment and through your own profession or occupation. How long is not all that important. What does matter is that we engrave, that we burn upon our souls the conviction that Christ's invitation to sanctity, which he addresses to all men without exception, puts each one of us under an obligation to cultivate our interior life and to struggle daily to practice the Christian virtues; and not just in any way whatsoever, nor in a way which is above average or even excellent. No; we must strive to the point of heroism, in the strictest and most exacting sense of the word.

4 The goal that I am putting before you, or rather that God has marked out for us all, is no illusory or unattainable ideal. I could quote you many specific examples of ordinary men and women, just like you and me, who have met Jesus passing by quasi in occulto, at what appeared to be quite ordinary cross-roads in their lives, and have decided to follow him, lovingly embracing their daily cross. In this age of ours, an age of generalized decay, of compromise and discouragement, and also of license and anarchy, I think it is more important than ever to hold on to that simple yet profound conviction which I had when I began my priestly work and have held ever since, and which has given me a burning desire to tell all mankind that 'these world crises are crises of saints.'

5 Interior life. We need it, if we are to answer the call that the Master has made to each and every one of us. We have to become saints, as they say in my part of the world, 'down to the last whisker,'* Christians who are truly and genuinely such, the kind that could be canonized. If not, we shall have failed as disciples of the one and only Master. And don't forget that when God marks us out and gives us his grace to strive for sanctity in the everyday world, he also puts us under an obligation to do apostolate. I want you to realize that, even looking at things humanly, concern for souls follows naturally from the fact that God has chosen us. As one of the Fathers of the Church points out, 'When you discover that something has been of benefit to you, you want to tell others about it. In the same way, you should want others to accompany you along the ways of the Lord. If you are going to the forum or the baths and you run into someone with time on his hands, you invite him to go with you. Apply this human behavior to the spiritual realm and, when you go towards God, do not go alone.'

If we do not wish to waste our time in useless activities, or in making excuses about the difficulties in our environment — for there have always been difficulties ever since Christianity began — we must remember that Christ has decreed that success in attracting our fellow men will depend, as a rule, on how much interior life we ourselves have. Christ has stipulated that our apostolic endeavors will only be effective if we are saints; rather (let me put it more correctly) if we strive to be faithful, for while we are on this earth we shall never actually be saints. It may seem hard to believe, but both God and our fellow men require from us an unswerving faithfulness that is true to its name and is consequent down to the last detail, with no half measures or compromises, a faithfulness to the fullness of the Christian vocation which we lovingly accept and caringly practice.

6 Some of you might think I am referring only to a select few. Don't let the promptings of cowardice or easygoing ways deceive you so easily. Feel, instead, God urging each one of you on, to become another Christ, ipse Christus, Christ himself. To put it simply, God is urging us to make our actions consistent with the demands of our faith. For our sanctity, the holiness we should be striving for, is not a second class sanctity. There is no such thing. The main thing we are asked to do, which is so much in keeping with our nature, is to love: 'charity is the bond of perfection'; a charity that is to be practiced exactly as Our Lord himself commands: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind,' holding back nothing for ourselves. This is what sanctity is all about.

7 Certainly our goal is both lofty and difficult to attain. But please do not forget that people are not born holy. Holiness is forged through a constant interplay of God's grace and the correspondence of man. As one of the early Christian writers says, referring to union with God, 'Everything that grows begins small. It is by constant and progressive feeding that it gradually grows big.' So I say to you, if you want to become a thorough-going Christian — and I know you are willing, even though you often find it difficult to conquer yourself or to keep climbing upwards with this poor body of ours — then you will have to be very attentive to the minutest of details, for the holiness that Our Lord demands of you is to be achieved by carrying out with love of God your work and your daily duties, and these will almost always consist of small realities.

Little things and the life of childhood

8 Thinking of those of you who, despite years of experience, still go about dreaming — with vain and childish dreams, like those of Tartarin of Tarascon — imagining they are hunting lions in the corridors of their homes, where the most they will find are mice, if that; with, I insist, such people in mind, I can only remind you how great a thing it is to be accompanying God through the faithful fulfillment of your ordinary daily duties, coming through struggles which fill Our Lord with joy, and which are known only to him and to each one of us.

Rest assured that you will usually find few opportunities for dazzling deeds, one reason being that they seldom occur. On the other hand, you will not lack opportunities, in the small and ordinary things around you, of showing your love for Christ. As St Jerome writes, 'Even in small things, the same (greatness of) spirit is revealed. We admire the creator, not only as the framer of heaven and earth, of sun and ocean, of elephants, camels, horses, oxen, leopards, bears and lions, but also as the maker of tiny creatures, ants, gnats, flies, worms and the like, things whose shapes we know better than their names: and in all of them (big or small) we reverence the same skill. So too, the person who is dedicated to Christ is equally earnest in small things as in great.'

9 When we meditate on the words of Our Lord, 'And for them do I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth,' we clearly perceive our one and only end: sanctification, or rather, that we have to become saints in order to sanctify others. Then, like a subtle temptation, the thought may come that there are very few of us

who have really taken to heart this divine invitation. Moreover, we see that those of us who have, are instruments of very little worth. It is true; we are few, in comparison with the rest of mankind, and of ourselves we are worth nothing. But our Master's affirmation resounds with full authority: Christians are the light, the salt, the leaven of the world and 'a little leaven leavens the whole batch.' That is precisely why I have always taught that we are interested in each and every person. Out of a hundred souls we are interested in a hundred. We discriminate against no one, for we know for certain that Jesus has redeemed us all, and that he wishes to make use of a few of us, despite our personal nothingness, to make his salvation known to all.

A disciple of Christ will never treat anyone badly. Error he will call error, but the person in error he will correct with kindness. Otherwise he will not be able to help him, to sanctify him. We must learn to live together, to understand one another, to make allowances, to be brotherly and, at all times, in the words of St John of the Cross, 'where there is no love, put love and you will find love'; and we have to do this even in the apparently uninspiring circumstances that arise in our professional work or in our domestic and social life. You and I must therefore seek to make use of even the most trifling opportunities that come our way, to sanctify them, to sanctify ourselves and to sanctify those who share with us the same daily cares, sensing in our lives the sweet and inspiring burden of the work of co-redemption.

10 I wish to continue this conversation with Our Lord with an observation I made use of years ago, but which is just as relevant today. I had noted down some remarks of St Teresa of Avila: 'All that passes away and is not pleasing to God, is worth nothing, and less than nothing.' Now do you understand why a soul loses all sense of peace and serenity when it turns away from its goal, and forgets that it was created by God to be a saint? Strive never to lose this supernatural outlook, not even at times of rest or recreation, which are as important in our daily lives as is work itself.

You can climb to the top of your profession, you can gain the highest acclaim as a reward for your freely chosen endeavors in temporal affairs; but if you abandon the supernatural outlook that should inspire all our human activities, you will have gone sadly astray.

11 Allow me a short digression. In fact it is very relevant to what we have been saying. I have never asked anyone who has come to me, about his politics. I am just not interested! My attitude here demonstrates a fundamental fact about Opus Dei, to which by the grace and mercy of God I have dedicated myself completely, in order to serve our holy Church. I am not interested in the subject because, as Christians, you enjoy the fullest freedom, with the consequent personal responsibility, to take part as you see fit in political, social or cultural affairs, with no restrictions other than those set by the Church's Magisterium. The only thing that would worry me, for the good of your souls, would be if you were to overstep these limits, for then you would have created a clear opposition between your actions and the faith you claim to profess, and in that case I would tell you so,

clearly. This holy respect for your opinions, so long as they do not lead you away from the law of God, is not understood by those who are unaware of the real meaning of the freedom which Christ won for us on the Cross, qua libertate Christus nos liberavit, by the sectarians at either extreme: those who seek to impose their temporal opinions as dogmas; or those who degrade man, by denying the value of the faith and putting it at the mercy of the grossest errors.

12 But to return to our subject. I was saying just now that though you might achieve spectacular success in society, in public affairs, in your own careers, if you neglect your spiritual life and ignore Our Lord you will end up a complete failure. As far as God is concerned — and in the last analysis that is the only thing that matters — victory only comes to those who strive to behave as genuine Christians. There is no middle way. That is why you find so many people who from a human point of view ought to be ever so happy, yet they go about uneasy and embittered. They appear to be overflowing with happiness, but just scratch beneath the surface of their souls and you will discover a bitterness more bitter than gall. This will not happen to us, provided we really try, day in day out, to do God's will, to give him glory, and praise him and spread his kingdom to all mankind.

Genuinely Christian lives

13 It makes me very sad to see a Catholic — a child of God, called by Baptism to be another Christ — calming his conscience with a purely formal piety, with a religiosity that leads him to pray now and again, and only if he thinks it worthwhile! He goes to Mass on holidays of obligation — though not all of them — while he cares punctiliously for the welfare of his stomach and never misses a meal. He is ready to compromise in matters of faith, to exchange his faith for a platter of lentils, rather than give up his job... And then he impudently or scandalously seeks to climb up in the world on the strength of being a Christian. No! Let us not live on labels. I want you to be genuine, solid Christians; and to become such you will have to be unswerving in your search for suitable spiritual food.

Personal experience shows, and you have often heard me tell you so, to warn you against discouragement, that our interior life consists in beginning again and again each day; and you know in your hearts, as I do in mine, that the struggle is never ending. You will have noticed too, when making your examination of conscience just as I do (excuse these personal references, but even as I am speaking to you I am going over the needs of my own soul with Our Lord) that you often experience little setbacks, which at times perhaps may seem to you enormous, revealing as they do an evident lack of love, of self-surrender to God, of a spirit of sacrifice, of refinement. Well, strengthen your yearning for reparation, with a sincere act of contrition, but please do not lose your peace of mind.

14 Way back, in the early forties, I used to go quite often to Valencia. I had no human means at the time and, with those who were gathered around this penniless priest, as you are now, I would pray wherever we could, some afternoons on a deserted beach. Just like the first friends of the Master, remember? St Luke

writes how, when St Paul and he were leaving Tyre on their way to Jerusalem, 'they all of them, with their wives and children, escorted us until we were out of the city; and there on the beach we knelt down and prayed.'

Well, late one afternoon, during one of those marvelous Valencian sunsets, we saw a boat approaching the shore. Some men jumped out, swarthy looking and strong as granite, dripping wet, stripped to the waist, so weather-burned that they might have been made of bronze. They began to haul in the net that trailed behind the boat. It was laden with fishes, all shining like silver. Their feet sank into the sand as they pulled away with amazing strength. Then all of a sudden a little boy appeared, all sunburnt too. He came up to the rope, seized it with his tiny hands and began to tug away with evident clumsiness. The tough, unsophisticated fishermen must have felt their hearts soften, for they allowed the child to join in, without chasing him away, even though he was more of a hindrance than a help.

I thought of you and of myself. Of you, whom I did not know as yet, and of myself; of our daily tugging away at the rope, and of many things. If we come before God Our Lord like that child, convinced of our weakness yet ever prepared to second his plans, we shall more easily reach our goal. We shall haul the net onto the shore, bursting with an abundant catch, for the power of God reaches where our strength cannot.

Sincerity in spiritual direction

15 You well know the obligations of your Christian way of life; they will lead you safely and surely to sanctity. You have also been forewarned about the difficulties, or practically all of them, because you can already get a rough idea of them at the beginning of the road. Now I wish to emphasize that you must let yourselves be helped and guided by a spiritual director, to whom you can confide all your holy ambitions and the daily problems affecting your interior life, the failures you may suffer and the victories.

Always be very sincere in spiritual direction. Don't make allowances for yourselves without checking beforehand; open up your souls completely, without fear or shame. Otherwise this smooth and straight road will become tortuous, and what at first was trivial will end up strangling you like a noose. 'Do not imagine that those who are lost fall victims of a sudden failure. No, each went astray at the outset or neglected his soul for a long spell, so that the firmness of his virtues was gradually undermined while his vices grew little by little, and so he came to a wretched downfall... A house does not fall down suddenly by some unforeseen accident. There was either something wrong with its very foundations, or the neglect of those dwelling in it was so prolonged that what at first were tiny defects ended up corroding the firmness of the structure, and so when storms came or torrential rains fell the house tumbled inevitably and in so doing brought to light the years of neglect.'

Do you remember the story of the gypsy who went to confession? It is only a story, a joke, because we never talk about confession and, besides, I have a very high opinion of gypsies. Poor fellow! He was very sorry for what he had done. 'Father,' he

said, 'I have stolen a halter.' Nothing much to worry about there, is there? 'And with it there was a mule... and then, another halter... and, another mule.' And so on, up to twenty. My children, it is the same with us. Once we give in and steal the halter, the rest follows, a whole string of evil inclinations, bringing wretchedness, degradation and shame. Something similar can happen in our dealings with others: at first there is a small, cutting remark, and in the end people can end up cold shouldering each other, and living in an atmosphere of icy indifference.

16 'Catch the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil our vineyards, our vineyards in bloom.' Be faithful, very faithful, in all the little things. If we try to live thus, we shall also learn to run trustingly into the arms of Mary, as children of hers. Did I not remind you, at the beginning, that we are all really very young, only as old as the years we have lived since we decided to come very close to God? That being so, it is understandable that our wretchedness and littleness should find strength in the greatness and holy purity of the Mother of God, who is also our Mother.

There is another story, a true one, which I can tell you since it took place many, many years ago; and because the expression used is so startling that it will help you reflect. I was giving a retreat at the time, to priests from several dioceses. I invited them, in a friendly way because I wanted to help, to come and have a talk and unburden their consciences, because we priests too need brotherly help and advice. I began to speak to one of them. He was somewhat rough in manner, but a worthy and honest man. I tried to draw him out a bit, gently but firmly, so as to heal any wound there might be inside his heart. All at once he interrupted me, more or less with these words: 'I'm very envious of my donkey. It's been working in seven parishes and you can't say a thing against it. If only the same could be said of me!'

17 Examine your conscience sincerely: perhaps neither you nor I deserve the praise that country priest had for his donkey. We have worked so hard, held responsible positions, you have won success in men's eyes in such and such a job... But, in God's presence, is there nothing you regret? Have you truly tried to serve God and your fellow men? Or have you pursued your own selfish plans, your personal glory, your own ambitions, seeking a purely earthly success that will dwindle pitifully into nothingness?

If I am speaking to you somewhat bluntly, it is because I myself want once again to make a very sincere act of contrition, and I would like each one of you to do the same. As we call to mind our infidelities, and so many mistakes, weaknesses, so much cowardice each one of us has his own experience — let us repeat to Our Lord, from the bottom of our hearts, Peter's cry of contrition, Domine, tu omnia nosti, tu scis quia amo te! 'Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you, despite my wretchedness!' And I would even add, 'You know that I love you, precisely because of my wretchedness, for it leads me to rely on you who are my strength: quia tu es, Deus, fortitudo mea.' And at that point let us start again.

Seeking God's presence

18 Interior life. Sanctity in our ordinary tasks, sanctity in the little things we do, sanctity in our professional work, in our daily cares...; sanctity, so that we may sanctify others. A friend of mine was dreaming once. (He is someone I've never really managed to get to know!) He was flying very high, but he was not inside the plane, in the cabin. He was outside, on the wings. Poor soul, how he suffered! What anguish! It was as if Our Lord was showing him that just such insecurity and danger faces apostolic souls who would fly up to the heights of God, but have no interior life, or else neglect it. They are full of anxiety and doubt, and in constant danger of coming to grief.

I really do believe that a serious danger of losing the way threatens those who launch out into action — activism! — while neglecting prayer, self denial and those means without which it is impossible to achieve a solid piety: receiving the Sacraments frequently, meditation, examination of conscience, spiritual reading and constant recourse to Our Lady and the Guardian Angels... Besides, all these means contribute in a way that nothing else can, to making the Christian's daily life a joyful one, for, from their hidden riches, flow out the sweetness and joy of God, like honey from the comb.

19 In our inner life, in our external behavior, in our dealings with others, in our work, each of us must try to maintain a constant presence of God, conversing with him, carrying on a dialogue in a way that does not show outwardly. Or, rather, which as a rule does not express itself in audible words, but which certainly should show itself in the determination and loving care we put into carrying out all our duties, both great and small. Without such perseverance, our behavior would hardly be consistent with our status as children of God, for we would have wasted the resources which Our Lord in his goodness has placed within our reach, in order that we may come to 'perfect manhood, unto the measure of the fullness of Christ.'

During the civil war in Spain I traveled a lot to offer priestly care to many young men at the front. In a trench one day near Teruel, I heard a conversation which I have never forgotten. A young soldier was saying of one of the others, apparently a somewhat indecisive and weak-willed person, that he wasn't all of a piece! I should be very sad if it could seriously be said of any of us that we are inconsistent: people who claim to be striving to be genuine Christians, saints, yet despise the means of becoming such, because when they carry out their duties they fail to show God the constant affection and love that he deserves from his children. If our behavior could be so described, then neither you nor I would be Christians who are all of a piece.

20 Let us try to foster deep down in our hearts a burning desire, an intense eagerness to achieve sanctity, even though we see ourselves full of failings. Do not be afraid: the more one advances in the interior life, the more clearly one sees one's own faults. Grace works in us like a magnifying glass, and even the tiniest speck of dust or an almost invisible grain of sand can appear immensely large, for the soul acquires a divine sensitivity, and even the slightest shadow irritates one's conscience, which finds delight only in the limpid clarity of God. Speak now from the bottom of your heart: 'Lord, I really do want to be a saint. I really do want to be a worthy disciple of yours and to follow you unconditionally.' And now you should

make a resolution to renew each day the great ideals which inspire you at this moment.

Oh, Jesus, if only we who are united in your Love were truly persevering! If only we could translate into deeds the yearnings you yourself awaken in our souls! Ask yourselves often, 'What am I here on earth for?' It will help you in your efforts to finish all your daily tasks perfectly and lovingly, taking care of the little details. Let us turn to the example of the saints. They were people like us, of flesh and bone, with failings and weaknesses, who managed to conquer and master themselves for love of God. Let us consider their lives and, like bees who distil precious nectar from each flower, we shall learn from their struggles. You and I shall also learn to discover so many virtues in the people about us, who teach us by their hard work, their self-denial, their joy, and we shall not dwell too much on their defects; only when it is absolutely necessary, in order to help them with fraternal correction.

In Christ's boat

21 Like Our Lord, I too am fond of talking about fishing boats and nets, so that we may all draw clear and decisive resolutions from the Gospel scenes. St Luke tells us of some fishermen washing and mending their nets by the shores of Lake Genesareth. Jesus comes up to the boats tied up alongside and goes into one of them, which is Simon's. How naturally the Master comes aboard our own boat! 'Just to complicate our lives,' you hear some people complain. You and I know better, we know that Our Lord has crossed our paths to complicate our existence with gentleness and love.

When he has finished preaching from Peter's boat, he says to the fishermen, *duc in altum et laxate retia vestra in capturam!*, 'launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch!' Trusting in Christ's word they obey, and haul in a wonderful catch. Then turning to Peter who, like James and John, cannot hide his astonishment, the Lord explains, 'Fear not; henceforth you shall be fishers of men. And having brought their boats to land, leaving all things, they followed him.'

Your boat — your talents, your hopes, your achievements — is worth nothing whatsoever, unless you leave it in Christ's hands, allowing him the freedom to come aboard. Make sure you don't turn it into an idol. In your boat by yourself, if you try to do without the Master, you are — supernaturally speaking — making straight for shipwreck. Only if you allow, and seek, his presence and captaincy, will you be safe from the storms and setbacks of life. Place everything in God's hands. Let your thoughts, the brave adventures you have imagined, your lofty human ambitions, your noble loves, pass through the heart of Christ. Otherwise, sooner or later, they will all sink to the bottom together with your selfishness.

22 If you agree to let God take command of your boat, if you let him be the master, how safe you will be!... even when he seems to have gone away, to have fallen asleep, to be unconcerned; even though a storm is rising and it's pitch dark all around you. St Mark tells us how once the apostles were in just such circumstances and Jesus 'when the night had reached its fourth quarter, seeing them hard put to it with rowing (for the wind was against them), came to them

walking on the sea... Take courage, he said, it is myself; do not be afraid. So he came to them on board the boat, and thereupon the wind dropped.'

My children, so many things happen to us here on earth!... I could tell you so many tales of sorrow, of suffering, of ill treatment, of martyrdom — and I mean it literally — of the heroism of many souls. In our mind's eye we sometimes get the impression that Jesus is asleep, that he does not hear us. But St Luke describes how the Lord looks after his own. 'When they (the disciples), were sailing, he slept. And there came down a storm of wind upon the lake and they began to ship water perilously. They came and awakened him saying, Master, we perish! But Jesus arising, rebuked the wind and the rage of the water. And it ceased and there was a calm. And he said to them, Where is your faith?'

If we give ourselves to him, he will give himself to us. We must trust the Master completely, place ourselves unreservedly in his hands; show him by our actions that the boat is his; that we want him to do as he pleases with all we possess.

Let me finish with these resolutions, asking Our Lady to intercede for us: let us live by faith; let us persevere with hope; let us remain very close to Jesus; let us really, really, really love him; let us live out and enjoy our adventure of Love, for we are in love, in love with God; let us allow Christ to come aboard our poor boat, and take possession of our souls as Lord and Master; let us show him sincerely that we are going to try to live in his presence always, day and night, for he has called us to the faith: ecce ego quia vocasti me! We are coming into his fold, drawn there by his call, his gentle whistle as our Good Shepherd, certain that only in its shelter will we find true happiness both here and in eternity.

FREEDOM, A GIFT FROM GOD

A homily given on 10 April 1956

Choosing life

The meaning of freedom

Freedom and self-surrender

Freedom of consciences

Answerable to God

23 I have often reminded you of that moving scene in the Gospel where Jesus is in Peter's boat, from which he has been speaking to the people. The multitude following him has stirred the eagerness for souls which consumes his heart, and now the Divine Master wants his disciples to share his zeal. After telling them to launch out into the deep, duc in altum! he suggests to Peter that he let down his nets for a catch.

I am not going to linger now over the details of what happened, although there is much to be learned from them. What I would like you to consider with me is how the Prince of the Apostles reacts to the miracle he has just seen: 'Lord, depart from

me,' he says, 'for I am a sinful man.' This is true and I am quite sure it applies perfectly to the personal situation of each one of us. Nevertheless, I assure you that having witnessed during my life so many marvelous works of divine grace performed through human hands, I feel moved, and more so each day, to shout out, 'Lord, do not depart from me, for without you I can do no good at all.'

Precisely because of this, I readily understand those words of St Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, which ring out like a wonderful hymn to freedom, 'God who created you without you, will not save you without you.' Every single one of us, you and I as well, always has the possibility, the unfortunate possibility of rising up against God, of rejecting him (perhaps by our behavior) or of crying out, 'we do not want this man to rule over us.'

Choosing life

24 We have learned with gratitude, because it makes us realize the happiness we are being called to, that all creatures have been created out of nothing by God and for God: both men, who are rational creatures, although we so often act unreasonably, and the irrational beings who roam the surface of the earth, or burrow in its inmost recesses, or sail the azure skies — some soaring so high that they come face to face with the sun. But in all this wonderful variety, it is only we men (I am not referring now to the angels) who can unite ourselves to the Creator by using our freedom. We are in a position to give him, or deny him, the glory that is his due as the Author of everything that exists.

This possibility makes up the light and shade of human freedom. Our Lord invites us, urges us to choose the good, so tenderly does he love us! 'See, today I set before you a choice between life and death, good and evil. If you pay heed to the commandments of Yahweh your God which I command you this day, by loving Yahweh your God, by walking in his ways and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his ordinances, then you shall live... Choose life, that you may live.'

Ask yourself now (I too am examining my conscience) whether you are holding firmly and unshakably to your choice of Life? When you hear the most lovable voice of God urging you on to holiness, do you freely answer 'Yes'? Let us turn our gaze once more to Jesus, as he speaks to the people in the towns and countryside of Palestine. He doesn't want to force himself upon us. 'If you have a mind to be perfect...', he says to the rich young man. The young man refused to take the hint, and the Gospel goes on to say: *abiit tristis*, he went away forlorn. That is why I have sometimes called him the 'sad lad.' He lost his happiness because he refused to hand over his freedom to God.

25 Consider now the sublime moment when the Archangel Gabriel announces to the Virgin Mary the plans of the Most High. Our Mother listens, and asks a question to understand better what the Lord is asking of her. Then she gives her firm reply: *Fiat!* Be it done unto me according to thy word! This is the fruit of the best freedom of all, the freedom of deciding in favor of God.

This hymn to freedom is echoed in all the mysteries of our Catholic faith. The Blessed Trinity draws the world and man out of nothing, in a free outpouring of love. The Word comes down from Heaven and takes on our flesh, an act which bears the splendid mark of freedom in submission: 'Behold I have come to do thy Will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.' When God's appointed time comes to save mankind from the slavery of sin, we contemplate Jesus Christ in Gethsemani, suffering in agony to the point of sweating blood. He spontaneously and unconditionally accepts the sacrifice which the Father is asking of him: 'Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, like a sheep standing dumb before its shearers.' He had already told his disciples that this was to happen, in one of those conversations where he would pour out his heart so that those who love him might know that he is the Way, the only way, to approach the Father. 'This is why my Father loves me, because I am laying down my life to take it up again afterwards. Nobody can rob me of it; I lay it down of my own accord. I am free to lay it down and free to take it up again.'

The meaning of freedom

26 We will never fully understand Jesus' freedom. It is immense, infinite, as is his love. But the priceless treasure of his generous holocaust should move us to ask, 'Why, my Lord, have you granted me this privilege which I can use to follow in your footsteps, but also to offend you?' Thus we come to appreciate that freedom is used properly when it is directed towards the good; and that it is misused when men are forgetful and turn away from the Love of loves. Personal freedom, which I defend and will always defend with all my strength, leads me to ask with deep conviction, though I am well aware of my own weakness: 'What do you want from me, Lord, so that I may freely do it?'

Christ himself gives us the answer: *veritas liberabit vos*, the truth will set you free. How great a truth is this, which opens the way to freedom and gives it meaning throughout our lives. I will sum it up for you, with the joy and certainty which flow from knowing there is a close relationship between God and his creatures. It is the knowledge that we have come from the hands of God, that the Blessed Trinity looks upon us with predilection, that we are children of so wonderful a Father. I ask my Lord to help us decide to take this truth to heart, to dwell upon it day by day; only then will we be acting as free men. Do not forget: anyone who does not realize that he is a child of God is unaware of the deepest truth about himself. When he acts he lacks the dominion and self-mastery we find in those who love Our Lord above all else.

Convince yourselves that to get to heaven we must commit ourselves freely, with a whole-hearted, constant and voluntary determination. By itself, however, freedom is insufficient: it needs a guide, a pole-star. 'The soul cannot proceed without someone to guide it; this is why it has been redeemed in order that it may have as its King, Christ, whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light (Matt 11:30), and not the devil, whose rule is oppressive.'

Reject the deception of those who appease themselves with the pathetic cry of 'Freedom! Freedom!' Their cry often masks a tragic enslavement, because choices that prefer error do not liberate. Christ alone sets us free, for He alone is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

27 Let us ask ourselves once again, here in the presence of God: 'Lord, why have you given us this power? Why have you entrusted us with the faculty of choosing you or rejecting you? You want us to make good use of this power. Lord, what you do want me to do?' His reply is precise, crystal-clear: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul and with thy whole mind.'

Don't you see? Freedom finds its true meaning when it is put to the service of the truth which redeems, when it is spent in seeking God's infinite Love which liberates us from all forms of slavery. Each passing day increases my yearning to proclaim to the four winds this inexhaustible treasure that belongs to Christianity: 'the glorious freedom of the children of God!' This is essentially what is meant by a 'good will,' which teaches us to pursue 'good, after having distinguished it from evil.'

I would like you to meditate on a fundamental point, which brings home to us the responsibility we have for our own consciences. Nobody else can choose for us: 'men's supreme dignity lies in this, that they are directed towards the good by themselves, and not by others.' Many of us have inherited the Catholic faith from our parents, and, by the grace of God, supernatural life began in our souls from the moment we were baptized as new-born infants. But we must renew throughout our lives, and every day of our lives, our determination to love God above all things. 'He is a Christian, a true Christian, who subjects himself to the rule of the one and only Word of God,' without laying down conditions to his obedience, and being ever ready to resist the devil's temptings by adopting the same attitude as Christ did: 'Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and serve none but Him.'

Freedom and self-surrender

28 God's love is a jealous love. He is not satisfied if we come to meet him with conditions. He longs for us to give ourselves completely, without keeping dark corners in our heart, where the joy and happiness of grace and the supernatural gifts cannot reach. Perhaps you are thinking, 'if I say "yes" to this exclusive Love might I not lose my freedom?'

Aided and enlightened by Our Lord, who is presiding over us in this period of prayer, I trust that this question will become clearer for you and me. Each one of us has at some time or other experienced that serving Christ Our Lord involves suffering and hardship; to deny this would imply that we had not yet found God. A soul in love knows however that when such suffering comes it is only a fleeting impression; the soul soon finds that the yoke is easy and the burden light, because Jesus is carrying it upon his shoulders as he embraced the wood of the Cross when our eternal happiness was at stake. But there are people who do not understand. They rebel against the Creator, in a sad, petty, impotent rebellion, and they blindly repeat the futile complaint recorded in the Psalms, 'let us break away from their bondage, rid ourselves of their toils.' They shrink from the hardship of fulfilling

their daily task with heroic silence and naturalness, without show or complaint. They have not realized that even when God's Will seems painful and its demands wounding, it coincides perfectly with our freedom, which is only to be found in God and in his plans.

29 Such people barricade themselves behind their freedom. 'My freedom! My freedom!' they cry. They have their freedom, but they don't use it. They look at it, they set it up, a clay idol for their petty minds to worship. Is this freedom? What use is this treasure to them, if there is no commitment guiding their whole lives? Such behavior goes against their very dignity and nobility as human beings. They are left aimless, with no clear path to guide their footsteps on this earth. You and I have met such people. They then let themselves be carried away by childish vanity, by selfish conceit, by sensuality.

Their freedom turns out to be barren, or produces fruits which even humanly speaking are ridiculous. A person who does not choose, with complete freedom, an upright code of conduct, sooner or later ends up being manipulated by others. He will lead a lazy, parasitic existence, at the mercy of what others decide. He will let himself be blown to and fro by any wind whatsoever, and it will always be others who make up his mind for him. 'These are waterless clouds, carried hither and thither by the winds, autumn trees that bear no fruit, doubly dead and rootless,' even though they may try to disguise their lack of character, courage and honesty behind a smoke-screen of constant chatter and excuses.

'No one is forcing me!' they obstinately repeat. No one? Everyone is coercing their make-believe freedom which will not run the risk of accepting responsibility for the consequences of its own free actions. Where there is no love of God, the individual and responsible use of personal freedom becomes impossible. There, despite appearances to the contrary, the individual is coerced at every turn. The indecisive and irresolute person is like plasticine at the mercy of circumstances. Anyone and anything can mould him according to its whim, and especially his passions and the worst tendencies of his own nature wounded by sin.

30 Remember the parable of the talents. The servant who received one talent could have put it to good use, as his fellow servants did. He could have set to work with his own abilities. He could have made sure that his talent bore fruit. Instead, what is on his mind? He is worried about losing his talent. Fair enough. But, then? He goes and buries it! The talent he received bears no fruit.

Let us not forget this man's sickly fear of putting to honest use his capacity for work, his mind, his will, his whole being. 'I'll bury it,' the poor fellow seems to be saying, 'but my freedom is safe!' Not so. He has turned his freedom towards something very definite, towards the most miserable and arid barrenness. He has taken sides, because he had no alternative. He had to choose, but he has chosen badly.

It is utterly false to oppose freedom and self-surrender, because self-surrender is a consequence of freedom. Look, when a mother sacrifices herself for love of her children, she has made a choice, and the more she loves the greater will be her

freedom. If her love is great, her freedom will bear much fruit. Her children's good derives from her blessed freedom, which presupposes self-surrender, and from her blessed self-surrender, which is precisely freedom.

31 But, you might say, when we have attained our heart's desire, our search will be over. Does freedom vanish then? I assure you that it will then be more active than ever, because love is not content with a routine fulfillment of duty. Love is incompatible with boredom or apathy. To love means to renew our dedication every day, with loving deeds of service.

I insist, and I would like to engrave this deep in your hearts, that freedom and self-surrender are not contradictory. They sustain one another. Freedom can only be given up for love; I cannot conceive any other reason for surrendering it. And I am not just playing with words or phrases. When people give themselves freely, at every moment of their self-surrender, freedom renews their love; to be renewed in that way is to be always young, generous, capable of high ideals and great sacrifices. I remember how pleased I was when I was told that the Portuguese term for young people is *os novos*, the new ones. That is just what they are. I tell you this because, although I have been around a good many years, when I pray at the foot of the altar 'to God who gives joy to my youth,' I feel young and I know that I will never consider myself old. If I keep true to my God, Love will constantly vivify me. My youth will be renewed like that of the eagle.

It's because we love freedom that we tie ourselves down. Only pride sees such bonds as a heavy chain. True humility, which is taught us by the One who is meek and humble of heart, shows that his yoke is easy and his burden light: his yoke is freedom and love and unity; his yoke is the Life which he won for us on the Cross.

Freedom of consciences

32 Throughout my years as a priest, whenever I have spoken, or rather shouted, about my love for personal freedom, I have noticed some people reacting with distrust, as if they suspected that my defence of freedom could endanger the faith. Such faint-hearted people can rest assured. The only freedom that can assail the faith is a misinterpreted freedom, an aimless freedom, one without objective principles, one that is lawless and irresponsible. In a word, license. Unfortunately, this is what some people are advocating, and their claim does indeed constitute a threat to the faith.

This is why it is inaccurate to speak of freedom of conscience, thereby implying that it may be morally right for someone to reject God. We have already seen that it is in our power to oppose God's plans for salvation. It is in our power, but we should not do so. If someone adopted this attitude deliberately, he would be sinning, by breaking the first and most important of the commandments: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart.' PP I defend with all my strength the freedom of consciences, which means that no one can licitly prevent a man from worshipping God. The legitimate hunger for truth must be respected. Man has a grave obligation to seek God, to know him and worship him, but no one on earth

is permitted to impose on his neighbor the practice of a faith he lacks; just as no one can claim the right to harm those who have received the faith from God.

33 Our Holy Mother the Church has always spoken out in favor of freedom and has always rejected fatalism, both in its ancient and more modern versions. She has pointed out that each soul is master of its own destiny, for good or ill: 'and those who have been true to the good will go to eternal life; those who have committed evil, to eternal fire.' I have always been impressed by this awesome capacity which you and I have, which all of us have, a capacity which indeed reveals the nobility of our state. 'So true is it that sin is a voluntary evil, that in no way would it be sin if it did not have its origin in the will. This affirmation is so evident that the few wise men and the many fools who inhabit the earth are agreed upon it.'

Once again I raise my heart in thanksgiving to my God and Lord, because there was nothing to stop him from creating us impeccable, irresistibly drawn towards the good. Nevertheless, 'he judged that his servants would be better if they served him freely.' How great is the love, the mercy of our Father! Whenever I think of his divine extravagance for us his children, I wish I had a thousand tongues, a thousand hearts and more, with which to be constantly praising God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Just think: the Almighty, who through his Providence rules the whole universe, does not want the forced service of slaves; he prefers to have children who are free. Although we are born *proni ad peccatum*, inclined to sin, due to the fall of our first parents, he has placed in the soul of each and every one of us a spark of his infinite intelligence, an attraction towards the good, a yearning for everlasting peace. And he brings us to understand that we will attain truth, happiness and freedom if we strive to make this seed of eternal life grow in our hearts.

34 But we can still say 'no' to God, rejecting this source of new and permanent happiness. Anyone who does so stops being a son and becomes a slave. 'Each thing is that which it is fitted to be according to its nature; hence, when it goes in search of something alien to its nature, it is not acting according to its own manner of being, but under an alien impulse; and this is to act in a servile manner. Man is rational by nature. When he acts according to reason, he proceeds by his own movement, according to what he is: and this is proper to freedom. When he sins, he works against reason, and then he is allowing himself to be led by the impulse of another, he is subject to limitations imposed by another and so anyone who commits sin is a slave to sin (John 8:34).'

Allow me to insist on this point. It is quite evident, as we can see in ourselves and in others, that everybody is a slave in some form or other. Some stoop before riches; others worship power; some, the relative tranquility of skepticism, and there are those who discover in sensuality their golden calf. The same happens in noble things. We put effort into a job of work, into an undertaking, large or small, into scientific, artistic, literary or spiritual activities. Wherever there is commitment and real passion, the person involved lives enslaved, joyfully devoting himself to fulfilling his task.

35 We will be slaves either way. Since we must serve anyway, for whether we like it or not this is our lot as men, then there is nothing better than recognizing that Love has made us slaves of God. From the moment we recognize this we cease being slaves and become friends, sons. Then we see the difference: we find ourselves tackling the honest occupations of the world just as passionately and just as enthusiastically as others do, but with peace in the depth of our hearts. We are happy and calm, even in the midst of difficulties, for we are not putting our trust in passing things, but in what lasts for ever. We are not children of the slave but of the free woman.'

Where does our freedom come from? It comes from Christ Our Lord. This is the freedom with which he has ransomed us. That is why he teaches, 'if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.' We Christians do not have to ask anyone to tell us the true meaning of this gift, because the only freedom that can save man is Christian freedom.

I like to speak of the adventure of freedom, because that is how your lives and mine unfold. I insist that it is freely, as children and not as slaves, that we follow the path which Our Lord has marked out for each one of us. We relish our freedom of action as a gift from God.

I opt for God because I want to, freely, without compulsion of any kind. And I undertake to serve, to convert my whole life into a means of serving others, out of love for my Lord Jesus. It is this freedom which moves me to cry out that nothing on earth can separate me from the love of Christ.

Answerable to God

36 "God created man in the beginning and he left him in the power of his own free will" (Sir 15:14). This could not be so unless man had freedom of choice.' We are answerable to God for all the actions we freely perform. There is no room here for anonymity. Each one finds himself face to face with his Lord, and he can decide to live as God's friend or as his enemy. This is the beginning of the path of the interior struggle which is a lifelong undertaking because, as long as we are on this earth, we will never achieve complete freedom.

Moreover, our Christian faith tells us to ensure that everyone enjoys a climate of freedom, the first step for this being to remove any element of insidious compulsion in the manner of presenting the faith. 'If we are brought to Christ by force, we believe without wanting to; this is violence, not freedom. We can enter the Church unwillingly. We can approach the altar unwillingly. We can even receive the Sacrament unwillingly. But we can only believe if we want to.' It is clear also that, when one reaches the use of reason, personal freedom is required to enter the Church, and to correspond to the continual calls which Our Lord makes to us.

37 In the parable of the wedding feast, when the master of the house finds out that some guests have declined his invitation with poor excuses, he tells his servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedgerows and compel — compelle intrare — people to

come in.' Surely this is coercion, an act of violence against the legitimate freedom of each individual conscience?

If we meditate on the Gospel and reflect on the teachings of Jesus, we will not mistake these commands for coercion. See how gently Christ invites: 'If you have a mind to be perfect... If any man would come after me...' His compelle intrare implies no violence, either physical or moral. Rather, it reflects the power of attraction of Christian example, which shows in its way of acting the power of God: 'See how the Father attracts. He delights in teaching, and not in imposing necessity on men. That is how he attracts men towards himself.'

When we breathe this air of freedom we see clearly that evil is an enslavement, not a liberation. 'He who sins against God keeps the freedom of his will to the extent that he is free from coercion, but he has lost it in that he is no longer free from blame.' Such a person may show that he has acted according to his preferences, but he does not speak with the voice of true freedom, because he has become the slave of his decision and he has decided for the worst, for the absence of God, where there is no freedom to be found.

38 I tell you once again: I accept no slavery other than that of God's Love. This is because, as I have told you on other occasions, religion is the greatest rebellion of men, who refuse to live like animals, who are dissatisfied and restless until they know their Creator and are on intimate terms with him. I want you to be rebels, free and unfettered, because I want you — it is Christ who wants us! — to be children of God. Slavery or divine sonship, this is the dilemma we face. Children of God or slaves to pride, to sensuality, to the fretful selfishness which seems to afflict so many souls.

Love of God marks out the way of truth, justice and goodness. When we make up our minds to tell Our Lord, 'I put my freedom in your hands,' we find ourselves loosed from the many chains that were binding us to insignificant things, ridiculous cares or petty ambitions. Then our freedom, which is a treasure beyond price, a wonderful pearl that it would be a tragedy to cast before swine, will be used by us entirely to learn how to do good.

This is the glorious freedom of the children of God. Christians who let themselves be browbeaten or become inhibited or envious in the face of the licentious behavior of those who have not accepted the Word of God, show that they have a very poor idea of the faith. If we truly fulfill the law of Christ — that is if we make the effort to do so, because we will not always fully succeed — we will find ourselves endowed with a wonderful gallantry of spirit that does not need to look elsewhere to discover the full meaning of human dignity.

Our faith is not in any way a burden or a limitation. What a poor idea of Christianity one would have if one thought that way! When we decide for God we lose nothing, and we gain everything. He who at the expense of his soul 'secures his own life, will lose it; it is the man who loses his life for my sake that will secure it.'

We have drawn the winning card, the first prize. If anything prevents us from seeing this clearly, let us look inside our own soul. We may find that our faith is weak, that we have little personal contact with God, that our life of prayer is impoverished. We must beg Our Lord, through his Mother who is our Mother too, to increase his love in us, to grant us a taste of the sweetness of his presence. Only when we love do we attain the fullest freedom: the freedom of not wanting ever to abandon, for all eternity, the object of our love.

TIME IS A TREASURE

A homily given on 9 January 1956

From the first hour

Being profitable in God's service

At the foot of the vine

The barren fig tree

Going about our Father's business

39 As I talk to you, and we make conversation together with God, Our Lord, I am simply voicing aloud my personal prayer. I like to remind myself of this very often. You for your part must also make an effort to nourish your own prayer within your souls, even in situations, such as the one we are in today, when we find ourselves having to deal with a topic which, at first sight, does not seem very conducive to a loving dialogue, which is what our conversation with God should aim to be. I say 'at first sight,' because, of course, everything that happens to us, everything that goes on around us, can and indeed should form a theme for our meditation.

I want to talk to you about time, that passes so swiftly. I am not going to repeat to you the well-known phrase about one year more being one year less... Nor am I going to suggest that you ask around what others think of the passage of time. If you were to do so, you would probably hear something like, 'Oh divine treasure of youth that slips away, never more to return...,' though I admit you may come across other views with a deeper and more supernatural content.

Nor is it my purpose to dwell nostalgically on the brevity of human life. For us Christians the fleetingness of our journey through life should instead be a spur to help us make better use of our time. It should never be a motive for fearing Our Lord, and much less for looking upon death as a disastrous and final end. It had been said in countless ways, some more poetical than others that, by the grace and mercy of God, each year that ends is a step that takes us nearer to Heaven, our final home.

When I reflect on this, how well I understand St Paul's exclamation when he writes to the Corinthians, *tempus breve est*. How short indeed is the time of our passing through this world! For the true Christian these words ring deep down in his heart as a reproach to his lack of generosity, and as a constant invitation to be loyal.

Brief indeed is our time for loving, for giving, for making atonement. It would be very wrong, therefore, for us to waste it, or to cast this treasure irresponsibly overboard. We mustn't squander this period of the world's history which God has entrusted to each one of us.

40 Let us open the gospel of St Matthew at chapter twenty-five. We read, 'The kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins, who went to bring the bridegroom and his bride home, taking their lamps with them. Five of these were foolish, and five were wise.' The evangelist tells us that the wise virgins had made good use of their time. They had prudently gone and provided themselves with the necessary amount of oil, and were ready when they were told: 'See, it's time. Behold, the bridegroom is on his way; go out to meet him!' They turned up their lamps and went out joyfully to welcome him.

That day will come for us. It will be our last day, but we're not afraid of it. Trusting firmly in God's grace, we are ready from this very moment to be generous and courageous, and take loving care of little things: we are ready to go and meet Our Lord, with our lamps burning brightly. For the feast of feasts awaits us in Heaven. 'Dearly beloved brethren, it is we who are called to take part in the wedding feast of the Word, we who already have faith in the Church, who are nourished on Sacred Scripture, and who rejoice because the Church is united to God. Ask yourselves now, I pray you, whether you have come to the feast wearing your wedding garment: examine your thoughts attentively.' I assure you, and I say the same to myself, that our wedding garment has to be woven with our love of God, a love we will have learnt to reap even in the most trivial things we do. It is precisely those who are in love who pay attention to details, even when they're doing apparently unimportant things.

41 But let us follow the thread of the parable. What happens to the foolish virgins? As soon as the cry is raised, they do their best to get ready to receive the Bridegroom. They go off to buy oil. But their decision had come too late, and while they were away, 'the bridegroom came; those who stood ready escorted him to the wedding, and the door was shut. Afterwards those other virgins came, with the cry, "Lord, Lord, open to us".' It's not that they hadn't done anything. They had tried to do something... But in the end they were to hear his stern reply: 'I do not recognize you.' Either they didn't know how to get ready properly or they didn't want to and they forgot to take the sensible precaution of buying oil in due time. They were not generous enough to carry out properly the little that had been entrusted to them. They had been told with many hours to spare, but they had wasted their time.

Let us take a good honest look at our own lives. How is it that sometimes we just can't find those few minutes it would take to finish lovingly the work we have to do, which is the very means of our sanctification? Why do we neglect our family duties? Why that tendency to rush through our prayers, or through the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass? How are we so lacking in calm and serenity when it comes to fulfilling the duties of our state, and yet so unhurried as we indulge in our own whims? You might say these are trifling matters. You're right, they are, but these trifles are the oil, the fuel we need to keep our flame alive and our light shining.

From the first hour

42 'Here is an image of the kingdom of heaven; a rich man went out at daybreak to hire laborers for his vineyard.' You know how the story continues. The man goes back several times to the marketplace to hire workers. Some were called at dawn, others almost at nightfall.

All receive a silver piece, 'the wages that I promised you, in other words, my own image and likeness. For the image of the King is engraved on each silver piece.' Such is the mercy of God. He calls each one bearing in mind their personal circumstances, because he wants 'all men to be saved.' In our case, we were born Christians, brought up in the faith, and then we received a clear calling from Our Lord. The facts are undeniable. Therefore, when you sense he's beckoning you, even if it is at the last hour, how can you think of lingering in the marketplace, basking in the sun as so many of those workers did, because they had time on their hands?

We should never have time on our hands, not even a second — and I am not exaggerating. There is work to be done. The world is a big place and there are millions of souls who have not yet heard the doctrine of Christ in all its clarity. I am addressing each one of you individually. If you have time on your hands, think again a little. It's quite likely that you have become lukewarm; that, supernaturally speaking, you have become a cripple. You are not moving, you are at a standstill. You are barren, you are not doing all the good you should be doing to the people around you, in your environment, in your work and in your family.

43 You might tell me, 'Why should I make an effort?' It is not I who answer you, but St Paul: 'Christ's love is urging us.' A whole lifetime would be little, if it was spent expanding the frontiers of your charity. From the very beginnings of Opus Dei I have repeated tirelessly that cry of Our Lord: 'By this shall men know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.' I did this to encourage generous souls to put it into practice in their own lives. This is precisely how we shall be recognized as Christians, if we make charity the starting point of everything we do.

He, who is purity personified, does not assert that his disciples will be known by the purity of their lives. He, who so lived sobriety that he didn't even have a stone upon which to lay his head, and spent so many days in prayer and fasting, did not declare to his Apostles: 'you will be known as my chosen ones because you are not gluttons or drunkards.'

The purity of Christ's life was — and will be in every generation — a slap in the face to the society of his day, a society which then as now was often so corrupt. His temperance also stung those whose lives were one long banquet, interrupted only by self-induced vomiting so that they could then get back to eating, thus fulfilling to the letter the words of Saul: their stomachs have become their god.

44 Our Lord's humility was yet another blow for those who spent their lives only looking after themselves. Here in Rome I have often commented — perhaps you yourselves have heard me say it — that, under its now ruined arches, there used to

march in triumph victorious emperors and generals, all vain and haughty and full of pride. And as they passed under these monuments they may have had to lower their heads for fear of striking the great archways with their majestic brows. Yet again, Christ, who is so humble, does not state: 'you will be known as my disciples by your modesty and humility.'

I would like to help you realize that, even after twenty centuries, the Master's commandment is still as strikingly new as ever. It is, as it were, a letter of introduction proving that one is truly a son of God. Ever since I became a priest I have very often preached that, for so many people alas, this commandment continues to be new, because they have never, or hardly ever, made an effort to put it into practice. It is sad to have to say this, but it is true. Nevertheless the Messiah's words are quite clear. He stresses, once and for all, 'by this you will be known, by the love you have for one another!' This is why I feel I must remind people constantly about these words of Our Lord. St Paul adds, 'bear one another's burdens; then you will be fulfilling the law of Christ.' Think of the amount of time you have wasted, perhaps with the false excuse that you could easily afford it, and yet you have so many brothers, your friends about you, who are overworked! Help them unobtrusively, kindly, with a smile on your lips, in such a way that it will be practically impossible for them to notice what you are doing for them. Thus they will not even be able to express their gratitude, because the discreet refinement of your charity will have made your help pass undetected.

The foolish virgins, poor things, with their empty lamps, might argue that they hadn't had a free moment. The workers at the marketplace end up wasting most of the day, because they don't feel duty bound to render any useful service, even though Our Lord was seeking them constantly, urgently, from the very first hour. When he calls us to his service, let us say 'Yes' and bear 'the day's burden and the heat' for love's sake, in which case it will be no burden.

Being profitable in God's service

45 Let us now consider the parable of the man who 'went on his travels; he summoned his servants and entrusted his goods to them.' Each one is given a different amount to administer in his master's absence. I think it is appropriate here to consider how the man who accepted the one talent behaved. He acted in a way which in my part of the world we'd call 'playing the cuckoo.' His petty mind thinks and wonders, then is made up: 'he went off and made a hole in the ground, and there hid his master's money.'

What kind of work can our man undertake henceforth, now that he has given up the very tools of his trade? He has opted irresponsibly for the easy way out. He will simply give back what he has received. From now on he will just kill time, minutes, hours, days, months, years, his whole life! The others meanwhile are busy trading. They are noble fellows and keen to give back more than they have received, for the master has a right to expect a profit. His instructions had been very clear: *negotiamini dum venio*; look after the business and make it yield a profit, until the owner returns. Not so our man, and thus his whole life becomes useless.

46 What a shame it would be to have as one's occupation in life that of killing time which is a God-given treasure! No excuse could justify such behavior. 'Let no one say, "I only have one talent, I can't do anything." Even with just one talent you can act in a meritorious way.' How sad not to turn to good account and obtain a real profit from the few or many talents that God has given to each man so that he may dedicate himself to the task of serving other souls and the whole of society!

When a Christian kills time on this earth, he is putting himself in danger of 'killing Heaven' for himself, that is, if through selfishness, he backs out of things and hides away and doesn't care. A person who loves God not only hands over to the service of Christ, what he has and what he is in life. He gives his very self. He is not small-minded. He does not see himself in his health, in his good name, or in his career.

47 'Mine, mine, mine,' is the way many people think and talk and act. How unpleasant an attitude this is! St Jerome comments that, 'truly the words of Scripture, "to seek excuses for sins" (Ps 140:4) are fulfilled by those people who, apart from having the sin of pride, are also lazy and careless.'

It is pride that constantly makes people think: 'mine, mine, mine.' It is a vice that makes men sterile and fruitless. It destroys their keenness to work for God and leads them to waste their time. As for you, don't lose your effectiveness; instead, trample on your selfishness. You think your life is for yourself? Your life is for God, for the good of all men, through your love for Our Lord. Your buried talent, dig it up again! Make it yield, and you will taste the joy of knowing that in this supernatural business it does not matter if in this world the results are not wonders that men can admire. What really matters is to hand over all that we are and all that we have, striving to make our talent yield, and constantly exerting ourselves in order to produce good fruit.

God may have given us just one more year in which to serve him. Don't think of five, or even two. Just concentrate on this one year, that has just started. Give it to God, don't bury it! This is the resolution we ought to make.

At the foot of the vine

48 'There was a rich man who planted a vineyard; he walled it in, and dug a wine-press and built a tower in it, and then let it out to some vinedressers, while he went on his travels.'

I would like you to meditate with me on what this parable teaches, bearing in mind the points we are interested in now. This story has traditionally been seen to refer to the destiny of God's chosen people, above all pointing out how we human beings respond with unfaithfulness and ingratitude to so much love on God's part.

In particular I should like to concentrate on the phrase 'he went on his travels.' I come immediately to the conclusion that we Christians must not abandon the vineyard where God has placed us. We must direct our energies to the work before us, within these walls, toiling in the wine-press. And then taking our rest in the tower when our day's work is over. If we were to give in to comfort, it would be like

telling Jesus, 'Look, my time is mine, not yours. I don't want to tie myself down to looking after your vineyard.'

49 Our Lord has given us as a present our very lives, our senses, our faculties, and countless graces. We have no right to forget that each of us is a worker, one among many, on this plantation where He has placed us to cooperate in the task of providing food for others. This is our place, here within the boundaries of this plantation. Here is where we have to toil away each day with Jesus, helping him in his work of redemption.

Allow me to insist. You think your time is for yourself? Your time is for God! It may well be that, by God's mercy, such selfish thoughts have never entered into your mind. I'm telling you these things in case you ever find your heart wavering in its faith in Christ. Should that happen, I ask you — God asks you — to be true to your commitments, to conquer your pride, to control your imagination, not to be superficial and run away, not to desert.

The workers in the marketplace had all day to spare. The one who buried his talent wanted to kill the passing hours. The one who should have been looking after the vineyard went off elsewhere. They all prove insensitive to the great task the Master has entrusted to each and every Christian, that of seeing ourselves as his instruments, and acting accordingly, so that we may co-redeem with him, and of offering up our entire lives in the joyful sacrifice of surrendering ourselves for the good of souls.

The barren fig tree

50 Again it is St Matthew who tells us that Jesus felt hungry one day on his way back from Bethany. I am always deeply moved by the example of Our Lord, and especially when I see that as well as being perfect God he is true and perfect Man, and as such teaches us to make use even of our frailty and our own natural weaknesses, and to offer ourselves completely, just as we are, to the Father, who will gladly accept our holocaust.

He was hungry. The Maker of the universe, the Lord of all creation, experiences hunger! Thank you, Lord, for inspiring the sacred author to include this small touch here, a detail that makes me love you more and which encourages me to desire ardently to contemplate your sacred Humanity! Perfectus Deus, perfectus homo, perfect God and perfect Man, of flesh and bone, just like you and I.

51 Jesus had worked hard the previous day, so when he set off once more on his way he felt hungry. Moved by his need, he goes up to a fig tree which, from a distance, boasts a magnificent foliage. St Mark tells us that 'it was not the season for figs,' but Our Lord comes to pick them, knowing full well that he won't find any at this time of year. However, when the tree proves to be barren in spite of its apparent fertility and luxuriant leaves, Jesus commands, 'Let no man ever eat fruit of yours hereafter.'

Hard words, indeed! May you never more bear fruit! How must the disciples have felt, especially if they considered that it was the Wisdom of God who had thus spoken? Jesus curses the fig tree because in it he has found only the appearance of fruitfulness — many leaves. Let this be a lesson to us. There is no excuse for being unproductive. Some might say 'I don't know enough...' But that is no excuse. Or else, 'I am unwell, I haven't much talent, the conditions are not right, my surroundings...' These aren't excuses either. How pitiful the man who adorns himself with the foliage of a false apostolate, who has all the outward appearance of leading a fruitful life, but is not sincerely attempting to yield fruit! It looks as though he is using his time well. He seems to get around, to organize things, to be inventing new ways of solving all kinds of problems... but he has nothing to show for his efforts. No one will benefit from his works if they have no supernatural content.

Let us ask Our Lord that we may be souls who are ready to work with a heroism that proves fruitful. For there is no lack of people here on earth who, on being approached, turn out to be nothing but large, shiny, glossy leaves. Foliage, just foliage and nothing more. Meanwhile, many souls are looking to us hoping to satisfy their hunger, which is a hunger for God. We must not forget that we have all the means we need. We have sufficient doctrine and the grace of God, in spite of our wretchedness.

52 I'd like to remind you once more that we don't have much time left, *tempus breve est*, because life on earth is short, and also that, since we have the means, all that's needed is our good will to make use of the opportunities that God grants us. From the moment that Our Lord came into this world, 'the acceptable time, the day of salvation' commenced for us and for all men. May Our Father God never have to cast upon us the reproach he spoke through the prophet Jeremiah, 'the kite, circling in the air, knows its time; turtledove can guess, and swallow, and stork, when they should return; only for my people the divine appointment passes unobserved.'

There are no bad or inopportune days. All days are good, for serving God. Days become bad only when men spoil them with their lack of faith, their laziness and their indolence, which turns them away from working with God and for God. 'At all times I will bless the Lord.' Time is a treasure that melts away. It escapes from us, slipping through our fingers like water through the mountain rocks. Tomorrow will soon be another yesterday. Our lives are so very short. Yesterday has gone and today is passing by. But what a great deal can be done for the love of God in this short space of time!

No excuses will do us any good. Our Lord has been very generous with us, He has instructed us patiently. He has explained his precepts to us through parables. He has insisted tirelessly. As with Philip, he could ask us, 'here am I, who have been all this while in your company; have you not learned to recognize me yet?' The time has now come for us to get down to hard work, filling each moment of the day and bearing, willingly and joyfully, 'the day's burden and the heat.'

Going about our Father's business

53 There's a passage in St Luke's gospel, chapter two, which I think will help us to finish off well what we have been reflecting on today. In this passage Christ is a child. How his Mother and St Joseph must have suffered when, on their way back from Jerusalem, they could not find him among their relatives and friends. And then what joy when they recognize him from afar, as he instructs the teachers of Israel. But notice the words that issue from his lips. Don't they seem hard? The Son says in reply to his Mother, 'How is it that you sought me?'

Surely they were right to have looked for him? Souls who know what it is to lose Jesus Christ and to find him again, are able to understand this... 'How is it that you sought me? Didn't you know that I must be about my Father's business?' Didn't you know that I must devote my time entirely to my heavenly Father?

54 The fruit of our prayer today should be the conviction that our journey on earth, at all times and whatever the circumstances, is for God; that it is a treasure of glory, a foretaste of heaven, something marvelous, which has been entrusted to us to administer, with a sense of responsibility, being answerable both to men and to God. But it is not necessary for us to change our situation in life. Right in the middle of the world we can sanctify our profession or job, our home life, and social relations — in fact all those things that seem to have only a worldly significance.

When at the age of twenty-six I perceived the full depth of what it meant to serve Our Lord in Opus Dei, I asked with all my heart to be granted the maturity of an eighty year old man. I asked my God, with the childlike simplicity of a beginner, to make me older, so that I would know how to use my time well and learn how to make the best use of every minute, in order to serve him. Our Lord knows how to grant these riches. Perhaps the time will come when you and I will be able to say, 'I have understood more than the elders, because I have fulfilled your commandments.' Youth need not imply thoughtlessness, just as having grey hair does not necessarily mean that a person is prudent and wise.

Come with me to Mary, the Mother of Christ. You, who are our Mother and have seen Jesus grow up and make good use of the time he spent among men, teach me how to spend my days serving the Church and all mankind. My good Mother, teach me, whenever necessary, to hear in the depths of my heart, as a gentle reproach, that my time is not my own, because it belongs to Our Father who is in Heaven.

WORKING FOR GOD

A homily given on February 6, 1960

Work as a participation in God's creative power

The exemplary value of professional life

Turning work into prayer

Do everything for Love's sake

55 Many people begin, but few finish. And we, who are trying to behave as God's children, have to be among those few. Remember that only work that is well done and lovingly completed deserves the praise of the Lord which is to be found in Holy Scripture: 'better is the end of a task than its beginning.'

You may already have heard me tell this story on other occasions; but even so, I would like to bring it up again because it contains a very striking lesson. I was once looking through the Roman Ritual in search of the prayers for blessing the last stone of a building, obviously the most important stone, since it symbolically represents the hard and enterprising work of many people, who have persevered in the task throughout the long years of construction. To my surprise, I found that no such prayers existed, and I had to be satisfied with a *benedictio ad omnia*, that is, an all-purpose blessing. I must say that at first I just couldn't believe that there was such an omission in the Ritual, and I spent quite a while going over the index without finding what I wanted.

Many Christians are no longer convinced that the fullness of Life that God rightly expects from his children means that they have to have a careful concern for the quality of their everyday work, because it is this work, even in its most minor aspects, which they have to sanctify.

It is no good offering to God something that is less perfect than our poor human limitations permit. The work that we offer must be without blemish and it must be done as carefully as possible, even in its smallest details, for God will not accept shoddy workmanship. 'Thou shalt not offer anything that is faulty,' Holy Scripture warns us, 'because it would not be worthy of him.' For that reason, the work of each one of us, the activities that take up our time and energy, must be an offering worthy of our Creator. It must be *operatio Dei*, a work of God that is done for God: in short, a task that is complete and faultless.

56 If you consider the many compliments paid to Jesus by those who witnessed his life, you will find one which in a way embraces all of them. I am thinking of the spontaneous exclamation of wonder and enthusiasm which arose from the crowd at the astonishing sight of his miracles: *bene omnia fecit*, he has done everything exceedingly well: not only the great miracles, but also the little everyday things that didn't dazzle anyone, but which Christ performed with the accomplishment of one who is *perfectus Deus*, *perfectus homo*, perfect God and perfect man.

Our Lord's whole life fills me with love for him, but I have a special weakness for his thirty hidden years spent in Bethlehem, Egypt and Nazareth. That period, so long in comparison with his public life and which the Gospels hardly mention, might seem empty of any special meaning to a person who views it superficially. And yet, I have always maintained that this silence about Our Lord's early life speaks eloquently for itself, and contains a wonderful lesson for us Christians. They were years of intense work and prayer, years during which Jesus led an ordinary life, a life like ours, we might say, which was both divine and human at the same time. In his simple workshop, unnoticed, he did everything to perfection, just as he was later to do before the multitudes.

Work as a participation in God's creative power

57 From the beginning of creation man has had to work. This is not something that I have invented. It is enough to turn to the opening pages of the Bible. There you can read that, before sin entered the world, and in its wake death, punishment and misery, God made Adam from the clay of the earth, and created for him and his descendants this beautiful world we live in, *ut operaretur et custodiret illum*, so that we might cultivate it and look after it.

We must be convinced therefore that work is a magnificent reality, and that it has been imposed on us as an inexorable law which, one way or another, binds everyone, even though some may try to seek exemption from it. Make no mistake about it. Man's duty to work is not a consequence of original sin, nor is it just a discovery of modern times. It is an indispensable means which God has entrusted to us here on this earth. It is meant to fill out our days and make us sharers in God's creative power. It enables us to earn our living and, at the same time, to reap 'the fruits of eternal life,' for 'man is born to work as the birds are born to fly.'

To this you might reply that many centuries have gone by and very few people think along these lines; that most people, when they work, do so for very different reasons: some for money, some to support their families, others to get on in society, to develop their capabilities, or perhaps to give free play to their disordered desires, or to contribute to social progress. In other words, most people regard their work as something that has to be done and cannot be avoided.

This is a stunted, selfish and earthbound outlook, which neither you nor I can accept. For we have to remember and remind people around us that we are children of God, who have received the same invitation from our Father as the two brothers in the parable: 'Son, go and work in my vineyard.' I give you my word that if we make a daily effort to see our personal duties in this light, that is, as a divine summons, we will learn to carry them through to completion with the greatest human and supernatural perfection of which we are capable. Occasionally we may rebel, like the elder of the two sons, who replied to his father, 'I will not,' but we will learn how to turn back repentant and will redouble our efforts to do our duty.

58 'If the mere presence of an important person who is worthy of respect is enough to improve the behavior of the people before him, how is it that the continual presence of God, which reaches out to every corner and is acknowledged by our faculties and gratefully loved, does not increasingly better us in our speech, actions and feelings?' Indeed, if the fact that God sees us were fully impressed on our consciences, and if we realized that all our work, absolutely all of it is done in his presence — for nothing escapes his eyes — how carefully we would finish things and how differently we would react! This is the secret of the holiness which I have now been preaching for so many years. God has called on all of us to imitate him. He has called you and me so that, living as we do in the midst of the world — and continuing to be ordinary everyday people! — we may put Christ at the top of all honest human activities.

Now you will understand even better that if anyone among you didn't love work, his own particular job; if he didn't feel sincerely committed to some noble occupation in this world so as to sanctify it, or if he were to lack a professional vocation, then that person would never be able to understand the supernatural substance of what this priest is saying to you, for the very good reason that he would be lacking an indispensable condition for doing so: that of being a worker.

59 I should tell you (and I don't think I am being presumptuous in saying this) that I realize immediately when I am speaking with someone if my words are going in one ear and out the other or making no impression. Let me open my heart to you so that you can help me give thanks to God. When I saw in 1928 what Our Lord wanted of me, I immediately set to work. At the time (thank you, my God, for there was much to suffer and much to love!) I was taken for a madman. Some people indeed, in an excess of understanding, called me a dreamer, but a dreamer of impossible dreams. In spite of all this and of my own shortcomings, I went ahead without getting discouraged. And since the project was not of my doing it found its way through the difficulties. Today it is a reality spread throughout the world from pole to pole, and it seems so natural to most people, because Our Lord made sure that it was recognized as something of his own doing.

I was saying that I only need exchange a couple of words with someone and I can tell whether or not he understands me. I am not like the hen who was sitting on her nest when an unknown hand slipped a duck's egg under her. The days passed and it wasn't until the chickens hatched and she saw the fluffy creature waddling about awkwardly, one leg this way, the other that way, that she realized that it wasn't one of hers and that it would never learn to chirp no matter how hard it tried. I have never ill treated anyone who turned his back on me, not even when my offer of help was repaid with insolence. That is why, back in 1939, my attention was arrested by an inscription on a building where I was preaching a retreat to some university students. It read: 'Let each wayfarer follow his own way.' It was very useful advice.

60 Forgive this digression and, though we haven't really gone off the track, let us return to the central idea. Be convinced that our professional vocation is an essential and inseparable part of our condition as Christians. Our Lord wants you to be holy in the place where you are, in the job you have chosen for whatever reason. To me, every job that is not opposed to the divine law is good and noble, and capable of being raised to the supernatural plane, that is, inserted into the constant flow of Love which defines the life of a child of God.

I cannot avoid getting a little uneasy when someone, in speaking about his job, plays the role of a victim. He talks about how his work takes up so many hours each day, when the truth is that he isn't doing half as much as many of his professional colleagues are and they quite likely are only driven by selfish or, at best, by merely human motives. All of us who are here engaged in a personal dialogue with Jesus have very definite occupations: doctors, lawyers, economists... Think a moment about those of your colleagues who are outstanding for their professional prestige, their integrity or their spirit of service and self-sacrifice. Isn't

it true that they devote many hours of the day, and even of the night, to their jobs? Isn't there anything we can learn from them?

While I speak, I too am examining the way I have behaved and I confess that, in putting the question to myself, I feel a little ashamed and wish immediately to ask God's forgiveness, thinking how weak my response has been and how far short it has fallen of the mission that God has given us to carry out in the world. One of the Fathers of the Church writes: 'Christ has appointed us to be like lamps, so as to be teachers to others; to act as leaven; to live like angels among men, like adults among children, like spiritual beings among the merely rational; to be seed and to yield fruit. There would be no need of speaking if our lives shone in this way. Words would be superfluous if we had deeds to show for them. There would not be a single pagan left if we were truly Christian.'

The exemplary value of professional life

61 We must avoid the error of thinking we can reduce the apostolate to the performance of a few pious practices. You and I are Christians but at the same time, and without any break in continuity, we are citizens and workers with clear obligations, which we have to fulfill in an exemplary manner if we really want to become saints. Jesus himself is urging us: 'You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Neither do men light a lamp and put it under a measure, but upon the lamp stand, so as to give light to all in the house. Even so, let your light shine before men, in order that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.'

Professional work, whatever it is, becomes a lamp to enlighten your colleagues and friends. That is why I usually tell those who become members of Opus Dei, and the same applies to all of you now listening to me: 'What use is it telling me that so and so is a good son of mine — a good Christian — but a bad shoemaker?' If he doesn't try to learn his trade well, or doesn't give his full attention to it, he won't be able to sanctify it or offer it to Our Lord. The sanctification of ordinary work is, as it were, the hinge of true spirituality for people who, like us, have decided to come close to God while being at the same time fully involved in temporal affairs.

62 You must fight against the tendency to be too lenient with yourselves. Everyone has this difficulty. Be demanding with yourselves! Sometimes we worry too much about our health, or about getting enough rest. Certainly it is necessary to rest, because we have to tackle our work each day with renewed vigor. But, as I wrote many years ago, 'to rest is not to do nothing. It is to turn our attention to other activities that require less effort.'

At other times, relying on flimsy excuses, we become too easygoing and forget about the marvelous responsibility that rests upon our shoulders. We are content with doing just enough to get by. We let ourselves get carried away by false rationalizations and waste our time, whereas Satan and his allies never take a holiday. Listen carefully to St Paul and reflect on what he said to those Christians who were slaves. He urged them to obey their masters, 'not serving to the eye as pleasers of men, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart,

giving your service with good will as to the Lord and not to men.' What good advice for you and me to follow!

Let us ask Our Lord Jesus for light, and beg him to help us discover, at every moment, the divine meaning which transforms our professional work into the hinge on which our calling to sanctity rests and turns. In the Gospel you will find that Jesus was known as *faber, filius Mariae*, the workman, the son of Mary. Well, we too, with a holy pride, have to prove with deeds that we are workers, men and women who really work!

Since we should behave at all times as God's envoys, we must be very much aware that we are not serving him loyally if we leave a job unfinished; if we don't put as much effort and self-sacrifice as others do into the fulfillment of professional commitments; if we can be called careless, unreliable, frivolous, disorganized, lazy or useless... Because people who neglect obligations that seem less important will hardly succeed in other obligations that pertain to the spiritual life and are undoubtedly harder to fulfill. 'He who is faithful in very little is faithful also in much; and he who is dishonest in very little is dishonest also in much.'

63 I am not speaking of imaginary ideals. I confine myself to a very definite reality which is of paramount importance, and which is capable of transforming an environment that is utterly pagan and hostile to God's designs, as indeed happened at the beginning of the era of our salvation. Savor these words of an anonymous author of those times, who sums up the grandeur of our vocation as follows: Christians, he writes, 'are to the world what the soul is to the body. They live in the world but are not worldly, as the soul is in the body but is not corporeal. They live in every town and city, as the soul is in every part of the body. They work from within and pass unnoticed, as the soul does of its essence... They live as pilgrims among perishable things with their eyes set on the immortality of heaven, as the immortal soul now dwells in a perishable house. Their numbers increase daily amid persecutions, as the soul is made beautiful through mortifications... And Christians have no right to abandon their mission in the world, in the same way that the soul may not voluntarily separate itself from the body.'

We would therefore be on the wrong path if we were to disregard temporal affairs, for Our Lord awaits us there as well. You can be sure that it is through the circumstances of ordinary life, ordained or permitted by the infinite wisdom of divine Providence, that we come close to God. But we shall not attain our goal if we do not strive to finish our work well; if we do not sustain the effort we put in when we began our work with human and supernatural zeal; if we do not carry out our work as well as the best do and, if possible, even better than the best. And I think that if you and I really want to, we will work better than the best, because we will use all the honest human means as well as the supernatural ones which are required in order to offer Our Lord a perfect job of work, finished like filigree and pleasing in every way.

Turning work into prayer

64 I have often said that we must not allow these periods of conversation with Jesus, who sees us and hears us from the Tabernacle, to degenerate into an impersonal type of prayer. If we want our meditation to develop right away into a personal dialogue with Our Lord (for which the sound of words is not necessary), we must shed the cloak of anonymity and put ourselves in his presence, just as we are. We must avoid hiding ourselves in the crowd that fills the church, or diluting our prayer into a meaningless patter that does not come from the heart and is little better than a reflex habit, empty of any real content.

To this I now add that your work too must become a personal prayer, that it must become a real conversation with Our Father in heaven. If you seek sanctity in and through your work, you will necessarily have to strive to turn it into personal prayer. You cannot allow your cares and concerns to become impersonal and routine, because if you were to do so, the divine incentive that inspires your daily tasks will straightaway wither and die.

As I say these things, my memory goes back to the journeys I made to the battle fronts during the Spanish civil war. I had no material resources but I went wherever there was anyone who needed my services as a priest. In the very special circumstances we were in, which might well have given a number of people cause to justify their moral negligence and slackness, I did not limit myself to giving purely ascetical advice. I was concerned then, as now, with the one thing which I would like Our Lord to awaken in each one of you. I was interested in the welfare of their souls, and also in their happiness here on earth. I encouraged them to make good use of their time by doing something worthwhile, and not to look upon the war as something of a closed parenthesis in their lives. I asked them not to give in to laziness, but to do all they could to avoid letting their trenches and sentry posts become like the station waiting-rooms of the period where people killed time waiting for trains that seemed never to arrive...

I suggested specific occupations (for example, study or learning a language), occupations that were compatible with their military duties. I advised them never to cease being men of God, and to try turning everything they did into *operatio Dei*, God's work. I was greatly moved when I saw how wonderfully those boys responded, for their situation was far from easy. The solidity of their interior spirit was remarkable.

65 I also remember my stay in Burgos around that time. A lot of young men on leave, as well as many who were stationed in the city, came to spend a few days with me. The living quarters that I shared with a few of my sons consisted of a single room in a dilapidated hotel and, though we lacked even the most basic amenities, we organized things in such a way that the men who came — there were hundreds of them — had whatever they needed to rest and recover their strength.

We used to go for walks along the banks of the River Arlanzon. There we would talk and, while they opened their hearts, I tried to guide them with suitable advice to confirm their decisions or open up new horizons in their interior lives. And always, with God's help, I would do all I could to encourage them and stir up in their hearts

the desire to live genuinely Christian lives. Our walks would sometimes take us as far as the monastery of Las Huelgas. On other occasions we would find our way to the cathedral.

I used to enjoy climbing up the cathedral towers to get a close view of the ornamentation at the top, a veritable lacework of stone that must have been the result of very patient and laborious craftsmanship. As I chatted with the young men who accompanied me I used to point out that none of the beauty of this work could be seen from below. To give them a material lesson in what I had been previously explaining to them, I would say: 'This is God's work, this is working for God! To finish your personal work perfectly, with all the beauty and exquisite refinement of this tracery stonework.' Seeing it, my companions would understand that all the work we had seen was a prayer, a loving dialogue with God. The men who spent their energies there were quite aware that no one at street level could appreciate their efforts. Their work was for God alone. Now do you see how our professional work can bring us close to Our Lord? Do your job as those medieval stonemasons did theirs, and your work too will be *operatio Dei*, a human work with a divine substance and finish.

66 'Since we are convinced that God is to be found everywhere, we plough our fields praising the Lord, we sail the seas and ply all our other trades singing his mercies.' Doing things this way we are united to God at every moment. Even when you find yourselves isolated and away from your normal surroundings, like those boys in the trenches, you will be living in Our Lord by means of your continual hard work, which you will have learned to turn into prayer, because you will have started it and finished it in the presence of God the Father, of God the Son and of God the Holy Spirit.

But don't forget that you are also in the presence of men, and that they expect from you, from you personally, a Christian witness. Thus, as regards the human aspect of our job, we must work in such a way that we will not feel ashamed when those who know us and love us see us at our work, nor give them cause to feel embarrassed. If you work in the spirit that I am trying to teach you, you will not embarrass those who rely on you, nor will you have any cause to blush. You will not be like the man in the parable who set out to build a tower: 'When he had laid the foundations and was unable to finish, all who beheld him began to mock him, saying, This man began to build and was not able to finish.'

Believe me. If you don't lose your supernatural outlook, you will crown your work. You will finish your cathedral to the very last stone.

67 Possumus! With God's help, we too can be victorious in this battle. Rest assured that it is not difficult to convert work into a prayerful dialogue. As soon as you offer it up and then set to work, God is already listening and giving encouragement. We acquire the style of contemplative souls, in the midst of our daily work! Because we become certain that he is watching us, while he asks us to conquer ourselves anew: a little sacrifice here, a smile there for someone who bothers us, beginning the least pleasant but most urgent job first, carefulness in little details of order,

perseverance in the fulfilment of our duty when it would be so easy to abandon it, not leaving for tomorrow what should be finished today: and all this, to please him, Our Father God! On your desk or in some inconspicuous place that nobody notices, you perhaps place your crucifix to awaken in you a contemplative spirit and to act as a textbook for your mind and soul where you learn the lessons of service.

If you make up your mind to follow these ways of contemplation, in the midst of your ordinary work, without doing anything odd or withdrawing from the world, you will immediately feel that you are a friend of the Master, with the God-given task of opening up the divine ways of the earth to the whole of mankind. Yes. With your work you will help to spread Christ's kingdom in every continent. You will offer up hour after hour of work for far-off lands which are being born to the faith, for the peoples of the East who are being cruelly forbidden to profess their faith, and for the traditionally Christian nations where it seems that the light of the Gospel has grown dim and souls are struggling in the obscurity of ignorance... Then, how valuable your hour of work becomes as you persevere with the same effort a little longer, a few minutes more, until the job is finished! In a simple and practical way you are converting contemplation into apostolate, seeing it as an imperative necessity of your heart, which beats in unison with the most sweet and merciful Heart of Jesus, Our Lord.

Do everything for Love's sake

68 How shall I manage, you seem to ask, to act always in a spirit that leads me to finish all my professional work perfectly? The answer comes not from me, but from St Paul: 'Work courageously, be strong. And let everything you do be done in a spirit of charity.' Do everything for Love's sake and do it freely. Never give way to fear or routine. Serve God Our Father.

Having put them very much to the test, I am very fond of repeating these artless but very expressive verses:

My life consists in loving,

And if with loving I'm familiar,

'Tis because I've sorrowed much;

For there's no finer lover,

Than one who's suffered much.*

Go about your professional duties for Love's sake. Do everything for the sake of Love and (precisely because you are in love, even though you may taste the bitterness of misunderstanding, of injustice, of ingratitude and even of failure in men's eyes) you will see the result in the wonders that your work produces — rich, abundant fruit, the promise of eternity!

69 It happens, however, that some people (who are good, or should we rather say 'goodish') pay lip service to the beautiful ideal of spreading our faith, but in practice

they make do with a superficial and careless professional output. They seem scatterbrained. If we happen to come across such Christians, we should do our best to help them, affectionately but uncompromisingly, having recourse where necessary to the gospel remedy of fraternal correction: 'Brethren, if a man is found guilty of some fault, you who are spiritually minded ought to show a spirit of gentleness in correcting him. Have an eye upon thyself, lest thou too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens and so you will be fulfilling the law of Christ.' If besides the fact that they claim to be Catholics there are other factors involved, because, for instance, those at fault are older, or have more experience or responsibility, then there is all the more reason to talk to them. We should try to get them to react, helping them take their work more seriously, trying to guide them, like a good parent does or a teacher, but without humiliating them.

It is very moving to pause and meditate on the way St Paul behaved. 'You know well enough what you have to do to imitate us. We were no vagabonds among you. We would not even be indebted to you for our daily bread, but we worked night and day in labor and toil, so that we might not burden any of you... The charge we gave you on our visit was this: if any man will not work, neither let him eat.'

70 For the love of God, for the love of souls, and to live up to our Christian vocation, we must give good example. So as not to give scandal, or to provoke even the faintest suspicion that the children of God are soft and useless, so as not to disedify..., you must strive to show an example of balanced justice, to behave properly as responsible men. The farmer who ploughs his field while constantly raising his heart to God, just as much as the carpenter, the blacksmith, the office worker, the academic — all Christians in fact — have to be an example for their colleagues at work. And this without conceit, since we realize very clearly in our hearts that only with God's help can we secure the victory, for by ourselves alone we could not even lift a piece of straw from the ground. Therefore, everyone, in his job, in whatever place he has in society, must feel obliged to make his work God's work, sowing everywhere the peace and joy of the Lord. 'The perfect Christian is always a bearer of peace and joy. Peace, because he realizes he is in the presence of God; joy, because he sees himself surrounded by God's blessings. Such a Christian is truly a royal personage, a holy priest of God.'

71 To achieve this goal, we must act like souls urged on by Love and never as people under punishment or a curse. 'Whatever you do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.' Thus we shall complete our tasks perfectly, using our time to the full, for we shall be instruments who are in love with God. We shall be conscious of all the responsibility and trust that God has placed on our shoulders in spite of our own weaknesses. In every one of your actions, because you are relying on God's strength, you must behave as one motivated solely by Love.

But let's not close our eyes to reality and content ourselves with a naive and superficial outlook that could lead us to think that the road ahead is an easy one, and that to follow it we only need to make a few sincere resolutions and have an ardent desire to serve God. Make no mistake about it. As the years go by, you will

have to face (perhaps sooner than you think) situations that are especially difficult and which will call for a great spirit of sacrifice and an even greater forgetfulness of self. Foster then the virtue of hope and boldly make your own that cry of the Apostle: 'For I reckon that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come that will be revealed in us.' Reflect in peace and security on what it will be like to have the infinite Love of God poured out on this poor creature that we are. The time has come, amid your ordinary occupations, to exercise your faith, awaken your hope and revive your love; that is, to activate the three theological virtues, which help us to banish immediately (without dissimulation, deceit or evasion) any ambiguities in our professional conduct or in our interior life.

72 Again we hear the voice of St Paul: 'Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast and immovable in your resolve, doing your full share continually in the Lord's work, since you know that your labor in the Lord's service cannot be spent in vain.' Don't you see? A complete range of virtues is called into play when we set about our work with the purpose of sanctifying it: fortitude, to persevere in our work despite the difficulties that naturally arise and to ensure that we never let ourselves be overwhelmed by anxiety; temperance, in order to spend ourselves unsparingly and to overcome our love of comfort and our selfishness; justice, so as to fulfill our duties towards God, society, our family and our fellow workers; prudence, to know in each case what course to take, and then to set about it without hesitation... And all this, I emphasize, is for the sake of Love, with a keen and immediate sense of responsibility for the results of our work and its apostolic impact.

'Love is deeds, not sweet words,' says the proverb, and I don't think there is anything else to add.

Lord, give us your grace. Open the door to the workshop in Nazareth so that we may learn to contemplate you, together with your holy Mother Mary and the holy Patriarch St Joseph, whom I love and revere so dearly, the three of you dedicated to a life of work made holy. Then, Lord, our poor hearts will be enkindled, we shall seek you and find you in our daily work, which you want us to convert into a work of God, a labor of Love.

HUMAN VIRTUES

A homily given on 6 September 1941

Human virtues

Fortitude, composure, patience, magnanimity

Industriousness, diligence

Truthfulness and justice

The rewards of temperance

Wisdom of the heart

An ordinary way

Human virtues and supernatural virtues

73 In the seventh chapter of his gospel, St Luke writes: 'One of the Pharisees invited him to a meal; so he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table.' At this point a woman, who is known publicly in the city as a sinner, arrives and comes up to wash the feet of Jesus who, in keeping with the customs of the time, is eating in a reclined position. The woman's tears are the water for this washing of feet which is so moving; her hair, the towel for drying them. With ointment poured from a fine alabaster jar, she anoints the Master's feet, and she kisses them.

The Pharisee thinks badly of this. He cannot imagine that Jesus could have so much mercy in his heart. 'If this man were a prophet,' he thinks to himself, 'he would know who and what manner of woman this is.' Jesus reads his thoughts and explains to him: 'Do you see this woman? I came into your house and you gave me no water for my feet; she has washed my feet with her tears, and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss of greeting; she, from the moment she entered, has never ceased to kiss my feet. You did not pour oil on my head; she has anointed my feet, and with ointment. And so I tell you, great sins have been forgiven her, for she has greatly loved.'

We cannot pause now to consider the divine marvels of Our Lord's most merciful Heart. Instead let us turn our attention to another aspect of the scene, to the way Jesus notices the omission of the expression of human courtesy and refinement which the Pharisee failed to show him. Christ is perfectus Deus, perfectus homo. He is perfect God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, and perfect man. He comes to save, not to destroy nature. It is from him that we learn that it is unchristian to treat our fellow men badly, for they are creatures of God, made to his image and likeness.

Human virtues

74 There is a certain type of secularist outlook that one comes across, and also another approach which one might call 'pietistic,' both of which share the view that Christians somehow are not fully and entirely human. According to the former, the demands of the Gospel are such as to stifle our human qualities; whereas for the latter, human nature is so fallen that it threatens and endangers the purity of the faith. The result, either way, is the same. They both fail to grasp the full significance of Christ's Incarnation, they do not see that 'the Word was made flesh,' became man, 'and dwelt amongst us.'

My experience as a man, as a Christian and as a priest, teaches me just the opposite. There is no human heart, no matter how deeply immersed in sin, which does not conceal, like embers among the ashes, a flicker of nobility. Whenever I have sounded out such hearts, talking to them individually with the words of Christ, they have always responded.

In this world of ours there are many people who neglect God. It may be that they have not had an opportunity to listen to his words, or that they have forgotten them. Yet their human dispositions are honest, loyal, compassionate and sincere. I would go so far as to say that anyone possessing such qualities is ready to be generous with God, because human virtues constitute the foundation for the supernatural virtues.

75 It is true that in themselves such personal qualities are not enough, for no one is saved without the grace of Christ. But if a man fosters and cultivates the seeds of virtue within him, God will smooth out his path, and such a person will be able to become holy because he has known how to live as a man of good will.

You may perhaps have noticed other cases which are in a certain sense just the opposite; so many people who call themselves Christians because they have been baptized and have received other sacraments, but then prove to be disloyal and deceitful, insincere and proud, and... they fail to achieve anything. They are like shooting stars, lighting up the sky for an instant and then falling away to nothing.

If we accept the responsibility of being children of God, we will realize that God wants us to be very human. Our heads should indeed be touching heaven, but our feet should be firmly on the ground. The price of living as Christians is not that of ceasing to be human or of abandoning the effort to acquire those virtues which some have even without knowing Christ. The price paid for each Christian is the redeeming Blood of Our Lord and he, I insist, wants us to be both very human and very divine, struggling each day to imitate him who is perfectus Deus, perfectus homo.

76 I don't know if I could say which is the most important human virtue. It depends on the point of view from which they are considered. In any case, this question doesn't really get us anywhere, for it is not a matter of practicing one or even a number of virtues. We have to try to acquire and to practice all of them. Each individual virtue is interwoven with the others and, thus, our effort to be sincere will also make us upright, cheerful, prudent and composed. .PP I am not convinced either when I hear people making a great distinction between personal and social virtues. No virtue worthy of its name can foster selfishness. Every virtue necessarily works to the good both of our own soul and to the good of those around us. We are all of us men and all likewise children of God, and we cannot think that life consists in building up a brilliant curriculum vitae or an outstanding career. Ties of solidarity should bind us all and, besides, in the order of grace we are united by the supernatural bond of the Communion of Saints.

At the same time, we must bear in mind that decision making and responsibility derive from the personal freedom of each individual. Virtues are therefore also radically personal, they pertain to the person. Nevertheless, in this great battle of love no one fights alone. None of us, I like to say, is a floating line of verse. In some way we are always either helping or hindering each other. We are all links in the same chain. Join with me now in asking Our Lord to grant that this chain may

anchor us to his Heart until that day comes when we shall contemplate him face to face for ever in Heaven.

Fortitude, composure, patience, magnanimity

77 Let us now consider some of these human virtues. While I am talking I would like you, on your own, to keep up a conversation with Our Lord. Ask him to help us all, to encourage us to penetrate more deeply today into the mystery of his Incarnation, so that we too, in our own flesh, may learn how to give living witness to our fellow men of him who has come to save us.

No man, whether he be a Christian or not, has an easy life. To be sure, at certain times it seems as though everything goes as we had planned. But this generally lasts for only a short time. Life is a matter of facing up to difficulties and of experiencing in our hearts both joy and sorrow. It is in this forge that man can acquire fortitude, patience, magnanimity and composure.

The person with fortitude is one who perseveres in doing what his conscience tells him he ought to do. He does not measure the value of a task exclusively by the benefit he receives from it, but rather by the service he renders to others. The strong man will at times suffer, but he stands firm; he may be driven to tears, but he will brush them aside. When difficulties come thick and fast, he does not bend before them. Remember the example given us in the book of the Machabees: an old man, Eleazar, prefers to die rather than break God's law. 'By manfully giving up my life now, I will show myself worthy of my old age and leave to the young a noble example of how to die a good death willingly and nobly for the revered and holy laws.'

78 The man who knows how to be strong will not be in a hurry to receive the reward of his virtue. He is patient. Indeed it is fortitude that teaches us to appreciate the human and divine virtue of patience. "'By your patience you will gain possession of your souls.'" (Luke 21:19) The possession of the soul is attributed to patience, which in effect is the root and guardian of all the virtues. We secure possession of our souls through patience, for, by learning to have dominion over ourselves, we begin to possess that which we are.' And it is this very patience that moves us to be understanding with others, for we are convinced that souls, like good wine, improve with time.

79 We have to be strong and patient and, therefore, calm and composed, but not with the composure of the man who buys his own tranquility at the expense of ignoring his brothers or neglecting the great task (which falls to us all) of tirelessly spreading good throughout the world. We can keep calm because there is always forgiveness and because there is a solution for everything, except death; and for the children of God, death is life. We must try to keep our peace, even if only so as to act intelligently, since the man who remains calm is able to think, to study the pros and cons, to examine judiciously the outcome of the actions he is about to undertake. He then plays his part calmly and decisively.

80 I have been briefly reviewing some of the human virtues. I have no doubt that, as you pray to Our Lord, many others will spring to mind. I would like to pause now for a few moments to consider that wonderful quality which is magnanimity.

Magnanimity means greatness of spirit, a largeness of heart wherein many can find refuge. Magnanimity gives us the energy to break out of ourselves and be prepared to undertake generous tasks which will be of benefit to all. Small-mindedness has no home in the magnanimous heart, nor has meanness, nor egoistic calculation, nor self-interested trickery. The magnanimous person devotes all his strength, unstintingly, to what is worthwhile. As a result he is capable of giving himself. He is not content with merely giving. He gives his very self. He thus comes to understand that the greatest expression of magnanimity consists in giving oneself to God.

Industriousness, diligence

81 There are two human virtues, industriousness and diligence, which merge into one, for they both help us in our efforts to make good use of the talents we have each received from God. They are virtues because they lead us to finish things properly. As I have been preaching since 1928, work is not a curse; nor is it a punishment for sin. Genesis had already spoken about the fact of work before ever Adam rebelled against God. According to Our Lord's plans work was to be a permanent feature of man who, through work, would cooperate in the immense task of creation.

A hardworking person makes good use of time, for time is not only money, it is glory, God's glory! He does as he ought and concentrates on what he is doing, not out of routine nor to while away the passing hours, but as the result of attentive and pondered reflection. This is what makes a man diligent. Our everyday usage of this word 'diligent' already gives us some idea of its Latin origin. 'Diligent' comes from the verb diligo, which means to love, to appreciate, to choose something after careful consideration and attention. The diligent man does not rush into things. He does his work thoughtfully and lovingly.

Our Lord, perfect man in every way, chose a manual trade and carried it out attentively and lovingly for almost the entirety of the years he spent on this earth. He worked as a craftsman among the other people in his village. This human and divine activity of his shows us clearly that our ordinary activities are not an insignificant matter. Rather they are the very hinge on which our sanctity turns, and they offer us constant opportunities of meeting God, and of praising him and glorifying him through our intellectual or manual work.

Truthfulness and justice

82 In order to practice the human virtues, we need to make a sustained effort, since it is not easy to maintain a spirit of honesty and integrity for any length of time when faced with situations that seem to put our own safety at risk. Take truthfulness, a virtue so clean and pure. Can it be true that it has fallen into disuse? Has the practice of compromise, of 'gilding the pill' and 'putting on a show' finally triumphed? People are afraid of the truth and to justify their attitude they

make the shabby excuse that no one practices or tells the truth any more, that everyone has to resort to pretence and lies.

Fortunately this is not so. There are many people, Christians or not, who are ready to sacrifice honor and reputation for the sake of the truth, people who aren't always feverishly turning this way and that in search of 'the warmest place in the sun.' These are the very people who, because they love the truth, are happy to put things right when they discover they have made a mistake; whereas those who begin by lying, those for whom the truth has become merely a high-sounding word to cover up their baseness, such people refuse to make amends.

83 If we are truthful we will practice justice. I could go on talking about justice and never tire, but here we can only outline a few of its characteristics, bearing in mind that the purpose of the considerations I have been making is to build a real and genuine interior life upon the deep foundations of the human virtues. Justice means giving to each his due. I would however go further and say that this is not enough. However much a particular person is due, we must be ready to give him more, because each single soul is a masterpiece of God's making.

The best way of living charity lies in generously outstripping the demands made on us by justice. Such charity will generally go unnoticed, but it is very fruitful in heaven and indeed also on earth. It would be a mistake to think that when expressions such as 'the happy mean' or 'a just mean' are used regarding the moral virtues, they imply mediocrity, or somehow aiming at doing half of what we could do. The mean we are asked to aim at lies midway between excess and defect, and is in fact a summit, a peak: the best course of action, as indicated to us by prudence. Though when it comes to the theological virtues, there is no middle course. We cannot believe, or hope, or love too much. We are called to love God without limit, with a love that overflows to those around us in an abundance of generosity, understanding and charity.

The rewards of temperance

84 Temperance is self-mastery. Not everything we experience in our bodies and souls should be given free rein. Nor ought we to do everything we can do. It is easier to let ourselves be carried away by so-called natural impulses; but this road ends up in sadness and isolation in our own misery.

Some people don't want to deny anything to their stomach, eyes, or hands. They refuse to listen when they are advised to lead clean lives. As for the faculty of generating new life — a great and noble faculty, a participation in God's creative power — they misuse it and make it a tool for their own selfish ends.

But I never did like talking about impurity. I would rather consider the rich rewards that temperance brings. I want to see men who are really men, and not slaves to cheap glitter, as worthless as the trinkets that magpies gather. A manly person knows how to do without those things that may harm his soul and he also comes to realize that his sacrifice is more apparent than real; for living this way,

with a spirit of sacrifice, means freeing oneself from many kinds of slavery and savoring instead, in the depths of one's heart, the fullness of God's love.

Life then takes on again shades and tones which intemperance had tended to blur. We find ourselves able to care for the needs of others, to share what is ours with everyone, to devote our energies to great causes. Temperance makes the soul sober, modest, understanding. It fosters a natural sense of reserve which everyone finds attractive because it denotes intelligent self control. Temperance does not imply narrowness, but greatness of soul. There is much more deprivation in the intemperate heart which abdicates from self-dominion only to become enslaved to the first caller who comes along ringing some pathetic, tinny cow bell.

Wisdom of the heart

85 'The wise heart will be reckoned prudent,' we read in the book of Proverbs. We would have a mistaken idea of prudence if we thought it faint hearted or lacking in daring. Prudence expresses itself as a habit which inclines us to act well, by shedding light on the end and by helping us to seek the most suitable means of achieving it.

But prudence does not stand highest in the scale of values. We should ask ourselves always: prudence, for what? For there is a false kind of prudence (cunning would be a better name for it) which is at the service of selfishness and is expert in using the best means to achieve warped ends. In such circumstances, cleverness and perspicacity only serve to worsen one's dispositions and to bring upon oneself the reproach St Augustine made in one of his sermons: 'Are you trying to bend the heart of God, which is always upright, so that it may fall in with the perversity of yours?' This is the false prudence of the person who thinks his own efforts are quite sufficient to save him. 'Do not seek to consider yourselves prudent,' says St Paul, 'for it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the prudence of the prudent.'

86 St Thomas points out three aspects of this good habit of the intellect. They are: to seek advice, to judge correctly and to decide. To be prudent the first step is to acknowledge our own limitations. This is the virtue of humility. Through it, we admit that in certain matters we cannot cover everything, that in so many cases we cannot take in all the circumstances that have to be borne in mind in order to make a fair judgement. So, we look for advice; but not from just anyone. We go to a person with the right qualities, to someone who wants to love God as sincerely as we do and who tries to follow him faithfully. It is not enough to ask just anyone for their opinion. We must go to a person who can give us sound and disinterested advice.

Next we have to judge, because as a rule, prudence demands that we come to a suitable decision, and promptly. Though at times it is prudent to delay a decision until all the factors that should influence our judgment have been brought together, on other occasions it would be very imprudent not to begin to carry out immediately what we see needs to be done. This is specially true when the good of others is at stake.

87 Such wisdom of the heart, such prudence will never become the prudence of the flesh that St Paul speaks of, the prudence of those who are intelligent but try not to use their intelligence to seek and love Our Lord. A truly prudent person is ever attentive to God's promptings and, through this vigilant listening, he receives in his soul the promise and reality of salvation: 'I glorify thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for having hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to little ones.'

Wisdom of the heart guides and governs many other virtues. Through prudence, a man learns to be daring without being rash. He will not make excuses (based on hidden motives of indolence) to avoid the effort involved in living wholeheartedly according to God's plans. The temperance of the prudent man is not insensitive or misanthropic; his justice is not harsh nor is his patience servile.

88 A person is prudent not because he never makes a mistake, but because he corrects his errors. He shows his prudence in preferring to miss the mark twenty times rather than give in to an easygoing 'do nothing' attitude. He won't rush into things foolishly or behave with absurd rashness. He will run the risk of his decisions. Fear of failure will not make him give up in his effort to do good. As we go through life we find ourselves coming across people who are objective and know how to weigh things up, who don't get heated or try to tip the balance towards that which favors them. Almost instinctively, we find ourselves trusting such people, because, unassumingly and quietly, they always act in a good and upright manner.

This open-hearted virtue is indispensable for Christian living. But the highest goal of prudence is not social harmony or the peace which results from not creating friction. The fundamental motive behind prudence is to fulfill the will of God who wants us to be straightforward without being childish, friends of truth but never bewildered or superficial. 'The prudent heart shall possess knowledge,' the knowledge given by God's Love, that ultimate knowledge which can save us and bring to all creation the reward of peace and understanding and, to each soul, eternal life.

An ordinary way

89 We have been speaking about human virtues. Now perhaps some of you might wonder: if I behave in this way, will it not involve cutting myself off from my normal environment? Isn't it something alien to the everyday world? No. Nowhere is it written that Christians should be strangers to the world. Our Lord Jesus by his deeds and by his teaching has bestowed praise on another human virtue which is particularly dear to me, the virtue of naturalness or simplicity.

Remember how Our Lord comes into the world, just like every other human being. He spends his childhood and adolescence in a village in Palestine, where he is no different from his fellow villagers. Time and again in his public life we hear echoes of his everyday existence in Nazareth. He speaks about work. He is concerned to see that his disciples rest. He makes a point of meeting people of every sort and never refuses to talk with anyone. To his followers he expressly indicates that they

should not hinder children from coming to him. Recalling perhaps memories of his own childhood he uses the example of the children playing in the marketplace.

Surely all this is quite normal, natural and straightforward? Surely it can be lived in ordinary life? What happens is that people tend to get used to what is plain and ordinary and, without realizing it, they begin to look for what is showy and artificial. You will have come across examples of this, as I have, as when for instance you remark on the beauty of some freshly cut roses, with delicately fragrant petals, and someone comments 'They look so perfect, they must be artificial!'

90 Naturalness and simplicity are two marvelous human virtues which enable men to take in the message of Christ. On the other hand, all that is tangled and complicated, the twisting and turning about one's own problems, all this builds up a barrier which often prevents people from hearing Our Lord's voice. Remember Christ's reproach to the Pharisees: they had enmeshed themselves in a maze-ridden world which made them pay tithes of mint, dill and cumin, while neglecting the most essential duties of the law, of justice and of faith. They were careful to strain everything they drank so as not to let even a mosquito pass, and they ended up swallowing a camel.

No. Neither the decent human lives of those who, through no fault of their own, do not know Christ, nor the lives of Christians, should be odd or strange. The human virtues which we are considering today lead us, each and every one of them, to the same conclusion. That man is truly human who strives to be truthful, loyal, sincere, courageous, temperate, generous, serene, just, hard-working, patient. Such behavior may be difficult to achieve, but it can never be strange. If some people find it surprising, it is because their eyes have grown dim and they are clouded by a hidden cowardice and a lack of determination.

Human virtues and supernatural virtues

91 Once a person is striving to improve in the human virtues, his heart is already very close to Christ. If he is a Christian, he will realize that the theological virtues (faith, hope and charity) and all the other virtues which God's grace brings with it are an encouragement never to neglect the good qualities he shares with so many of his fellow men.

The human virtues are, I insist, the foundation for the supernatural ones. These in turn provide us with constant encouragement to behave as good human beings. In either case, it is not sufficient merely to want to have these virtues. We have to learn how to practice them. Discite benefacere, learn to do good. We need to make a habit of exercising each virtue, by actually being sincere, truthful, balanced, calm and patient... for love is proved by deeds and we cannot love God only by word, but 'with deeds and in truth.'

92 When a Christian fights to acquire these virtues, his soul is preparing to receive the grace of the Holy Spirit fruitfully. In this way his good human qualities are strengthened by the motions of the Paraclete in his soul. The Third Person of the

Blessed Trinity, the soul's sweet guest, pours out his gifts: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and the fear of the Lord.

Then one experiences joy and peace, a joyous peace, an interior rejoicing that goes hand in hand with the human virtue of cheerfulness. At the very moment when everything seems to be collapsing before our eyes, we realize that quite the opposite is true, 'because you, Lord, are my strength.' If God is dwelling in our soul, everything else, no matter how important it may seem, is accidental and transitory, whereas we, in God, stand permanent and firm.

Through the gift of piety, the Holy Spirit helps us to realize with certainty that we are children of God. And, being children of God, how can we be sad? Sadness is the end product of selfishness. If we truly want to live for God, we will never lack cheerfulness, even when we discover our errors and wretchedness. Cheerfulness finds its way into our life of prayer, so much so that we cannot help singing for joy. For we are in love, and singing is a thing that lovers do.

93 If we live our lives in this way, we shall be bringing peace to the world. We shall be making God's service attractive to others, because 'God loves a cheerful giver.' Christians are ordinary people, but their hearts overflow with the joy that comes when we set out to fulfill, with the constant help of grace, the will of the Father. Christians don't see themselves as victims, underrated, or restricted in their behavior. They walk head on high, because they are men and children of God.

Our faith brings out the full meaning of these human virtues, which no one should ever neglect. Christians should be second to none as human beings. Those who follow Christ are able (not by their own merit but by the grace of God) to communicate to those around them what they at times suspect but cannot quite grasp: that true happiness, a genuine spirit of serving our neighbor, can only come by passing through the Heart of our Redeemer, perfectus Deus, perfectus homo.

Let us turn to Mary, our Mother, and the most excellent creature ever fashioned by God's hands. Let us ask her to make us humanly good so that our human virtues, woven into the life of grace, may become our best way of helping those who, with us, are working in the world to bring peace and happiness to all men.

HUMILITY

A homily given on 6 April 1965

Listening to God

The enemy is pride

A donkey for his throne

The fruits of humility

Humility and joy

94 Let us consider for a moment the texts of today's Mass, Tuesday in Passion Week, for they will help us to distinguish 'true godliness' from 'false godliness.'** We shall be speaking about humility, for this is the virtue which helps us to recognize, at one and the same time, both our wretchedness and our greatness.

Our wretchedness is all too evident. I am not here referring to our natural limitations, to those great ambitions that people dream of but, in fact, never achieve, if only for lack of time. I am thinking rather of the things we do badly, of our falls, of the mistakes that could have been avoided and were not. We are continually experiencing our personal inadequacies. Moreover, there are times when it seems as if all our failings come together, as if wanting to show themselves more clearly, to make us realize just how little we are worth. When that happens, what are we to do?

Expecta Dominum, hope in the Lord. Live by hope, full of faith and love, the Church says to us. Viriliter age, be of good heart. What does it manner that we are made of clay, if all our hope is placed in God? And if at a certain moment you should fall or suffer some setback (not that it has to happen), all you have to do is to apply the remedy, just as, in the normal course of events, you would do for the sake of your bodily health. And then: off to a fresh start!

95 Haven't you noticed the way families look after valuable ornaments or decorative pieces, a vase for example; how they take care lest it get broken? Until one day the baby happens to be playing nearby and knocks it over. The precious souvenir is dashed to pieces, and all the family are very upset. But they immediately set about repairing it. The pieces are gathered up and carefully glued together, and in the end it is restored to its former beauty.

However, when the broken object is a simple piece of crockery or just a piece of earthenware, it is usually enough to get some simple rivets, clips of iron or other metal, to bind the fragments together. The pot or vessel thus repaired takes on an original charm of its own.

We can apply this lesson to our own interior life. When we are faced with weaknesses and sins, with our mistakes even though, by God's grace, they be of little account — let us turn to God our Father in prayer and say to him, 'Lord, here I am in my wretchedness and frailty, a broken vessel of clay. Bind me together again, Lord, and then, helped by my sorrow and by your forgiveness, I shall be stronger and more attractive than before!' What a consoling prayer, which we can say every time something fractures this miserable clay of which we are made.

Let us not be surprised to discover our frailty. Let it not come as a shock to see how easily our good behavior breaks down, for little or no reason. Have confidence in the Lord, whose help is always at hand. 'The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear?' No one. If we approach our heavenly Father in this way, we will have no grounds for fearing anyone or anything.

Listening to God

96 If we turn to Sacred Scripture we will see that humility is absolutely necessary when we are making ready to listen to God. 'Where there is humility, there is wisdom,' says the book of Proverbs. Humility means looking at ourselves as we really are, honestly and without excuses. And when we realize that we are worth hardly anything, we can then open ourselves to God's greatness: it is there our greatness lies.

How well Our Lady, Jesus' Holy Mother, understood this! She, the most exalted of all God's creatures that have existed or ever will exist upon this earth! Mary glorifies the power of Our Lord, who 'has put down the mighty from their thrones and has exalted the lowly.' And she sings of how his divine providence has once again been fulfilled in her: 'because he has regarded the lowliness of his handmaid, behold henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.'

Mary becomes transformed in holiness in the depths of her most pure heart on seeing the humility of God: 'the Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow you; and therefore the Holy One to be born of you shall be called the Son of God.' The Blessed Virgin's humility is a consequence of that unfathomable depth of grace which comes into operation with the Incarnation of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity in the womb of his ever Immaculate Mother.

97 When St Paul considers this mystery he too breaks into a joyful hymn which we can savor today word by word: 'Yours is to be the same mind which Christ Jesus showed. Though being by nature God, he did not consider being equal to God a thing to be coveted,' (for he was God by essence) 'but emptied himself, and took the nature of a slave, fashioned in the likeness of men, presenting himself to us in human form; and then he humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to death on a cross.'

In his preaching, Our Lord Jesus Christ very often sets before our eyes the example of his own humility. 'Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart,' so that you and I may know that there is no other way, and that only our sincere recognition of our nothingness is powerful enough to draw divine grace towards us. St Augustine says: 'It was for us that Jesus came to suffer hunger and to be our food, to suffer thirst and to be our drink, to be clothed with our mortality and to clothe us with immortality, to be poor so as to make us rich.'

98 'God resists the proud, but gives his grace to the humble,' the apostle St Peter teaches. In any age, in any human setting, there is no other way, to live a godly life, than that of humility. Does this mean that God takes pleasure in our humiliation? Not at all. What would he, who created all things and governs them and maintains them in existence, gain from our prostration? God only wants us to be humble and to empty ourselves, so that he can fill us. He wants us not to put obstacles in his way so that — humanly speaking — there will be more room for his grace in our poor hearts. For the God who inspires us to be humble is the same God who 'will refashion the body of our lowliness, conforming it to the body of his glory, by

exerting the power by which he is able also to subject all things to himself.' Our Lord makes us his own, he makes us divine with a 'true godliness.'

The enemy is pride

99 What is it that impedes this humility, this 'true godliness'? It is pride. Pride is the capital sin that leads to 'false godliness.' Pride encourages one, even perhaps in very trivial matters, to follow the subtle prompting which Satan made to our first parents: 'your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' Elsewhere in the Scriptures we read that 'the beginning of the pride of man is to draw away from God.' Indeed this vice, once it has taken root, infects a man's entire way of life, until it becomes what St John calls *superbia vitae*, the pride of life.

Pride? About what? Sacred Scripture finds both tragic and comic expressions to stigmatize pride: Why are you so proud, you who are but dust and ashes? Even in life, you are vomiting your entrails. A slight illness: the doctor smiles. The king that reigns today will be dead tomorrow.

100 When pride takes hold of a soul, it is no surprise to find it bringing along with it a whole string of other vices: greed, self-indulgence, envy, injustice. The proud man is always vainly striving to dethrone God, who is merciful to all his creatures, so as to make room for himself and his ever cruel ways.

We should beg God not to let us fall into this temptation. Pride is the worst sin of all, and the most ridiculous. If, with its multiple delusions, it manages to get a hold, the unfortunate victim begins to build up a facade, to fill himself with emptiness, and becomes conceited like the toad in the fable which, in order to show off, puffed itself up until it burst. Pride is unpleasant, even from a human point of view. The person who rates himself better than everyone and everything is constantly studying himself and looking down on other people, who in turn react by ridiculing his foolish vanity.

101 When we hear pride spoken of, perhaps we imagine it as despotic, domineering behavior. We associate it with the clamor of the mob acclaiming the passing victor, who, like a Roman emperor, bows his head lest his glorious brow graze the white marble of the high triumphal arches.

But let us be realistic. This type of pride is found only in people with crazy imaginations. We have to fight against other forms of pride that are more subtle, and more frequent: against the pride of preferring our own excellence to that of our neighbor; against vanity in our conversations, thoughts and gestures; against an almost sickly touchiness that takes offence at words and actions that are in no way meant to be insulting.

All this can be, and is, a common temptation. A person can come to see himself as the sun and centre of all those around him. Everything must centre round himself. And to satisfy this unhealthy urge, the proud person will sometimes even fake pain, sadness or illness to attract attention so that others will make a fuss of him.

Most of the conflicts arising in the interior life of many people are products of their own imagination: 'the things people have said, what they are thinking, whether I am appreciated....' The poor soul suffers, through his pathetic foolishness, harboring suspicions that are unfounded. In this miserable mood everything makes him bitter and he tries to upset others also. All this because he doesn't wish to be humble, because he hasn't learned to forget himself in order to give himself generously in the service of others for the love of God.

A donkey for his throne

102 Let us turn once again to the Gospels, and look at ourselves in our model, in Jesus Christ.

James and John, through their mother, have asked Jesus for places at his right and at his left. The other disciples are angry with them. What is Our Lord's answer to all this? 'Whoever has a mind to be great among you, must be your servant; and whoever has a mind to be first among you, must be the slave of all; for the Son of Man has not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'

On another occasion they were going to Capharnaum. Jesus may have been walking ahead of them as he did on other days. 'And there, when they were in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" But they kept silence, for on the way they had' once more 'been disputing among themselves which of them was the greatest. Then he sat down, and called the twelve to him, and said, "If anyone has a mind to be the first, he must be the last of all, and the servant of all." And he took a little child, and set him in the midst of them; and taking him into his arms, he said to them, "Whoever welcomes such a child as this in my name, welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me, welcomes, not me, but him who sent me."'

Doesn't this way Jesus has of doing things move us to love him? He teaches them the doctrine and then, to enable them to understand it, he gives them a living example. He calls a little child, one of the children running around the house, and he lovingly embraces him. How eloquent Our Lord's silence is! With it he has already said everything. He loves those who become as little children. He then adds that the reward for this simplicity, for this humility of spirit, is the joy of being able to embrace him and his Father who is in heaven.

103 When the time for his Passion draws near and Jesus wants to illustrate his kingship in a very vivid way, he makes a triumphant entry into Jerusalem, mounted on a donkey! It had been written that the Messiah was to be a king of humility: 'Tell the daughter of Zion: Behold your king comes to you, meek and seated on an ass, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'

Now it is the Last Supper. Christ has prepared everything to bid farewell to his disciples, while they, for the umpteenth time, have become embroiled in an argument about which one of the chosen group is to be considered the greatest. Jesus then 'rising from supper, laid his garments aside, took a towel and put it

about him. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the feet of his disciples, wiping them with the towel that girded him.'

Once again he preaches by example, by his deeds. In the presence of the disciples, who are arguing out of pride and vanity, Jesus bows down and gladly carries out the task of a servant. Afterwards, when he returns to the table, he explains to them: 'Do you understand what it is I have done to you? You call me Master and Lord, and you are right, it is what I am. Why then, if I have washed your feet, I who am the Master and the Lord, you in your turn ought to wash each other's feet.' This tactfulness of Our Lord moves me deeply. He does not say: 'If I do this, how much more ought you to?' He puts himself at their level, and he lovingly chides those men for their lack of generosity.

As he did with the first twelve, so also, with us, Our Lord can and does whisper in our ear, time and again, *exemplum dedi vobis*, I have given you an example of humility. I have become a slave, so that you too may learn to serve all men with a meek and humble heart.

The fruits of humility

104 'The greater you are, the more in all things abase yourself, and you shall find favor with God.' If we are humble, God will never abandon us. He humbles the arrogance of the proud, but he saves the humble. He frees the innocent man, who is rescued because his hands are clean. The infinite mercy of Our Lord is not slow in coming to the aid of those who humbly call upon him. And then he acts as he truly is, as God Almighty. Although there may be many dangers, though the soul may feel harassed and find itself surrounded on all sides by the enemies of its salvation, it will not perish. This is not merely something that was true in days gone by. It continues to happen now.

105 As I read today's Epistle, I pictured Daniel there surrounded by hungry lions and, without wishing to be pessimistic, for I cannot say that 'old times were better' since every age has its good and bad aspects, I was thinking that at the present time there are also many lions running loose, and that we have to live in this environment. They are lions looking for someone to devour: *tamquam leo rugiens, circuit quærens quem devoret*. What can we do to avoid these wild beasts? Perhaps our lot won't be the same as Daniel's. While I am not one for miraculous solutions, I love the wondrous greatness of God when he performs them, and I realize that it would have been easier for God to allay the prophet's hunger, or to place food in front of him. Yet God did not do it that way. Rather he arranged for another prophet, Habakkuk, to be transported miraculously from Judea to bring him food. God did not mind working a great miracle here, because Daniel was in the lions' den not through any fault of his own, but on account of the injustice of the devil's hirelings, because he was a servant of God and a destroyer of idols.

We ourselves are also called to destroy many idols, not by doing anything spectacular but by living with the naturalness of an ordinary Christian, sowing peace and joy around us. In this way we will topple the idols of misunderstanding,

of injustice, of ignorance, and of those who claim to be self-sufficient and arrogantly turn their backs on God.

Don't be frightened; don't fear any harm, even though the circumstances in which you work are terrible, worse even than those of Daniel in the pit with all those ferocious beasts. God's hand is as powerful as ever and, if necessary, he will work miracles. Be faithful! With a loving, responsible and cheerful faithfulness to the teaching of Christ. Be convinced that our times are no worse than those of other centuries, and that Our Lord is always the same.

I knew an elderly priest who used to say with a smile: 'As for me, I'm always calm and peaceful.' That is how we should always be, immersed in the world, with hungry lions all around, yet never losing our peace, our calm. Always loving, believing and hoping, and never forgetting that Our Lord will work all the miracles we need, if and when we need them.

106 Let me remind you that if you are sincere, if you show yourselves as you really are, if you acquire that 'true godliness' by being humble and not proud, then you and I will be safe in any environment. We will always be able to talk of battles won and call ourselves the victors. Ours will be the intimate victories of God's love, which bring peace, understanding and happiness to the soul.

Humility will spur us on to carry out great tasks, but only on condition that we never lose sight of our inadequacy, and that we are convinced, and more so each day, of our own helplessness. St Ambrose says: 'Admit without hesitation that you are a servant obliged to carry out a great number of tasks. Do not swagger about because you are called a child of God. Let us acknowledge the grace, but not forget our nature. Do not become swollen-headed if you have served well, because you have done what you were supposed to do. The sun carries out its task and the moon obeys; the angels perform their duties. The instrument chosen by God for the gentiles says: "I do not deserve the name of apostle, because I have persecuted the Church of God" (1 Cor 15:9)... May we also refrain from seeking praise for ourselves,' for our own merits, which are always pitiful and small.

Humility and joy

107 'Rescue me from what is deceitful and impious in man.' Once again the text of the Mass brings us to 'true godliness.' It sets before our eyes the poor material of which we are made and all our evil inclinations. And then it begs God: *emitte lucem tuam*, send forth your light and your truth, which have led me and brought me to your holy mountain. I don't mind telling you that I have been deeply moved while praying these words of the Gradual.

How then are we to behave in order to acquire this 'true godliness'? In the Gospel we read that Jesus 'did not wish to go about in Judea because the Jews were seeking to put him to death.' He, who could have eliminated his enemies with a simple desire of his will, also used human means. He, who was God and could change circumstances with a mere wish, has left us a marvelous lesson here: he did not go to Judea. 'His brethren said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea that

your disciples also may see the works that you do.'" They would have him do something spectacular. Do you see? Do you see that this is a lesson in 'true godliness' and 'false godliness'?

'True godliness.' Today's Offertory prayer proclaims: 'all who know thy name, O Lord, hope in thee, for you forsake not those who seek thee.' And we who are but mended vessels of clay rejoice, 'for he has not forgotten the prayers of the poor in spirit,' the prayers of the humble.

108 Put not the slightest trust in those who present the virtue of humility as something degrading, or as a virtue condemning us to a permanent state of dejection. To know we are made of clay, riveted together again, is a continual source of joy. It means acknowledging our littleness in the eyes of God: a little child, a son. Can there be any joy to compare with that of the person who, knowing himself to be poor and weak, knows also that he is a son of God? Why do we men become dejected? It is because life on earth does not go the way we had hoped, or because obstacles arise which prevent us from satisfying our personal ambitions.

Nothing like this happens when a person lives the supernatural reality of his divine filiation. 'If God is for us, who can be against us?' As I never tire of repeating: let them be sad who are determined not to recognize that they are children of God!

Finally, we find in today's liturgy two petitions which should spring like arrows from our lips and hearts: 'O almighty God, may our ceaseless celebration of these divine mysteries help us to merit the gifts of heaven.' And 'O Lord, grant that we may constantly serve you in accordance with your will.' Service, my children, service: that is our role; to be 'servants to all, so that in our days the faithful people may grow in merit and in number.'

109 Let us turn our eyes towards Mary. No creature ever surrendered herself to the plans of God more humbly than she. The humility of the ancilla Domini, the handmaid of the Lord, is the reason we invoke her as *causa nostræ laetitiae*, cause of our joy. After Eve had sinned through her foolish desire to be equal to God, she hid herself from the Lord and was ashamed: she was sad. Mary, in confessing herself the handmaid of the Lord, becomes the Mother of the divine Word, and is filled with joy. May the rejoicing that is hers, the joy of our good Mother, spread to all of us, so that with it we may go out to greet her, our Holy Mother Mary, and thus become more like Christ, her Son.

DETACHMENT

A homily given on 4 April 1955, Monday in Holy Week

The example of Christ

Christian self-control

Father... do not take them out of the world

God loves the cheerful giver

110 Now that we are at the beginning of Holy Week, and so very close to the moment when the Redemption of the whole human race was accomplished on Calvary, it seems to be an especially appropriate time for you and me to reflect on how Our Lord Jesus Christ saved us, and to contemplate this love of his — this truly inexpressible love — for poor creatures like us, who have been made from the clay of the earth.

Memento homo, quia pulvis es, et in pulverem reverteris. Thus did our Mother the Church admonish us at the beginning of Lent so that we might never forget how very little we are, and that some day our bodies, now so full of life, will dissolve like a cloud of dust kicked up by our footsteps on a country road and will pass away 'like a mist dispersed by the rays of the sun.'

The example of Christ

But after this stark reminder of our personal insignificance, I would also like to put before you another splendid truth: the magnificence of God who sustains and divinizes us. Listen to the words of the Apostle: 'You know the graciousness of Our Lord Jesus Christ, how, being rich, he became poor for our sakes, that by his poverty you might become rich.' Reflect calmly on this example of Our Lord, and you will see at once that here we have abundant material on which we could meditate a whole lifetime and from which to draw specific and sincere resolutions to be more generous. We should never lose sight of the goal which we have to reach, namely, that each one of us must become identified with Jesus Christ, who, as you have just heard, became poor for you and for me, and suffered, that we might have an example of how to follow in his footsteps.

111 Have you never wondered, out of a holy curiosity, just how Jesus carried through to its conclusion this outpouring of his love? Once again it is St Paul who gives us the answer: 'though being by nature God... he emptied himself, and took the nature of a slave, fashioned in the likeness of men.' My children, fill yourselves with wonder and gratitude at such a mystery and learn from it. All the power, all the majesty, all the beauty, all the infinite harmony of God, all his great and immeasurable riches, God whole and entire! was hidden for our benefit in the Humanity of Christ. The Almighty appears determined to eclipse his glory for a time, so as to make it easy for his creatures to approach their Redeemer.

'No man,' St John writes, 'has ever seen God; but now his only-begotten Son, who abides in the bosom of the Father, has himself revealed him,' appearing to the astonished gaze of men: first, as a new-born babe, in Bethlehem; then, as a child just like other children; later on, in the Temple, as a bright and alert 12-year old; and finally in the lovable and attractive image of the Teacher who stirred the hearts of the enthusiastic crowds that accompanied him.

112 We have only to consider a few traits of God's Love made flesh and our souls are touched by his generosity; they are set on fire and feel gently impelled to contrition for having been petty and selfish on so many occasions. Jesus does not mind lowering himself in order to raise us from our destitution to the dignity of being children of God and brothers of his. You and I, unlike him, often pride

ourselves stupidly on the gifts and talents we have received, to the point of making them a pedestal from which to impose our will on others, as if the merits of our few relatively successful efforts derived from ourselves alone. 'What do you have that you have not received from God? And if what you have, you have received, why do you boast as if you had not received it?'

When we think of God's self-giving and the way he humbled himself — I am saying this so that each one of us can meditate on it and apply it to himself — then the vainglory and presumption of the proud man stands out as a truly hideous sin, for the very reason that such conduct is poles apart from the model given us by Jesus Christ. Think about it slowly: He, being God, humiliated himself; man, puffed up with self-love, tries to build himself up at any cost, without recognizing that he is but a creature of clay, and poor clay at that.

113 When you were children, you may have heard the fable of the farmer who was given a golden pheasant. When the initial delight and surprise were over, the new owner began looking for a place where he could keep the pheasant. After several hours of doubting and changing his mind, he decided to put the pheasant in the hen house. The hens greatly admired the handsome newcomer and flocked round him with all the astonishment that might accompany the discovery of a demigod. While all this commotion was going on, feeding time came round and, as the farmer threw in the first handfuls of grain, our pheasant, who was starving after all the waiting, jumped greedily at the chance of filling his empty stomach. When they saw such vulgarity, their handsome hero gobbling down his food as hungrily as the commonest of birds, his disillusioned barnyard companions fell to pecking their fallen idol until they had plucked out all his feathers. Such is the sorry collapse of self-worship, which is made all the more disastrous the more presumptuously it is built upon the foundation of one's own unaided ability.

As the trustees of certain talents, both supernatural and human, which you have to make good use of, draw your own practical conclusions for your daily life. And, at the same time, get rid of the ridiculous delusion that you have something that belongs to you alone as if it were the fruit of your own efforts. Remember there is an ever-present factor, God, which no one can ignore.

114 Bearing in mind what I have just said I want you to be completely convinced that, if we really want to follow Our Lord closely and be of real service to God and the whole of mankind, then we must be thoroughly detached from ourselves, our intellectual talents, our health, our good name, our noble ambitions, our triumphs and successes.

I would also include — because your decision ought to go that far — the high ideals that lead us to seek only to give all the glory to God and to praise him. We can ensure our detachment by tailoring our will to this clear and precise rule: 'Lord, I want this or that only if it pleases you, because, if not, I'm not the slightest bit interested.' By acting in this way, we are dealing a mortal blow to the selfishness and vanity that lurk in every conscience. At the same time we will find true peace of

soul through this selfless conduct that leads to an ever more intimate and intense possession of God.

If we are to imitate Jesus Christ, our hearts need to be entirely free from attachments. 'If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For he who would save his life shall lose it; but he who loses his life for my sake shall find it. For what does it profit a man, if he gains the whole world at the cost of losing his own soul?' St Gregory makes the following comments: 'It would not be enough to live detached from things, if we were not to renounce ourselves as well. But... where shall we go outside of ourselves? Who is the one who renounces, if he leaves himself?

'You must know that we find ourselves in two situations: in the one, we have fallen through sin; in the other, we have been formed by God. We have been created in one mode of existence but we find ourselves in another because of ourselves. So let us renounce ourselves as regards what we have become through sin, but let us stand firm in that which we have been constituted by grace. Thus, if the man who was proud is converted to Christ and becomes humble, then he has already renounced self; if a lustful man changes to a life of continence, he too has renounced self as regards what he was before; if a miser ceases to covet and, instead of seizing other people's property, begins to be generous with his own, he has most surely denied himself.'

Christian self-control

115 Our Lord asks for generous hearts that are truly detached. We will achieve this if we resolutely cut the thick bonds or the subtle threads that tie us to ourselves. I won't hide from you the fact that this entails a constant struggle, overriding our own intelligence and will, a renunciation that, frankly, is more difficult than the giving up of the most prized material possessions.

The detachment which Our Lord preached, and which he expects from every Christian, necessarily brings with it external manifestations. Jesus coepit facere et docere. Before teaching with words he proclaimed his doctrine with deeds. You have seen that he was born in a stable, in the most abject poverty, and that the first time he slept on this earth was on straw in a manger. Later, in the years of his apostolic journeying, you will recall, among many other examples, the clear warning he gave to a man who offered to become one of his disciples: 'Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air their resting places; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.' Nor should you forget to contemplate the Gospel scene which shows the apostles staving off their hunger on the Sabbath day by plucking some ears of corn that were growing by the wayside.

116 You might say that Our Lord's approach to the mission he received from his Father was to live from day to day, just as he advised his hearers in one of the most divinely challenging statements of his teaching: 'Therefore I say to you, do not be anxious for your life, what you shall eat; nor for your body, what you shall clothe it with. Life is a greater thing than food, the body than clothing. See how the ravens never sow nor reap, have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them;

have you not an excellence far beyond theirs?... See how the lilies grow; they do not toil, or spin, and yet I tell you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If God, then, so clothes the grasses which live today in the fields and will feed the oven tomorrow, will he not be much more ready to clothe you, men of little faith?’

If only we could live with more trust in divine Providence, strong in faith, in the certainty of God’s daily protection, which never fails, how many worries and anxieties we would be spared! Then that fretfulness which, as Jesus said, is typical of pagans, of ‘the heathen world,’ that is, of people who lack a supernatural outlook on life, would disappear. Now that I am confiding in you as a friend, as a priest and as a father, I would like to remind you that in every circumstance of our lives we are, by God’s mercy, children of our almighty Father, who is in heaven but who also dwells in the intimacy of our hearts. I would like to engrave upon your minds the conviction that since ‘your Father well knows what you need,’ we have every reason to be optimistic on our journey through this life, with our souls completely detached from those earthly things that seem so very necessary. God will provide. Believe me, this is the only way to be lords of creation and to avoid the pitiful slavery into which so many people fall because they forget that they are children of God and spend their time worrying about tomorrow or a future that they may never see.

117 Once again, let me share with you a tiny bit of my own experience. I open my heart to you in the presence of God, utterly convinced that I am not a model for anyone, that I am but a piece of old rag, a poor instrument — a deaf and clumsy instrument — which Our Lord has used to show conclusively that He can and does write perfectly, even with the leg of a table. So, when I am talking about myself, it never occurs to me — in no way whatsoever — to think that there is any merit of mine in what I have done. Even less would I try to press you into following the paths where Our Lord has led me, since it may well be that the Master will not ask you for that which has helped me so much to work unhindered in this Work of God, to which I have dedicated my entire life.

Let me assure you, it’s something which I have touched with my own hands and seen with my own eyes, that, if you trust in God’s Providence, if you abandon yourselves in his all-powerful arms, you will never lack the means to serve God, his Holy Church and the souls of men; and this without having to neglect any of your duties. You will then rejoice in the joy and peace which mundus dare non potest, which possessing all the goods of the world cannot give.

From the very beginning of Opus Dei in 1928, apart from the fact that I had no human resources whatever, I have never personally controlled even a penny. Nor have I intervened directly in the financial aspects that naturally arise in any project that involves people — men of flesh and blood, not angels — who need material instruments to do their work efficiently.

Opus Dei has needed, and I think it’s safe to assume that to the end of time it will always need the generous cooperation of many people in order to maintain its

apostolic works. One reason for this is that such activities never show a profit. Another reason is that, even though the number of helpers increases and the work done by my children expands, if there is love of God the apostolate grows and the requests multiply. And so, more than once I have made my children laugh for, while strongly urging them to respond faithfully to God's grace, I was encouraging them to go to Our Lord and fearlessly ask him for more grace and for the money, the ready cash, that we needed so badly.

In the early years we were short of everything, even the most basic necessities. Attracted by the fire of God, there came to my side workers, clerks, university students, etc., who had no idea of the straits we were in, because in Opus Dei we have always managed, with God's help, to work in such a way that both our sacrifices and our prayers have been both abundant and unnoticed. When I now look back on those times my heart overflows in humble thanksgiving. What certainty we felt in our souls! We knew that in seeking first the Kingdom of God and his justice, we would be given all the rest as well. And I can assure you that not a single apostolic initiative had to be abandoned for lack of material resources. Wherever it was necessary our Father God, through his ordinary providence, would ensure in one way or another that we got what we required so that we could see that He is always a 'generous paymaster.'

118 If you want to be your own masters at all times, I advise you to make a very real effort to be detached from everything, and to do so without fear or hesitation. Then, when you go about your various duties, whether personal, family or otherwise, make honest use of upright human means with a view to serving God, his Church, your family, your profession, your country, and the whole of mankind. Remember that what really matters is not whether you have this or lack that, but whether you are living according to the truth taught us by our Christian faith, which tells us that created goods are only a means, nothing more. So, do not be beguiled into imagining that they are in any way definitive: 'Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where there is rust and moth to consume it, and where there are thieves to break in and steal it. Lay up treasure for yourselves in heaven, where there is no moth or rust to consume it, no thieves to break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart is too.'

When a man tries to build his happiness exclusively around the things of this world, and in this I have witnessed some real tragedies, he perverts their proper use and destroys the order so wisely established by the Creator. As a consequence the heart is left sad and unsatisfied. It starts following paths that lead to everlasting unhappiness and it ends up, even in this world, a slave, the victim of the very same goods that had perhaps been gained at the cost of countless efforts and renunciations. But, above all, I recommend you never to forget that God cannot find a place, that he cannot dwell in a heart that is bogged down by a coarse, disorderly and empty love. 'No man can serve two masters; either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will devote himself to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.' 'Let us then anchor our hearts in a love that can make us happy... Let us desire the treasures of heaven.'

119 I am not, of course, encouraging you to give up fulfilling your duties or claiming your rights. On the contrary, for any of us in normal circumstances to retreat on this front would be tantamount to a cowardly desertion from the battle for sanctity to which God has called us. You should therefore, with a sure conscience, endeavor (above all through your work) to ensure that neither you nor your family lack what is necessary to live with Christian dignity. If at times you feel the pinch of poverty, don't get dejected and don't rebel against it. I do however insist that you should try to use all the upright means available to get over such a situation, because to do otherwise would be to tempt God's providence. But while you are so fighting, remember too the omnia in bonum!: all things, even scarcity and poverty, work together unto the good of those who love God. Get into the habit, from now on, of facing up cheerfully to little shortcomings and discomforts, to cold and heat, to the lack of things you feel you can't do without, to being unable to rest as and when you would like to, to hunger, loneliness, ingratitude, lack of appreciation, disgrace...

Father... do not take them out of the world

120 It is we, men walking in the street, ordinary Christians immersed in the bloodstream of society, whom Our Lord wants to be saints and apostles, in the very midst of our professional work; that is, sanctifying our job in life, sanctifying ourselves in it and, through it, helping others to sanctify themselves as well. Be convinced that it is there that God awaits you, with all the love of a Father and Friend. Consider too that, by doing your daily work well and responsibly, not only will you be supporting yourselves financially you will also be contributing in a very direct way to the development of society, you will be relieving the burdens of others and maintaining countless welfare projects, both local and international, on behalf of less privileged individuals and countries.

121 When we behave this way, acting quite normally (just the same as our fellow men do) and with a supernatural outlook, we are simply following the example set by Jesus Christ who is true God and true Man. See how full of naturalness his life is. For thirty years he passes unnoticed as just another workman, without calling attention to himself, and he is known in his village as the son of the carpenter. The same is true of his public life. There is nothing off-key about it, nothing odd or eccentric. He had his group of friends like any one of his compatriots. There was nothing distinctive in his bearing: so much so, in fact, that Judas had to arrange a sign in order to single him out: 'Whomever I kiss, that is he.' There was nothing peculiar about Jesus and I must say that I am greatly touched by this rule of behavior of Our Lord who passed through life as just one more among men.

John the Baptist, who had a special vocation, wore a garment of camel's hair and ate locusts and wild honey. Our Savior wore a seamless tunic, ate and drank as the others did, rejoiced at their happiness, was moved by the sorrows of his neighbors, and did not refuse the rest and shelter that his friends offered him. He made no secret of the fact that he had earned his living for many years working alongside Joseph the craftsman. This is the way we should behave in this world: as Our Lord

did. I could sum up my advice very briefly as follows: we ought to go about in clean clothes, with a clean appearance and, most important of all, with a clean soul.

It is worth noting that even Our Lord, who preached such marvelous detachment from worldly goods, at the same time went to great lengths not to waste them. After the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves, whereby he had so generously satisfied the hunger of over five thousand men, 'he said to his disciples, "Gather the fragments that are left over, lest they be wasted." They therefore gathered them up; and they filled twelve baskets.' If you reflect carefully on this whole scene, you will learn never to be mean or miserly, but rather how to be good administrators of the talents and the material resources God has given you.

122 Following this example we see in Our Lord, who is our model, I preach that detachment is self-dominion. It is not a noisy and showy beggarliness, nor is it a mask for laziness and neglect. You should dress in accordance with the demands of your social standing, your family background, your work... as your companions do, but to please God: eager to present a genuine and attractive image of true Christian living. Do everything with naturalness, without being extravagant. I can assure you that in this matter it is better to err on the side of excess than to fall short. How do you think Our Lord dressed? Haven't you pictured to yourself the dignity with which he wore his seamless cloak, which had probably been woven for him by Our Lady? Don't you remember how, in Simon's house, he was grieved because he had not been offered water to wash his hands before taking his place at the table? No doubt he drew attention to this example of bad manners to underline his teaching that love is shown in little details. But he also wants to make it clear that he stands by the social customs of his time, and therefore you and I must make an effort to be detached from the goods and comforts of the world, but without doing anything that looks odd or peculiar.

As far as I am concerned, one of the signs that we're aware of being lords of the earth and God's faithful administrators is the care we take of the things we use: keeping them in good condition, making them last and getting the best out of them so that they serve their purpose for as long a time as possible and don't go to waste. In the Centers of Opus Dei you will find the decoration simple, attractive and, above all, clean, because poverty in a home is not to be confused with bad taste or with dirt. Nevertheless, it seems quite natural to me that, in keeping with your means and your social and family commitments, you should possess some objects of value that you take care of with a spirit of mortification and detachment.

123 Many years ago, twenty-five and more, I used to visit an eating-place run by a charitable group for the benefit of beggars who were so poor that their only food each day was the meal they were given there. There was a large canteen looked after by a number of kind women. After the first meal was served, more beggars would come in to finish off the leftovers. Among this second group of beggars one man in particular attracted my attention. He was the proud owner of... a pewter spoon! He would take it carefully out of his pocket, look at it covetously and, after he had downed his meager ration, he would look at the spoon again with eyes that seemed to exclaim: 'It's mine!' Next he would lick it a couple of times to clean it and

then, with deep satisfaction, would hide it away again in the folds of his tattered garment. True enough, the spoon was his! Here was a wretchedly poor beggar who, among his companions in misfortune, thought himself to be rich.

Around that same time I knew a titled lady who belonged to the Spanish aristocracy. In the eyes of God such a thing counts for nothing. We are all equal; all of us are children of Adam and Eve, weak creatures with virtues and defects, and capable all of us, if Our Lord abandons us, of committing the worst crimes imaginable. Ever since Christ redeemed us there are no distinctions of race, language, color, birth, or wealth: we are all children of God. This lady of whom I have just been speaking lived in an ancestral mansion. But she spent next to nothing on herself. On the other hand she paid her servants very well and gave the rest of her money to the needy, while depriving herself of almost everything. This lady had many of the goods that so many people are anxious to obtain but she personally was poor, given to mortification and completely detached from everything. Am I making myself clear? In any event, all we need do is listen to the words of Our Lord: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.'

If you want to achieve this spirit, I would advise you to be sparing with yourself while being very generous towards others. Avoid unnecessary expenditure on luxuries and comforts, whether out of caprice, or vanity, etc. Don't create needs for yourself. In other words, learn from St Paul 'to live in poverty and to live in abundance, to be filled and to be hungry, to live in plenty and to live in want: I can do all things in him who comforts me.' Like the Apostle, we too will come out winners in this spiritual combat if we keep our hearts unattached and free from ties.

'All of us who enter the arena of the faith,' says St Gregory the Great, 'are committed to fight against evil spirits. The devils possess nothing in this world and therefore, since they enter the lists naked, we too must fight naked. Because, if someone who is clothed fights against someone who goes naked, he will soon be dragged down, since his enemy has something to get a grip on. And what are the things of this world if not a kind of apparel?'

God loves the cheerful giver

124 Within the general framework of total detachment which Our Lord asks of us I would like to point out to you another particularly important aspect: our health. Most of you here are young. You are passing through that splendid period of being full of life, brimming over with energy. But time passes and inexorably we begin to notice a physical decline; then come the limitations of maturity and finally the infirmities of old age. Moreover, any one of us, at any moment, can fall ill or suffer some bodily disorder.

Only if we have a truly Christian appreciation of our periods of physical well-being, of 'our good times,' will we be able to accept with supernatural cheerfulness such happenings as people mistakenly call bad. Without going into too many details I would like to pass on to you my own personal experience in this area. When we are

sick we can get very tiresome: 'they aren't looking after me properly, nobody cares about me, I'm not getting the attention I deserve, nobody understands me...' The devil, who is always on the lookout, can attack from any angle. When people are ill his tactics consist in stirring up a kind of psychosis in them so as to draw them away from God and fill the atmosphere with bitterness, or destroy that treasure of merits earned (on behalf of souls everywhere) by pain, that is when it is borne with supernatural optimism, when it is loved! Therefore, if God wills that we be struck down by some affliction, take it as a sign that he considers us mature enough to be associated even more closely with his redeeming Cross.

What we need therefore is a long-term preparation, by practicing daily a holy detachment from self, so that we are prepared to bear sickness or misfortune gracefully if Our Lord permits them. Begin now to make use of everyday opportunities: something you may have to do without, small recurring pains, voluntary mortifications, and also put into practice the Christian virtues.

125 We have to make demands on ourselves in our daily lives. In this way we will not go about inventing false problems and ingenious needs which, in the last analysis, are prompted by conceit, capriciousness and a comfort-loving and lazy approach to life. We ought to be striding towards God at a fast pace, carrying no dead weights or impedimenta which might hinder our progress. Since poverty of the spirit does not consist in not having things but rather in being truly detached from what we have, we need to be vigilant so as not to be deceived by our imagination into thinking we can't survive unless we have certain things. As St Augustine puts it: 'Seek what suffices, seek what is enough, and don't desire more. Whatever goes beyond that, produces anxiety not relief: it will weigh you down, instead of lifting you up.'

In giving you this advice I am not thinking of exceptional or complicated situations. I know a person who used some slips of paper as bookmarks on which he wrote out some ejaculatory prayers to help him keep in the presence of God. One day he found himself wanting to keep those treasures and he suddenly realized that he was getting attached to the silly bits of paper. Now you see what a model of virtue we have here! I wouldn't mind telling you about every one of my weaknesses, if it were of any use to you. I have merely drawn the cloak aside a little because something similar might be happening to you: your books, your clothes, your desk, your... tin can idols?

In such cases, my recommendation is that you consult your spiritual director. Don't be childish or scrupulous about it. At times the best remedy will be the small mortification of doing without something for a short space of time. Or, to take a different example, it would probably do you no harm to give up your normal means of transport occasionally and to give to charity the money you thereby save, no matter how small the amount may be. In any case, if you really have a true spirit of detachment from things, you will not fail to find all kinds of effective and unobtrusive ways of putting it into practice.

Having opened my heart to you I must also confess to one attachment, which I have no intention of ever giving up; it is my deep love for each and every one of you. I have learned it from the best Teacher there is, and I would like to follow his example most faithfully, by loving all men with all my heart, starting with those about me. Are you not moved when you think of Jesus' ardent charity — his tenderness! — which lead the Evangelist to describe one of his disciples as the one quem diligebat Iesus, the one whom Jesus loved?

126 We will finish with a quotation which the Gospel of today's Mass offers for our consideration: 'Six days before the Paschal feast Jesus went to Bethany where Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised to life, had died. And a feast was made for him there, at which Martha was waiting at table, while Lazarus was one of his fellow guests. And now Mary brought in a pound of pure spikenard ointment, which was very precious, and poured it over the feet of Jesus, wiping his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the scent of the ointment.' What a shining proof of magnanimity is this extravagance on Mary's part! Judas on the other hand laments this waste of so valuable a perfume; in his greed he had been calculating the price: it would have fetched at least 'three hundred silver pieces.'

True detachment leads us to be very generous with God and with our fellow men. It makes us actively resourceful and ready to spend ourselves in helping the needy. A Christian cannot be content with a job that only allows him to earn enough for himself and his family. He will be big-hearted enough to give others a helping hand both out of charity and as a matter of justice, in the manner described by St Paul when writing to the Romans: 'Macedonia and Achaia have thought fit to make a contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. They have thought fit to do it, I say, and indeed they are in their debt. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual blessings, they should also contribute to their temporal needs in return.'

Don't be mean and grudging with people who, without counting the cost, have given of their all, everything they have, for your sake. Just ask yourselves, how much does it cost you — in financial terms as well — to be Christians? Above all, don't forget that 'God loves a cheerful giver. And God has the power to supply you abundantly with every kind of blessing, so that, with all your needs well supplied at all times, you may have something to spare for every work of mercy.'

As we draw closer during this Holy Week to the suffering of Jesus Christ, let us ask the Blessed Virgin Mary to enable us, like her, to keep all these things in our minds and ponder over them in our hearts.

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF CHRIST

A homily given on 3 April 1955

The Christian's way

Keeping the end in sight

Like the beating of our heart

A spirit of penance

127 Ego sum via, veritas et vita. I am the way, the truth and the life. In these clear and unmistakable words Our Lord traces out for us the true path that leads to everlasting happiness. Ego sum via: he is the only road linking heaven and earth. He is speaking to all men, but in a very special way he is thinking of people who, like you and me, are determined to take our Christian vocation seriously, so that God may always be present in our thoughts, on our lips and in everything we do, including our most ordinary and routine actions.

Jesus is the way. Behind him on this earth of ours he has left the clear outlines of his footprints. They are indelible signs which neither the erosion of time nor the treachery of the evil one have been able to erase. Iesus Christus heri et hodie; ipse et in saecula. How I love to recall these words! Jesus Christ the very Jesus who was alive yesterday for his Apostles and the people who sought him out; this same Jesus lives today for us, and will live forever. Yet, at times, we poor men fail to recognize his ever-present features, because our eyes are tired and our vision clouded. Now, as we begin this time of prayer close to the tabernacle, ask him, like the blind man in the Gospel did, Domine, ut videam! Lord, that I may see! Enlighten my intelligence and let Christ's words penetrate deep into my mind. Strengthen his Life in my soul so that I may be transformed in readiness for eternal Glory.

The Christian's way

128 How crystal clear Christ's teaching is. As usual, let us turn to the New Testament, this time to St Matthew, chapter eleven: 'Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart.' Don't you see? We have to learn from him, from Jesus who is our only model. If you want to go forward without stumbling or wandering off the path, then all you have to do is walk the road he walked, placing your feet in his footprints and entering into his humble and patient Heart, there to drink from the wellsprings of his commandments and of his love. In a word, you must identify yourself with Jesus Christ and try to become really and truly another Christ among your fellow men.

To make sure there is no mistake here, let us read another quotation from St Matthew. In chapter sixteen, Our Lord makes his doctrine even clearer: 'If anyone wishes to come my way, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.' God's way is one of renunciation, of mortification and of self-surrender, but it is not one of sadness or faint-heartedness.

Reflect on the example that Christ gave us, from the crib in Bethlehem to his throne on Calvary. Think of his self-denial and of all he went through: hunger, thirst, weariness, heat, tiredness, ill-treatment, misunderstandings, tears... But at the same time think of his joy in being able to save the whole of mankind. And now I would like you to engrave deeply in your mind and upon your heart — so that you can meditate on it often and draw your own practical conclusions — the summary St Paul made to the Ephesians when he invited them to follow resolutely in Our Lord's footsteps: 'Be imitators of God, as very dear children, and walk in love, as

Christ has loved us and delivered himself up for us, a sacrifice breathing out fragrance as he offered it to God.'

129 Jesus gave himself up for us in a holocaust of love. What about you, who are a disciple of Christ? You, a favored son of God; you, who have been ransomed at the price of the Cross; you too should be ready to deny yourself. So, no matter what situation we may find ourselves in, neither you nor I can ever allow ourselves to behave in a way that is selfish, materialistic, comfort-loving, dissipated or — forgive me if I speak too candidly — just plain stupid! 'If all you want is the esteem of your fellow men, and you long to be respected and appreciated, and you only seek a pleasant life, then you have strayed from the path... Only those who travel the rugged, narrow and austere path of tribulation are allowed to enter the city of the saints, there to rest and reign with the King for eternity.'

You yourself must decide of your own free will to take up the cross; otherwise, your tongue may say that you are imitating Christ, but your actions will belie your words. That way, you will never get to know the Master intimately, or love him truly. It is really important that we Christians convince ourselves of this. We are not walking with Our Lord unless we are spontaneously depriving ourselves of many things that our whims, vanity, pleasure or self-interest clamor for. Not a single day should pass that has not been seasoned with the salt and grace of mortification; and, please get rid of the idea that you would then be miserable. What a sad little happiness you will have if you don't learn to overcome yourself, if you let your passions and fancies dominate and crush you, instead of courageously taking up your cross!

130 As I speak of these things, there comes to mind the dream of that author of the golden age of Spanish literature — I am sure some of you have heard me mention it in other meditations. The writer sees two roads opening up before him. One of them is broad and smooth, easy to travel, with many comfortable inns, taverns and other places of beauty and delight. Along this road go great crowds of people on horseback or in carriages, in a hubbub of music and mindless laughter. One sees a multitude intoxicated by a joy which is simply ephemeral and superficial, for this road leads to a bottomless precipice. It is the road taken by the worldly-minded, ever seeking material pleasure, boasting a happiness that they do not really possess, and craving insatiably for comfort and pleasure... They are terrified at the thought of suffering, self-denial or sacrifice. They have no wish to know anything about the Cross of Christ. They think it is sheer madness. But then it is they who are insane, for they are slaves of envy, gluttony and sensuality. They end up suffering far more, and only too late do they realize that they have squandered both their earthly and their eternal happiness in exchange for meaningless trifles. Our Lord has warned us about this. 'The man who tries to save his life shall lose it; it is the man who loses his life for my sake who will secure it. How is a man the better for it if he gains the whole world at the cost of losing his own soul?'

In that dream there is another path which goes in a different direction. It is so steep and narrow that the travelers who take it cannot go on horseback. All who take it must go on foot, perhaps having to zigzag from side to side, but they move

steadily on, treading on thorns and briars, picking their way round rocks and boulders. At times their clothing gets torn, and even their flesh. But at the end of this road a garden of paradise awaits them, eternal happiness, Heaven. This is the way taken by holy people, who humble themselves and who, out of love for Jesus, gladly sacrifice themselves for others. It is the path of those who are not afraid of an uphill climb, who bear the cross lovingly, no matter how heavy it may be, because they know that if they fall under its weight they can still get up and continue their ascent. Christ is the strength of these travelers.

131 What does it matter that we stumble on the way, if we find in the pain of our fall the energy to pick ourselves up and go on with renewed vigor? Don't forget that the saint is not the person who never falls, but rather the one who never fails to get up again, humbly and with a holy stubbornness. If the book of Proverbs says that the just man falls seven times a day, who are we poor creatures, you and I, to be surprised or discouraged by our own weaknesses and falls! We will be able to keep going ahead, if only we seek our fortitude in him who says: 'Come to me all you who labor and are burdened and I will give you rest.' Thank you, Lord, quia tu es, Deus, fortitudo mea, because you, and you alone, my God, have always been my strength, my refuge and my support.

If you really want to make progress in the interior life, be humble. Turn constantly and confidently to the help of Our Lord and of his Blessed Mother, who is your Mother too. No matter how much the still open wound of your latest fall may hurt, embrace the cross once more and, calmly, without getting upset, say: 'With your help, Lord, I'll fight so as not to be held back. I'll respond faithfully to your invitations. I won't be afraid of steep climbs, nor of the apparent monotony of my daily work, nor of the thistles and loose stones on the way. I know that I am aided by your mercy and that, at the end of the road, I will find eternal happiness, full of joy and love for ever and ever.'

Later, in the same dream, our writer discovers a third path. It too is narrow and, like the second, it is both steep and rugged. Those who travel it walk solemnly and regally in the midst of countless hardships. Yet they end up falling over the same terrible precipice that the first road leads to. This is the path of the hypocrites, people who lack a right intention, who are motivated by a false zeal and pervert divine works by mixing them with their own selfish and temporal ambitions. 'It is folly to undertake a hard and difficult task just to be admired; to put great effort into keeping God's commandments with but an earthly reward in mind. Whoever practices virtue for the sake of some human benefit is like a person who sells off a priceless heirloom for just a few coins. He could have won Heaven, but he is content instead with fleeting praise... That is why they say that the hopes of hypocrites are like a spider's web: so much effort goes into weaving it, and in the end it is blown away by a puff of the wind of death.'

Keeping the end in sight

132 My purpose in reminding you of these hard realities is to stimulate you to examine carefully the motives that inspire your behavior, so that you can put right

what needs to be corrected and direct everything to the service of God and your fellow men. Don't forget that God has passed by our side, that he has cast his loving glance upon us, and 'has called us to a vocation of holiness, not because of anything we have done, but out of his own good pleasure and the grace he has lavished on us since the world began.'

Purify your intentions then. Do everything for the love of God and embrace your daily cross joyfully. This is something I have repeated thousands of times because I believe that these ideas should be engraved on every Christian heart. When we advance beyond the stage of simply tolerating difficulties or sufferings (whether physical or moral) and, instead, love them and offer them to God in reparation for our sins and the sins of all mankind, then, I assure you, they do not distress us.

It is no longer just any cross we are carrying. We discover that it is the Cross of Christ, and with it the consolation of knowing that our Redeemer has taken it upon himself to bear its weight. We cooperate as Simon of Cyrene did, who, when he was returning from work on his farm intending to take a well-earned rest, was forced to lend his shoulders to help Jesus. For a soul in love it is no misfortune to become voluntarily Christ's Simon of Cyrene and, in this way, to give such close company to his suffering Humanity, reduced to a state of rags and tatters. For if we do this we can be certain of our closeness to God, who blesses us by choosing us for this task.

Many people have spoken to me in amazement of the joy which, thanks be to God, my children in Opus Dei have and which they spread to others. Faced with this evident truth, I always give the same reply, because I know no other. Their happiness has its foundation in the fact that they fear neither life nor death; that they are not overwhelmed when they meet with misfortune; that they strive daily to live with a spirit of sacrifice, in spite of their own defects and weaknesses, and they are constantly ready to deny themselves in order to make the Christian path easier and more pleasant for others.

Like the beating of our heart

133 While I am speaking I know that you are trying, in the presence of God, to take a close look at your past behavior. Isn't it true that most of the annoyances which have made your soul restless and have taken your peace away, are due to your failure to live up to the calls of divine grace? Or rather, that you were perhaps following the path of the hypocrites by thinking only of yourself? With the sorry idea of keeping up the mere appearance of a Christian attitude for the sake of those around you, you were inwardly refusing to renounce self, to mortify your unruly passions, and to give yourself unconditionally, in complete surrender, as Jesus did.

You see, in these periods of meditation in front of the tabernacle you can't confine yourselves simply to listening to the priest's words, as if he were giving voice to the intimate prayer of each individual present. I am making some suggestions, giving some indications, but it is for you to make the effort to take them in and reflect on them, so as to convert them into the theme of a very personal inner conversation between yourself and God, in such a way that you can apply them to your present

situation and then, in the light that Our Lord offers you, distinguish what is going well from what is going badly and, with the help of his grace, correct your course.

Thank Our Lord for the great number of good works which you have disinterestedly carried out, for with the psalmist you too can sing: 'He drew me out of the deadly pit, where the mire had settled deep. He gave me a foothold on rock and gave strength to my steps.' Also ask him to forgive your omissions, or the false steps you took when you entered the wretched maze of hypocrisy, saying that you desired only the glory of God and the good of your neighbor, while in fact you were really honoring yourself... Be daring, be generous, and say No: you don't want to deceive Our Lord and mankind any more.

134 It is the moment to turn to your Blessed Mother in Heaven, so that she may take you into her arms and win for you a glance of mercy from her Son. And try at once to make some practical resolutions: put a stop once and for all, even though it hurts, to that little defect that holds you back, as God and you yourself know so well. Pride, sensuality and a lack of supernatural spirit will combine forces to suggest to you: 'That? But what a small and insignificant little thing it is!' Don't play with the temptation. Instead, answer: 'Yes, in this too I will surrender myself to the divine call.' And you will be right, for love is shown especially in little things. Normally the sacrifices that Our Lord asks of us, even the most difficult ones, refer to tiny details, but they are as continuous and invaluable as the beating of our heart.

How many mothers have you known who have been the heroines of some epic or extraordinary event? Few, very few. Yet you and I know many mothers who are indeed heroic, truly heroic, who have never figured in anything spectacular, who will never hit the headlines, as they say. They lead lives of constant self-denial, happy to curtail their own likes and preferences, their time, their opportunities for self-expression or success, so that they can carpet their children's lives with happiness.

135 Let's take other examples, again from everyday life. St Paul refers to some: 'Anyone who has to compete in the arena must keep all his appetites under control; and he does it to win a perishable crown, whereas ours is imperishable.' All you have to do is look around you. See how many sacrifices men and women make, willingly or less willingly, to take care of their bodies, protect their health, or gain the respect of others... Are we unable to stir ourselves at the thought of the immensity of God's love, so poorly requited by men, and mortify what needs to be mortified so that our hearts and minds may be more attentive to Our Lord?

In the consciences of many, the meaning of Christianity has been so distorted that when they speak of mortification and penance they think only of the rigorous fasts and hair shirts mentioned in the awe-inspiring tales that are found in some lives of saints. At the start of this meditation we took as a self-evident premise the fact that we must imitate Jesus, taking him as the model for our behaviour. It is true that he made ready for his preaching by retiring into the wilderness to fast for forty days and forty nights. But, before this, and afterwards, he practiced the virtue of

temperance with such naturalness that his enemies took advantage of it to slander him as a 'glutton and a drunkard, the friend of publicans and sinners.'

136 I would like you to discover the full depth of this simplicity of Our Lord, who lived a life of penance without any special fuss, for it is the type of life he is asking of you: 'When you fast, do not show it by gloomy looks, as the hypocrites do. They make their faces unsightly, so that men can see they are fasting; believe me they have their reward already. But do you, at the times of fasting, anoint your head and wash your face, so that your fast may not be known to men, but to your Father who dwells in secret; and then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.'

That is how you ought to practice the spirit of penance: looking towards God and behaving like a son, like a little child who shows his father how much he loves him by giving up the few treasures he has: a spool of thread, a tin soldier with no head, a bottle top... Their value is slight, yet he finds it hard to make up his mind. But in the end love wins, and he happily hands them over.

137 Let me insist again and again that this is the road that God wants us to follow when he calls us to his service in the midst of the world to sanctify others and to sanctify ourselves by means of our daily occupations. With that enormous common sense of his, combined with his great faith, St Paul preached that 'in the law of Moses it is written: thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treads out the corn,' and then he asks: 'Is God here concerned about oxen? Or does he not rather say it for us? Yes, truly for your sake it was laid down; for hope makes the ploughman plough, and the thresher to thresh, in the anticipation of sharing in the crop.'

Christian life can never be reduced to an oppressive set of rules which leave the soul in a state of exasperation and tension. Rather, it accommodates itself to individual circumstances as a glove fits the hand, and it says that, as well as praying and sacrificing ourselves constantly, we should never lose our supernatural outlook as we go about our everyday tasks, be they big or small. Remember that God loves his creatures to distraction. How can a donkey work if it is not fed or given enough rest, or if its spirit is broken by too many beatings? Well, your body is like a little donkey, and it was a donkey that was God's chosen throne in Jerusalem, and it carries you along the divine pathways of this earth of ours. But it has to be controlled so that it doesn't stray away from God's paths. And it has to be encouraged so that it can trot along with all the briskness and cheerfulness that you would expect from a poor beast of burden.

A spirit of penance

138 Are you trying to make sincere resolutions? Ask Our Lord to help you to take a tough line with yourself, for love of him; to help you apply, with all naturalness, the purifying touch of mortification to everything you do. Ask him to help you to spend yourself in his service, silently and unnoticed, like the flickering lamp that burns beside the Tabernacle. And if you can't think of anything by way of a definite answer to the divine guest who knocks at the door of your heart, listen well to what I have to tell you.

Penance is fulfilling exactly the timetable you have fixed for yourself, even though your body resists or your mind tries to avoid it by dreaming up useless fantasies. Penance is getting up on time and also not leaving for later, without any real reason, that particular job that you find harder or most difficult to do.

Penance is knowing how to reconcile your duties to God, to others and to yourself, by making demands on yourself so that you find enough time for each of your tasks. You are practicing penance when you lovingly keep to your schedule of prayer, despite feeling worn out, listless or cold.

Penance means being very charitable at all times towards those around you, starting with the members of your own family. It is to be full of tenderness and kindness towards the suffering, the sick and the infirm. It is to give patient answers to people who are boring and annoying. It means interrupting our work or changing our plans, when circumstances make this necessary, above all when the just and rightful needs of others are involved.

Penance consists in putting up good-humouredly with the thousand and one little pinpricks of each day; in not abandoning your job, although you have momentarily lost the enthusiasm with which you started it; in eating gladly whatever is served, without being fussy.

For parents and, in general, for those whose work involves supervision or teaching, penance is to correct whenever it is necessary. This should be done bearing in mind the type of fault committed and the situation of the person who needs to be so helped, not letting oneself be swayed by subjective viewpoints, which are often cowardly and sentimental.

A spirit of penance keeps us from becoming too attached to the vast imaginative blueprints we have made for our future projects, where we have already foreseen our master strokes and brilliant successes. What joy we give to God when we are happy to lay aside our third-rate painting efforts and let him put in the features and colors of his choice!

139 I could continue pointing out a multitude of details (I have just mentioned those that came immediately to mind) which you can take advantage of during the course of the day to come closer to God and to your neighbor. But here let me emphasize that, in giving you these examples, I am not in any way disparaging great penances. On the contrary, they may prove to be very good and holy, and even necessary, when Our Lord leads you by that road, always assuming that they have been approved by the person who directs your soul. But I warn you that great penances are also compatible with great falls, which are brought about by pride. On the other hand, if you continually wish to please God in the little battles that go on inside you — a smile, for example, when you don't feel like smiling; and I assure you that a smile is sometimes more difficult than an hour's worth of cilice — then there is little room left for pride, or for the ridiculous notion of thinking we are great heroes. Instead, we will see ourselves as a little child, who is hardly able to offer even the merest trifles to his father, but who then sees them received most joyfully.

So, does a Christian have to be mortified always? Yes, but for love. For this treasure of our vocation 'we carry it in vessels of clay, to show that the abundance of the power is God's and not ours. In all things we suffer tribulation, but we are not distressed; we are sore pressed, but we are not destitute; we endure persecution, but we are not forsaken; we are cast down, but we do not perish; always bearing about in our body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be made manifest in our bodily frame.'

140 Perhaps up to this moment we had not felt urged to follow so closely in the footsteps of Christ. Perhaps we did not realize that we could unite our little renunciations to his redeeming sacrifice: to make up for our own sins, for the sins of men of all ages, and for the evil work of Lucifer who continues to oppose God with his non serviam! How can we dare to cry out without hypocrisy, 'Lord, I am hurt by the offences that wound your most loving Heart,' if we don't make up our minds to deprive ourselves of this or that triviality, or to offer up some small sacrifice in praise of his Love? Penance, genuine reparation, sets us on the path of self-giving, of charity. We give ourselves to make reparation, and we live charity to help others, as Christ has helped us.

From now on, be in a hurry to fall in love. Love itself will prevent us from complaining and protesting. For we put up with setbacks often enough, but then we feel sorry for ourselves, so that not only do we waste God's grace, but we also tie his hands and make it harder for him to ask us for things in the future: *Hilarem enim datorem diligit Deus*. God loves the cheerful giver, the person who gives with the spontaneity of a loving heart, without all the fuss and bother of one who gives himself as if he were doing God a favor.

141 Take another look over your life and ask forgiveness for this or that fault which you notice immediately with the eyes of your conscience: for using your tongue badly; for thoughts that revolve continually around yourself; for those critical judgments you made and consented to and which now cause you to worry foolishly, leaving you restless and fretful. Believe me you can be very happy! Our Lord wants us to be glad, to be drunk with joy, stepping out along the same roads of happiness that he himself walked! We only become miserable when we persist in straying off those roads, and take the path of selfishness and sensuality or, much worse, when we take the path of the hypocrites.

The Christian must prove himself to be genuine, truthful and sincere in all that he undertakes. His conduct should reflect a spirit — the spirit of Christ. If anyone in this world has a duty to be consistent with his beliefs it is the Christian, for he has been entrusted with a gift that he must make fruitful, and that gift is the truth which liberates and saves. But Father, you might ask me, how I am to achieve this sincerity of life? Jesus Christ has given his Church all the means necessary. He has shown us how to pray, how to get to know his heavenly Father. He has sent us his spirit, the Great Unknown, who acts within our souls. And he has left us those visible signs of his grace that we call the Sacraments. Use them. Intensify your life of piety. Pray every day. And never refuse to shoulder the sweet burden of Christ's Cross.

It is Jesus who has invited you to follow him like a good disciple so that you can journey through this earthly life, sowing the peace and joy which the world cannot give. Therefore — and let me emphasize this once more — we have to walk without fear of life and without fear of death, without shrinking at any cost from pain and sorrow which, for a Christian, are always a means of purification and a chance for showing that we really love our fellow men, through the thousand and one circumstances of ordinary life.

Our time is up and I have to bring these considerations to a close. With them I have tried to stir your soul so that you might respond by making a few specific resolutions — not many, but definite ones. You should realize that God wants you to be glad and that, if you do all you can, you will be happy, very, very happy, although you will never be a moment without the Cross. But that Cross is no longer a gallows. It is the throne from which Christ reigns. And at his side, his Mother, our Mother too. The Blessed Virgin will obtain for you the strength that you need to walk decisively in the footsteps of her Son.

GETTING TO KNOW GOD

A homily given on 5 April 1964, Low Sunday

We are children of God

The example of Jesus Christ

Piety, a childlike attitude towards God

Plan of life

Signposts painted red

142 Low Sunday brings to my memory a pious tradition of my own country. On this day, in which the liturgy invites us to hunger for spiritual food — rationabile, sine dolo lac concupiscite, to desire the spiritual milk, that is free from guile — it was customary to take Holy Communion to the sick (they did not have to be seriously ill) so that they could fulfill their Easter duties.

In some large cities, each parish would organize its own Eucharistic procession. From my days as a university student in Saragossa, I remember frequently seeing thousands of people crossing the Coso in three separate contingents made up entirely of men, thousands of men!, carrying huge burning candles. Strong and robust men they were, accompanying Our Lord in the Holy Eucharist, with a faith that was greater than those candles that weighed so much.

Last night when I found myself awake several times I repeated, as an aspiration, the words, quasi modo geniti infantes, as new-born babes. It occurred to me that the Church's invitation today is very well suited to all of us who feel the reality of our divine filiation. It is certainly right that we be very strong, very solid, men of mettle who can influence our environment; and yet, before God, how good it is to see ourselves as little children!

We are children of God

Quasi modo geniti infantes, rationabile, sine dolo lac concupiscite: like children just born into the world, cry out for the clean and pure milk of the spirit. How marvelous this verse from St Peter is and how appropriate that the liturgy should then add: exsultate Deo adiutori nostro: iubilate Deo Iacob: leap with joy in honor of God; acclaim the God of Jacob, who is also Our Lord and Father. But today I would like us, you and I, to meditate not so much on the Holy Sacrament of the Altar, which draws from our hearts the greatest possible praise for Jesus, but on the certainty of our divine filiation and on some of the consequences deriving from it for all who want to live their Christian faith nobly and earnestly.

143 For reasons that I need not go into now (but which Jesus, who is presiding over us here from the Tabernacle, knows full well) my life has led me to realize in a special way that I am a son of God and I have experienced the joy of getting inside the heart of my Father, to rectify, to purify myself, to serve him, to understand others and find excuses for them, on the strength of his love and my own lowliness.

This is why I want to insist now that you and I need to be made anew, we need to wake up from the slumber of feebleness by which we are so easily lulled and to become aware once again, in a deeper and more immediate way, of our condition as children of God.

The example of Jesus, every detail of his life in those Eastern lands, will help us to fill ourselves with this truth. 'If we admit the testimony of men,' we read in today's Epistle, 'the testimony of God is greater.' And what does God's testimony consist of? Again St John tells us: 'See how God has shown his love towards us; that we should be counted as his sons, should be his sons... Beloved, we are sons of God even now.'

Over the years, I have sought to rely unfalteringly for my support on this joyous reality. No matter what the situation, my prayer, while varying in tone, has always been the same. I have said to him: 'Lord, You put me here. You entrusted me with this or that, and I put my trust in you. I know you are my Father, and I have seen that tiny children are always absolutely sure of their parents.' My priestly experience tells me that abandonment such as this in the hands of God stimulates souls to acquire a strong, deep and serene piety, which drives them to work constantly and with an upright intention.

The example of Jesus Christ

144 Quasi modo geniti infantes... It has made me very happy to spread everywhere this attitude of being children, little children of God, an attitude which enables us to savor those other words we find in the liturgy of today's Mass: 'all that is born of God overcomes the world'; it conquers difficulties and achieves victory in this great battle for the peace of souls and of society.

Our wisdom and our strength lie precisely in our being convinced of our littleness, of our nothingness in the eyes of God. But at the same time He himself is

prompting us to get moving, to proclaim confidently his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, even though we have errors and miseries, provided, that is, that, as well as being weak, we are fighting to overcome our weakness.

You must have often heard me repeat the following advice contained in Scripture: *discite benefacere*, for there can be no doubt that we need to learn how to do good and to teach others to do the same. In this, we have to begin with ourselves, by striving to discover which particular good we should be aiming at, for each one of us, for each of our friends, for each and every man. I know no better way of considering the greatness of God than to start from this inexpressible and simple fact that he is our Father and we are his children.

145 Let us take another look at the Master. You too may find yourself now hearing his gentle reproach to Thomas: 'Let me have your finger; see, here are my hands. Let me have your hand; put it into my side. Cease your doubting, and believe;' and, with the Apostle, a sincere cry of contrition will rise from your soul: 'My Lord, and my God!' I acknowledge you once and for all as the Master. From now on, with your help, I shall always treasure your teachings and I shall strive to follow them loyally.

If we go back a few pages in the Gospel we can relive the scene in which Jesus retires to pray and his disciples are nearby, probably watching him. When Jesus has finished, one of them boldly asks him: 'Lord, teach us how to pray, as John did for his disciples. And he told them, When you pray, you are to say, Father, hallowed be thy name.'

Note the surprising thing about this reply. The disciples share their daily lives with Jesus and there, in the course of their ordinary conversations, Our Lord tells them how they should pray. He reveals to them the great secret of God's mercy: that we are children of God and we can talk things over with him and spend time with him, just as trustingly as a son does with his father.

When I see how some people set about the life of piety, which is the way a Christian should approach his Lord, and I find them presenting such an unattractive picture, all theory and formulas, plagued with soulless chanting, better suited to anonymity than to a personal, one to One, conversation with God Our Father (genuine vocal prayer is never anonymous), then I am reminded of Our Lord's words: 'When you are at prayer, do not use many phrases, like the heathens, who think to make themselves heard by their eloquence. You are not to be like them; your heavenly Father knows well what your needs are before you ask him.' A Father of the Church comments on this passage as follows: 'I understand from this that Christ is telling us to avoid long prayers, not long as regards time but as regards the endless multiplicity of words... For Our Lord himself set us the example of the widow who, by dint of supplication, conquered the resistance of the unjust judge; and the other example of the inconsiderate individual who arrives late at night and who, through insistence more than friendship, gets his friend out of bed (cf Luke 11:5-8; 18:1-8). With these two examples, he is telling us to ask constantly, not by composing endless prayers, but rather telling him of our needs with simplicity.'

In any case, if on beginning your meditation you don't succeed in concentrating your attention so as to be able to talk with God; if you feel dry and your mind seems incapable of expressing a single idea, or your affections remain dull, my advice is that you try to do what I have always tried to do on such occasions: put yourselves in the presence of your Father and tell him this much at least: 'Lord, I don't know how to pray. I can't think of anything to tell you.' You can be sure that at that very moment you have already begun to pray.

Piety, a childlike attitude towards God

146 The piety which is born of divine filiation is a profound attitude of the soul which eventually permeates one's entire existence. It is there in every thought, every desire, every affection. Haven't you noticed in families how children, even without realizing it, imitate their parents? They imitate their gestures, their habits; much of their behavior is the same as that of their parents.

Well, the same kind of thing happens to a good son of God. One finds oneself acquiring — without knowing how, or by what means — a marvelous godliness, which enables us to focus events from the supernatural viewpoint of faith; we come to love all men as our Father in Heaven loves them and, what is more important, we become more fervent in our daily efforts to come closer to God. Our wretchedness, I insist, doesn't matter, because we have the loving arms of our Father God to lift us up.

Have you noticed what a great difference there is between a child falling and a fall by an adult? In the case of children, most falls are unimportant; they are always falling over! If they do start crying, their father tells them: 'Look here now, men don't cry.' And the incident ends with the child trying earnestly to please his father.

But what happens if an adult loses his balance and falls awkwardly to the ground? If it weren't so pitiful, his misfortune would provoke merriment and laughter. Besides, the fall may have serious consequences and, if it's an old man, it might even give rise to a fracture that will never heal. In our interior life, it does all of us good to be quasi modo geniti infantes, like those tiny tots who seem to be made of rubber and who even enjoy falling over because they get up again right away and are once more running around, and also because they know their parents will always be there to console them, whenever they are needed.

If we try to act like them, our stumbling and failures in the interior life (which, moreover, are inevitable) will never result in bitterness. Our reaction will be one of sorrow but not discouragement, and we'll smile with a smile that gushes up like fresh water out of the joyous awareness that we are children of that Love, that grandeur, that infinite wisdom, that mercy, that is our Father. During the years I have been serving Our Lord, I have learned to become a little child of God. I would ask you to do likewise, to be quasi modo geniti infantes, children who long for God's word, his bread, his food, his strength, to enable us to behave henceforth as Christian men and women.

147 Be very childlike! the more childlike, the better. I speak from my experience as a priest, who has had to pick himself up many times in these past thirty-six years (how long and yet how short they now seem to me!) which have been spent striving to fulfill a very precise requirement of God's Will. There's one thing that has helped me always, the fact that I am still a child, and I am always climbing onto my Mother's lap and finding refuge in the Heart of Christ, my Lord.

Serious falls, of the kind that can do great damage to the soul, at times almost irreparable damage, can always be traced back to the pride of thinking oneself to be grown up and self-sufficient. In such cases, people seem almost incapable of asking for help from those who can give it: not only from God, but also from a friend, or from a priest. And the poor soul, alone in its misfortune, sinks into confusion and loses its way.

Let us beseech God, right now, never to let us feel self-satisfied, but rather to make us grow ever more desirous of his help, his word, his Bread, his consolation and his strength: rationabile, sine dolo lac concupiscite, foster your hunger, your ambition to be like children. Believe me, it is the best way to conquer pride; and it's the only way to make our conduct good, great hearted, divine. 'Believe me, unless you become like little children again, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.'

148 The scenes of my student days come back to me again. What a demonstration of faith it was! I can almost hear the liturgical singing, breathe the smell of incense, see those thousands and thousands of men, each with his own misery — but each with a childlike heart; a little child who may perhaps be unable to lift up his eyes to meet those of his father. 'Know and see that it is an evil and bitter thing for you, to have forsaken the Lord your God.' Let us renew our firm decision never to forsake Our Lord for the cares of this world. Let us increase our thirst for God, making specific resolutions for our daily conduct, like little ones who recognize how needy they are and who therefore keep looking and calling for their Father.

But, let me go back to what I was telling you before: we have to learn to behave like children, we have to learn how to be God's sons. At the same time, we have to pass on to others this outlook which in the midst of our natural weaknesses, will make us 'strong in the faith,' fruitful in good works, and certain of our way, so that no matter what kind of mistakes we may make, even the most embarrassing, we will never hesitate to react and return to the sure path of divine filiation which ends up in the open and welcoming arms of our Father God.

Which of you here does not remember the arms of his father? They probably weren't as caressing, as gentle and tender as those of his mother. But our father's strong and powerful arms held us tight and safe and warm. Lord, I thank you for those tough arms. Thank you for those strong hands. Thank you for that sturdy and tender heart. I was going to thank you also for my errors! No, you don't want them! But you understand them, and excuse them and forgive them.

This is the wisdom God wants us to practice in our dealings with him. This indeed is a good mathematical lesson to learn to recognize that we are really a zero, but that our Father God loves each one of us just as we are, yes, indeed, just as we are!

I — who am nothing but a poor man — love each one of you as he is, so just imagine what God's Love will be like! That is provided we struggle, provided we are determined to bring our life into line with our conscience. a well formed conscience.

Plan of life

149 When we examine how our piety is and what it should be like, that is what specific points of our personal relationship with God need improving, if you have understood me right you will reject the temptation of imagining fantastic feats, because you will have discovered that Our Lord is quite happy if we offer him little tokens of love any moment of the day.

Try to commit yourself to a plan of life and to keep to it: a few minutes of mental prayer, Holy Mass — daily, if you can manage it — and frequent Communion; regular recourse to the Holy Sacrament of Forgiveness — even though your conscience does not accuse you of mortal sin; visiting Jesus in the Tabernacle; praying and contemplating the mysteries of the Holy Rosary, and so many other marvelous devotions you know or can learn.

You should not let them become rigid rules, or water-tight compartments. They should be flexible, to help you on your journey you who live in the middle of the world, with a life of hard professional work and social ties and obligations which you should not neglect, because in them your conversation with God still continues. Your plan of life ought to be like a rubber glove which fits the hand perfectly.

Please don't forget that the important thing does not lie in doing many things; limit yourself, generously, to those you can fulfill each day, whether or not you happen to feel like doing them. These pious practices will lead you, almost without your realizing it, to contemplative prayer. Your soul will pour forth more acts of love, aspirations, acts of thanksgiving, acts of atonement, spiritual communions. And this will happen while you go about your ordinary duties, when you answer the telephone, get on to a bus, open or close a door, pass in front of a church, when you begin a new task, during it and when you have finished it: you will find yourself referring everything you do to your Father God.

150 Rest and repose in the fact of being children of God. God is a Father who is full of tenderness, of infinite love. Call him 'Father' many times a day and tell him — alone, in your heart — that you love him, that you adore him, that you feel proud and strong because you are his son. All this implies a genuine program of interior life, which needs to be channeled through your relationship of piety with God, through these acts (which should be few, I insist, but constant) which will enable you to develop the attitudes and manner of a good son.

I must also warn you against the danger of routine — the real sepulcher of piety. Routine is often disguised as an ambition to do or to embark upon great feats, while daily duties are lazily neglected. When you see this beginning to happen, look at yourself sincerely before Our Lord: ask yourself if the reason why you may have become tired of always struggling on the same thing, is not simply that you were

not seeking God; check if your faithful perseverance in work has not fallen off, due to lack of generosity and a spirit of sacrifice. It is then that your norms of piety, your little mortifications, your apostolic efforts that are not reaping an immediate harvest, all seem to be terribly sterile. We find ourselves empty and perhaps we start dreaming up new plans merely to still the voice of our Heavenly Father who asks us to be totally loyal to him. And with this dream, or rather nightmare, of mighty wonders in our soul, we become oblivious to reality, forgetting the way that will lead us most certainly straight towards sanctity. It is a clear sign that we have lost our supernatural outlook, our conviction that we are tiny children and our confidence that our Father will work wonders in us, if we begin again with humility.

Signposts painted red

151 One of my most vivid childhood memories is of seeing, up in the mountains near my home, those signposts they planted alongside the hill paths. I was struck by those tall posts usually painted red. It was explained to me then that when the snow fell, covering up everything, paths, seeded fields and pastures thickets, boulders and ravines, the poles stood out as sure reference points, so that everyone would always know where the road went.

Something similar happens in the interior life. There are times of spring and summer, but there are also winters, days without sun and nights bereft of moonlight. We can't afford to let our friendship with Jesus depend on our moods, on our ups and downs. To do so would imply selfishness and laziness, and is certainly incompatible with love.

Therefore, in times of wind and snow, a few solid practices of piety, which are not sentimental but firmly rooted and adjusted to one's special circumstances, will serve as the red posts always marking out the way for us, until the time comes when Our Lord decides to make the sun shine again. Then the snows melt and our hearts beat fast once more, burning with a fire that never really went out. It was merely hidden in the embers, beneath the ashes produced by a time of trial, or by our own poor efforts or lack of sacrifice.

152 I do not deny that over the years people have come to me and have told me with real sorrow: 'Father, I don't know what's come over me, but I find I am tired and cold. My piety used to be so solid and straightforward, but now it feels like play acting...' Well, for those who are going through such a phase, and for all of you, I answer: 'Play acting? Wonderful! The Lord is playing with us as a father does with his children.'

We read in Scripture: *ludens in orbe terrarum*, that God plays over the whole face of the earth. But he does not abandon us because he adds immediately afterwards: *deliciae meae esse cum filiis hominum*, my delight is to be with the children of men. Our Lord is playing with us! So when we feel that we are just play acting, because we feel cold and uninspired; when we find it difficult to fulfill our duties and attain the spiritual objectives we had set ourselves, then the time has come for us to realize that God is playing with us, and that he wishes us to act out our play with style.

I don't mind telling you that the Lord has, on occasion, given me many graces. But as a rule I have to go against the grain. I follow my plan, not because I like it, but because I've a duty to do so, for Love. 'But, Father,' you ask me, 'can one put on an act for God? Wouldn't that be hypocritical?' Don't worry: for you the moment has arrived to play out a human comedy before a divine spectator. Persevere, for the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are contemplating your act; do it all for love of God, to please him, although you find it hard.

How beautiful it is to be God's jester! How beautiful to act out such a role for Love, with a spirit of sacrifice, not seeking any personal satisfaction, but just to please Our Father God who is playing with us! Turn to Our Lord with confidence and say to him: 'I don't feel like doing this at all, but I will offer it up for you.' And then put your heart into the job you are doing, even though you think you are just play acting. Blessed play acting! I assure you it isn't hypocrisy, because hypocrites need a public for their pantomimes, whereas the spectators of our play, let me repeat, are the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Most Holy Virgin, St Joseph and all the Angels and Saints in Heaven. Our interior life involves no more show than this, it is Christ who is passing by quasi in occulto.

153 Iubilare Deo. Exsultate Deo adiutori nostro. Praise God. Leap for joy in the Lord, our one and only help. Jesus my Lord, whoever doesn't understand this, knows nothing about love, or sin, or wretchedness. Do you know what it is to be lifted up to the heart of God? Do you realize that a soul can face his Lord, open his heart to him and tell him his woes? I do it, for example, when God takes to himself people who are still young, who could still serve him and love him for many years here on earth; because I just don't understand. But my lament is one of trust, because I know that if I were ever to slip out of God's arms, I would stumble immediately. So, right away, calmly, as I accept the designs of Heaven, I add: 'May the most just and most lovable Will of God be done, be fulfilled, be praised and eternally exalted above all things. Amen. Amen.'

This is the way of doing things the Gospel teaches us; it is a clever move and a very holy one, the source of the effectiveness of our apostolic work. This is the fountainhead; from it our love and our peace as children of God flow and it is the way by which we can transmit affection and serenity to mankind. If only we do this, we will end our days in Love, having sanctified our work and found in it the hidden happiness of the things of God. We will go about life with the holy shamelessness of children and reject the shame, the hypocrisy, of grown ups, who are afraid to return to their Father after experiencing the failure of a fall.

I end with Our Lord's words of greeting, as found in today's Gospel: pax vobis! 'Peace be with you... And the disciples rejoiced at the sight of the Lord,' of this Lord who accompanies us to the Father.

OPEN TO GOD AND MEN

A homily given on 3 November 1963, 22nd Sunday after Pentecost

Prudence, a necessary virtue

Human respect

Be right-minded

Turning our weakness to good account

To each his due

Duties of justice towards God and men

Justice and love of freedom and truth

Justice and charity

154 We are here, consummati in unum! united in prayer and intention, and ready to begin this period of conversation with Our Lord, having renewed our desires to be effective instruments in his hands. Before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament — how I love to make an act of explicit faith in the real presence of Our Lord in the Eucharist! — use your prayer to stir up in your hearts the eagerness to spread the fervor of their resolute beating to every part of the earth, to the utmost corner of the planet where even one man may be found generously spending his life in the service of God and souls. Thanks to the ineffable reality of the Communion of Saints, we are indeed all joined together — ‘fellow workers,’ St John says — in the task of spreading the truth and the peace of the Lord.

It is right that we should think about how we are imitating the Master. We should pause and reflect so that we can learn directly from Our Lord’s life some of the virtues which ought to shine out in our lives, if we are really anxious to spread the Kingdom of Christ.

Prudence, a necessary virtue

155 In the passage from St Matthew’s Gospel which we read in today’s Mass, it says: tunc abeuntes pharisei, consilium inierunt ut caperent eum in sermone; the Pharisees went and took council that they might trap him in his talk. Don’t forget that this hypocritical approach is a common tactic even in our own times. I suspect that the tares of the Pharisees will never be wiped out in this world; they have always managed to grow at such an amazing rate. Perhaps Our Lord tolerates this growth to make us, his sons, more prudent, for the virtue of prudence is essential for anyone whose job it is to judge, to strengthen, to correct, to fire with enthusiasm, or to encourage. And that is exactly what a Christian has to do, by taking advantage, as an apostle, of the situations of his ordinary work to help the people around him.

At this point, I raise my heart to God, and I ask him through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin — who is in the Church and yet above the Church, who is between Christ and the Church, protecting us and reigning over us, the Mother of all mankind, as she is of Our Lord — through her, I beg that he may grant the gift of prudence to everyone of us, and especially to those who, immersed in the

bloodstream of society, wish to work for God; because it will stand us in very good stead to learn to be prudent.

156 The scene from the Gospel continues to unfold: the Pharisees 'sent their disciples with some of those who were of Herod's party, and said: Master...' Note how craftily they call him 'Master.' They pretend to be his admirers and friends, treating him as they would a person from whom they expect to receive instruction. *Magister, scimus quia verax es*, we know that you are truthful... What infamous guile! Have you ever come across such double-dealing! Take care then how you pass through this world. Don't be over-cautious or distrustful. But you should feel on your shoulders — remembering the image of the Good Shepherd depicted in the catacombs — the weight of the lost sheep, which represents not just a single soul, but the entire Church, the whole of humanity.

If you accept this responsibility with good grace and zest, you will become both daring and prudent in defending and proclaiming God's rights. And then, because of the integrity of your life style, many people will come to regard you as teachers and call you so, even though you have no such ambition, for we have no interest in earthly glory. But, at the same time, don't be surprised if, among the many who approach you, there are some who sidle up to you with no other purposes than to flatter you. I would like you to register deep in your souls those words that you have so often heard from me: we must never let anything, neither slander, nor backbiting, neither human respect, nor the fear of what others may say, and much less the praise of the hypocrites, stand in the way of the fulfillment of our duty.

157 You remember the parable of the Good Samaritan? A poor man lies by the roadside, covered with the injuries he has received from thieves who have robbed him of his last penny. A priest of the Old Law passes by, and a little later a Levite. They both continue on their way without bothering to help. 'But a certain Samaritan as he journeyed came upon him, and seeing him, was moved with compassion. And he went up to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. And setting him on his own beast, he brought him to an inn and took care of him.' Note that this is not an example provided by Our Lord for the benefit of just a few select people, since he immediately adds in answer to his questioner, that is to each one of us: 'Go and do the same yourself.'

Therefore, when in our own life or in that of others we notice something that isn't going well, something that requires the spiritual and human help which, as children of God, we can and ought to provide, then a clear sign of prudence is to apply the appropriate remedy by going to the root of the trouble, resolutely, lovingly and sincerely. There is no room here for inhibitions, for it is a great mistake to think that problems can be solved by omissions or procrastination.

Prudence demands that the right medicine be used whenever the situation calls for it. Once the wound has been laid bare, the cure should be applied in full and without palliatives. When you see the slightest symptom that something is wrong, be straightforward and truthful about it, irrespective of whether it involves helping someone else or whether it is your own problem. When such help is needed, we

must allow the person who, in the name of God, has the qualifications to carry out the cure, to press in on the infected wound, first from a distance, and then closer and closer until all the pus is squeezed out and the infection eradicated at its source. We must apply these procedures first to ourselves, and then to those whom, for reasons of justice or charity, we are obliged to help: I pray specially that parents, and everyone whose job it is to train and educate, may do this well.

Human respect

158 Don't let any hypocritical excuse hold you back: apply the dose in full. But go about it with a motherly hand, with the almost infinite tenderness shown by our own mothers, when they were treating the hurts and injuries, big or little, resulting from our childhood games and falls. When it is better to wait a few hours, by all means do so. But never wait longer than is strictly necessary. Any other approach would imply cowardice or a desire not to inconvenience ourselves, which is very different from prudence. Everyone, especially those of you who have the job of training others, must put aside the fear of getting at the wound to disinfect it.

It could happen that someone might whisper cunningly in the ears of those who have to heal, but are hesitant or unwilling to face up to their obligations: 'Master, we know that you are truthful...' Don't tolerate such ironical praise. Those who don't make the effort to carry out their task diligently are not masters, because they don't teach the true way. Nor are they truthful, since their false prudence leads them to despise or regard as exaggerated the clear guidelines which have been tested a thousand times over by upright conduct, by age, by the science of government, by the knowledge of human weakness, and by the love for each and every sheep of the flock. They are guidelines which impel one to speak up, to intervene, to show concern.

False teachers are afraid of getting to the bottom of things. They get uneasy at the very idea, never mind the obligation, of having to use a painful antidote when circumstances require it. You can be quite sure that in such an attitude there is no prudence: and no piety or good sense either. It reflects instead a timid disposition, a lack of responsibility, foolishness and stupidity. These are the people who will afterwards panic, at the sight of disaster, and try to stop the evil when it is already too late. They forget that the virtue of prudence demands that we find out and pass on in good time the calm advice that comes from maturity, long experience, unhindered vision and unhampered speech.

159 Let us continue with the same passage from St Matthew: 'we know that you are truthful, and that you teach the way of God in truth.' Such cynicism never ceases to surprise me. These people are motivated only by the intention of twisting Our Lord's words. They want to catch him out in some slip of the tongue and, instead of explaining in simple terms what they consider to be an insoluble problem, they try to confuse the Master with compliments that should only come from friendly lips and honest hearts. I have purposely paused to consider the methods of the Pharisees, not so that we will become suspicious, but so that we learn to be prudent; so that we aren't taken in by deceit even though it comes

decked out in phrases or expressions which in themselves are true, as in the Gospel passage we have been just considering. You don't make distinctions, they say; you have come for all men; nothing stops you from proclaiming the truth and teaching goodness.

I will say it again: we have to be prudent, yes; but not suspicious. Give everyone the utmost credit for what he says. Be very noble. As far as I am concerned, the word of a Christian, of a loyal man — I trust every one of you entirely — is worth more than the official signatures of a hundred notaries who are in unanimous agreement, even though on some occasions I may have been deceived by following this rule. But I prefer to leave myself open to the unscrupulous abuse of this confidence, rather than deprive anyone of the credit he deserves as a person and as a son of God. I can assure you that I have never been disappointed by the consequences of this way of acting.

Be right-minded

160 If the Gospel isn't helping us constantly to draw conclusions applicable to our everyday life, the reason is that we aren't meditating on it enough. Many of you are young; some of you have already reached maturity. You all want, all of us want — otherwise we wouldn't be here — to yield good fruit in our lives. We are trying to bring a spirit of sacrifice into our actions and to turn the talent that Our Lord has entrusted to us to good account, for we feel a divine zeal for souls. But, in spite of all these good intentions, it wouldn't be the first time that someone has fallen into the trap set by this alliance — *ex phariseis et herodianis* — made up perhaps of those who ought in some way or other to be defending God's rights because they are Christians, but who having instead become allied to and mixed in with the interests of evil forces, are treacherously laying snares to catch their brothers in the faith, who are servants with them of the same Redeemer.

Be prudent and always act with simplicity, which is a very appropriate virtue for a son of God. Behave naturally in the way you speak and in what you do. Get to the root of problems; don't stay on the surface. Remember that, if we really want to fulfill our obligations as Christians in a holy and manly way, we must anticipate unpleasant moments for others and for ourselves too.

161 I won't hide from you the fact that, when I have to correct someone or take a decision that will cause pain, I suffer before, during and after it; and I am not a sentimental person. It consoles me to think that it is only animals that don't cry. We men, children of God, do cry. As I see it, there will be times when you too will have to suffer if you are really serious about doing your duty faithfully. Don't forget that it is more comfortable (though it is a mistake) to avoid suffering at any cost, with the excuse of not wanting to hurt others. This inhibition often hides a shameful escape on our part from suffering, since it isn't usually pleasant to correct someone in a serious matter. My children, remember that hell is full of closed mouths.

A number of you here are doctors. Forgive my presumption in taking another example from medicine. What I say may not be very scientific, but the ascetical

comparison will still be valid. To heal a wound, the first thing to do is to clean it well, including a wide area around it. The surgeon knows that the cleaning hurts, but he also knows that there will be worse pain later if it is not done. A disinfectant is also applied immediately. Naturally it stings (or, as they say where I come from, it prickles) and hurts the patient. But it's the only way if the wound is not to become infected.

If it is obvious that such measures must be taken to protect bodily health, although it may only be a relatively minor wound, then when the health of the soul is at stake — the very nerve centre of a man's life — how much more necessary it is to wash, to cut away, to scrape, to disinfect, to suffer! Prudence demands that we intervene in this way and that we don't flee from duty, because to side-step our obligations here would indicate a great lack of concern for and even a grave offence against the virtues of justice and fortitude.

You can be sure that a Christian who really wants to do everything honestly in the eyes of God and of his neighbor, needs to possess all the virtues, at least potentially. But Father, you will ask me, what about my weaknesses? And I will answer: can't a doctor who is sick cure others, even if his illness is chronic? Will his illness prevent him from prescribing proper treatment for other patients? Obviously not. In order to cure others, all he needs is to have the necessary knowledge and to apply it with the same concern as he would in his own case.

Turning our weakness to good account

162 Each day, you will find, as I do, if you examine yourselves courageously in the presence of God, that you have many defects. If we struggle, with God's help, to get rid of them we needn't give them too much importance, and we will overcome them even though it may seem that we never manage to uproot them entirely. Furthermore, over and above those weaknesses, if you are really determined to correspond to God's grace, you will be helping to cure the big shortcomings of others. When you realize you are as weak as they are and capable of any sin, no matter how horrible, you will be more understanding and gentle with others, and at the same time more demanding, because you will want all men to make up their minds to love God with all their heart.

We Christians, children of God, must help others by honestly putting into practice what those hypocrites perversely muttered to the Master: 'You make no distinction between man and man.' That is to say, we must completely reject any kind of partiality (we are interested in the souls of all men!) although it is only natural that we turn first to the people whom for whatever reasons (even though at times they may appear to be only human reasons) God has placed at our side.

163 Et viam Dei in veritate doces. Teach others. Never stop teaching: that means showing the ways of God with utter truthfulness. You needn't worry about your defects being seen, yours and mine. I like making mine public, and telling of my personal struggle and my desire to correct this failing or that in my battle to be loyal to Our Lord. Our efforts to banish and overcome our defects will in themselves be a way of teaching God's ways: first, and in spite of our visible errors, he wants

us to strive to give witness with our lives; then, with our teaching, just like Our Lord did when he *coepit facere et docere*. He began with works, then afterwards he devoted himself to preaching.

Having reminded you that this priest loves you very much and that your Father in Heaven loves you more because he is infinitely good, infinitely a Father; and having shown you that there is nothing I can reproach you with, I feel all the same that I must help you to love Jesus Christ and the Church, his flock, because in this I think you are not ahead of me; you emulate me, but you are not ahead of me. When, through my preaching or in my personal conversations with each one of you, I draw attention to some defect, it is not in order to make you suffer. My only motive is to help us love Our Lord more deeply. And when I impress upon you the need to practice the virtues, I never forget that I am under the same obligation myself.

164 I once heard someone say very rashly that the experience of one's lapses serves to make one fall a further hundred times into the same error. I tell you, instead, that a prudent person makes use of these setbacks to be more careful in the future, to learn to do good and to renew his decision to seek greater holiness. From your failures and successes in God's service, seek always to draw, together with an increase in love, a stronger determination to carry on fulfilling your rights and duties as Christian citizens, no matter what the cost. And do this manfully, without fleeing from honors or responsibilities, without being afraid of the reactions we produce in those around us, perhaps originating from false brethren, when we nobly and loyally try to seek God's glory and the good of our neighbor.

So, then, we have to be prudent. Why is this? In order to be just, in order to live charity, and to give good service to God and to all our fellow men. Not without good reason has prudence been called *genitrix virtutum*, the mother of virtues, and also *auriga virtutum*, the guide of every good habit.

To each his due

165 Read the Gospel scene attentively, in order to take advantage of these wonderful lessons in the virtues which should throw light on the way we act. When they had finished their hypocritical and fawning preamble, the Pharisees and Herodians came to the point, 'Tell us therefore what you think: is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar or not?' And St John Chrysostom writes: 'Take note of their astuteness, for they don't say, "Tell us what is right or suitable or permissible, but tell us what you think." They were obsessed with the idea of betraying him and of making him hateful to the authorities.' 'But Jesus, knowing their wickedness, said, "Why do you test me, you hypocrites? Show me the coin of the tribute." So they offered him a denarius. Then Jesus said to them, "Whose are this image and this inscription?" They said to him, "Caesar's." Then he said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

As you can see the dilemma is as old as Our Lord's answer is unequivocal and clear. There is no clash, no opposition, between serving God and serving men; between the exercise of our civic rights and duties and our religious ones; between

the commitment to build up and improve the earthly city, and the conviction that we are passing through this world on our way to our heavenly homeland.

Here too, as I never tire of repeating, we can see that unity of life which is an essential condition for those who are trying to sanctify themselves in the midst of the ordinary situations of their work and of their family and social relationships. Jesus does not allow any division here: 'No one can serve two masters, for he will either hate the one and love the other, or if he subjects himself to the first, he will despise the other.' The exclusive choice of God that a Christian makes when he responds fully to his call, impels him to refer everything to Our Lord and, at the same time, to give his neighbor everything that justice requires.

166 There is no excuse for protecting oneself with apparently pious reasons, in order to deprive others of their due. 'If anyone says, "Yes, I love God", while at the same time he hates his brother, he is a liar.' But they also lie who deny Our Lord the love and reverence — the adoration due to him as our Creator and Father; or who refuse to obey his commandments with the false excuse that such obedience is incompatible with serving men, since St John clearly states that 'in this we know that we love the sons of God, if we love God and keep his commandments. For loving God means keeping his commandments; and his commandments are not a burden to us.'

You may hear many people who, in the name of efficiency, and even of charity, make speeches and invent theories with the aim of curtailing the outward signs of respect and homage towards God. They seem to regard everything done to honor God as excessive. Take no notice of them. Keep on your way. Such speculations only lead to controversies that at best get nowhere, and quite often cause scandal among Christians and end up hindering the fulfillment of Our Lord's precept that we give everyone his due and practice the holy virtue of justice with gentle perfection.

Duties of justice towards God and men

167 First of all, we must be just towards God. Let this fact be firmly impressed in our hearts, so that it shows in our behavior, for it is the touchstone of the true 'hunger and thirst for justice,' which distinguishes this virtue from the shouting of the envious and resentful and from the outcries of the selfish and greedy... For the worst and most ungrateful injustice is to deny our Creator and Redeemer the recognition of the abundant and wonderful gifts he has given us. If you are really striving to be just, you will often reflect on your utter dependence upon God, and be filled with gratitude and the desire to repay the favors of a Father who loves us to the point of madness: 'For what have you got that you have not received?'

This way the good spirit of filial piety will come alive in our hearts and it will bring you to address God with a tender heart. Don't be taken in by the hypocrites around you when they sow doubts as to whether Our Lord has a right to ask so much of you. Instead, put yourselves obediently and unconditionally in the presence of God, like 'clay in the potter's hands,' and humbly confess to him: Deus meus et omnia! You are my God and my all. And if you ever have to bear unexpected blows, or

undeserved tribulations at the hands of your fellow men, you will know how to sing with a new joy: 'May the most just and most lovable will of God be done, be fulfilled, be praised and eternally exalted above all things. Amen. Amen.'

168 The circumstances of the servant in the parable who owed ten thousand talents, are a good summary of our situation before God. We too are unable to find the wherewithal to pay the enormous debt we have contracted for so much divine goodness, a debt which we have increased through our personal sins. Even though we fight resolutely, we can never properly repay the great debt that God has forgiven us. However, divine mercy fully makes up for the impotence of human justice. God can say he is satisfied and remit our debt, simply 'because he is good and his mercy infinite.'

The parable, as you will remember, ends with a second scene which is the counterpoint of the first. The servant, whose huge debt has just been cancelled, took no pity on a fellow servant who owed him only a hundred pence. And it is here that the meanness of his heart comes to light. Strictly speaking, no one will deny him the right to demand what is his. Nevertheless, there is something inside us that rebels and tells us that his intolerant attitude is very far from real justice. It is not right that a person who only a moment previously has been treated with mercy and understanding, should not then react with at least a little patience towards his own debtor. Remember that justice does not consist exclusively in an exact respect for rights and duties, as in the case of arithmetical problems that are solved simply by addition and subtraction.

169 The Christian virtue of justice is more ambitious. It enjoins us to prove ourselves thankful, friendly and generous. It encourages us to act as loyal and honorable friends, in hard times as well as in good ones; to obey the law and to respect legitimate authority; to amend gladly when we realize we have erred in tackling a problem. Above all, if we are just, we will fulfill our professional, family and social commitments without fuss or display, working hard and exercising our rights, which are also duties.

I don't believe in the justice of idle people, because, with their *dolce far niente*,* as they say in my beloved Italy, they fail, sometimes seriously, in that most fundamental principle of equity, which is work. We must not forget that God created man *ut operaretur*, that he might work, and others (our family and our country, the whole human race) also depend on the effectiveness of our work. My children, what a poor idea of justice those people have who would reduce it to the mere redistribution of material goods!

Justice and love of freedom and truth

170 From early childhood (or, as Scripture says, as soon as I had ears to hear) I already began to hear people clamoring about the social question. There is nothing special about this, because it is such an old topic; it has always been around. It arose, most likely, when men first became organized in some way and began to perceive differences of age, intelligence, capacity for work, interests and personality.

I don't know whether or not we can avoid having social classes. In any case it is not my job to speak of such matters, much less here, in this oratory, where we have come together to talk about God (I would never want to talk about anything else), and to talk to God.

You may think what you will about anything that Providence has left to the free and legitimate discussion of men. But in my case, my being a priest of Christ tells me I must work at a higher level and remind you that, whatever the situation, we are never exempt from practicing justice, heroically if necessary.

171 We have a duty to defend the personal freedom of everyone, in the knowledge that 'Jesus Christ is the one who obtained that freedom for us.' If we do not so behave, what right have we to claim our own freedom? We must also spread the truth, because *veritas liberabit vos*, the truth makes us free, while ignorance enslaves. We have to uphold the right of all men to live, to own what is necessary to lead a dignified existence, to work and to rest, to choose a particular state in life, to form a home, to bring children into the world within marriage and to be allowed to educate them, to pass peacefully through times of sickness and old age, to have access to culture, to join with other citizens to achieve legitimate ends, and, above all, the right to know and love God in perfect liberty, for conscience, true conscience, will discover the imprint of the Creator in all things.

For this reason, it is urgent to repeat (and here I am not speaking politics, I am simply pointing out the Church's teaching) that Marxism is incompatible with the Christian faith. Can there be anything more opposed to the faith than a system which is based on eliminating the loving presence of God from the soul? Shout it aloud, so that your voice is clearly heard, that in order to practice justice we have no need whatsoever of Marxism. On the contrary, because of its exclusively materialistic solutions, which know nothing of the God of peace, this most serious error raises all kinds of barriers to the achievement of happiness and understanding among men. It is within Christianity that we find the good light that will enable us to answer all problems: all you have to do is to strive sincerely to be Catholics, *non verbo neque lingua, sed opere et veritate*, not with words or with the tongue, but with works and in truth. Speak up fearlessly, whenever the occasion arises (and, if necessary, look for such opportunities), without being in any way shy.

Justice and charity

172 Read Holy Scripture. Meditate one by one on the scenes depicting Our Lord's life and teachings. Consider especially the counsels and warnings with which he prepared the handful of men who were to become his Apostles, his messengers from one end of the earth to the other. What is the key to his teaching? Is it not the new commandment of charity? It was Love that enabled them to make their way through that corrupt pagan world.

Be convinced that justice alone is never enough to solve the great problems of mankind. When justice alone is done, don't be surprised if people are hurt. The dignity of man, who is a son of God, requires much more. Charity must penetrate

and accompany justice because it sweetens and deifies everything: 'God is love.' Our motive in everything we do should be the Love of God, which makes it easier for us to love our neighbor and which purifies and raises all earthly loves on to a higher level.

There is a long road to travel from the demands of strict justice to the abundance of charity. And there are not many who persevere to the end. Some are content to go as far as the threshold: they leave aside justice and limit their actions to a bit of welfare work, which they define as charitable, without realizing that they are doing only a small part of what in fact they have a strict duty to do. And they are as satisfied with themselves as the Pharisee who thought he had fulfilled the law perfectly because he fasted twice a week and gave tithes of all he possessed.

173 Charity, which is like a generous overflowing of justice, demands first of all the fulfillment of one's duty. The way to start is to be just; the next step is to do what is most equitable...; but in order to love, great refinement is required, and much thoughtfulness, and respect, and kindness in rich measure. In other words, it involves following the Apostle's advice: 'carry one another's burdens, and thus you will fulfill the law of Christ.' Then indeed we shall be living charity fully and carrying out the commandment of Jesus.

p class="MsoNormal" style="margin-top:6.0pt;margin-right:0in;margin-bottom:12.0pt; margin-left:0in">For me there is no clearer example of this practical union of justice and charity than the behavior of mothers. They love all their children with the same degree of affection, and it is precisely this same love that impels them to treat each one differently, with an unequal justice, since each child is different from the others. So, in the case of our fellow men, charity perfects and completes justice. It moves us to respond differently to different people, adapting ourselves to their specific circumstances so as to give joy to those who are sad, knowledge to those who lack it, affection to the lonely... Justice says that each person should receive his due, which does not mean giving the same to everyone. Utopian egalitarianism can give rise to the greatest injustice.

In order to act in this way always, the way good mothers do, we need to forget about ourselves and aspire to no other honor than that of serving others, in the same way as Jesus Christ, who preached that 'the Son of man has not come to be served but to serve.' This requires the integrity of being able to submit our own wills to that of our divine model, working for all men, and fighting for their eternal happiness and well-being. I know of no better way to be just than that of a life of self-surrender and service.

174 Perhaps someone will think I am naive. It doesn't worry me. Although I may be labeled as such, because I still believe in charity, I assure you I will believe in it, always! And, while God gives me life, I shall continue, as a priest of Jesus Christ, to work for unity and peace among those who are brothers by the very fact that they are children of the same Father, God. I shall continue to work with the aim of getting men to understand each other, and to share the same ideal, the ideal of the Faith!

Let us turn to Our Lady, the prudent and faithful Virgin, and to St Joseph, her husband, the perfect model of the just man. They, who lived the virtues we have just contemplated in the presence of Jesus, the Son of God, will obtain for us the grace we need to have the same virtues rooted in our souls, so that we may resolve always to behave as good disciples of the Master: prudent, just and full of charity.

FOR THEY SHALL SEE GOD

A homily given on 12 March 1954

The example of Christ

Bearing God in our bodies

Chastity is possible

Giving one's whole heart

Chastity and human love

The means to conquer

175 Jesus Christ is our model, the model for every Christian. You are well aware of this because you have heard it and reflected on it so often. You have also taught this to many people in the course of your apostolate of friendship (true friendship, with a divine meaning) which by now has become a part of you. And you have recalled this fact, when necessary, when using the wonderful means of fraternal correction, so that the person who was listening to you might compare his behavior with that of our first born Brother, the Son of Mary, Mother of God and our Mother also.

Jesus is the model for us. He himself has told us so: *discite a me, learn from me*. Today I want to talk to you about a virtue which, while it is neither the only virtue, nor the most important one, nevertheless operates in a Christian's life like salt, preserving it from corruption; it is also the touchstone of the apostolic soul. The virtue is holy purity.

We know full well that theological charity is the highest virtue. But chastity is a means *sine qua non*, an indispensable condition if we are to establish an intimate dialogue with God. When people do not keep to it, when they give up the fight, they end up becoming blind. They can no longer see anything, because 'the animal man cannot perceive the things that are of the Spirit of God.'

We, however, wish to look through unclouded eyes, encouraged as we are by Our Lord's teaching: 'Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God.' The Church has always understood these words as an invitation to chastity. As St John Chrysostom writes, 'Those who love chastity, whose consciences are completely clear, keep their hearts pure. No other virtue is so necessary in order to see God.'

The example of Christ

176 During the course of his life on earth, Jesus, Our Lord, had all manner of insults heaped upon him and was mistreated in every way possible. Remember the way it was rumored that he was a trouble-maker and how he was said to be possessed? At other times, demonstrations of his infinite Love were deliberately misinterpreted, and he was accused of being a friend of sinners.

Later on he, who personified penance and moderation, was accused of haunting the tables of the rich. He was also contemptuously referred to as *fabri filius*, the carpenter's son, the worker's son, as if this were an insult. He allowed himself to be denounced as a glutton and a drunkard... He let his enemies accuse him of everything, except that he was not chaste. On this point he sealed their lips, because he wanted us to keep a vivid memory of his immaculate example: a wonderful example of purity, of cleanness, of light, of a love that can set the whole world on fire in order to purify it.

For myself, I always like to consider holy purity in the light of Our Lord's own behavior. In practicing this virtue, what refinement he showed! See what St John says about Jesus when *fatigatus ex itinere, sedebat sic supra fontem*, wearied as he was from the journey, he was sitting by the well.

Recollect yourselves and go over the scene again slowly in your minds. Jesus Christ, *perfectus Deus, perfectus homo*, is tired out from his travels and his apostolic work. Perhaps there have been times when the same thing has happened to you and you have ended up worn out, because you have reached the limit of your resources. It is a touching sight to see our Master so exhausted. He is hungry too — his disciples have gone to a neighboring village to look for food. And he is thirsty.

But tired though his body is, his thirst for souls is even greater. So, when the Samaritan woman, the sinner, arrives, Christ with his priestly heart turns eagerly to save the lost sheep, and he forgets his tiredness, his hunger and his thirst.

Our Lord was busy with this great work of charity when the apostles came back from the village, and they *mirabantur quia cum muliere loquebatur*, they were astonished to find him talking to a woman, alone. How careful he was! What love he had for the beautiful virtue of holy purity, that virtue which helps us to be stronger, manlier, more fruitful, better able to work for God, and more capable of undertaking great things!

177 'For this is the will of God, your sanctification... Let every one of you learn how to make use of his body in holiness and honor, not yielding to the promptings of passion, as the heathen do, who do not know God.' We belong to God completely, soul and body, flesh and bones, all our senses and faculties. Ask him, confidently: Jesus, guard our hearts! Make them big and strong and tender, hearts that are affectionate and refined, overflowing with love for you and ready to serve all mankind.

Our bodies are holy. They are temples of God, says St Paul. This cry of the apostle brings to mind the universal call to holiness which Our Lord addresses to all men:

estote vos perfecti sicut et Pater vester caelestis perfectus est. Our Lord asks everyone, without distinction of any kind, to cooperate with his grace. He demands that each of us, in accordance with his particular state in life, should put into practice the virtues proper to the children of God.

Thus, when I remind you now that Christians must keep perfect chastity, I am referring to everyone: to the unmarried, who must practice complete continence; and to those who are married, who practice chastity by fulfilling the duties of their state in life.

If one has the spirit of God, chastity is not a troublesome and humiliating burden, but a joyful affirmation. Will power, dominion, self-mastery do not come from the flesh or from instinct. They come from the will, especially if it is united to the Will of God. In order to be chaste (and not merely continent or decent) we must subject our passions to reason, but for a noble motive, namely, the promptings of Love.

I think of this virtue as the wings which enable us to carry God's teaching, his commandments, to every environment on this earth, without fear of getting contaminated in the process. Wings, even in the case of those majestic birds which soar higher than the clouds, are a burden and a heavy one. But without wings, there is no way of flying. I want you to grasp this idea clearly, and to decide not to give in when you feel the sting of temptation, with its suggestion that purity is an unbearable burden. Take heart! Fly upwards, up to the sun, in pursuit of Love!

Bearing God in our bodies

178 It has always made me very sorry to hear some teachers (so many alas!) going on and on about the dangers of impurity. The result, as I have been able to verify in quite a few souls, is the opposite of what was intended, for it's a sticky subject, stickier than tar, and it deforms people's consciences with all kinds of fears and complexes, so that they come to imagine that the obstacles in the way of attaining purity of soul are almost insurmountable. This is not our way. Our approach to holy purity must be healthy and positive, and expressed in modest and clear language.

To discuss purity is really to talk about Love. I have just pointed out to you that I find it helpful in this regard to have recourse to the most holy Humanity of Our Lord, that indescribable marvel where God humbles himself to the point of becoming man, and in doing so does not feel degraded for having taken on flesh like ours, with all its limitations and weaknesses, sin alone excepted. He does all this because he loves us to distraction! He does not in fact lower himself when he empties himself. On the contrary, he raises us up and deifies us in body and soul. The virtue of chastity is simply to say Yes to his Love, with an affection that is clear, ardent and properly ordered.

We must proclaim this loud and clear to the whole world, by our words and by the witness of our lives: 'Let us not poison our hearts as if we were miserable beasts governed by our lower instincts!' A Christian writer once expressed it thus: 'Consider that man's heart is no small thing, for it can embrace so much. Do not

measure its greatness by its physical dimensions, but by the power of its thought, whereby it is able to attain the knowledge of so many truths. In the heart it is possible to prepare the way of the Lord, to lay out a straight path where the Word and the Wisdom of God may pass. With your honorable conduct and your irreproachable deeds, prepare the Lord's way, smooth out his path so that the Word of God may act in you without hindrance and give you the knowledge of his mysteries and of his coming.'

Holy Scripture reveals to us that the great work of our sanctification, which is accomplished in a marvelous hidden manner by the Paraclete, takes place in both the soul and the body. 'Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?' cries the Apostle, 'Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot?... Or do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in you, whom you have received from God, and that you are no longer your own? For you have been bought at a great price. Glorify God and bear him in your bodies.'

179 There are people who smile when they hear chastity mentioned. Theirs is a joyless and dead smile, the product of a sick mind. And they tell you: 'Hardly anyone believes in that any more!' One of the things I used to say to the young men who accompanied me when I used to go, so very many years ago, to the slums and hospitals on the outskirts of Madrid was: 'As you know, there is a mineral kingdom; then, on a higher plane, a vegetable kingdom, where we find life as well as existence. Higher still there is the animal kingdom, comprised of beings endowed, for the most part, with sensitivity and movement.'

Then I would explain to them, in a manner that may not have been very scientific, although it made the point, that we ought to establish another kingdom, the hominal kingdom, made up of human beings. This is because rational creatures possess a wonderful intelligence, a spark of the Divine Wisdom which enables them to reason on their own. And they also have the marvelous gift of freedom whereby they can accept or reject one thing or another, as they see fit.

Now in this kingdom of human beings (I would tell them, drawing on the experience gained from all my priestly work) for normal people, sex comes in fourth or fifth place. First come spiritual ideals, with each person choosing his own. Next, a whole series of matters that concern ordinary men and women: their father and mother, home, children and so on. After that, one's job or profession. Only then, in fourth or fifth place, does the sexual impulse come in.

For this reason, whenever I have met people who make sex the central topic of their conversation and interests, I have felt they were abnormal, wretched people, even sick perhaps. And I would add (and the young people to whom I was speaking would burst out laughing at this point) that these poor things made me feel as much pity as would the sight of a deformed child with a big, enormous head, one yard round. They are unhappy individuals. For our part, besides praying for them, we should feel a brotherly compassion for them because we want them to be cured

of their pitiful illness. But what is quite clear is that they are in no way more manly or womanly than people who don't go around obsessed with sex.

Chastity is possible

180 We are all of us subject to passions, and we all come up against the same sort of difficulties, no matter how old we are. That is why we have to fight. Remember what St Paul wrote: *datus est mihi stimulus carnis meae, angelus Satanae, qui me colaphizet*, he was given a sting for his flesh, which was like an angel of Satan, to buffet him, otherwise he would have become proud.

It is not possible to lead a clean life without God's assistance. He wants us to be humble and to ask for his aid. At this very moment, you should trustingly beg Our Lady, as you accompany her in the solitude of your heart, without saying anything out loud: 'Mother, this poor heart of mine rebels so foolishly... If you don't protect me...' And she will help you to keep it pure and to follow the way to which God has called you.

Be humble, very humble, my children. Let us learn to be humble. We need prudence to protect our Love. We must keep a careful watch and not be overcome by fear. Many of the classical spiritual authors compare the devil to a mad dog tied down by a chain. If we don't go near him, he cannot bite us, no matter how much he barks. If you foster humility in your souls, you will certainly avoid the occasions of sin, and you will react by having the courage to run away from them. You will have daily recourse to the help that comes from Heaven, and will make lively progress along this path of true love.

181 Don't forget that when someone is corrupted by the concupiscence of the flesh he cannot make any spiritual progress. He cannot do good works. He is a cripple, cast aside like an old rag. Have you ever seen patients suffering from progressive paralysis and unable to help themselves or get up? Sometimes they cannot even move their heads. Well, in the supernatural order, the same thing happens to people who are not humble and have made a cowardly surrender to lust. They don't see, or hear, or understand anything. They are paralysed. They are like men gone mad. Each of us here ought to invoke Our Lord, and his Blessed Mother, and pray that he will grant us humility and a determination to avail ourselves devoutly of the divine remedy of confession. Do not let even the smallest focal point of corruption take root in your souls, no matter how tiny it may be. Speak out. When water flows, it stays clean; blocked up, it becomes a stagnant pool full of repugnant filth. What was once drinking water becomes a breeding-ground for insects.

You know as well as I do that chastity is possible and that it is a great source of joy. You also realize that now and then it requires a little bit of struggle. Let us listen again to St Paul: 'For I am delighted with the law of God according to the inner man, but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind and making me prisoner to the law of sin that is in my members. Unhappy man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?' Cry out yourself more than he, if you have to, although without exaggerating. *Sufficit tibi gratia mea*, 'my grace is sufficient for you,' is Our Lord's answer.

182 I have noticed at times how an athlete's eyes light up at the sight of the obstacles he has to overcome. What a victory there is in store! See how he conquers the difficulties! God Our Lord looks at us that way. He loves our struggle: we will win through always, because he will never deny us his all-powerful grace. Thus, it doesn't matter if we have to fight, because he does not abandon us.

It is a battle, but not a renunciation. We respond with a joyful affirmation, and give ourselves to him freely and cheerfully. Your conduct should not be limited to simply evading falls and occasions of sin. In no way should you let it come down to a cold and calculating negation. Are you really convinced that chastity is a virtue and that, as such, it ought to grow and become perfect? Then I insist once again that it is not enough merely to be continent according to one's state in life. We must practice, we must live chastity, even to a heroic degree. This attitude involves a positive act whereby we gladly accept God's summons when he says: *Praebe, fili mi, cor tuum mihi et oculi tui vias meas custodiant*, 'Son, give me your heart, and turn your gaze upon my ways of peace.'

And now I ask you, how are you facing up to this battle? You know very well that a fight which is kept up from the beginning is a fight already won. Get away from danger as soon as you are aware of the first sparks of passion, and even before. Also, speak about it at once to the person who directs your soul. Better if you talk about it beforehand, if possible, because, if you open your heart wide, you will not be defeated. One such act after another leads to the forming of a habit, an inclination, and ends up making things easy. That is why we have to struggle to make this virtue a habit, making mortification a habit so that we do not reject the Love of Loves.

Reflect on this advice of St Paul to Timothy: *te ipsum castum custodi*, so that we too may be ever vigilant, determined to guard this treasure that God has entrusted to us. During the course of my life, how often have I heard people exclaim: 'Oh, if only I had broken it off at the start!' They said it full of sorrow and shame.

Giving one's whole heart

183 I must remind you that you will not find happiness if you don't fulfil your Christian duties. If you were to leave them aside, you would feel terrible remorse and would be thoroughly miserable. Even the most ordinary things, which are licit and which bring a bit of happiness, would then become as bitter as gall, as sour as vinegar and as repugnant as arum.

Let each of us, myself included, put our trust in Jesus, saying to him: 'Lord, I am ready to struggle and I know that you do not lose battles. I realize too that if at times I lose, it is because I have gone away from you. Take me by the hand. Don't trust me. Don't let go of me.'

You may be thinking: 'But, Father, I am so happy! I love Jesus! Even though I am made of clay, I do want to become a saint with the help of God and his Blessed Mother!' I don't doubt you. I am only forewarning you with these words of advice just in case, just supposing a difficulty were to arise.

At the same time, I would remind you that for Christians (for you and me) our life is a life of Love. This heart of ours was born to love. But when it is not given something pure, clean and noble to love, it takes revenge and fills itself with squalor. True love of God, and consequently purity of life, is as far removed from sensuality as it is from insensitivity, and as far from sentimentality as it is from heartlessness or hard-heartedness.

It is such a pity not to have a heart. How unfortunate are those people who have never learned to love with tenderness! We Christians are in love with Love: Our Lord does not want us to be dry and rigid, like inert matter. He wants us to be saturated with his love! People who, for the sake of God, say No to a human love are not bachelors or spinsters, like those sad, unhappy, crestfallen men and women who have despised the chance of a pure and generous love.

Chastity and human love

184 As I have often told you, and I don't care who knows it, I have also used the words of popular songs, that almost always treat of love, to keep up my conversation with Our Lord. I like them, I really do. Our Lord has chosen me and some of you as well to belong totally to himself; so we translate the noble love expressed in human love songs into something that is divine. The Holy Spirit does this in the Song of Songs; and the great mystics of all ages have done the same.

Look at these verses of St Teresa of Avila:

'If you would have me idling

For love of you I will be idle;

But if you bid me work, my

Sole desire is to die working.

Tell me the when, the how, the where;

Sweetest love I beg of you

To say what you would have me do.'

Or that song of St John of the Cross, which begins so charmingly:

'A little shepherd boy

Is all alone and far from joy

Full of sorrow and distress

From thinking of his shepherdess

Love unrequited in his breast.'

Human love, when it is pure, fills me with immense respect and inexpressible veneration. How could we fail to appreciate the holy and noble love shared by our

parents, to whom we owe a great part of our friendship with God? I bless such love with my two hands, and if anyone asks me why I say with my two hands, I reply at once: 'Because I don't have four.'

Blessed be human love! But Our Lord has asked something more of me. And, as Catholic theology clearly states, to give oneself out of love for the Kingdom of heaven to Jesus alone and, through Jesus, to all men, is a love more sublime than married love, even though marriage is a sacrament and indeed sacramentum magnum.

But, whatever the calling, the fact is that each person, in his own place, according to the vocation which God has inspired in his soul (be he single, married, widowed or priest) must strive to live chastity with great refinement, because it is a virtue for everyone. It calls on everyone to struggle, to be delicate, sensitive and strong. It calls for a degree of refinement which can only be fully appreciated when we come close to the loving Heart of Christ on the Cross. Don't worry if at times you feel threatened by temptation. One thing is to feel temptation, quite another to consent. Temptation can be rejected easily with God's help. What we must never do is to dialogue with temptation.

The means to conquer

185 Let us now take a look at the resources we Christians can count on at all times to conquer in the struggle to guard our chastity; a struggle we must undertake not as angels but as women and men who are strong and healthy and normal! I have a great devotion for the angels, and I venerate this army of God with all my Heart. But I do not like comparing ourselves to them, for angels have a different nature from ours and any comparison would only confuse the issue.

Many places are affected by a general climate of sensuality which, taken together with confused ideas about doctrine, leads many people to justify all types of aberrations, or at least to show a very careless tolerance towards all kinds of depraved customs.

We must be as clean and pure as we can as far as the body is concerned and without being afraid, because sex is something noble and holy — a participation in God's creative power — which was made for marriage. And thus, pure and fearless, you will give testimony by your behaviour that it is possible and beautiful to live holy purity.

First we will strive to refine our conscience. We must go sufficiently deep, until we can be sure our conscience is well formed and we can distinguish between a delicate conscience, which is a true grace from God, and a scrupulous conscience, which is not the same.

Take very special care of chastity and also of the other virtues which accompany it: modesty and refinement.* They are as it were the safeguard of chastity. Don't take lightly those norms of conduct which help so much to keep us worthy in the sight of God: keeping a watchful guard over our senses and our heart; the courage — the

courage to be a coward — to flee from the occasions of sin; going to the sacraments frequently, particularly to the sacrament of Confession; complete sincerity in our own spiritual direction; sorrow, contrition and reparation after one's falls. And all this imbued with a tender devotion to Our Lady so that she may obtain for us from God the gift of a clean and holy life.

186 If, alas, one falls, one must get up at once. With God's help, which will never be lacking if the proper means are used, one must seek to arrive at repentance as quickly as possible, to be humbly sincere and to make amends so that the momentary failure is transformed into a great victory for Jesus Christ.

You should also get into the habit of taking the battle to areas that are far removed from the main walls of the fortress. We cannot go about doing balancing acts on the very frontiers of evil. We have to be firm in avoiding the indirect voluntary. We must reject even the tiniest failure to love God, and we must strive to develop a regular and fruitful Christian apostolate, which will have holy purity both as a necessary foundation and also as one of its most characteristic fruits. We ought as well to fill all our time with intense and responsible work, in which we seek God's presence, because we must never forget that we have been bought at a great price and that we are temples of the Holy Spirit.

What other advice do I have for you? Well, simply to do what the Christians who have really tried to follow Christ have always done, and to use the same means employed by the first men who felt prompted to follow Jesus: developing a close relationship with Our Lord in the Eucharist, a childlike recourse to the Blessed Virgin, humility, temperance, mortification of the senses ('it is not good to look at what it is not licit to desire,' was St Gregory the Great's warning) and penance.

You might well tell me that all this is nothing but a summary of the whole Christian life. The fact is that purity, which is love, cannot be separated from the essence of our faith, which is charity, a constant falling in love with God, who created and redeemed us, and who is constantly taking us by the hand, even though time and again we may not even notice it. He cannot abandon us. 'Sion said: "The Lord has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me." Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness to the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you.' Don't these words fill you with immense joy?

187 I like to say that there are three things that fill us with gladness in this life and which will bring us the eternal happiness of Heaven: a firm, refined, joyful and unquestioning fidelity to the faith, to the vocation that each of us has received, and to purity. The person who gets entangled in the brambles along the way (sensuality, pride, etc.) does so because he wants to and, if he doesn't change, he will be miserable all his life because he will have turned his back on Christ's Love.

As I have already said, we all have our defects. But our defects should never be a reason for us to turn away from God's Love. Rather should they lead us to cling to that Love, sheltering within his divine goodness, as the warriors of old did by climbing into their suits of armour. Our defence is the cry *ecce ego, quia vocasti me*, here I am, because you have called me. Just because we discover how fragile

we are is no reason to run away from God. What we must do is to attack our defects, precisely because we know that God trusts us.

188 How shall we be able to overcome our meanness? Let me make the point again because it is so important: by being humble and by being sincere in spiritual direction and in the Sacrament of Penance. Go to those who direct your souls with your hearts open wide. Do not close your hearts, for if the dumb devil gets in, it is very difficult to get rid of him.

Forgive me for insisting on these points, but I believe it is absolutely necessary for you to have deeply impressed on your minds the fact that humility, together with its immediate consequence, sincerity; are the thread which links the other means together. These two virtues act as a foundation on which a solid victory can be built. If the dumb devil gets inside a soul, he ruins everything. On the other hand, if he is cast out immediately, everything turns out well; we are happy and life goes forward properly. Let us always be brutally sincere, but in a good mannered way.

I want one thing to be clear: I am not as worried about the heart or the flesh as I am about pride. Be humble. If ever you think you are completely and utterly right, you are not right at all. Go to spiritual direction with your soul wide open. Don't close it because, I repeat, the dumb devil will get in, and it is difficult to get him out again.

Remember the poor boy who was possessed by a devil, and the disciples were unable to set him free. Only Our Lord could free him, by prayer and fasting. On that occasion the Master worked three miracles. The first enabled the boy to hear because, when the dumb devil gets control, the soul refuses to listen. The second made him speak, and the third expelled the devil.

189 Tell first what you would not like to be known. Down with the dumb devil! By turning some small matter over and over in your mind, you will make it snowball into something big, with you trapped inside. What's the point of doing that? Open up your soul! I promise that you will be happy, that is faithful to your Christian way, if you are sincere. Clarity and simplicity: they are absolutely necessary dispositions. We have to open up our souls completely, so that the sun of God and the charity of Love can enter in.

It is not necessarily bad will that prevents people from being utterly sincere. Sometimes they may simply have an erroneous conscience. Some people have so formed, or rather deformed, their consciences that they think their dumbness, their lack of simplicity, is something good. They think it is good to say nothing. This can even happen to people who have received an excellent training and know the things of God. This may indeed be what is convincing them that they should not speak out. But they are wrong. Sincerity is a must, always. There are no valid excuses, no matter how good they seem.

Let us end this period of conversation in which you and I have been praying to Our Father, asking him to grant us the grace to live the Christian virtue of chastity as a joyful affirmation.

We ask this of him through the intercession of Our Lady, she who is immaculate purity. Let us turn to her, *tota pulchra!** taking to heart the advice I gave many years ago to those who felt uneasy in their daily struggle to be humble, pure, sincere, cheerful and generous. 'All the sins of your life seem to be rising up against you. Don't give up hope! On the contrary, call your holy Mother Mary, with the faith and abandonment of a child. She will bring peace to your soul.'

LIVING BY FAITH

A homily given on 12 October 1947

By the pool of Siloe

The faith of Bartimaeus

Faith and deeds

Faith and humility

Contemplation in our everyday life

190 You hear people saying sometimes that there are fewer miracles nowadays. Might it not rather be that there are fewer people living a life of faith? God cannot go back on his promise, 'Ask of me, and I will give you the nations for your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for your possession.' Our God is Truth itself, the very foundation of all that exists: nothing takes place independently of his almighty will.

'As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end.' The Lord does not change. He does not need to go after things he might not have, for he is all motion, all beauty, all greatness. Today as always. 'The heavens will vanish like smoke, and the earth will wear out like a garment... but my salvation will last for ever and my justice will have no end.'

In Jesus Christ God has established a new and everlasting covenant with mankind. He has placed his almighty power at the service of our salvation. When his creatures lose confidence and are afraid through lack of faith, we hear once again the voice of Isaiah who speaks out in the name of the Lord: 'Is my hand too short to redeem? Have I not strength to save? With one threat I can dry the sea and turn rivers to desert; so that their fish shrivel up for want of water and die of thirst. I clothe the heavens with darkness, and make sackcloth their covering.'

191 Faith is a supernatural virtue which disposes our intelligence to give assent to the truths of revelation, to say Yes to Christ, who has brought us full knowledge of the Blessed Trinity's plan for our salvation. 'In old days, God spoke to our fathers in many ways and by many means, through the prophets; now at last in these times, he has spoken to us through his Son, whom he has appointed heir of all things, through whom also he created this world of time; a Son who is the splendor of his glory and the figure of his substance; all things depend, for their support, on

his word of power. Now, making atonement for our sins, he has taken his place on high, at the right hand of God's majesty.'

By the pool of Siloe

192 I would like Jesus himself to talk to us about faith, to give us lessons in faith. So let us open the New Testament and relive with him some of the events of his life. For he did not disdain to teach his disciples, showing them, little by little, how to give themselves wholeheartedly to carrying out the Will of his Father. He taught them both by words and by deeds.

Consider chapter nine of St John. 'And Jesus saw, as he passed on his way, a man who had been blind from birth. Whereupon his disciples asked him, Master, was this man guilty of sin, or was it his parents, that he should have been born blind?' These men, even though they were so close to Christ, could still think badly about that poor blind man. So do not be surprised if, as you go through life seeking to serve the Church, you also come across disciples of Our Lord behaving in a similar manner towards you or towards others. Don't let it worry you and, like the blind man, take no notice; just place yourselves wholeheartedly in Christ's hands. He does not accuse, he pardons. He does not condemn, he forgives. He is not cold and indifferent towards illness, but instead cures it with divine diligence.

Our Lord 'spat on the ground, and made clay with the spittle. Then he spread the clay on the man's eyes, and said to him, Go and wash in the pool of Siloe (a name that means, Sent). So he went and washed there, and came back with his sight restored.'

193 What an example of firm faith the blind man gives us! A living, operative faith. Do you behave like this when God commands, when so often you can't see, when your soul is worried and the light is gone? What power could the water possibly contain that when the blind man's eyes were moistened with it they were cured? Surely some mysterious eye salve, or a precious medicine made up in the laboratory of some wise alchemist, would have done better? But the man believed; he acted upon the command of God, and he returned with eyes full of light.

St Augustine commenting on this passage wrote: 'It seems appropriate that the Evangelist should have explained the meaning of the name of the pool saying that it meant, Sent. Now you know who has been sent. If Our Lord had not been sent to us, none of us would have been freed from sin.' We must have complete faith in the one who saves us, in this divine Doctor who was sent with the express purpose of curing us, and the more serious or hopeless our illness is the stronger our faith has to be.

194 We must learn to acquire the divine measure of things, never losing our supernatural outlook, and realizing that Jesus makes use also of our weaknesses to reveal his glory. So, whenever your conscience feels the stirrings of self-love, of weariness, of discouragement, or the weight of your passions, you must react immediately and listen to the Master, without letting the sad truth about our lives frighten us, because as long as we live our personal failings will always be with us.

This is the way we Christians must travel. We have to cry out ceaselessly with a strong and humble faith, 'Lord, put not your trust in me. But I, I put my trust in you.' Then, as we sense in our hearts the love, the compassion, the tenderness of Christ's gaze upon us, for he never abandons us, we shall come to understand the full meaning of those words of St Paul, *virtus in infirmitate perficitur*. If we have faith in Our Lord, in spite of our failings or, rather, with our failings — we shall be faithful to our Father, God; his divine power will shine forth in us, sustaining us in our weakness.

The faith of Bartimaeus

195 If we turn now to St Mark we will find he tells us about another blind man being cured. As Jesus 'was leaving Jericho, with his disciples and a great multitude, Bartimaeus, the blind man, Timaeus' son, was sitting there by the wayside, begging.' Hearing the commotion the crowd was making, the blind man asked, 'What is happening?' They told him, 'It is Jesus of Nazareth.' At this his soul was so fired with faith in Christ that he cried out, 'Jesus, son of David, have pity on me.'

Don't you too feel the same urge to cry out? You who also are waiting at the side of the way, of this highway of life that is so very short? You who need more light, you who need more grace to make up your mind to seek holiness? Don't you feel an urgent need to cry out, 'Jesus, son of David, have pity on me?' What a beautiful aspiration for you to repeat again and again!

I recommend you to meditate slowly on the events preceding the miracle, to help you keep this fundamental idea clearly engraved upon your minds: what a world of difference there is between the merciful Heart of Jesus and our own poor hearts! This thought will help you at all times, and especially in the hour of trial and temptation, and also when the time comes to be generous in the little duties you have, or in moments when heroism is called for.

'Many of them rebuked him, telling him to be silent. As people have done to you, when you sensed that Jesus was passing your way. Your heart beat faster and you too began to cry out, prompted by an intimate longing. Then your friends, the need to do the done thing, the easy life, your surroundings, all conspired to tell you: 'Keep quiet, don't cry out. Who are you to be calling Jesus? Don't bother him.'

But poor Bartimaeus would not listen to them. He cried out all the more: 'Son of David, have pity on me.' Our Lord, who had heard him right from the beginning, let him persevere in his prayer. He does the same with you. Jesus hears our cries from the very first, but he waits. He wants us to be convinced that we need him. He wants us to beseech him, to persist, like the blind man waiting by the road from Jericho. 'Let us imitate him. Even if God does not immediately give us what we ask, even if many people try to put us off our prayers, let us still go on praying.'

196 'And Jesus stopped, and told them to call him.' Some of the better people in the crowd turned to the blind man and said, 'Take heart. Rise up, he is calling you.' Here you have the Christian vocation! But God does not call only once. Bear in

mind that Our Lord is seeking us at every moment: get up, he tells us, put aside your indolence, your easy life, your petty selfishness, your silly little problems. Get up from the ground, where you are lying prostrate and shapeless. Acquire height, weight and volume, and a supernatural outlook.

'Whereupon the man threw away his cloak and leapt to his feet, and so came to him.' He threw aside his cloak! I don't know if you have ever lived through a war, but many years ago I had occasion to visit a battlefield shortly after an engagement. There, strewn all over the ground, were greatcoats, water bottles, haversacks stuffed with family souvenirs, letters, photographs of loved ones... which belonged, moreover, not to the vanquished, but to the victors! All these items had become superfluous in the bid to race forward and leap over the enemy defenses. Just as happened to Bartimaeus, as he raced towards Christ.

Never forget that Christ cannot be reached without sacrifice. We have to get rid of everything that gets in the way: greatcoat, haversack, water bottle. You have to do the same in this battle for the glory of God, in this struggle of love and peace by which we are trying to spread Christ's kingdom. In order to serve the Church, the Pope and all souls, you must be ready to give up everything superfluous, to be left without a cloak to shelter you from the bitter cold of night, without your much loved family souvenirs, without water to refresh you. This is the lesson taught us by faith and love. This is the way that we must love Christ.

Faith and deeds

197 And now begins a dialogue with God, a marvelous dialogue that moves us and sets our hearts on fire, for you and I are now Bartimaeus. Christ, who is God, begins to speak and asks, *Quid tibi vis faciam?* 'What do you want me to do for you?' The blind man answers, 'Lord, that I may see.' How utterly logical! How about yourself, can you really see? Haven't you too experienced at times what happened to the blind man of Jericho? I can never forget how, when meditating on this passage many years back, and realizing that Jesus was expecting something of me, though I myself did not know what it was, I made up my own aspirations: 'Lord, what is it you want? What are you asking of me?' I had a feeling that he wanted me to take on something new and the cry *Rabboni, ut videam*, 'Master, that I may see,' moved me to beseech Christ again and again, 'Lord, whatever it is that you wish, let it be done.'

198 Pray with me now to Our Lord: *doce me facere voluntatem tuam, quia Deus meus es tu*, 'teach me to do your will, for you are my God.' In short, our lips should express a true desire on our part to correspond effectively to our Creator's promptings, striving to follow out his plans with unshakeable faith, being fully convinced that he cannot fail us.

If we love God's Will in this way, we shall come to understand that the value of our faith lies not only in how clearly we can express it, but also in our determination to defend it by our deeds, and we shall act accordingly.

But let us go back to the scene outside Jericho. It is now to you that Christ is speaking. He asks you, 'What is it you want of me?' 'That I may see, Lord, that I may see.' Then Jesus answers, 'Away home with you. Your faith has brought you recovery. And all at once he recovered his sight and followed Jesus on his way.' Following Jesus on his way. You have understood what Our Lord was asking from you and you have decided to accompany him on his way. You are trying to walk in his footsteps, to clothe yourself in Christ's clothing, to be Christ himself: well, your faith, your faith in the light Our Lord is giving you, must be both operative and full of sacrifice. Don't fool yourself. Don't think you are going to find new ways. The faith he demands of us is as I have said. We must keep in step with him, working generously and at the same time uprooting and getting rid of everything that gets in the way.

Faith and humility

199 Now it is St Matthew who tells us about a most touching episode. 'And behold a woman who for twelve years had been troubled with an issue of blood, came up behind him and touched the hem of his cloak.' What great humility she shows! 'She said to herself, "If only I can touch the hem of his garment, I shall be healed."' There are always sick people who, like Bartimaeus, pray with great faith and have no qualms about confessing their faith at the top of their voices. But notice how, among those whom Christ encounters, no two souls are alike. This woman, too, has great faith, but she does not cry aloud; she draws near to Jesus without anyone even noticing. For her it is enough just to touch his garment, because she is quite certain she will be cured. No sooner has she done so than Our Lord turns round and looks at her. He already knows what is going on in the depths of her heart and has seen how sure she is: 'Have no fear, my daughter, your faith has saved you.'

'She delicately touched the hem of his garment. She came forward with faith. She believed, and she knew she had been cured... We too, if we want to be saved, should touch Christ's garment with faith.' Do you see now how our faith must be? It must be humble. Who are you, and who am I, to deserve to be called in this way by Christ? Who are we, to be so close to him? As with that poor woman in the crowd, he has given us an opportunity. And not just to touch his garment a little, to feel for a moment the fringe, the hem of his cloak. We actually have Christ himself. He gives himself to us totally, with his Body, his Blood, his Soul and his Divinity. We eat him each day. We speak to him intimately as one does to a father, as one speaks to Love itself. And all this is true. It is no fantasy.

200 Let us try to become more humble. For only a truly humble faith will allow us to see things from a supernatural point of view. We have no other alternative. There are only two possible ways of living on this earth: either we live a supernatural life, or else an animal life. And you and I can only live the life of God, a supernatural life. 'For what does it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and suffers the loss of his own soul?' What use to man are all the things of the earth, all that our intelligence and will can aspire to? What is the point of all that, if it is all to come to

an end and sink out of sight; if all the riches of this world are mere theatre props and scenery, and if after all this there is eternity for ever, and ever, and ever?

The phrase 'for ever' made St Teresa of Avila great. One day, as a child, she set out from Avila with her brother Rodrigo through the Adaja gate. As they left behind the city walls, intending to reach the land of the Moors where they could be beheaded for love of Christ, she kept whispering to her brother, who was beginning to get tired, 'for ever, for ever, for ever.'

Men lie when they say 'for ever' about things on earth. The only true, totally true, 'for ever' is that which we say with reference to God. This is how you ought to live your life, with a faith that will help you to taste the honey, the sweetness of heaven whenever you think about eternal life which is indeed 'for ever.'

Contemplation in our everyday life

201 Let us go back to the Gospels and take a look at what St Matthew tells us in chapter twenty-one. He described how Jesus 'returning to the city was hungry. And seeing a fig tree by the wayside he went up to it.' How wonderful, Lord, to see you hungry! To see you thirsty, too, by the well of Sichar! I contemplate you who are perfectus Deus, perfectus homo, truly God, yet truly man, with flesh like my flesh. 'He emptied himself, taking the form of a slave,' so that I should never have the slightest doubt that he understands me and loves me.

'He was hungry.' Whenever we get tired — in our work, in our studies, in our apostolic endeavors — when our horizon is darkened by lowering clouds, then let us turn our eyes to Jesus, to Jesus who is so good, and who also gets tired; to Jesus who is hungry and suffers thirst. Lord, how well you make yourself understood! How lovable you are! You show us that you are just like us, in everything but sin, so that we can feel utterly sure that, together with you, we can conquer all our evil inclinations, all our faults. For neither weariness nor hunger matter, nor thirst, nor tears... since Christ also grew weary, knew hunger, was thirsty, and wept. What is important is that we struggle to fulfil the will of our heavenly Father, battling away good-heartedly, for Our Lord is always at our side.

202 Jesus approaches the fig tree: he approaches you, he approaches me. Jesus hungers, he thirsts for souls. On the Cross he cried out Sitio!, 'I thirst.' He thirsts for us, for our love, for our souls and for all the souls we ought to be bringing to him, along the way of the Cross which is the way to immortality and heavenly glory.

He reached the fig tree 'and found nothing but leaves on it.' How deplorable. Does the same thing happen to us? Is the sad fact that we are lacking in faith, in dynamism in our humility? Have we no sacrifices, no good works to show? Is our Christianity just a facade, with nothing real behind it? This would be terrible, because Jesus goes on to command, 'Let no fruit ever grow on you hereafter. Whereupon the fig tree withered away.' This Gospel passage makes us feel sorry, yet at the same time encourages us to strengthen our faith, to live by faith, so that we may always be ready to yield fruit to Our Lord.

Let us not deceive ourselves: Our Lord does not depend in any way on the human results of our efforts. Our most ambitious projects are, for him, but child's play. What he wants are souls, he wants love. He wants all men to come to him, to enjoy his Kingdom for ever. We have to work a lot on this earth and we must do our work well, since it is our daily tasks that we have to sanctify. But let us never forget to do everything for his sake. If we were to do it for ourselves, out of pride, we would produce nothing but leaves, and no matter how luxuriant they were, neither God nor our fellow men would find any good in them.

203 When they saw the tree had withered 'his disciples were amazed, saying "How did it wither so suddenly?"' The first twelve, who had seen Christ work so many miracles, were completely astonished once again. Their faith was not yet a burning faith, so Our Lord went on to assure them, 'I promise you, if you have faith, and do not hesitate, you will be able to do more than I have done over the fig tree. If you say to this mountain, "Remove and be cast into the sea", it will come about.' Christ lays down one condition: we must live by faith; then we will be able to move mountains. And so many things need moving... in the world, but, first of all, in our own hearts. So many obstacles placed in the way of grace! We have to have faith, therefore: faith and works, faith and sacrifice, faith and humility. For faith makes us all powerful: 'If you will only believe, every gift you ask for in your prayer will be granted.'

The man of faith sees the things of this life in their proper perspective. He knows that our stay on earth is, to use a phrase of St Teresa, 'a bad night in a bad inn.' He becomes convinced once again that our time on earth is a time to work and to struggle, a time to purify ourselves in order to wipe out the debt we owe to God's justice for our sins. He knows too that worldly possessions are but a means, and he uses them generously, heroically.

204 Faith is not only a virtue to be preached. Above all it is to be practiced. Often, perhaps, we just don't have the strength. If this happens (once more we go to the Gospels) let us do as the father of the lunatic boy did. He very much wanted his son to be saved; he hoped Christ would cure him, but he could not bring himself to believe that such happiness was possible. Jesus, who always asks us to have faith and who knows at the same time what is troubling the man's soul, helps him saying: 'If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.' Everything is possible, we are all powerful! But only if we have faith. The man feels his faith wavering and he is afraid that his lack of trust will prevent his son from being cured. He weeps. Don't be ashamed of tears like these, for they are the fruit of our love of God, of contrite prayer, of true humility. 'Whereupon the father of the boy cried aloud, with tears, Lord, I do believe. Help my unbelief.'

We too now, after this time of meditation, can speak the same words to him: 'Lord, I do believe! I have been brought up to believe in you. I have decided to follow you closely. Repeatedly during my life I have implored your mercy. And repeatedly too I have thought it impossible that you could perform such marvels in the hearts of your children. Lord, I do believe, but help me to believe more and better!'

Let us address this same plea to Our Lady, Mother of God and our Mother, and Teacher of faith: 'Blessed art thou for thy believing; the message that was brought to thee from the Lord shall have fulfillment.'

THE CHRISTIAN'S HOPE

A homily given on 8 June 1968, Ember Saturday after Pentecost

Earthly expectations and Christian hope

What to hope for

I can do all things

Our wretchedness and God's forgiveness

God never tires of forgiving

It is important to struggle

With our eyes on Heaven

205 A good number of years ago, with a sense of conviction that was growing stronger in me each day, I wrote: 'Put all your hope in Jesus. You yourself have nothing, are worth nothing, can do nothing. He will act, if only you abandon yourself in him.' Time has gone by, and that conviction of mine has grown even stronger and deeper. I have seen many souls with such hope in God that it has set them marvelously ablaze with love, with a fire that makes the heart beat strong and keeps it safe from discouragement and dejection, even though along the way they may suffer and at times suffer greatly.

I was deeply moved by the Epistle in today's Mass, and I imagine the same will have happened to you. I realized that God was helping us, through the words of the Apostle, to contemplate the divine interlacing of the three theological virtues which form the backing upon which the true life of every Christian man or woman has to be woven.

Let us listen once again to the words of St Paul: 'Since we are justified by faith, let us enjoy peace with God through Our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have obtained access, by faith, to that grace in which we stand and we rejoice in the hope of attaining glory as the sons of God. More than that, we rejoice even in our afflictions, knowing well that affliction gives rise to patience, and patience brings perseverance, and perseverance brings hope, and this hope does not disappoint us: for the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.'

206 Here in the presence of God who is presiding over us right now from the Tabernacle (how reassuring it is to have Jesus so very close to us!) we are going to meditate today on the virtue of hope, that gentle gift from God which makes our hearts overflow with gladness, *spe gaudentes*, joyful, for if we are faithful an everlasting Love awaits us.

Let us never forget that for all men, and therefore for each and every one of us, there are only two ways of living on this earth: either we lead a divine life, striving to please God; or we set him aside and live an animal-like existence, guided to a greater or lesser degree by human enlightenment. I have never given too much credit to the 'do-gooders' who pride themselves on their unbelief. I love them truly, as I do all mankind who are my brothers. I admire their good will which in certain aspects may even be heroic. But I also feel sorry for them because they have the immense misfortune of lacking the light and the warmth of God, and the indescribable joy which comes from the theological virtue of hope.

The true Christian, who acts according to his faith, always has his sights set on God. His outlook is supernatural. He works in this world of ours, which he loves passionately; he is involved in all its challenges, but all the while his eyes are fixed on Heaven. St Paul brings this out very clearly: *quae sursum sunt quaerite*; 'seek the things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. Savor the things of Heaven, not the things that are upon the earth. For you are dead,' to worldliness, through Baptism, 'and your life is hidden with Christ in God.'

Earthly expectations and Christian hope

207 There are many who repeat that hackneyed expression 'while there's life there's hope,' as if hope were an excuse for ambling along through life without too many complications or worries on one's conscience. Or as if it were a pretext for postponing indefinitely the decision to mend one's ways and the struggle to attain worthwhile goals, particularly the highest goal of all which is to be united with God.

If we follow this view, we will end up confusing hope with comfort. Fundamentally, what is wrong with it is that there is no real desire to achieve anything worthwhile, either spiritual or material. Thus some people's greatest ambition boils down to avoiding whatever might upset the apparent calm of their mediocre existence. These timid, inhibited, lazy souls, full of subtle forms of selfishness, are content to let the days, the years, go by *sine spe nec metu*,* without setting themselves demanding targets, nor experiencing the hopes and fears of battle: the important thing for them is to avoid the risk of disappointment and tears. How far one is from obtaining something, if the very wish to possess it has been lost through fear of the demands involved in achieving it!

Then there is the superficial attitude of those for whom hope is a sort of idyllic fantasy, often presented under the guise of culture and learning. As they are incapable of facing up to themselves squarely and of choosing to do good, they say that hope is merely an illusion, a utopian dream, a bit of relief from the anxieties of a hard life. For these people hope has become frivolous wishful-thinking, leading nowhere. What a false idea of hope!

208 But along with these timid and frivolous types, we also find here on earth many upright individuals pursuing noble ideals, even though their motives are often not supernatural, but merely philanthropic. These people face up to all kinds of hardship. They generously spend themselves serving others, helping them overcome suffering and difficulties. I am always moved to respect and even to

admiration by the tenacity of those who work wholeheartedly for noble ideals. Nevertheless, I consider I have a duty to remind you that everything we undertake in this life, if we see it exclusively as our own work, bears from the outset the stamp of perishability. Remember the words of Scripture: 'I considered all that my hands had done and the effort I had spent doing it, and I saw that all was vanity and a striving after wind, with nothing gained under the sun.'

This precariousness does not stifle hope. On the contrary, once we recognize the insignificant and contingent nature of our earthly endeavors, the way is then open for true hope, a hope which upgrades all human work and turns it into a meeting point with God. An inexhaustible light then bathes everything we do and chases away the dark shadows of disappointment. But if we transform our temporal projects into ends in themselves and blot out from our horizon our eternal dwelling place and the end for which we have been created, which is to love and praise the Lord and then to possess him for ever in Heaven, then our most brilliant endeavors turn traitor, and can even become a means of degrading our fellow creatures. Remember that sincere and well-known exclamation of St Augustine, who had such bitter experience when God was unknown to him and he was seeking happiness outside God: 'You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless till they rest in you!' Perhaps there is no greater tragedy for man than the sense of disillusionment he suffers when he has corrupted or falsified his hope, by placing it in something other than the one Love which satisfies without ever satiating.

In my case, and I wish the same to happen to you, the certainty I derive from feeling — from knowing — that I am a son of God fills me with real hope which, being a supernatural virtue, adapts to our nature when it is infused in us, and so is also a very human virtue. I am happy because I am certain we will attain Heaven if we remain faithful to the end; I rejoice in the thought of the bliss that will be ours, quoniam bonus, because my God is good and his mercy infinite. This conviction spurs me on to grasp that only those things that bear the imprint of God can display the indelible sign of eternity and have lasting value. Therefore, far from separating me from the things of this earth, hope draws me closer to these realities in a new way, a Christian way, which seeks to discover in everything the relation between our fallen nature and God, our Creator and Redeemer.

What to hope for

209 Perhaps some of you are wondering, 'What should a Christian hope for?' After all, the world has many good things to offer that attract our hearts, which crave happiness and anxiously run in search of love. Besides we want to sow peace and joy at every turn. We are not content to achieve prosperity just for ourselves. We want to make everyone around us happy as well.

Some people, alas, whose aims are worthy but limited and their ideals only perishable and fleeting, forget that Christians have to aspire to the highest peaks of all, to the infinite. Our aim is the very Love of God, to enjoy that Love fully, with a joy that never ends. We have seen in so many ways that things here below have to come to an end for all of us, when this world ends; and even sooner, for each

individual, when he dies, for we cannot take wealth and prestige with us to the grave. That is why, buoyed up by hope, we raise our hearts to God himself and have learned to pray, in te Domine speravi, non confundar in aeternum, I have placed my hope in you, O Lord: may your hand guide me now and at every moment, for ever and ever.

210 God did not create us to build a lasting city here on earth, because 'this world is the way to that other, a dwelling place free from care.' Nevertheless, we children of God ought not to remain aloof from earthly endeavors, for God has placed us here to sanctify them and make them fruitful with our blessed faith, which alone is capable of bringing true peace and joy to all men wherever they may be. Since 1928 I have constantly preached that we urgently need to Christianize society. We must imbue all levels of mankind with a supernatural outlook, and each of us must strive to raise his daily duties, his job or profession, to the order of supernatural grace. In this way all human occupations will be lit up by a new hope that transcends time and the inherent transience of earthly realities.

Through Baptism we are made bearers of the word of Christ, a word which soothes, enkindles and reassures the wounded conscience. For Our Lord to act in us and for us, we must tell him that we are ready to struggle each day, even though we realize we are feeble and useless, and the heavy burden of our personal shortcomings and weakness weighs down upon us. We must tell him again and again that we trust in him and in his help: if necessary, like Abraham, hoping 'against all hope.' Thus we will go about our work with renewed vigor, and we will teach others how to live free from worry, hate, suspicion, ignorance, misunderstandings and pessimism, because God can do everything.

211 Wherever we may be, Our Lord urges us to be vigilant. His plea should lead us to hope more strongly in our desires for holiness and to translate them into deeds. 'Give me your heart, my son,' he seems to whisper in our ear. Stop building castles in the air. Make up your mind to open your soul to God, for only in Our Lord will you find a real basis for your hope and for doing good to others. If we don't fight against ourselves; if we don't rebuff once and for all the enemies lodged within our interior fortress — pride, envy, the concupiscence of the flesh and of the eyes, self-sufficiency, and the wild craving for licentiousness; if we abandon this inner struggle, our noblest ideals will wither 'like the bloom on the grass; and when the scorching sun comes up the grass withers, and the bloom falls, and all its fair show dies away.' Then, all you need is a tiny crevice and discouragement and gloom will creep in, like encroaching poisonous weeds.

Jesus is not satisfied with a wavering assent. He expects, and has a right to expect, that we advance resolutely, unyielding in the face of difficulties. He demands that we take firm, specific steps; because, as a rule, general resolutions are just fallacious illusions, created to silence the divine call which sounds within our hearts. They produce a futile flame that neither burns nor gives warmth, but dies out as suddenly as it began.

You will convince me that you sincerely want to achieve your goals when I see you go forward unwaveringly. Do good and keep reviewing your basic attitudes to the jobs that occupy you each moment. Practice the virtue of justice, right where you are, in your normal surroundings, even though you may end up exhausted. Foster happiness among those around you by cheerfully serving the people you work with and by striving to carry out your job as perfectly as you can, showing understanding, smiling, having a Christian approach to life. And do everything for God, thinking of his glory, with your sights set high and longing for the definitive homeland, because there is no other goal worthwhile.

I can do all things

212 If you're not struggling, it's no use telling me that you are really trying to become more closely identified with Christ, to know him and love him. When we set out seriously along the royal highway, that of following Christ and behaving as children of God, we soon realize what awaits us: the Holy Cross. We must see it as the central point upon which to rest our hope of being united with Our Lord.

Let me warn you that the program ahead is not an easy one. It takes an effort to lead the kind of life Our Lord wants. Listen to the account St Paul gives of the incidents and sufferings he encountered in carrying out the will of Jesus: 'Five times the Jews scourged me, and spared me but one lash in forty; three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned; I have been shipwrecked three times, I have spent a night and a day as a castaway at sea. What journeys I have undertaken, in danger from rivers, in danger from robbers, in danger from my own people, in danger from the gentiles; danger in cities, danger in the wilderness, danger in the sea, danger among false brethren! I have met with toil and weariness, so often been sleepless, hungry and thirsty; so often denied myself food, gone cold and naked. And all this, over and above something else which I do not count; I mean the burden I carry every day, my anxious care for all the churches.'

In these conversations we have with Our Lord, I like to keep very close to everyday reality and avoid dreaming up theories or imagining great hardships and heroic exploits, which seldom happen. What is important is to make good use of time, that time which is always slipping from our grasp and which to a Christian is more precious than gold, because it represents a foretaste of the glory that will be granted us hereafter.

Naturally, the difficulties we meet in our daily lives will not be as great or as numerous as St Paul encountered. We will, however, discover our own meanness and selfishness, the sting of sensuality, the useless, ridiculous smack of pride, and many other failings besides: so very many weaknesses. But are we to give in to discouragement? Not at all. Together with St Paul, let us tell Our Lord, 'I am well content with these humiliations of mine, with the insults, the hardships, the persecutions, the times of difficulty I undergo for Christ; for when I am weakest, then I am strongest of all.'

213 Sometimes, when things turn out the very opposite of what we intended, we cry out spontaneously: 'Lord, it's all going wrong, every single thing I'm doing!' The

time has come for us to rectify our approach and say: 'With you, Lord, I will make steady headway, because you are strength itself, quia tu es Deus fortitudo mea.'

I have asked you to keep on lifting your eyes up to Heaven as you go about your work, because hope encourages us to grasp hold of the strong hand which God never ceases to reach out to us, to keep us from losing our supernatural point of view. Let us persevere even when our passions rear up and attack us, attempting to imprison us within the narrow confines of our selfishness; or when puerile vanity makes us think we are the centre of the universe. I am convinced that unless I look upward, unless I have Jesus, I will never accomplish anything. And I know that the strength to conquer myself and to win comes from repeating that cry, 'I can do all things in him who strengthens me,' words which reflect God's firm promise not to abandon his children if they do not abandon him.

Our wretchedness and God's forgiveness

214 Our Lord has come so close to his creatures that we all hunger in our hearts for higher things, to be uplifted, to do good. If I am now prompting similar aspirations in you, it is because I want you to be convinced of the confidence he has placed in your soul. If you let him work in you, you will become, right where you are, a useful instrument, more useful than you could ever have imagined. But to make sure that cowardice does not make you betray the confidence God has placed in you, you must avoid the presumption of naively underestimating the difficulties that you will meet in your Christian life.

These difficulties shouldn't surprise us. As a consequence of our fallen nature, we carry within us a principle of opposition, of resistance to grace. It comes from the wounds inflicted by original sin, and is aggravated by our own personal sins. Therefore we have to strive ever upwards, by means of our everyday tasks, which are both divine and human and always lead to the love of God. In this we must be humble and contrite of heart and we must trust in God's help, while at the same time devoting our best efforts to those tasks as if everything depended on us.

As we fight this battle, which will last until the day we die, we cannot exclude the possibility that enemies both within and without may attack with violent force. And, as if this burden were not enough, you may at times be assailed by the memory of your own past errors, which may have been very many. I tell you now, in God's name: don't despair. Should this happen (it need not happen; nor will it usually happen) then turn it into another motive for uniting yourself more closely to Our Lord, for he has chosen you as his child and he will not abandon you. He has allowed that trial to befall you so that you may love him the more and may discover even more clearly his constant protection and Love.

Take heart, I insist, because Christ, who pardoned us on the Cross, is still offering us his pardon through the Sacrament of Penance. We always 'have an advocate to plead our cause before the Father: the Just One, Jesus Christ. He, in his own person, is the atonement made for our sins, and not only for ours, but for the sins of the whole world,' so that we may win the Victory.

Forward, no matter what happens! Cling tightly to Our Lord's hand and remember that God does not lose battles. If you should stray from him for any reason, react with the humility that will lead you to begin again and again; to play the role of the prodigal son every day, and even repeatedly during the twenty-four hours of the same day; to correct your contrite heart in Confession, which is a real miracle of God's Love. In this wonderful Sacrament Our Lord cleanses your soul and fills you with joy and strength to prevent you from giving up the fight, and to help you keep returning to God unwearied, when everything seems black. In addition, the Mother of God, who is also our Mother, watches over you with motherly care, guiding your every step.

God never tires of forgiving

215 Holy Scripture points out that even 'the just man falls seven times.' Whenever I read this phrase my soul trembles with love and sorrow. This divine indication shows us Our Lord once again setting out to meet us and speak to us about his mercy, his tenderness and clemency that know no limits. Be sure of this: God does not want our wretchedness, but he is aware of it, and indeed he makes use of our weakness to make saints of us.

As I was saying, I tremble out of love. Looking at my life, I see quite honestly that I myself am nothing, am worth nothing and have nothing, that I can do nothing and, even more, that I am nothingness itself! But He is everything and, at the same time, he belongs to me and I to him because he does not reject me and has given himself up for me. Have you ever seen a greater love than this?

I tremble also out of sorrow, because when I look back at what I have done, I am amazed at the extent of my failings. All I have to do is to examine my behavior in the few hours since I woke up this morning to discover so much lack of love, so little faithful correspondence. This truly saddens me, but it does not take away my peace of mind. I prostrate myself before God and I state my situation clearly. Immediately he helps me, he reassures me, and I hear him repeat slowly in the depths of my heart, *meus es tu!*, I know the way you are, as I have always known it. Forward!

It cannot be otherwise. If we strive continually to place ourselves in Our Lord's presence, our confidence will increase when we realize that his Love and his call are always present. God never tires of loving us. Hope shows us that without him we cannot carry out even the most insignificant duty. But with God, with his grace, our wounds will quickly heal; clothed with his strength we shall be able to ward off the attacks of the enemy, and we shall improve. To sum up, the realization that we are made of clay, and cheap clay at that, has to lead us, above all, to strengthen our hope in Christ Jesus.

216 Make it a habit to mingle with the characters who appear in the New Testament. Capture the flavor of those moving scenes where the Master performs works that are both divine and human, and tells us, with human and divine touches, the wonderful story of his pardon for us and his enduring Love for his children. Those foretastes of Heaven are renewed today, for the Gospel is always

true: we can feel, we can sense, we can even say we touch God's protection with our own hands; a protection that grows stronger as long as we keep advancing despite our stumbles, as long as we begin again and again, for this is what interior life is about, living with our hope placed in God.

Unless we aspire to overcome the obstacles both within and without, we will not obtain the reward. "No athlete wins a crown, if he has not fought in earnest;" and the fight would not be genuine if there were no opponent to fight with. Therefore, if there is no opponent, there will be no crown; for there can be no victor without someone vanquished.'

Far from discouraging us, the difficulties we meet have to spur us on to mature as Christians. This fight sanctifies us and gives effectiveness to our apostolic endeavors. As we contemplate those moments when Jesus, in the Garden of Olives and later mocked and abandoned on the Cross, accepts and loves the Will of his Father, all the while feeling the enormous weight of the Passion, we must be convinced that in order to imitate Christ, and be good disciples of his, we must take his advice to heart, 'If any man has a mind to come my way, let him renounce self, and take up his cross, and follow me.' That is why I like to ask Jesus, for myself, 'Lord, no day without a cross!' Then, through God's grace, our characters will grow strong and we will become a point of support for our God, over and above our own wretchedness.

Take a nail, for instance. If you meet no resistance when you hammer it into a wall, what can you expect to hang on it? Likewise, if we do not let God toughen us through sacrifice, we will never become Our Lord's instruments. On the other hand, if we decide to accept difficulties gladly and make use of them for the love of God, then in the face of what is difficult and unpleasant, when things are hard and uncomfortable, we will be able to exclaim with the apostles James and John, 'Yes, we can!'

It is important to struggle

217 I ought to put you on your guard against a trick that Satan does not hesitate to use in order to rob us of our peace. He never takes a holiday! A time may come when he sows doubts in our minds, tempting us to think that we are slipping sadly backwards and are making scarcely any progress. The conviction may grow upon us that, in spite of all our efforts to improve, we are getting worse. I can assure you that normally this pessimistic judgment is mere fantasy, a deception that needs to be rejected. What has happened, as a rule, is that our soul has become more attentive, our conscience more sensitive, and our love more demanding. It can also be that the light of grace is shining more intensely and exposing to our view many details that would otherwise remain unnoticed in the shadows. In any case, we have to examine our uneasiness carefully, because through these insights Our Lord is asking us to be more humble or more generous. It is good to remember that God in his providence is continuously leading us forward and he spares no effort, whether in the form of portentous signs or of tiny miracles, to make his children progress.

Militia est vita hominis super terram, et sicut dies mercenarii, dies eius. Man's life on earth is warfare, and his days are spent under the burden of work. No one escapes this law, not even the easygoing who try to turn a deaf ear to it. They desert the ranks of Christ, and then take up other battles to satisfy their laziness, their vanity, or their petty ambitions. They become enslaved to their every whim.

Since to be in a state of struggle is part and parcel of the human condition, let us try to fulfill our obligations with determination. Let us pray and work with good will, with upright motives and with our sights set on what God wants. This way our longing for Love will be satisfied and we shall progress along the path to sanctity, even if we find at the end of the day that we still have a long way to go.

Renew your decision each morning, with a very determined Serviam!, I will serve you, Lord! Renew your resolution not to give in, not to give way to laziness or idleness; to face up to your duties with greater hope and more optimism, convinced that if we are defeated in some small skirmish we can overcome this setback by making a sincere act of love.

218 The virtue of hope assures us that God governs us with his all powerful providence and that he gives us all the means we need. Hope makes us aware of Our Lord's constant good will towards mankind, towards you and me. He is always ready to hear us, because he never tires of listening. He is interested in your joys, your successes, your love, and also in your worries, your suffering and your failures. So do not hope in him only when you realize you are weak. Call upon your heavenly Father in good times and in bad, taking refuge in his merciful protection. And our conviction that we are nothing (it doesn't take a high degree of humility to recognize the truth that we are nothing but a row of zeros) will turn into irresistible strength, because Christ will be the one to the left of these zeros, converting them into an immeasurable figure! 'The Lord is my strength and my refuge; whom shall I fear?'

Get used to seeing God behind everything, realizing that he is always waiting for us, that he is contemplating us and quite rightly demands that we follow him faithfully without abandoning the place assigned to us in the world. In order not to lose his divine company, we must walk with loving vigilance and with a sincere determination to struggle.

219 The struggle of a child of God cannot go hand in hand with a spirit of sad-faced renunciation, somber resignation or a lack of joy. It is, on the contrary, the struggle of the man in love who, whether working or resting, rejoicing or suffering, is always thinking of the one he loves, for whose sake he is happy to tackle any problems that may arise. Besides, in our case, being united with God, we can call ourselves victors because, I insist, he does not lose battles. My own experience is that when I strive faithfully to meet his demands, 'he gives me a resting place where there is green pasture, leads me out to the cool water's brink, refreshed and content. As in honor pledged, by sure paths he leads me; dark be the valley about my path, hurt I fear none while he is with me; thy rod, thy crook are my comfort.'

To win the battles of the soul, the best strategy often is to bide one's time and apply the suitable remedy with patience and perseverance. Make more acts of hope. Let me remind you that in your interior life you will suffer defeats and you will have ups and downs — may God make them imperceptible — because no one is free of these misfortunes. But our all powerful and merciful Lord has granted us the precise means with which to conquer. As I have already mentioned, all we have to do is to use them, resolving to begin again and again at every moment, should it prove necessary.

I would like to see you going to the holy Sacrament of Penance, the sacrament of divine forgiveness, every week, and indeed whenever you need it, without giving in to scruples. Clothed in grace, we can cross mountains, and climb the hill of our Christian duty, without halting on the way. If we use these resources with a firm purpose and beg Our Lord to grant us an ever increasing hope, we will possess the infectious joy of those who know they are children of God: 'If God is with us, who can be against us?' Let us be optimists. Moved by the power of hope, we will fight to wipe away the trail of filth and slime left by the sowers of hatred. We will find a new joyful perspective to the world, seeing that it has sprung forth beautiful and fair from the hands of God. We will give it back to him with that same beauty, if we learn how to repent.

With our eyes on Heaven

220 Let us grow in hope, thereby strengthening our faith which is truly 'that which gives substance to our hopes, which convinces us of things we cannot see.' Let us grow in this virtue, let us beg Our Lord to increase his charity in us; after all, one can only really trust that which one loves with all one's might. And it is certainly worthwhile to love Our Lord. You and I know from experience that people in love surrender themselves unhesitatingly. Their hearts beat in a wonderful unison, with a single love. What then will the Love of God be like? Do you not realize that Christ has died for each and every one of us? Yes, for this poor little heart of ours, Jesus consummated his redeeming sacrifice.

Our Lord speaks frequently to us of the reward which he won for us by his Death and Resurrection. 'I am going away to prepare a home for you. And though I do go away, to prepare you a home, I am coming back; and then I will take you to myself, so that you too may be where I am.' Heaven is the final destination of our path on earth. Jesus has gone ahead of us and awaits us there, in the company of Our Lady and of St Joseph, whom I so much revere, and of all the angels and saints.

Even in the times of the Apostles there were heretics who tried to tear hope away from Christians. 'If what we preach about Christ, then, is that he rose from the dead, how is it that some of you say the dead do not rise again? If the dead do not rise, then Christ has not risen either; and if Christ has not risen, then our preaching is groundless, and your faith too is groundless...' Our way is divine, Jesus himself being the way, the truth and the life, and thus we have a sure token that it ends in eternal happiness, provided we do not separate ourselves from him.

221 How marvelous it will be when we hear Our Father tell us, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant, because you have been faithful over a few things, I will set you over many; enter into the joy of your Lord!' Let us be full of hope! This is the great thing about being a contemplative soul. We live by Faith, Hope and Love, and Hope makes us powerful. Do you remember what St John says? 'I am writing to you, young men, because you are strong and the word of God abides in you, and you have conquered the evil one.' God is urging us on, for the sake of the eternal youthfulness of the Church and of all mankind. You have the power to transform everything human into something divine, just as King Midas turned everything he touched into gold!

Do not ever forget that after death you will be welcomed by Love itself. And in the love of God you will find as well all the noble loves which you had on earth. Our Lord has arranged for us to spend this brief day of our earthly existence working and, like his only-begotten Son, 'doing good.' Meanwhile we have to be on our guard, alert to the call St Ignatius of Antioch felt within his soul as the hour of his martyrdom approached. 'Come to the Father,' come to your Father, who anxiously awaits you.

Let us ask Holy Mary, Spes Nostra, our hope, to kindle in us a holy desire that we may all come together to dwell in the house of the Father. Nothing need disturb us if we make up our minds to anchor our hearts in a real longing for our true fatherland. Our Lord will lead us there with his grace, and he will send a good wind to carry our ship to the bright shores of our destination.

THE STRENGTH OF LOVE

A homily given on 6 April 1967

God's way of teaching

Charity with everyone

Expressing our love

Practising charity

The only way

222 From his position in the multitude a man asks Our Lord a question. He was one of those learned men who were no longer able to understand the teaching that had been revealed to Moses, so entangled had it become because of their own sterile casuistry. Jesus opens his divine lips to reply to this doctor of the law and answers him slowly, with the calm assurance of one who knows what he is talking about: 'You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, and your whole soul, and your whole mind. This is the greatest of the commandments and the first. And the second, its like, is this, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments all the law and the prophets depend.'

Let us now consider the Master and his disciples gathered together in the intimacy of the Upper Room. The time of his Passion is drawing close and he is surrounded by those he loves. The fire in the Heart of Christ bursts into flame in a way no words can express and he confides in them, 'I give you a new commandment that you love one another, just as I have loved you, you also must love one another. By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'

If you wish to get close to Our Lord through the pages of the Gospels, I always recommend that you try to enter in on the scene taking part as just one more person there. In this way (and I know many perfectly ordinary people who live this way) you will be captivated like Mary was, who hung on every word that Jesus uttered or, like Martha, you will boldly make your worries known to him, opening your heart sincerely about them all no matter how little they may be.

223 Lord, why do you call it a new commandment? As we have just heard, it was already laid down in the Old Testament that we should love our neighbor. You will remember also that, when Jesus had scarcely begun his public life, he broadened the scope of this law with divine generosity: 'You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell you, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, pray for those who persecute and slander you.'

But, Lord, please allow us to insist. Why do you still call this precept new? That night, just a few hours before offering yourself in sacrifice on the Cross, during your intimate conversation with the men who — in spite of being weak and wretched, like ourselves — accompanied you to Jerusalem, you revealed to us the standard for our charity, one we could never have suspected: 'as I have loved you.' How well the apostles must have understood you, having witnessed for themselves your unbounded love.

The Master's message and example are clear and precise. He confirmed his teaching with deeds. Yet I have often thought that, after twenty centuries, it is indeed still a new commandment because very few people have taken the trouble to practice it. The others, the majority of men, both in the past and still today, have chosen to ignore it. Their selfishness has led them to the conclusion: 'Why should I complicate my life? I have more than enough to do just looking after myself.'

Such an attitude is not good enough for us Christians. If we profess the same faith and are really eager to follow in the clear footprints left by Christ when he walked on this earth, we cannot be content merely with avoiding doing unto others the evil that we would not have them do unto us. That is a lot, but it is still very little when we consider that our love is to be measured in terms of Jesus' own conduct. Besides, he does not give us this standard as a distant target, as a crowning point of a whole lifetime of struggle. It is — it ought to be, I repeat so that you may turn it into specific resolutions — the starting point, for Our Lord presents it as a sign of Christianity: 'By this shall all men know that you are my disciples.'

224 Our Lord Jesus Christ became incarnate and took on our nature to reveal himself to mankind as the model of all virtues, 'Learn from me,' he says to us, 'for I am meek and humble of heart.'

Later, when he explains to the Apostles the mark by which they will be known as Christians, he does not say, 'Because you are humble.' He is purity most sublime, the immaculate Lamb. Nothing could stain his perfect, unspotted holiness. Yet he does not say, 'You will be known as my disciples because you are chaste and pure.'

He passed through this world completely detached from earthly goods. Though he is the Creator and Lord of the whole universe, he did not even have a place to lay his head. Nevertheless he does not say, 'They will know that you are mine because you are not attached to wealth.' Before setting out to preach the Gospel he spent forty days and forty nights in the desert keeping a strict fast. But, once again, he does not tell his disciples, 'Men will recognize you as God's servants because you are not gluttons or drunkards.'

No, the distinguishing mark of the apostles and of true Christians in every age is, as we have heard: 'By this,' precisely by this, 'shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'

I think it is perfectly understandable that God's children have always been deeply moved, as you and I are now, by our Master's insistence on this point. 'The Lord does not say that the proof of his disciples' faithfulness will be the working of wondrous miracles and prodigies, although he gave them the power to perform them, in the Holy Spirit. What does he tell them? "You shall be known as my disciples if you love one another."'

God's way of teaching

225 Not to hate one's enemies, not to return evil for evil, to refrain from vengeance and to forgive ungrudgingly were all considered at that time unusual behavior, too heroic for normal men. The same thing, let's be honest about it, is true today. Such is the small-mindedness of men. But Christ, who came to save all mankind and who wishes Christians to be associated with him in the work of redemption, wanted to teach his disciples — you and me — to have a great and sincere charity, one which is more noble and more precious: that of loving one another in the same way as Christ loves each one of us. Only then, by imitating the divine pattern he has left us, and notwithstanding our own rough ways, will we be able to open our hearts to all men and love in a higher and totally new way.

How well the early Christians practiced this ardent charity which went far beyond the limits of mere human solidarity or natural kindness. They loved one another, through the heart of Christ, with a love both tender and strong. Tertullian writing in the second century tells us how impressed the pagans were by the behaviour of the faithful at that time. So attractive was it both supernaturally and humanly that they often remarked: 'See how they love one another.'

If you think, looking at yourself now or in so many things you do each day, that you do not deserve such praise; that your heart does not respond as it should to the promptings of God, then consider that the time has come for you to put things right. Listen to St Paul's invitation, 'Let us do good to all men, and especially to

those who are of one family with us in the faith,' who make up the Mystical Body of Christ.

226 The principal apostolate we Christians must carry out in the world, and the best witness we can give of our faith, is to help bring about a climate of genuine charity within the Church. For who indeed could feel attracted to the Gospel if those who say they preach the Good News do not really love one another, but spend their time attacking one another, spreading slander and quarrelling?

It is all too easy, and very fashionable, to say that you love everyone, Christians and non-Christians alike. But if those who maintain this ill-treat their brothers in the faith, I don't see how their behavior can be anything but 'pious hypocrisy.' By contrast, when in the Heart of Christ we love those 'who are children of the same Father, and with us share the same faith and are heirs to the same hope' then our hearts expand and become fired with a longing to bring everyone closer to Our Lord.

I am reminding you here of the demands of charity, and perhaps someone might object that it is precisely the virtue of charity which is lacking in what I have just said. Nothing could be further from the truth. I can assure you with a holy pride and without any false ecumenism that I was overjoyed when in the recent Second Vatican Council the Church expressed with renewed intensity its concern to bring the Truth to those who walk outside the one Way, that of Jesus; because I am consumed by a hunger that all may be saved.

227 Yes, I was very glad; glad too because it confirmed anew a favorite apostolate of Opus Dei, the apostolate ad fidem, which rejects no one and admits non-Christians, atheists and pagans, allowing them to share as far as they are able in the spiritual benefits of our Association. As I have mentioned on other occasions, this apostolate has a long history, involving both suffering and loyalty. So I am not afraid to repeat that I think it is a false and hypocritical zeal that leads some to be friendly towards those who are far away from us, while they trample on or despise those who share our same faith. In the same way, I don't believe that you are genuinely concerned about the poorest of the poor, if you persist in mortifying the people you live with; if you are indifferent to their joys, sorrows or grief; if you are not trying to understand or overlook their defects, provided they do not offend God.

228 Doesn't it move you to find the apostle John in his old age devoting the best part of one of his epistles to exhorting us to follow this divine teaching? The love that ought to exist amongst us Christians is born of God who is Love. 'Beloved let us love one another; for charity comes from God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who has no love does not know God, for God is Love.' He focuses on fraternal charity because through Christ we have become children of God: 'See what love the Father has shown towards us, that we should be called children of God, and should be such.'

At the same time as he raps sharply on our consciences to make them sensitive to God's grace, he also insists that we have received a marvelous proof of the Father's love for men, 'By this was made manifest the charity of God for us, that God sent

his only begotten Son into the world, so that we might live through him.' It was the Lord who took the initiative by coming out to meet us. He gave us this example so that we might join him in serving others, generously placing our hearts on the ground, as I am fond of saying, so that others may tread softly and find their struggle more pleasant. This is how we should behave because we have been made children of the same Father, that Father who did not hesitate to give us his dearly beloved Son.

229 Charity is not something we ourselves build up. It invades us along with God's grace, 'because he has loved us first.' We would do well to fill, to saturate ourselves with this most beautiful truth: 'If we are able to love God, it is because we have been loved by God.' You and I are able to lavish affection upon those around us, because we have been born to the Faith, through the Father's love for us. Ask God boldly for this treasure, for the supernatural virtue of charity, so that you may practice it even in the smallest details.

Too often we Christians have not known how to correspond to this gift. At times we have debased it, as if it could be confined to a soulless and cold almsgiving; or we have reduced it to more or less stereotyped good works. This distortion of charity was well expressed once by a sick woman when she commented with sad resignation, 'Yes, they treat me with "charity" here, but my mother used to look after me with affection.' A love that springs from the Heart of Christ could never countenance such distinctions.

In order that you might grasp this truth very clearly, I have preached on countless occasions that we do not have one heart to love God with and another with which to love men. This poor heart of ours, made of flesh, loves with an affection which is human and which, if it is united to Christ's love, is also supernatural. This, and no other, is the charity we have to cultivate in our souls, a charity which will lead us to discover in others the image of Our Lord.

Charity with everyone

230 St Leo the Great says that 'the term "neighbor" includes not only those with whom we have ties of friendship or family, but all our fellow men with whom we share a common nature... A single Creator has made us and given us our souls. We all live under the same sky and breathe the same air, and we live through the same days and nights. Although some people are good and others bad, some just and others unjust, God nevertheless is generous and kind towards all.'

We grow up as children of God by practicing the new commandment. In the Church we learn to serve and not to be served, and we find we have the strength to love all mankind in a new way, which all will recognize as stemming from the grace of Christ. Our love is not to be confused with sentimentality or mere good fellowship, nor with that somewhat questionable zeal to help others in order to convince ourselves of our superiority. Rather, it means living in peace with our neighbor, venerating the image of God that is found in each and every man and doing all we can to get them in their turn to contemplate that image, so that they may learn how to turn to Christ.

Charity with everyone means, therefore, apostolate with everyone. It means we, on our part, must translate into deeds and truth the great desire of God 'who wishes all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of truth.'

If we must also love our enemies (here I mean those who regard us as such, for I do not consider myself an enemy of anyone or of anything) we have all the more reason for loving those who are simply distant from us, those whom we find less attractive, those who seem the opposite of you or me on account of their language, culture or upbringing.

231 What kind of love are we talking about? Sacred Scripture uses the Latin word *dilectio*, to make us understand clearly that it does not simply mean the feeling of affection. It signifies, rather, a firm determination on the part of the will. *Dilectio* comes from *electio*, choice. I would add that, for Christians, loving means 'wanting to love,' making up one's mind in Christ to work for the good of souls, without discrimination of any kind; trying to obtain for them, before any other good, the greatest good of all, that of knowing Christ and falling in love with him.

Our Lord spurs us on: 'Do good to those who hate you, pray for those who persecute and insult you.' We might not feel humanly attracted to those who would reject us were we to approach them. But Jesus insists: we must not return evil for evil; we must not waste any opportunities we have of serving them wholeheartedly, even if we find it difficult to do so; we must never cease keeping them in mind in our prayers.

This *dilectio*, this charity, becomes even more affectionate when its object is our brothers in the faith and particularly those who, by God's will, work close beside us: our parents, husband or wife, children, brothers and sisters, friends and colleagues, neighbors. Without this affection, which is a noble and pure human love directed towards God and based on him, there would be no charity.

Expressing our love

232 I like to repeat what the Holy Spirit tells us through the prophet Isaiah, *discite benefacere*, learn how to do good. I like to apply this advice to all the different aspects of our interior struggle, because we can never consider our lives as Christians as something finished and complete. The Christian virtues develop as a consequence of real effort, each day.

Take any job in life; how do we set about learning it? First we find out what we want to achieve and what means we have to obtain it. Then we use those means, perseveringly, over and over again, until we have formed a well-rooted habit. As soon as we learn one thing, we discover other things hitherto unknown to us and they in turn stimulate us to continue working without ever giving up.

Charity towards our neighbor is an expression of our love of God. Accordingly, when we strive to grow in this virtue, we cannot fix any limits to our growth. The only possible measure for the love of God is to love without measure; on the one hand, because we will never be able to thank him enough for what he has done for

us; and on the other, because this is exactly what God's own love for us, his creatures, is like: it overflows without calculation or limit.

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches his divine command of charity to all who are ready to listen with an open mind. At the end, by way of summary, he says, 'Love your enemies, and do good to them, and lend to them, without any hope of return; then your reward will be a rich one, and you will be children of the most High, generous like him towards the thankless and unjust. Be merciful, then, as your Father is merciful.'

Mercy is more than simply being compassionate. Mercy is the overflow of charity, which brings with it also an overflow of justice. Mercy means keeping one's heart totally alive, throbbing in a way that is both human and divine, with a love that is strong, self-sacrificing and generous. Here is what St Paul has to say about charity in his hymn to this virtue, 'Charity is patient, is kind; charity feels no envy; charity is never perverse or proud, never insolent; does not claim its rights, cannot be provoked, does not brood over an injury; takes no pleasure in wrong-doing, but rejoices at the victory of truth; sustains, believes, hopes, endures, to the last.'

233 One of its first expressions is to initiate the soul into the ways of humility. When we sincerely see ourselves as nothing; when we understand that, without God's help, the weakest and most puny of creatures would be better than we are; when we see we are capable of every kind of error and every kind of abomination; when we realize we are sinners, even though we are earnestly struggling to turn our back on our many infidelities, how could we possibly think badly of others? Or how could we harbor fanaticism, intolerance or haughtiness in our hearts?

Humility leads us as it were by the hand to treat our neighbor in the best way possible, that is, being understanding towards everyone, living at peace with everyone, forgiving everyone; never creating divisions or barriers; and behaving — always! — as instruments that foster unity. Not in vain is there in the depths of man's being a strong longing for peace, for union with his fellow man, for a mutual respect for personal rights, so strong that it seeks to transform human relations into fraternity. This longing reflects something which is most deeply imprinted upon our human condition: since we are all children of God, our fraternity is not a cliché or an empty dream; it beckons as a goal which, though difficult, is really ours to achieve.

As Christians we must show that affection of this kind is in fact possible whatever the cynics or skeptics, those disappointed in love or those with a cowardly outlook on life might say. It may be quite difficult to be truly affectionate, for man was created free and he can rebel against God in a useless and bitter way. But it is possible and people can attain it, because it flows as a necessary consequence of God's love for us and our love for God. If you and I want it, Jesus also wants it. Then we will obtain a full and fruitful understanding of the meaning of suffering, sacrifice and unselfish dedication in ordinary life.

Practising charity

234 It would be naive to think that the demands of Christian charity are easy to fulfill. Our day to day experience of the affairs of men, even unfortunately within the Church itself, tells us a very different story. If love did not bid us keep silence, each could tell a lengthy tale of disunity, personal attacks, injustice, slander and intrigue. Let us admit it openly, and try for our part to apply the right solution to the problem, which should consist in our personal efforts not to wound or ill-treat anyone, and not to humiliate others when we have to correct them.

The problem of course is not new. Only a few years after Christ's Ascension into heaven, when most of the apostles were still alive and active and there was a wonderful atmosphere of faith and hope, there were already quite a number who had begun to lose their way, failing to follow the charity of their Master.

To the Corinthians St Paul writes, 'Do not these rivalries, these dissensions among you show that nature is still alive, that you are guided by human standards? When one of you says, I am for Paul, and another, I am for Apollo, are not these human thoughts,' of men who do not understand that Christ came to do away with all these divisions? 'Why, what is Apollo, what is Paul? Only the ministers of the God in whom your faith rests, who have brought that faith to each of you in the measure God granted.'

The Apostle is not condemning diversity. Each person has his own gift from God, some in one thing, some in another. These differences, however, must serve the good of the Church. I feel moved right now to ask Our Lord (and if you wish you can join in my prayer) not to permit uncharitableness to sow its cockle in the Church. Charity is the salt of the Christian apostolate. If it should lose its taste, how can we come to the world and proclaim: 'Here is Christ?'

235 Therefore I repeat to you with St Paul, 'I may speak with every tongue that men and angels use; yet, if I lack charity, I am no better than echoing bronze, or the clash of cymbals. I may have powers of prophecy, no secret hidden from me, no knowledge too deep for me; I may have utter faith, so that I can move mountains; yet if I lack charity, I count for nothing. I may give away all that I have to feed the poor; I may give myself up to be burnt at the stake; if I lack charity, it goes for nothing.'

Some people have reacted to these words of the Apostle to the Gentiles like those disciples who, on hearing Our Lord promise the Sacrament of his Body and Blood, commented: 'This is a hard saying. Who can listen to it?' It is indeed hard, because the charity described by St Paul is not just philanthropy, humanitarianism or an understandable sympathy for the sufferings of others. Rather it requires the practice of the theological virtue of loving God and of loving others for the sake of God. This is why 'charity never fails, whereas prophecies will disappear, and tongues will cease, and knowledge will be destroyed... So there abide faith, hope and charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.'

The only way

236 We are now convinced that charity has nothing whatever in common with the caricature that sometimes has been made of this central virtue of the Christian life. Why, then is it necessary to preach about it so constantly? Is it just a topic that has to be preached about, but has little chance of being put into practice in everyday life?

If we look about us we could find reasons for believing that charity is a phantom virtue. But if we then consider things from a supernatural point of view, we can also see what is the root cause of this sterility: the absence of a continuous and intense, person-to-person relationship with Our Lord Jesus Christ, and an ignorance of the work of the Holy Spirit in the soul, whose very first fruit is precisely charity.

In commenting on St Paul's advice, 'bear one another's burdens and so you will fulfill the law of Christ,' one of the Fathers of the Church says, 'By loving Christ we can easily bear the weaknesses of others, including those people whom we do not love as yet because they are lacking in good works.'

This is the direction taken by the path that makes us grow in charity. We would be mistaken were we to believe that we must first engage in humanitarian activities and social works, leaving the love for God to one side. 'Let us not neglect Christ out of concern for our neighbor's illness, for we ought to love the sick for the sake of Christ.'

Turn your gaze constantly to Jesus who, without ceasing to be God, humbled himself and took the nature of a slave, in order to serve us. Only by following in his direction will we find ideals that are worthwhile. Love seeks union, identification with the beloved. United to Christ, we will be drawn to imitate his life of dedication, his unlimited love and his sacrifice unto death. Christ brings us face to face with the ultimate choice: either we spend our life in selfish isolation, or we devote ourselves and all our energies to the service of others.

237 Let us now ask Our Lord, as we finish these moments of conversation with him, to enable us to say with St Paul, 'in all this we are conquerors, through him who has granted us his love. Of this I am fully persuaded: neither death nor life, nor angels or principalities or powers, neither what is present nor what is to come, no force whatever, neither the height above us nor the depth beneath us, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which comes to us in Christ Jesus Our Lord.'

Scripture sings the praises of this love with burning words: 'Many waters cannot quench charity, neither can the floods drown it.' So thoroughly did this love fill Mary's Heart that it enriched her to the point of making her a Mother for all mankind. In the Virgin Mary, her love of God is one with her concern for all her children. Her most sweet Heart, which was sensitive to the smallest details — 'they have no wine' — must have suffered immensely on seeing the collective cruelty and the ferocity of the executioners that led to the Passion and Death of Jesus. Mary, however, does not speak. Like her Son, she loves, keeps silent and forgives. Here we see the strength of love!

A LIFE OF PRAYER

A homily given on 4 April 1955

How to pray

Prayer is dialogue

Vocal prayers and mental prayer

Among the followers of Our Lord

238 Whenever we feel in our hearts a desire to improve, a desire to respond more generously to Our Lord, and we look for something to guide us, a north star to guide our lives as Christians, the Holy Spirit will remind us of the words of the Gospel that we 'ought to pray continually and never be discouraged.' Prayer is the foundation of any supernatural endeavor. With prayer we are all powerful; without it, if we were to neglect it, we would accomplish nothing.

I would like us, in our meditation today, to make up our minds once and for all that we need to aspire to become contemplative souls, in the street, in the midst of our work, by maintaining a constant conversation with our God and not breaking it off at any time of the day. If we really want to be loyal followers of our Master, this is the only way.

239 Let us turn our gaze to Jesus Christ, who is our model, the mirror in which we should see ourselves. How does he act, even in his outward behavior, in the great moments of his life? What does the holy Gospel tell us about him? I am moved by Our Lord's habitual attitude of prayer, the way he turns to the Father before beginning his public life, retiring to the desert for forty days and forty nights, to pray.

Forgive me if I insist, but it is very important to note carefully what the Messiah did, because he came to show us the path that leads to the Father. With Our Lord we will discover how to give a supernatural dimension to all our actions, even those that seem least important. We will learn to live every moment of our lives with a lively awareness of eternity, and we will understand more deeply man's need for periods of intimate conversation with his God, so as to get to know him, to invoke him, to praise him, to break out into acts of thanksgiving, to listen to him or, quite simply, to be with him.

Many years ago, as I reflected upon Our Lord's way of doing things, I came to the conclusion that the apostolate, of whatever kind it be, must be an overflow of the interior life. This is why the passage which relates how Christ decided to choose the first twelve seems to me to be so natural and at the same time so supernatural. St Luke tells us that before choosing them 'he spent the whole night in prayer.' Think also of the events at Bethany. Before he raises Lazarus from the dead, after having wept over his friend, he lifts his eyes to heaven and says, 'Father, I thank you for hearing my prayer.' This is his message for us: if we wish to help others, if we really

wish to encourage them to discover the true meaning of their life on earth, we must base everything on prayer.

240 There are so many Gospel scenes where Jesus talks to his Father that we cannot stop to consider them all. But I do feel we must pause to consider the intense hours preceding his Passion and Death, when Christ prepares himself to carry out the Sacrifice that will bring us back once more to God's Love. In the intimacy of the Upper Room the Heart of Jesus overflows with love; he turns to the Father in prayer, announces the coming of the Holy Spirit, and encourages his disciples to maintain the fervor of their charity and their faith.

Our Redeemer's mood of fervent recollection continues in the Garden of Gethsemani, as he perceives that his Passion is about to begin, with all its humiliation and suffering close at hand, the harsh Cross on which criminals are hanged and which he has longed for so ardently. 'Father, if it pleases thee, take away this chalice from before me.' And immediately he adds, 'Yet not my will but thine be done.' Later, nailed to the Cross, alone, with his arms opened wide in a gesture of an eternal priest, he continues his dialogue with his Father, 'Into thy hands I commend my spirit.'

241 Let us also contemplate his blessed Mother, who is our Mother too. We find her on Calvary, at the foot of the Cross, praying. This is nothing new for Mary. She has always acted like this, as she fulfilled her duties and looked after her home. As she went about the things of this earth she kept her attention on God. Christ, who is perfectus Deus, perfectus homo, wanted us also to have the example of his Mother, the most perfect of creatures, she who is full of grace, to strengthen our desire to lift our eyes up to the love of God at every moment. Remember the scene at the Annunciation? The Archangel comes down bearing a divine message — the announcement that Mary is to be the Mother of God — and he finds her withdrawn in prayer. When Gabriel greets her, she is totally absorbed in God. 'Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.' A few days later she breaks out into the joy of the Magnificat, a Marian hymn which the Holy Spirit has transmitted to us through the loving faithfulness of St Luke. It reveals Mary's constant and intimate conversation with God.

Our Mother had meditated deep and long on the words of the holy men and women of the Old Testament who awaited the Savior, and on the events that they had taken part in. She must have marveled at all the great things that God, in his boundless mercy, had done for his people, who were so often ungrateful. As she considers the tenderness shown time after time by God towards his people, Mary's immaculate Heart breaks out in loving words, 'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior, for he has looked graciously upon the lowliness of his handmaid.' The early Christians, children of this good Mother, learned from her; we can, and we ought to do likewise.

242 The Acts of the Apostles describe a scene I love to contemplate because it gives us a clear, abiding example of prayer: 'They persevered all of them in the apostles' teaching, in their fellowship in the breaking of bread, and in prayer.' We are told

this time and again in the passage narrating the lives of the first followers of Christ. 'All these, with one mind, gave themselves up to prayer.' Again when Peter was imprisoned because he had boldly preached the truth, they decide to pray. 'There was a continual stream of prayer going up to God from the Church on his behalf.'

Prayer was then, as it is today, the only weapon, the most powerful means, for winning the battles of our interior struggle. 'Is one of you sad?' asks St James. 'Let him pray.' St Paul sums it up by saying, 'Pray without ceasing.' Never get tired of praying.

How to pray

243 How should we pray? I would go as far as to say, without fear of being mistaken, that there are many, countless, ways of praying. But I would like all of us to pray genuinely, as God's children, not gabbling away like hypocrites who will hear from Jesus' lips 'Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord!" shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.' People who live by hypocrisy can perhaps achieve 'the sound of prayer,' says St Augustine, 'but they cannot possess its voice, because there is no life in them.' They lack the desire to fulfill the Father's Will. When we cry 'Lord!' we must do so with an effective desire to put into practice the inspirations the Holy Spirit awakens in our soul.

We must strive to eliminate any shadow of deceit on our part. If we are to banish this evil, which is condemned so severely by Our Lord, we must first try to ensure that our dispositions, both habitual and actual, are those of a clear aversion to sin. Sincerely, in a manly way, we must develop, both in our heart and in our mind, a sense of horror for mortal sin. We must also cultivate a deep-seated hatred of deliberate venial sin, those negligences which while they don't deprive us of God's grace, do serve to obstruct the channels through which grace comes to us.

244 I have never tired of talking about prayer and with God's grace I never will. I remember back in the thirties, as a young priest, people of all kinds used to come to me looking for ways of getting closer to Our Lord. To all of them, university students and workers, healthy and sick, rich and poor, priests and laymen, I gave the same advice: 'Pray.' If any one replied, 'I don't even know how to begin,' I would advise him to put himself in God's presence and tell Him of his desires and his anxiety, with that very same complaint: 'Lord, I don't know how to pray!' Often, humble admissions like that were the beginning of an intimate relationship with Christ, a lasting friendship with him.

Many years have gone by, and I still don't know of a better recipe. If you think you're not quite ready to pray, go to Jesus as his disciples did and say to him, 'Lord, teach us how to pray.' You will discover how the Holy Spirit 'comes to the aid of our weakness; when we do not know what prayer to offer, to pray as we ought, the Spirit himself intercedes for us, with groans beyond all utterance,' which are impossible to describe, for no words are adequate to express their depth.

What a great source of confidence the Word of God should be for us! When, throughout my priestly ministry, I have time and again counseled people to pray, I

have not been inventing anything. It's all there in Holy Scripture. That is where I learned to say, 'Lord, I don't know how to talk to you! Lord, teach us how to pray!' When we pray thus, we receive all the loving assistance of the Holy Spirit — that light, fire and driving wind which sets the flame alight and makes it capable of enkindling a great fire of love.

Prayer is dialogue

245 We have already entered upon the ways of prayer. But how do we go forward? You must have noticed how many people, both men and women, appear to be talking just to themselves, listening complacently to their own voices. It is an almost continuous chatter of words, a monologue that goes on and on about the problems that worry them, while they do nothing to solve them. It would seem as if all they really wanted was the morbid satisfaction of getting others to feel sorry for them, or admire them. That's all they seem to be aiming for.

If we truly want to unburden our hearts, and are honest and sincere about it, we seek the advice of those who love and understand us: our father or mother, wife or husband, our brother or friend. Even though often what we want isn't so much to listen as to express our feelings and say what has happened to us, a dialogue has already begun. Let us begin to do the same with God; we can be quite sure he listens to us and answers us. Let us pay attention to him and open up our soul in humble conversation, telling him in confidence everything that is on our mind and in our heart: our joys, sorrows, hopes, annoyances, successes, failures, even the most trivial happenings in our day. We will discover that our Heavenly Father is interested in everything about us.

246 Overcome any sluggishness you may feel, and the false excuse that prayer can wait for later. Let us never put off this vital source of grace until tomorrow. Now is the right time. God, who is a loving spectator of everything we do, watches over our most intimate needs. You and I, I tell you once again, we need to confide in him as we might confide in a brother, a friend, a father. Tell him, as I am telling him now, that he is all greatness, all goodness, all mercy. Tell him also, 'This is why I want to fall in love with you, despite my rough manner and poor hands, soiled and ill-treated by the dust and grime of this earth.'

In this way, almost without realizing it, we will go forward at God's pace, taking strong and vigorous strides. We will come to sense deep in our hearts that when we are close to Our Lord we are able to find joy in suffering, self-denial and sorrow. What a great source of strength it is for a son of God to know that he is so close to his Father! This is why, my Lord and Father, no matter what happens, I stand firm and secure with you, because you are my rock and my strength.

247 For some of you, all this may sound quite familiar; for others, it may be something new; for everybody, it is demanding. As for me, as long as I have strength to breathe, I will continue to preach that it is vitally necessary that we be souls of prayer at all times, at every opportunity and in the most varied of circumstances, because God never abandons us. It is not a proper Christian attitude to look upon friendship with God only as a last resort. Do we think it

normal to ignore or neglect the people we love? Obviously not! Those we love figure constantly in our conversations, desires and thoughts. We hold them ever present. So it should be with God.

When we seek Our Lord in this way, our whole day becomes one intimate and trusting conversation with him. I have said and written this so many times, but I don't mind saying it again, because Our Lord has shown us by his example that this is exactly what we have to do: we have to pray at all times, from morning to night and from night to morning. When everything goes well: 'Thank you, my God!' If we are having a hard time, 'Lord, do not abandon me!' Then this God of ours, who is 'meek and humble of heart' will not ignore our petitions or remain indifferent. For he himself has told us, 'Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened for you.'

Let us try, therefore, never to lose our supernatural outlook. Let us see the hand of God in everything that happens to us: both in pleasant and unpleasant things, in times of consolation and in times of sorrow, as in the death of someone we love. Your first instinct always should be to talk to your Father God, whom we should seek in the depths of our souls. And we cannot consider this a trivial or unimportant matter. On the contrary, it is a clear sign of a deep interior life, of a true dialogue of love. Far from being psychologically deforming, constant prayer should be for a Christian as natural as the beating of his heart.

Vocal prayers and mental prayer

248 Upon this living fabric of our Christian faith are woven in the vocal prayers, like jewels. Some are of divine composition: 'Our Father...', 'Hail Mary...', 'Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.' There is as well that crown of praise to God and to our Mother, the Holy Rosary, and then so many other acclamations, full of devotion, that fellow Christians, our brothers in the faith, have recited from the very earliest times.

St Augustine, quoting a verse from Psalm 85, 'Take pity on me, Lord, I have cried to you all day long,' comments: 'Not "one day": understand "all day" to mean all the time, without ceasing... A single man reaches out to the end of the world; for it is the members of the one Christ who call out to God, some of them already resting in him, others invoking him now, and others who will come and implore him when we will have died, and still others who will follow them in prayer.' Are you not moved when you consider that you can share in this never ending homage to the Creator? How great is man when he acknowledges that he is a privileged creature of God and has recourse to Him *tota die*, at every moment of his journey on earth!

249 Each day without fail we should devote some time specially to God, raising our minds to him, without any need for the words to come to our lips, for they are being sung in our heart. Let us give enough time to this devout practice; at a fixed hour, if possible. Before the Tabernacle, close to him who has remained there out of Love. If this is not possible, we can pray anywhere because our God is ineffably present in the heart of every soul in grace. Still I would advise you to go to the oratory whenever you can. I make a point of calling it an oratory and not a chapel,

to emphasize that it is not a place where you adopt a formal, ceremonial manner, but rather one where you can raise up your mind in an intimate and recollected way, to heaven, and you can be sure that Jesus sees us and hears us, that he is waiting for us and presides over us from the Tabernacle where he is truly present, hidden under the sacramental species.

Each one of you, if he wants, can find his own way to converse with God. I do not like to talk about methods or formulas, because I have never wished to straitjacket anyone. What I have always tried to do is to encourage everyone to come closer to Our Lord, respecting each soul as it is, each with its own characteristics. Ask him to introduce his ideas and plans into our lives: not only into our heads, but also into the depths of our hearts and into all our outward actions. I assure you that you will thus be spared many of the disappointments and sorrows of selfishness, and you will find you have the strength to do good to all around you. How many obstacles vanish when in our hearts we place ourselves next to this God of ours, who never abandons us! Jesus' love for his own, for the sick and for the lame, is renewed, expressed in different ways, 'What is the matter?' he asks, and we reply, 'It's my...' At once there is light, or at least the acceptance of his will, and inner peace.

When I encourage you to open your heart in confidence to the Master, I am referring especially to your own difficulties, because most of the obstacles to our happiness come from our pride, which may be hidden to a greater or less degree. We had thought we were worth a great deal and had a lot of exceptional qualities; then, when others didn't agree, we felt humiliated. This is a good time to pray and to correct our mistaken attitude. We can be sure it is never too late to change our course. But it's wise to start changing it as soon as possible.

In prayer, with God's grace, pride can be transformed into humility. Then, true joy wells up in our heart, even though we feel that the wings of our soul are still clogged with the mud, the clay of our wretchedness which is now beginning to dry out. If we practice mortification the mud will fall off, allowing us to soar very high, because the wind of God's mercy will be blowing in our favor.

250 Look: Our Lord is anxious to guide us at a marvelous pace, both human and divine, and which leads to joyful abandonment, happiness in suffering and self-forgetfulness. 'If any man has a mind to come my way, let him renounce self.' This is a counsel we have all heard. Now we have to make a firm decision to put it into practice. May Our Lord be able to use us so that, placed as we are at all the cross-roads of the world — and at the same time placed in God — we become salt, leaven and light. Yes, you are to be in God, to enlighten, to give flavor, to produce growth and new life.

But don't forget that we are not the source of this light: we only reflect it. It is not we who save souls and move them to do good. We are quite simply instruments, some more some less worthy, for fulfilling God's plans for salvation. If at any time we were to think that we ourselves are the authors of the good we do, then our

pride would return, more twisted than ever. The salt would lose its flavour, the leaven would rot and the light would turn to darkness.

Among the followers of Our Lord

251 During my thirty years as a priest I have constantly insisted that we need to pray, and that it is possible to convert our whole life into an unceasing clamor of prayer. Naturally, some people have asked me if this can really be done, all the time. It can. Union with Our Lord does not cut us off from the world we live in. It does not make us strange beings, out of touch with what is going on around us.

If it is true that God has created us, that he has redeemed us, that he loves us so much that he has given up his only-begotten Son for us, that he waits for us every day! — as eagerly as the father of the prodigal son did, how can we doubt that he wants us to respond to him with all our love? The strange thing would be not to talk to God, to draw away and forget him, and busy ourselves in activities which are closed to the constant promptings of his grace.

252 Besides, let me remind you that nobody escapes the tendency to imitate others. Even unconsciously we tend to imitate one another. Are we then going to refuse the invitation to imitate Jesus? Everyone strives to identify himself little by little with what he admires, with the model he has chosen for himself. Our way of acting is geared to the ideal we have set for ourselves. Our teacher is Christ, the Son of God and Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. If we imitate Christ, we will attain the marvelous possibility of sharing in that current of love, which is the mystery of God, One in Three.

If at times you don't feel strong enough to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, say a few loving words to those who knew him well during his life on earth. To Mary, first of all, for she it was who brought him to us. Then to the Apostles. 'And there were certain Gentiles who approached Philip, the man from Bethsaida in Galilee, and made a request of him: Sir, they said, we desire to see Jesus. Philip came and told Andrew, and together Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.' Don't you find this scene encouraging? Those foreigners didn't dare to approach the Master directly, so they looked for a good intercessor.

253 Are you worried that your sins are so many that Our Lord will not listen to you? It is not so, because Jesus is full of mercy. But if despite this marvelous truth you still feel how wretched you are, go to him like the publican did, and say, 'Lord, here I am. It's up to you!' See, too, what St Matthew tells us when Jesus had a paralyzed man brought before him. The sick man doesn't say a word. He is simply there, in the presence of God. And Christ, moved by the man's contrition, by the sorrow of one who knows he deserves nothing, responds immediately, as merciful as ever, 'Take courage, your sins are forgiven.'

My advice is that, in your prayer, you actually take part in the different scenes of the Gospel, as one more among the people present. First of all, imagine the scene or mystery you have chosen to help you recollect your thoughts and meditate. Next apply your mind, concentrating on the particular aspect of the Master's life you are

considering — his merciful Heart, his humility, his purity, the way he fulfils his Father's Will. Then tell him what happens to you in these matters, how things are with you, what is going on in your soul. Be attentive, because he may want to point something out to you, and you will experience suggestions deep in your soul, realizing certain things and feeling his gentle reprimands.

254 As a way of giving outlet to my prayer — this may be helpful for some of you as well — I often materialize even the most spiritual of things. It is a method that Our Lord used. He liked to teach through parables, using images from life around him: a shepherd and his flock, the vine and its branches, boats and nets, seed scattered by the sower...

The seed of God's Word has been sown in our hearts. What kind of ground have we prepared for him? Are there many stones? Is it full of thorns? Are we letting petty and exclusively human cares trample all over it? Lord, make my plot of ground be good, fertile and generously exposed to sun and rain. Let your seed take root in it and produce a fine crop of good wheat.

'I am the vine, you are the branches.' September comes and the vines are rich with long, lissome branches, flexibly intertwining and bending under the weight of the grapes now ready for the harvest. You see, the branches are full of fruit, because they share in the sap that comes from the stem. Otherwise, from the tiny buds we knew just a few months back, they could not have produced the sweet ripe fruit that gladdens the eye and makes the heart rejoice. Here and there on the ground we may find some dry twigs, lying half-buried in the soil. Once they too were branches of the vine; now they lie there withered and dead, a perfect image of barrenness: 'separated from me, you can do nothing.'

Then there is the treasure. You can imagine the immense joy of the lucky man who finds it. The hard times, the suffering are over. He sells everything he has and buys the field. His whole heart is there, where his treasure lies hidden. Our treasure is Christ. We shouldn't mind having to throw overboard everything that impedes our following him. Our boat, once freed of its useless cargo, will sail directly to the safe harbor of God's Love.

255 There are countless ways of praying, as I have already told you. We children of God don't need a method, an artificial system, to talk with our Father. Love is inventive, full of initiative. If we truly love, we will discover our own intimate paths to lead us to a continuous conversation with Our Lord.

May God grant that what we have contemplated today will not pass over our souls like a summer downpour — a few drops of rain, then once again the baking sun and the fields are as dry as before. The water of God's grace needs to settle, to seep through to the roots and bear fruit in virtues. If we let it do this, our years on earth — made up of days of work and prayer — will be spent in the presence of Our Father. If we falter, let us turn to Holy Mary who loves us and teaches us how to pray; and to St Joseph, our Father and Lord, whom we venerate so much. In this world he was the one who was closest to the Mother of God and, after Mary, to her

Divine Son. Together they will bring our weakness to Jesus, so that he may turn it into strength.

THAT ALL MAY BE SAVED

A homily given on 16 April 1954

Leavening the dough

Going fishing

Miracles will multiply

Apostolate in our daily life

Souls belong to God

Daring to speak about God

256 Our Christian vocation, this calling which Our Lord makes to each of us personally, leads us to become identified with him. But we should not forget that he came on earth to redeem everyone, because 'he wishes all men to be saved.' There is not a single soul in whom Christ is not interested. Each soul has cost him the price of his Blood.

As I think about these truths, there comes to mind a conversation which took place between the apostles and the Master shortly before the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand. A great multitude had followed Jesus. Our Lord looked up and said to Philip, 'Where shall we buy bread for these to eat?' Philip made a rapid calculation and answered: 'Two hundred silver pieces would not buy enough bread for them, even to give each a little.' They didn't have that kind of money; what they could find was paltry in comparison. 'One of his disciples, Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, said to him: There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fishes; but what is that among so many?'

Leavening the dough

257 We want to follow Our Lord. We are anxious to spread his Word. From a human point of view, it's only natural that we should ask ourselves: who are we, for so many people? Compared with the total population of the world, even though there are millions of us, we are few in number. We must therefore see ourselves as a tiny measure of yeast, prepared and ready to do good to the whole of mankind, remembering the words of the Apostle: 'a little leaven is enough to leaven all the dough,' transforming it completely. We have to learn to become that yeast, that leaven, and so modify and transform the multitude.

Is yeast, by its nature, better than dough? No. But it is what makes the dough rise and become good and nourishing food.

Reflect a moment, even if only in general terms, on the way yeast works in the making of bread — that simple, staple food which is available to everyone. In many

places (you yourselves may have seen it done) the baking process is like a real ceremonial, ending up with a splendid product that you can almost taste with your eyes.

They start with good flour, of top quality if possible. Then the dough is worked in the kneading-trough and the yeast is mixed in. It is a long and patient job. The dough must now be left to rest; this is essential for the leaven to do its work and make the dough rise.

Meanwhile, the oven is made ready, its temperature rising as the logs of wood burn bright. The risen dough is placed in the glowing oven and turns into high quality bread, wonderfully light and fresh. This result would never have been possible had it not been for the small amount of leaven, which dissolved and disappeared among the other ingredients, working effectively and passing unnoticed.

258 If we pray and meditate on these words of St Paul, we will realize that we have no alternative but to work, in the service of all souls. Anything else would be selfishness. If we look at ourselves humbly, we will see clearly that, in addition to his gift of faith, Our Lord has also granted us a number of talents and qualities. None of us has been mass-produced. Our Father has created us one by one and shared out different goods among his children. It is up to us to use these talents, these qualities, in the service of all men. We are called to use the gifts God has given us as instruments to help others discover Christ.

Please don't think that the desire to help others is in the nature of an extra, a lace trimming for our ordinary lives as Christians. If leaven is not used for fermenting, it rots. There are two ways leaven can disappear, either by giving life to dough, or by being wasted, a perfect tribute to selfishness and barrenness. We are not doing Jesus a favor when we make him known to others: 'When I preach the gospel, I take no credit for that; I act under constraint,' obliged by Jesus' command; 'it would go hard with me indeed if I did not preach the Gospel.'

Going fishing

259 'Behold, I will send many fishermen, says the Lord, and I will catch those fishes.' That is his way of explaining the great task we have before us: we must become fishermen. The world is often compared, in conversation or in books, with the sea. It is a good comparison, for in our lives, just as in the sea, there are quiet times and stormy seasons, periods of calm and gusts of strong wind. One often finds souls swimming in difficult waters, in the midst of heavy waves. They travel through stormy weather, their journey one sad rush, despite their apparently cheerful expressions and their boisterousness. Their bursts of laughter are a cover for their discouragement and ill-temper. Their lives are bereft of charity and understanding. Men, like fish, devour each other.

Our task as children of God is to get all men to enter, freely, into the divine net; to get them to love each other. If we are Christians, we must seek to become fishermen like those described by the prophet Jeremiah with a metaphor which

Jesus also often used: 'Follow me and I will make you fishers of men,' he says to Peter and Andrew.

260 Let us accompany Our Lord as he goes about his divine task of fishing. We find Jesus by the Lake of Genesareth, with the crowds pressing upon him, eager 'to hear the word of God.' Just as they do today! Can't you see? They want to hear God's message, even though outwardly they may not show it. Some perhaps have forgotten Christ's teachings. Others, through no fault of their own, have never known them and they think that religion is something odd. But of this we can be sure, that in every man's life there comes a time sooner or later when his soul draws the line. He has had enough of the usual explanations. The lies of the false prophets no longer satisfy. Even though they may not admit it at the time, such people are longing to quench their thirst with the teachings of Our Lord.

Let us follow St Luke's description. 'At this he saw two boats moored by the lake, whose fishermen had gone ashore, and were washing their nets. And he went on board one of the boats, which belonged to Simon, and asked him to stand off a little from the land; and so, sitting down, he began to teach the multitudes from the boat.' When he had finished his catechizing, he told Simon: 'Put out into the deep, and lower your nets for a catch.' Christ is the master of this boat. He it is that prepares the fishing. It is for this that he has come into the world, to do all he can so that his brothers may find the way to glory and to the love of the Father. It is not we who have invented the Christian apostolate. If anything, we get in its way, through our clumsiness and lack of faith.

261 'Simon answered him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and caught nothing.' A reasonable enough reply. The night hours were their normal time for fishing, and this time the catch had yielded nothing. What was the point of fishing by day? But Peter has faith: 'nevertheless, at your word I will let down the net.' He decides to act on Christ's suggestion. He undertakes to work relying entirely on the Word of Our Lord. And what happened? 'When they had done this, they took a great quantity of fish, so that the net was near breaking, and they must needs beckon to their partners who were in the other boat to come and help them. When these came, they filled both boats, so that they were ready to sink.'

When Jesus went out to sea with his disciples he was not thinking only about the catch of fishes. And so when Peter falls down at his feet and humbly confesses: 'Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man,' Our Lord replies: 'Do not be afraid; henceforth you shall be a fisher of men.' In this new task of fishing, all the power and effectiveness of God will also be at hand: the apostles are instruments for the working of great wonders, in spite of their personal shortcomings.

Miracles will multiply

262 The same is true of us. If we struggle daily to become saints, each of us in his own situation in the world and through his own job or profession, in our ordinary lives, then I assure you that God will make us into instruments that can work miracles and, if necessary, miracles of the most extraordinary kind. We will give sight to the blind. Who could not relate thousands of cases of people, blind almost

from the day they were born, recovering their sight and receiving all the splendor of Christ's light? And others who were deaf, or dumb, who could not hear or pronounce words fitting to God's children... Their senses have been purified and now they listen and speak as men, not animals. In nomine Iesu! In the name of Jesus his Apostles enable the cripple to move and walk, when previously he had been incapable of doing anything useful; and that other lazy character, who knew his duties but didn't fulfill them... In the Lord's name, surge et ambula, rise up and walk.

Another man was dead, rotting, smelling like a corpse: he hears God's voice, as in the miracle of the son of the widow at Naim: 'Young man, I say to you, rise up.' We will work miracles like Christ did, like the first apostles did. Maybe you yourself, and I, have benefited from such wonders. Perhaps we were blind, or deaf, or paralyzed; perhaps we had the stench of death, and the word of Our Lord has lifted us up from our abject state. If we love Christ, if we follow him sincerely, if we stop seeking ourselves and seek him alone, then in his name we will be able to give to others, freely, what we have freely received.

263 I have constantly preached about this opportunity that is both supernatural and human and which is offered by God our Father to us his children: we can share in Christ's work of Redemption. How glad am I when I find this teaching in the writings of the Fathers of the Church. St Gregory the Great explains: 'Christians free men from serpents, when they uproot evil from their hearts by exhorting them to do good... They lay their hands on the sick and cure them, when they see their neighbor flagging in his good work and they offer to help in so many ways, strengthening him with their example. These miracles are all the greater in that they are worked in spiritual things and give life not to bodies but to souls. You too, if you do not weaken, will be able to work these wonders, with the help of God.'

God wants all men to be saved. This is an invitation to us and also a responsibility that weighs upon each one of us. The Church is not a place of refuge for a privileged few. 'Who says the great Church is only a small part of the earth? The great Church is the whole world.' That is how St Augustine describes it. And he adds: 'Wherever you go, Christ is there. Your inheritance reaches to the ends of the earth; come take possession of it with me.' Remember the nets? They were full to overflowing, bursting with fish. God ardently longs to see his house full. He is a Father and likes to live surrounded by all his children.

Apostolate in our daily life

264 Let us turn now to the second catch of fish, after Jesus' Passion and Death. Peter, having denied his Master three times, later wept in humble sorrow. The cock with its crowing reminded him of Our Lord's prediction and with all his heart he asked to be forgiven. While with contrite heart he waits for the promise of the Resurrection, he goes about his ordinary work: he goes fishing. 'Regarding this catch of fish, we are often asked why Peter and the sons of Zebedee returned to the jobs they had before Our Lord called them. They were fishermen when Jesus told them: "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." To those who are surprised

by this behavior, we must answer that the Apostles were not forbidden to exercise their profession, it being a legitimate and honest thing to do.'

The apostolic concern which burns in the heart of ordinary Christians is not something separate from their everyday work. It is part and parcel of one's work, which becomes a source of opportunities for meeting Christ. As we work at our job, side by side with our colleagues, friends and relatives and sharing their interests, we can help them come closer to Christ who awaits us on the shore. Before becoming apostles, we are fishermen. After becoming apostles, we are fishermen still. The same profession, before and after.

265 What has changed? There is a change inside our soul, now that Christ has come aboard, as he went aboard Peter's boat. Its horizon has opened wider. It feels a greater ambition to serve and an irrepressible desire to tell all creation about the magnalia Dei, the marvelous doings of Our Lord, if only we let him work. Here I would like to make the point that the professional work, to put it that way, of priests is a divine and public ministry, so demanding that it embraces everything they do, and to such an extent that it can be stated as a general rule that, if a priest has time to spare for other occupations that are not strictly priestly, he can be sure that he is not fulfilling the duties of his ministry.

'Simon Peter was there, and with him were Thomas, who is also called Didymus, and Nathanael, from Cana of Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two more of his disciples. Simon Peter told them, I am going out fishing; and they said, We too, will go with you. So they went out and embarked on the boat; and all that night they caught nothing. But when morning came, there was Jesus standing on the shore.'

He passes by, close to his Apostles, close to those souls who have given themselves to him and they don't realize he is there. How often Christ is not only near us, but in us; yet we still live in such a human way! Christ is so close to us and yet we can't spare him an affectionate glance, a loving word, a good deed done by his children.

266 'The disciples,' writes St John, 'did not know that it was Jesus. Have you caught anything, friends, Jesus asked them, to season your bread with?' The close, family nature of this scene fills me with happiness and joy. That Jesus, my God, should say this! He, who already has a glorified body! 'Cast to the right of the boat, and you will have a catch. So they cast the net, and found before long they had no strength to haul it in, such a shoal of fish was in it.' Now they understand. They, the disciples, recall what they have heard so often from their Master's lips: fishers of men, apostles. And they realize that all things are possible, because it is He who is directing their fishing.

'Whereupon the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, It is the Lord.' Love, love is farsighted. Love is the first to appreciate kindness. The adolescent Apostle, who felt a deep and firm affection for Jesus, because he loved Christ with all the purity and tenderness of a heart that had never been corrupted, exclaimed: 'It is the Lord!'

'Simon Peter, hearing him say that it was the Lord, girded up the fisherman's coat, and sprang into the sea.' Peter personifies faith. Full of marvelous daring, he leaps into the sea. With a love like John's and a faith like Peter's, what is there that can stop us?

Souls belong to God

267 'The other disciples followed in the boat (they were not far from land, only some hundred yards away), dragging their catch in their net behind them.' They bring in the catch and immediately place it at Our Lord's feet, because it is his. This is a lesson for us, so that we may learn that souls belong to God; that no one on earth has that right over souls; and that the Church's apostolate, by which it announces and brings about salvation, is not based on the prestige of any human beings but on the grace of God.

Jesus questions Peter, three times, as if to give him a triple chance to atone for his triple denial. Peter has learned his lesson from the bitter experience of his wretchedness. Aware of his weakness, he is deeply convinced that rash claims are pointless. Instead he puts everything in Christ's hands. 'Lord, you know well that I love you. Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.' What is Christ's reply? 'Feed my lambs, feed my sheep.' 'Not yours, Peter; not yours: mine!' Because he created man; he redeemed man; he has bought each soul, one by one, at the cost, I say once again, of his Blood.

In the fifth century, when the Donatists were orchestrating their attacks against the Catholics, they claimed that Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo, couldn't possibly profess the truth because he had previously been a great sinner. St Augustine suggested to his brothers in the faith that they could reply as follows: 'Augustine is a bishop in the Catholic Church. He bears his burden and he will have to give an account of it to God. I met him in the company of good men. If he is a bad man, he will know it. But even if he is good, it is not in him that I have put my trust, because the first thing I learned in the Catholic Church is not to put my hope in any man.'

We are not doing our apostolate. If we were, what could we possibly say? We are doing Christ's apostolate, because God wants it to be done and because he has commanded us to do it: 'Go out all over the world, and preach the Gospel to the whole of creation.' The errors are ours; the fruits are his.

Daring to speak about God

268 How are we to carry out this apostolate? First of all, by our example, by living according to the Will of the Father, as Jesus, with his life and teaching, taught us to do. True faith does not permit our actions to contradict what we say. Let us examine our own behavior, to see how genuine our faith is. We are not sincere believers if we are not striving to put into practice what we preach with our lips.

269 This is a good moment to recall and reflect on an event that demonstrates the wonderful apostolic zeal of the early Christians. Scarcely a quarter of a century had

passed since Jesus had gone up to heaven and already his fame had spread to many towns and villages. In the city of Ephesus a man arrived, Apollo by name, 'an eloquent man, well grounded in the Scriptures. He had had instruction in the name of the Lord; and, with a spirit full of zeal, used to preach and teach about the life of Jesus, accurately enough, although he knew of no baptism except that of John.'

A glimmer of Christ's light had already filtered into the mind of this man. He had heard about Our Lord and he passed the news on to others. But he still had some way to go. He needed to know more if he was to acquire the fullness of the faith and so come to love Our Lord truly. A Christian couple, Aquila and Priscilla hear him speaking; they are not inactive or indifferent. They do not think: 'This man already knows enough; it's not our business to teach him.' They were souls who were really eager to do apostolate and so they approach Apollo and 'made friends with him, and gave him a fuller explanation of the way of the Lord.'

270 Then there is St Paul. How admirably he behaves! Imprisoned for spreading the teachings of Christ, he misses no opportunity of preaching the Gospel. Brought before Festus and Agrippa, he declares unflinchingly: 'Thanks to God's help, I still stand here today, bearing my witness to great and small alike. Yet there is nothing in my message which goes beyond what the prophets spoke of, and Moses spoke of, as things to come; a suffering Christ, and one who should show light to his people and to the Gentiles by being the first to rise from the dead.'

The Apostle doesn't silence or hide his faith, or his apostolic propaganda that had brought down on him the hatred of his persecutors. He continues preaching salvation to everyone he meets. And, with marvelous daring, he boldly asks Agrippa: 'Do you believe the prophets, King Agrippa? I know you do.' When Agrippa comments: 'You would have me turn Christian with very little ado. Why, said Paul, it would be my prayer to God that, whether it were with much ado or little, both you and all those who are listening to me today should become just as I am, but for these chains.'

271 Where did St Paul get all his strength from? *Omnia possum in eo qui me confortat!* I can do all things, because God alone gives me this faith, this hope, this charity. I find it very hard to believe in the supernatural effectiveness of an apostolate that is not based, is not solidly centered, on a life of constant conversation with Our Lord. Yes, right there in our work; in our own home, or in the street, with all the small or big problems that arise daily. Right there, not taken away from those things, but with our hearts fixed on God. Then our words, our actions — our defects! — will give forth the bonus odor Christi, the sweet fragrance of Christ, which other men will inevitably notice and say: 'Here is a Christian.'

272 If you were to fall into the temptation of wondering, 'who's telling me to embark on this?' We would have to reply: 'Christ himself is telling you, is begging you.' 'The harvest is plentiful enough, but the laborers are few. You must ask the Lord to whom the harvest belongs to send laborers out for the harvesting.' Don't take the easy way out. Don't say, 'I'm no good at this sort of thing; there are others who can do it; it isn't my line.' No, for this sort of thing, there is no one else: if you could get

away with that argument, so could everyone else. Christ's plea is addressed to each and every Christian. No one can consider himself excused, for whatever reason: age, health or occupation. There are no excuses whatsoever. Either we carry out a fruitful apostolate, or our faith will prove barren.

273 Besides, who ever said that to speak about Christ and to spread his doctrine, you need to do anything unusual or remarkable? Just live your ordinary life; work at your job, trying to fulfill the duties of your state in life, doing your job, your professional work properly, improving, getting better each day. Be loyal; be understanding with others and demanding on yourself. Be mortified and cheerful. This will be your apostolate. Then, though you won't see why, because you're very aware of your own wretchedness, you will find that people come to you. Then you can talk to them, quite simply and naturally — on your way home from work for instance, or in a family gathering, on a bus, walking down the street, anywhere. You will chat about the sort of longings that everyone feels deep down in his soul, even though some people may not want to pay attention to them: they will come to understand them better, when they begin to look for God in earnest.

Ask Mary, Regina Apostolorum, Queen of the Apostles, to help you make up your mind to share the desires of sowing and fishing that fill the Heart of her Son. I can assure You that if you begin, you will see the boat filled, just like the fishermen from Galilee did. And you will find Christ on the shore, waiting for you. Because the catch belongs to him.

MOTHER OF GOD AND OUR MOTHER

A homily given on 11 October 1964, the Feast of the Motherhood of the Blessed Virgin Mary

The faith of the Christian people

Mother of Fair Love

Mother of the Church

Teacher of faith, hope and charity

Our Mother

274 All the feasts of Our Lady are great events, because they are opportunities that the Church gives us to show with deeds that we love Mary. But if I had to choose one among all her feasts, I would choose today's, the feast of the divine Motherhood of the Blessed Virgin.

Today's celebration brings us to consider some of the central mysteries of our faith. We meditate on the Incarnation of the Word, which is the work of the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity. Through the Incarnation of Our Lord in her immaculate womb, Mary, the Daughter of God the Father, is also the Spouse of God the Holy Spirit and the Mother of God the Son. .PP When the Blessed Virgin said Yes, freely, to the plans revealed to her by the Creator, the divine Word assumed a human

nature: a rational soul and a body, which was formed in the most pure womb of Mary. The divine nature and the human were united in a single Person: Jesus Christ, true God and, thenceforth, true Man; the only-begotten and eternal Son of the Father and, from that moment on, as Man, the true son of Mary. This is why Our Lady is the Mother of the Incarnate Word, the second Person of the Blessed Trinity who has united our human nature to himself for ever, without any confusion of the two natures. The greatest praise we can give to the Blessed Virgin is to address her loud and clear by the name that expresses her very highest dignity: Mother of God.

The faith of the Christian people

275 This has always been the true belief of Christians. Against those who denied it, the Council of Ephesus proclaimed that 'if anyone should deny that the Emmanuel is truly God, and that therefore the most Blessed Virgin is the Mother of God, since she gave birth according to the flesh to the incarnate Word of God, let him be anathema.'

History has handed down to us eye-witness accounts of the joy felt by the Christians when they received such clear, precise definitions, which reaffirmed what everyone believed. In the words of St Cyril, 'The entire community of the city of Ephesus, from the first hours of the day until nightfall, waited anxiously for the resolution... When it became known that the author of the blasphemies had been deposed, with one voice we began to glorify God and to acclaim the Synod, for the enemy of the faith had fallen. On leaving the church we went by torchlight to our houses. It was night time and the whole city was joyful and illuminated.' I must say that, even at a distance of sixteen centuries, their outburst of piety impresses me deeply.

God grant that this same faith may burn in our hearts, and that a hymn of thanksgiving may rise from our lips: for the Blessed Trinity, in choosing Mary as the Mother of Christ, a Man like us, has brought each one of us under the shelter of her maternal cloak. She is the Mother of God and our Mother.

276 The divine Motherhood of Mary is the source of all the perfections and privileges with which she is endowed. Because of it, she was conceived immaculate and is full of grace; because of it, she is ever virgin, she was taken up body and soul to heaven and has been crowned Queen of all creation, above the angels and saints. Greater than she, none but God. 'The Blessed Virgin from the fact that she is the Mother of God has a certain infinite dignity which comes from the infinite good, which is God.' There is no danger of exaggerating. We can never hope to fathom this inexpressible mystery; nor will we ever be able to give sufficient thanks to our Mother for bringing us into such intimacy with the Blessed Trinity.

We were sinners and enemies of God. Redemption has not only freed us from sin and reconciled us with Our Lord. It has also made us into children of God and has given us a Mother, the very Mother who gave birth to the Word when he took human nature. Could there ever be a greater, more generous, outpouring of love? God longed to redeem us and, in his infinite wisdom, could have chosen many

different ways of carrying out his most holy Will. He chose one which dispels all possible doubts about our salvation and glorification. 'Just as the first Adam was not born of man and woman, but was formed of earth, so also the last Adam, who was to heal the wound of the first, took a body formed in the womb of the Blessed Virgin, in order to be, in his flesh, equal to the flesh of those who sinned.'

Mother of Fair Love

277 Ego quasi vitis fructificavi...: 'like the vine I sprouted beautiful branches and my blossoms gave forth savory and rich fruits.' We have read these words in today's Epistle. May our souls and the souls of all Christians be full of that sweet fragrance which is devotion to our Mother, and may it bring us to trust entirely in her who watches over us at all times.

'I am the Mother of fair love, and of fear, and of knowledge and of holy hope.' These are the lessons which Mary reminds us of today. The lesson of fair love, of living a clean life, of having a sensitive and passionate heart, so that we may learn to be faithful in our service to the Church. This is no ordinary love. It is Love itself. There is no room here for betrayal, or calculation, or forgetfulness. It is a fair, a beautiful love, because its beginning and end is God, who is thrice Holy, who is all Beauty, all Goodness and all Greatness.

But there is also a reference to fear. For myself, the only fear I can imagine is that of turning away from Love. God Our Lord certainly does not want us to be inhibited, timid or lukewarm about our dedication to him. He wants us to be daring, courageous and refined. When the sacred text speaks of fear here I am reminded of a complaint we find elsewhere in Scripture, 'I searched for my heart's love, but found him not.'

This can happen, if one has not yet fully understood what it means to love God. Then our hearts can be swayed by things which do not lead to Our Lord and so we lose sight of him. At other times it may be Our Lord who hides himself. He knows the reason why. In such cases, he will be encouraging us to seek him more earnestly and, when we find him, we shall be able to cry out with joy, 'I took hold of him and I will never let him go.'

278 The Gospel in today's Mass has called to our minds a moving scene in Jesus' life, when he stayed behind in Jerusalem teaching in the temple. Mary and Joseph 'had gone a whole day's journey before they made enquiry for him among their kinsfolk and acquaintances. When they could not find him, they made their way back to Jerusalem in search of him.' The Mother of God, who looked for her Son so anxiously when he was lost through no fault of her own, and experienced such great joy in finding him, will help us retrace our steps and put right whatever may be necessary when, because of our carelessness or our sins, we have been unable to recognize Christ. With her help we will know the happiness of holding him in our arms once more, and telling him we will never lose him again.

Mary is also the Mother of knowledge, for it is with her that we learn the most important lesson of all, that nothing is worthwhile if we are not close to Our Lord.

All the wonders of this earth, the fulfillment of our every ambition, all this is worthless unless the living flame of love burns within us, unless there is the light of holy hope giving us a foretaste of never-ending love in our true homeland in heaven.

279 'In me is to be found every grace of doctrine and of truth, every hope of life and of virtue.' How wise the Church is to put these words on our Mother's lips so that we Christians do not forget them. She is our safety, the Love that never fails, the refuge ever open to us, the hand ever ready to caress and console.

One of the Fathers of the early Church said that we should try to keep in our minds and in our memories a clear summary of the life of the Mother of God. I expect you have often looked up points in handbooks on medicine, mathematics or other subjects, where they list, for quick reference, the immediate remedies or measures to be taken so as to avoid elementary mistakes in these subjects.

280 We should often meditate, in the calm and quiet of our prayer, on all we have heard about our Mother. The reward will be that the story of her life will become engraved on our souls; we will find ourselves going to her without hesitation, especially when we have no one else to turn to. This may sound like self interest on our part. It is, of course; but then don't all mothers know that we children tend to be somewhat self interested, and that we often turn to them only as a last resort? They know this very well, but it doesn't really worry them. That comes with being a mother, and their disinterested love is able to discern, through our apparent selfishness, our filial affection and our trusting confidence.

I am not suggesting, either for myself or for you, that our devotion to Mary should be limited to times of urgent need. I feel, nevertheless, that we should not feel humiliated if this happens to us from time to time. Mothers don't keep a record of their children's tokens of affection; nor do they weigh them up or measure them with petty calculations. A tiny sign of affection is as sweet as honey to them, and they give themselves generously in return, bestowing much more than they receive. If good earthly mothers react in this way, just imagine what we can expect from our Holy Mother Mary.

Mother of the Church

281 I like to go back in my imagination to the years Jesus spent close to his Mother, years which span almost the whole of his life on earth. I like to picture him as a little child, cared for by Mary who kisses him and plays with him. I like to see him growing up before the loving eyes of his Mother and of Joseph, his father on earth. What tenderness and care Mary and the Holy Patriarch must have shown towards Jesus, as they looked after him during his childhood, all the while, silently, learning so much from him. Their souls would become more and more like the soul of that Son, who was both Man and God. This is why his Mother, and after her St Joseph, understand better than anyone the feelings of the Heart of Christ; and the two of them are thus the best way, I would say the only way, to reach the Savior.

'May the soul of Mary,' writes St Ambrose, 'be in each of you, so that you may praise Our Lord; may the spirit of Mary be in each one of you, so that you may rejoice in God.' This Father of the Church goes on to say something which at first sight seems bold, but which has a clear spiritual meaning for the life of the Christian. 'According to the flesh, there is only one Mother of Christ; according to the faith, Christ is the fruit of all of us.'

If we become identified with Mary and imitate her virtues, we will be able to bring Christ to life, through grace, in the souls of many who will in turn become identified with him through the action of the Holy Spirit. If we imitate Mary, we will share in some way in her spiritual motherhood. And all this silently, like Our Lady; without being noticed, almost without words, through the true and genuine witness of our lives as Christians, and the generosity of ceaselessly repeating her fiat, which we renew as an intimate link between ourselves and God.

282 I want to tell you something that was said to me by a good Christian, who has a great love for Our Lady, though he is no expert in theology. I am going to tell it to you just as he said it, because in its simplicity it is the natural reaction of an untutored mind.

'I needed to talk about this to someone,' he said. 'I get terribly upset at some of the things that are going on nowadays. In the preparatory meetings for the present Council and during the Council itself proposals were made to include the "theme of the Blessed Virgin". Just like that, "the theme"! Is that the proper way for children to speak of their mother? Is that the way our fathers professed their faith? Since when has love for the Blessed Virgin become a "theme" to be discussed as to whether or not it is appropriate?

'There is nothing more at odds with love than stinginess. I am not afraid of speaking out clearly,' he continued, 'in fact, if I didn't, I would feel I was insulting our Holy Mother. It has been discussed whether or not it was right to call Mary the Mother of the Church. It hurts me to have to spell this out, but surely, since she is the Mother of God and the Mother of all Christians, she must be the Mother of the Church, which gathers together all those who have been baptized and reborn in Christ, the Son of Mary.

'I can't understand,' he went on, 'where the pettiness comes from which hesitates at giving that title of praise to Our Lady. How different the faith of the Church is! The "theme" of the Blessed Virgin! Do children discuss the "theme" of love for their mother? They love her, and that's all there is to it. If they are good children, they will love her a lot. Only strangers approaching the matter with clinical coldness, as if it were a case to be studied, could speak about "themes" or "drafts".' That was how that simple and devout soul put it. A well-intentioned and pious outpouring, although not altogether fair.

283 Let us now return to our consideration of this mystery of the divine Motherhood of Mary, praying quietly and affirming from the bottom of our hearts, 'Virgin Mother of God, He whom the whole world cannot contain, enclosed himself in your womb to take the flesh of man.'

See what the liturgy proposes for our prayer today: 'Blessed be the womb of the Virgin Mary, which bore the Son of the eternal Father.' An exclamation both old and new, human and divine. We are telling Our Lord, as they do in some places when they want to praise someone, 'Blessed be the mother who brought you into the world!'

Teacher of faith, hope and charity

284 'The charity of Mary brought about the birth of the faithful into the Church, who are members of that head of which she is effectively the mother according to the flesh.' Mary teaches us as a mother does, and, being a mother, she does so quietly. We need to have a sensitivity of soul, a touch of refinement, in order to understand what she is showing us, by what she does more than by what she promises.

She teaches us to have faith. 'Blessed art thou for thy believing,' were the words of greeting uttered by her cousin Elizabeth when Our Lady went up into the hill country to visit her. Mary's act of faith had been a wonderful one, 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to thy word.' When her Son was born she contemplated the greatness of God on earth: a choir of angels was present, and not only the shepherds, but also important men of this world came to adore the Child. Afterwards, however, the Holy Family had to flee to Egypt, to escape Herod's murderous intent. Then, silence; thirty long years of simple, ordinary life, just like that of any other home in a small village in Galilee.

285 In a few brief words, the Holy Gospel points the way for us to understand our Mother's example: 'Mary treasured up all these sayings, and reflected on them in her heart.' Let us try to imitate her, talking to Our Lord, conversing like two people in love about everything that happens to us, even the most insignificant incidents. Nor should we forget that we have to weigh them, consider their value, and see them with the eyes of faith, in order to discover the Will of God.

If our faith is weak, we should turn to Mary. St John tells us that it was because of the miracle at the marriage feast at Cana, which Christ performed at his Mother's request, that 'his disciples learned to believe in him.' Our Mother is always interceding with her Son so that he may attend to our needs and show himself to us in such a way that we can cry out, 'You are the Son of God.'

286 Mary teaches us to hope. She proclaimed: 'all generations will call me blessed.' Humanly speaking, how could she hope for such a thing? Who was she, in the eyes of the men and women of her time? The great heroines of the Old Testament — Judith, Esther, Deborah — won a measure of human glory even here on earth, for they were acclaimed and exalted by the people. Mary's throne, by contrast, like that of her Son, is the Cross. During the rest of her life, until she was taken body and soul into Heaven, what most impresses us about her is her quiet presence. St Luke, who knew her well, describes her as being close to the first disciples, in prayer. This was the way she lived to the end of her days on earth, she who was to be praised by all creatures for all eternity.

What a contrast between Our Lady's hope and our own impatience! So often we call upon God to reward us at once for any little good we have done. No sooner does the first difficulty appear than we start to complain. Often we are incapable of sustaining our efforts, of keeping our hope alive. Why? Because we lack faith. 'Blessed art thou for thy believing; the message that was brought to thee from the Lord shall have fulfillment.'

287 She teaches us to have charity. Remember the scene of the presentation of Jesus in the temple. An old man, Simeon, 'said to his mother Mary, Behold, this child is destined to bring about the fall of many and the rise of many in Israel; and to be a sign which men will refuse to acknowledge; and so the thoughts of many hearts shall be made manifest; as for your own soul, it shall have a sword to pierce it.' So great is Mary's love for all mankind that she, too, fulfilled Christ's words when he affirmed: 'Greater love has no man than this, that he should lay down his life for his friends.'

It is with good reason that the Popes have called Mary Co-Redemptrix. 'So fully, in union with her suffering and dying Son, did she suffer and nearly die; so fully, for the sake of the salvation of men, did she abdicate her mother's rights over her Son, and immolate him, insofar as it was in her power, to satisfy the justice of God, that it can rightly be said that she redeemed mankind together with Christ.' This gives us a deeper understanding of that moment in the Passion of Our Lord, which we shall never tire of meditating: *Stabat autem iuxta crucem Iesu mater eius*, 'there, standing by the cross of Jesus, was his Mother.'

I expect you have noticed how some mothers, moved by a legitimate pride, are quick to appear alongside their children when success comes their way, when they receive some public acclaim. But there are other mothers who, even at times like these, stay in the background, showing their love silently. This was Mary's way, and Jesus knew it.

288 But when it comes to the scandal of the Sacrifice of the Cross, Mary is there, hearing with sadness how 'the passers-by blasphemed against him, tossing their heads, Come now, they said, you would destroy the temple and build it up in three days, rescue yourself; come down from that cross, if you are the Son of God.' Our Lady is there listening to the words of her Son, united to him in his suffering, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' What could she do? She united herself fully with the redemptive love of her Son, and offered to the Father her immense sorrow, which pierced her pure Heart like a sharp edged sword.

Jesus is comforted anew by the quiet, loving presence of his Mother. Mary does not shout; she does not run about frantically. *Stabat*: she is there, standing next to her Son. It is then that Jesus looks at her, and then turning his gaze to John he exclaims, 'Woman, this is thy son. Then he said to the disciple, This is thy Mother.' In the person of John, Christ is entrusting all men to his Mother, and especially his disciples: those who were to believe in him.

Felix culpa, the Church sings. Happy fault, that has brought us so great and wonderful a Redeemer. Happy fault, we could add, which has merited that we

should receive Mary as our Mother. Now we are safe. Nothing should worry us now, because Our Lady, the crowned Queen of heaven and earth, is omnipotent in her supplication before our Father God. Jesus cannot deny anything to Mary, nor to us, who are children of his own Mother.

Our Mother

289 Children, especially when they are small, give very little thought to what they should do for their parents and are much more concerned about what they hope to get from them. As children, we tend to be very self-interested, although our mothers, as we have already mentioned, do not seem to mind really, because they have so much love in their hearts and they love with the best kind of affection: that which gives without expecting anything in return.

The same is true of Mary. But today, on the feast of her divine Motherhood, we should try to be more attentive than usual. If we find there have been times when we failed to be gentle and kind towards this good Mother of ours, we should feel sorry. I ask you now, as I ask myself, how are we honoring her?

Let us return once again to our everyday experience and see how we behave with our earthly mothers. What does a mother want most of all from her children, from those who are flesh of her flesh and blood of her blood? Her greatest desire is to have them close to her. When the children grow up and it is no longer possible to have them beside her, she waits impatiently for news from them, and everything that happens to them, from the slightest illness to the most important events, concerns her deeply.

290 Look: in the eyes of our Mother Mary we never cease to be little, because she opens to us the way to the Kingdom of Heaven, which will only be given to those who become little children. We should never separate ourselves from Our Lady. How should we honor her? By keeping close to her, talking to her, showing her that we love her, pondering in our hearts the scenes of her life on earth and telling her about our struggles, successes and failures.

When we do this we discover the meaning of the Marian prayers, which the Church has always used, as if we were saying them for the very first time. What are the Hail Mary and the Angelus if not loving praises of her divine Motherhood? And when we say the Holy Rosary, which is a wonderful devotion which I will never tire of recommending to Christians everywhere, our minds and hearts go over the mysteries of Mary's admirable life which are, at the same time, the fundamental mysteries of our faith.

291 The liturgical year is adorned with feasts in honor of Mary. The basis of this cult is the divine Motherhood of Our Lady, which is the fount of all the gifts of nature and grace lavished on her by the Blessed Trinity. Anyone who fears that the cult of veneration given to the Blessed Virgin could in some way lessen the cult of adoration given to God shows scant knowledge of his Christian faith and very little filial love. Our Mother, the model of humility, sang, 'from this day forward all generations will count me blessed; because he who is mighty, he whose name is

holy, has wrought for me his wonders. He has mercy upon those who fear him, from generation to generation.'

When the feasts of Our Lady come round let us not be sparing in our tokens of affection. Let us raise our hearts to her more often, asking her for what we need, thanking her for her constant, motherly care and entrusting to her the people we love. Though, naturally, if we really want to act as good children, every day is a good day for loving Mary, just as every day is a good day for those who really love one another.

292 Perhaps some of you might be thinking that the ordinary comings and goings of your working day are not going to help you much to stay close to someone as pure as Our Lady. But I would just ask you to reflect a little. What are we looking for all the time in things we do, even without thinking about it especially? If we are motivated by the love of God and we work with a right intention, then we are seeking whatever is good and clean, whatever brings peace to our conscience and happiness to our soul. Yes, you might say, but don't we still have our faults? Indeed, but it is precisely by acknowledging our faults that we are able to see, more clearly than ever, just what our goal has to be. What we are looking for is happiness; not a momentary happiness, but one that is deep and lasting and both human and supernatural.

There is one creature who achieved such happiness here on earth because she is God's masterpiece: our most holy Mother Mary. She lives now and is protecting us. She is there, body and soul, with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. She is the same person who was born in Palestine, who gave herself to God while still a child, who received the message from St Gabriel the Archangel, who gave birth to our Savior and who stood beside him at the foot of the Cross.

In her, all ideals become a reality; but this should not make us think that her sublime greatness makes her inaccessible to us. She is the one who is full of grace and the sum of all perfections; and she is also our Mother. Her power before God is such that she can obtain anything we ask for, and, like any mother, she wants to answer our prayers. Like any mother also, she knows and understands our weaknesses. She encourages us and makes excuses for us. She makes the way easy for us and, even when we think there is no possible solution for our worry, she always has one ready to offer us.

293 If we truly got to know Mary our Mother, how quickly the supernatural virtues would grow in us! Let us not be shy about repeating short prayers and aspirations to her throughout the day. There is no need to say them out loud, we can say them in our heart. Christian devotion has gathered together many of these loving words of praise in the Litany which accompanies the Holy Rosary. But each one of us is free to think up new ones, and address new praises to her, telling her with our heart — with a holy bashfulness that she understands and approves — what we would not dare to say out loud.

Finally, I would recommend that, if you haven't already done so, you find out for yourself by personal experience the meaning of Mary's maternal love. It is not

enough just to know she is our Mother and to think and to talk about her as such. She is your Mother and you are her son. She loves you as if you were her only child in this world. Treat her accordingly: tell her about everything that happens to you, honor her and love her. No one will do it for you or as well as you, if you do not do it yourself.

I give you my word that, if you set out along this way, you will quickly discover all the love of Christ: and you will find yourself drawn into the ineffable life of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. You will draw strength from it to put the Will of God fully into practice, and you will be filled with desires of serving all men. You will be the Christian you have sometimes dreamed of being: full of works of charity and justice, happy and strong, understanding towards others and demanding on yourself.

This, and no other, is the kind of faith we want. Let us have recourse to our Mother Mary; she will accompany us and help us make firm and constant progress.

In Love with the Church

By Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer

Introduction: Josemaría Escrivá and His Love for the Church

Loyalty to the Church

The Supernatural Aim of the Church

A Priest Forever

Passionately loving the world

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INTRODUCTION: JOSEMARÍA ESCRIVÁ AND HIS LOVE FOR THE CHURCH

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Testimony of love for the Church

In a homily which he preached in 1963, the Founder of Opus Dei recalled: "When Pope John XXIII closed the first session of the Second Vatican Council and announced that the name of Saint Joseph was to be included in the canon of the Mass, a prominent churchman telephoned me to say: "'Rallegramenti!' Congratulations! Listening to the Pope's announcement, I thought immediately of you and of how happy you would be". And indeed I was happy, for in that conciliar gathering, which represented the whole Church brought together in the Holy Spirit, there was proclaimed the great supernatural value of Saint Joseph's life, the value of an ordinary life of work done in God's presence, and in total fulfilment of his will."

The Universal Call to Sanctity

At the request of Pope John XXIII, and afterwards of Pope Paul VI, I was called to work as President of the "Commission on the Laity" in the pre-preparatory phase of the Council, and during the Council, as Secretary of the "Commission on the Discipline of the Clergy and of the Christian People", as well as consultant to four other commissions dealing with important doctrinal and disciplinary matters within the wide range of issues touched upon by the Second Vatican Council. While the results of the work of all these different commissions were being gathered together during the Council's final sessions, I frequently recalled that small but significant telephone call. So often, in the course of approval of one Council document or another, it would have been a matter of perfect justice to turn to the Founder of Opus Dei and to say: "Congratulations! What you have lived in your own soul, and have untiringly taught since 1928, has been proclaimed, with all solemnity, by the Magisterium of the Church!"

Going back in mind and heart to the days of the Council, I can single out two reasons, above all, that led me to say to Our Lord: "Gratias tibi Deus, gratias tibi" - thank you, O God, thank you! The first of these was a vivid recollection from some thirty years earlier. At that time, while I was studying engineering, by the grace of God I received the vocation to Opus Dei, helped by the prayer, mortification and example of its Founder. He helped me to get to grips with my own conscience in a way which gave a new direction to my life as a Christian in the middle of the world, yet with no change of state whatsoever. A great impact was made upon me when I heard from his lips or read in his writings, statements so simple and so tremendous as: "We have come to say, with the humility of men who know themselves to be sinners and of little importance - "homo peccator sum" (I am a sinful man) in the words of Saint Peter - but with the faith of persons who allow themselves to be guided by the hand of God, that sanctity is not something for a privileged few. Our Lord calls all men, and from all he expects Love: from all, no matter what their state, their profession or occupation in life."

Elsewhere, in "The Way", a book of spirituality published in 1939 as an expanded version of his "Consideraciones espirituales" which had appeared in 1934, Monsignor Escrivá insisted on this point with great conviction: "Your duty is to

sanctify yourself. Yes, even you. Who thinks that this task is only for priests and religious? To everyone, without exception, our Lord said: Be perfect, as my heavenly Father is perfect."

This doctrine of the universal call to sanctity was deeply felt in the heart of the Founder of Opus Dei and he repeated it continually, despite the possibility, or even the certainty, that those who had a narrow (some would say monopolistic), vision of the fullness of Christian life, might not understand him very well at all. "From the beginning of the Work in 1928," he wrote some years ago, "I have preached that sanctity is not something for privileged individuals. We have to make it known that all the paths of the earth, all states in life, all professions and honest tasks can be divine."

With the passing of time and through the generosity of the Founder of Opus Dei through his faithful correspondence to divine grace, these teachings have spread throughout the entire world. (By 1965, more than two million copies of "The Way" had already been printed in twelve languages.) Above all, they had become truths firmly implanted in the daily lives of hundreds of thousands of Christians who were either members of Opus Dei or in regular contact with the activities of personal formation organized by the Work.

Hence we can be assured that the Council was fully justified in saying in the Dogmatic Constitution "Lumen gentium": "It is therefore quite clear that all Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love."

"Accordingly, all Christians, in and through the conditions, duties and circumstances of their life, will sanctify themselves more and more..."

"All the faithful are invited and obliged to holiness and the perfection of their own state in life."

The perfect correspondence of Monsignor Escrivá's teaching with that of the Council documents, not only here but also in so many other points, is certainly obvious. I am a witness to the fact that it never passed through the mind of the Founder of Opus Dei to seek the recognition, which he in fact merited and as so many eminent persons in the Church have already pointed out, as being one of the great forerunners of the Second Vatican Council.

His untiring priestly zeal acted through his richly supernatural and human personality, which was so profoundly warm and communicative. It led him, in the course of more than fifty years as a priest, to deal with hundreds of thousands of persons of all ages and conditions, who sought his spiritual counsel and assistance. Since the time of Opus Dei's foundation, he had tirelessly received people singly or in groups. These groups were by necessity quite large at times, as for example, during his trips of "catechesis" - as he liked to call his work - through nearly all of Europe and the Americas. Besides these large-scale get-togethers, there were others which were a constant feature of his daily life and in which non-Catholics and non-Christians from the most varied parts of the globe would come

to see him in Rome, where he lived since 1946. "I cannot say "No"," he would repeat while at the same time making sure, and at the cost of notable sacrifice, that this direct priestly work did not in any way jeopardise the other "very direct" priestly task of governing the Work, because he always discovered in his work, that of each moment, the duty of co-redeeming, of seeing souls.

I recall all this, because among the innumerable friends of Monsignor Escrivá there were many bishops from various countries (Council fathers in those years of Vatican II), who benefited from the warmth of his priestly affection - so direct, cordial and loyal - as well as from the light of a deep interior life and vast pastoral experience. How many were the occasions - I can vouch for them since I was present at those conversations - on which that life and experience shed light on grave doctrinal and disciplinary problems, all the while respecting with delicate reserve the workings of the Council.

This huge priestly capacity to give of himself - "I cannot say "No"" - was always accompanied by an effort "to hide and to disappear", to carefully avoid any of the multiple forms in which the subtle temptations of personal affirmation can disguise themselves, even in apostolic work. In 1934 he had written: "To shine like a star... the desire to be a high burning flame in the heavens? Better to be like a torch that burns hidden but igniting all that it touches. This is your apostolate; this is why you have been placed here on earth."

Many years later, in 1975, when he was about to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of his priesthood, he told us, his children: "I don't want you to prepare a solemn affair, because I want to spend this anniversary in accordance with my usual practice: my role is to hide and disappear, so that only Jesus stands out." I cannot but confess that my heart was filled with joy, together with that serene sorrow which faith gives to those who have been separated from the ones whom they love, when I was able to re-read in some of the earliest papers of the Founder of Opus Dei the same intention expressed in the very same words, written with quick and well-defined strokes: "to hide myself and disappear."

The Second Vatican Council ended its last session more than ten years ago, and has become a part of history. Monsignor Escrivá continues to live, but now he is in Heaven, and despite his wishes, it is no longer possible for him to hide himself because: "A city cannot be hidden if it is built on a mountain-top."

Although extensive and detailed studies will be needed to tap all of the doctrinal wealth, both theoretical and practical, which the Founder of Opus Dei has brought to the living body of the Church, I think that it is well worth while mentioning here, even if it be only in summary fashion, some particular points, "because it is a glorious thing to proclaim the works of God", works which the Lord has carried out in making use of an instrument that was "good and faithful."

The Priestly Soul: The Universal Call to Apostolate

If one were to describe the core of the Second Vatican Council's teaching and its overall thought, a primary place would be given to the concept of the Church as "a

people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit", according to an expression of Saint Cyprian in the Council's Constitution "Lumen gentium". The united people, the Mystical Body of Christ, extends the redemptive and sanctifying action of the Head to the end of time. It does so through all of the Catholic faithful, because all of them are called to carry out the great task of bringing men to God, each one in his or her particular circumstances. "The Lord Jesus 'whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world' (John 10:36) makes his whole Mystical Body share in the anointing of the Spirit wherewith He has been anointed: for in that Body all the faithful are made a holy and a kingly priesthood."

When Monsignor Escrivá dealt with this teaching concerning the common priesthood of the faithful, even in the early years of Opus Dei he would remind the members of the Work - laymen with a wide variety of professions and involved in all sorts of secular occupations - that this priestly soul was completely compatible with their lay mentality. "If the Son of God has become a man and died on the Cross, it was so that all men might be one with Him and the Father (cf John 17:22). All of us, therefore, are called to form a part of this divine unity. With a priestly soul and with the Holy Mass as the centre of our interior life, we strive to be present with Jesus, between God and men." "Through Baptism all of us have been made priests of our lives, 'to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ' (1 Pet 2:5), to carry out our every action with a spirit of obedience to God's will and to thus perpetuate the mission of the God-man." This explains the apostolic responsibility of the priestly soul, which feels the divine urging, stemming from Baptism, to co-redeem with Christ.

The Council has reminded us that: "Every activity of the Mystical Body with this in view (the spreading of the Kingdom of Christ on earth) is called apostolate. The Church realizes it through all her members, though in different ways. In fact, the Christian vocation, of its nature, is a vocation to the apostolate." Within that hierarchical order which the ministerial priesthood establishes and guarantees, the mission of Christ and the Church continues in a mission which corresponds, *ratione Baptismi*, to all the faithful, active members of a living body: "Each disciple of Christ has the obligation of spreading the faith to the best of his ability."

This universal call to the apostolate, inseparably united in the priestly soul to the universal call to sanctity, was another constant point of emphasis in the teaching of Monsignor Escrivá. He always saw the apostolic responsibility of laymen as a divine command, the vital effect which is produced by sacramental grace, because Christ himself had entrusted to the baptized the duty and the right to dedicate themselves to apostolate. This apostolate is meant to be carried out above all and primarily in and through the very circumstances and the very same secular - not ecclesiastical - structures which form the framework of their everyday lives as citizens and ordinary Christians: "In 1932, commenting for my sons and daughters in Opus Dei on some aspects and consequences of the special dignity and responsibility which Baptism confers upon people, I wrote for them in a document: 'The prejudice that ordinary members of the faithful must limit themselves to assisting the clergy in ecclesiastical apostolates has to be rejected. There is no reason why the secular apostolate should always be a mere participation in the

apostolate of the hierarchy Lay people, too, have a duty to do apostolate: not because they receive a canonical mission, but because they are a part of the Church. Their mission... is fulfilled in their profession, their job, their family, and among their colleagues and friends."

The priestly soul - that is, a soul which desires to make the spiritual priesthood it has received actually bear fruit means an apostolic spirit, a yearning to serve, an effort to turn the most ordinary actions, one's family and social relations, one's ordinary professional work, into the effective occasion of a filial and continuous encounter with God. The Founder of Opus Dei was only repeating this call anew when, during his catechesis throughout all of Latin America, he would state: "Christ is always passing by; passing, but with the desire to stay." We Christians live with an obligation to communicate to all men the fact that Christ is always passing by our side, desiring to travel together with each one of us along the very same path. And he wants, if we listen to him, to remain with us as on that marvellous afternoon in Emmaus.

I recall one of the last delicate gestures of Our Lord towards his servant, Josemaría Escrivá. The last words which he spoke in public, only two hours before his departure for Heaven, dealt with that priestly soul which is common to all Christians. It was like a confirmation of what he had constantly preached. These words were spoken in a university centre, located in Castalgandolfo, under the direction of the Women's Section of Opus Dei. He was speaking there to women students from twenty one countries: from Australia to Poland, from the Philippines to Kenya. The Father said: "Because you are Christians, you have a priestly soul. I tell you this whenever I come here. Your brothers who are laymen also have a priestly soul. You are able to act, and you ought to act, with that priestly soul. And thus with the grace of God and the ministerial priesthood which we priests of the Work have we will carry out an efficacious apostolate."

The Sanctification of Work

"Since it is characteristic of the layman's state in life to live in the midst of the world and secular occupations, laymen are called by God so that, moved by a Christian spirit, they exercise their apostolate in the world, acting like leaven." These considerations of the Decree *Apostolicam actuositatem* are closely linked to a text of the Constitution *Gaudium et spes* in which the Second Vatican Council, expressly referring to the "ordinary tasks" of men, declares that Christians "can rightly look upon their work as a prolongation of the work of the Creator, a service to their fellow men, and their personal contribution to the fulfilment in history of the divine plan."

Monsignor Escrivá emphasised, day after day, that the work of man is a sanctifiable reality, and an instrument of one's own sanctification and that of others. "What I have always taught, over the last forty years, is that a Christian should do all honest human work, be it intellectual or manual, with the greatest perfection possible: with human perfection (professional competence) and with Christian perfection (for love of God's will and as a service to mankind). Human

work done in this manner, no matter how humble or insignificant it may seem, helps to shape the world in a Christian way. The world's divine dimension is made more visible and our human labour is thus incorporated into the marvellous work of Creation and Redemption. It is raised to the order of grace. It is sanctified and becomes God's work, *operatio Dei*, *opus Dei*.

He liked to present this theological truth, laden with meaning, in graphic terms, readily understandable by all: "Bring Christ into all those places where mankind's varied tasks are being carried out - into the factory, the laboratory, the farm, the craftsman's workshop, the streets of the great cities, and the mountain trails." To work in the presence of God is a continuous and direct apostolate because in this way Christians can "speak of divine things in the very same language which men use..., see God from the very same secular and lay angle from which they deal, or could deal, with the transcendental questions of their lives."

Prayer, work and apostolate come together in the ordinary existence of Christians, who must overcome the temptation "to lead a kind of double life: on the one hand, an inner life, a life of relationship with God; and on the other, as something separate and distinct, their professional, social and family lives, made up of small earthly realities. No. We cannot lead a double life. We cannot be like schizophrenics, if we want to be Christians. There is only one life, made of flesh and spirit. And it is that life which has to become, in both body and soul, holy and filled with God." These words, spoken in 1967, were one more echo of others he had written back in 1943: "We must flee from falsely seeing the spiritual life as nothing more than a restriction of freedom, doctrinal formation as a mere collection of obscure formulae, and apostolate as a kind of extra part-time job to fill one's spare hours." Since 1928, the Founder of Opus Dei had been repeating, in the midst of the Church, that truth which is as "old as the Gospel and like the Gospel new." It is the truth that one can sanctify oneself and evangelize, if I may use the expression, "one's home ground." Therefore no gap or separation can exist between what is Christian and what is human, because history allows no other course than that which the salvific designs of God have traced.

Monsignor Escrivá presented this normality of the Christian life in a crystal clear way: "We are ordinary men and women, ordinary Christians, which is enough of a title." Many thousands of men and women, of all races and social backgrounds, have - upon acquiring this new awareness experienced that they were indeed going along "the divine paths of the earth." Without show, without ostentation, without a lot of noise, as men and women who are in the world by right and vocation, they are born to the life of grace for the purpose of sanctifying all earthly realities. "Have you ever stopped to think how absurd it is to leave one's Catholicism aside on entering a university, a professional association, a cultural society, or Parliament, like a man leaving his hat at the door?"

Freedom and the personal responsibility of Christians

The Second Vatican Council has underlined the fact that a principal part of the laity's apostolic mission consists in enlivening the diverse environments of the

world with a Christian spirit, so as to establish in these sectors of society - professional, social, economic etc. - that order which is willed by God. Lay people should have the conviction that it is here, in these very circles, that they are directly and immediately involved in the effort to channel all things to Christ. At the same time the Council has pointed out that laymen should carry out their tasks with freedom and personal responsibility: that is to say, with a conscience well formed through a due knowledge of the moral principles which the hierarchy of the Church teaches and interprets. But this can never justify that laymen consider themselves, or act in the diverse questions and specific problems of the temporal order, as a kind of *longa manus* (long arm) of the hierarchy. "It is their task to cultivate a properly informed conscience and to impress the divine law on the affairs of the earthly city. For guidance and spiritual strength let them turn to the clergy; but let them realize that their pastors will not always be so expert as to have a ready answer to every problem (even every grave problem) which arises. This is not the role of the clergy. It is, rather, up to the laymen to shoulder their responsibilities under the guidance of Christian wisdom and with eager attention to the teaching authority of the Church."

It is therefore not at all strange, but rather quite logical, that together with united adherence to moral principles, there be found a legitimate pluralism among Catholic laymen as regards free personal actions in matters of a professional, social or political nature. Catholic doctrine does not seek to create dogmas in what are essentially matters of opinion. The mind of the Council clearly supports this view. There was much less support however - in fact, there was opposition in certain sectors of both civil and ecclesiastical life when, in 1932, Monsignor Escrivá wrote to the first members of Opus Dei: "Avoid that abuse which seems to be widely intensified in our time - it is manifest in nations throughout the world which betrays a desire contrary to the legitimate freedom of men, in attempting to oblige all to form a single group in matters of opinion, to turn temporal doctrines into dogmas."

In line with this subject, the Council has reminded us that "very often the Christian vision of some members of the laity will suggest a certain solution in some given situation. Yet it happens rather frequently, and legitimately so, that some of the faithful, with no less sincerity, will see the problem quite differently. Now if one or other of the proposed solutions is too easily associated with the Gospel message, they must remember that in those cases no one is permitted to identify the authority of the Church exclusively with his own opinion." Here we have the freedom and personal responsibility of Christians, which Monsignor Escrivá so abundantly preached in order to help Catholics avoid the danger of "belittling their faith" and "reducing it to a human ideology."

"A man who knows that the world - and not just the church - is the place where he finds Christ, loves that world. He endeavours to become properly trained, intellectually and professionally. He makes up his own mind, in full freedom, about the problems of the environment in which he moves, and he takes his own decisions in consequence. As the decisions of a Christian, they derive from personal reflection, which strives in all humility to grasp the will of God in both the

unimportant and the important events of his life. But it never occurs to such a Christian to think or say that he was stepping down from the temple into the world to represent the Church, or that his solutions are the Catholic solutions to the problems."

Matrimony, a Christian Vocation

God wants the majority of Christians to start a family, with its origin in matrimony, the sacramentum magnum. It was not many years ago that many people - and perhaps their prejudice has not yet altogether disappeared - thought that there were only two possible courses to follow in order to achieve sanctity: either the religious life or the priesthood. By either of these paths, the only paths for which a vocation would be necessary, one could easily arrive at sanctity. On the other hand, in matrimony, living in the world, one remained in a state far from holiness, because earthly concerns, and in particular the duties related to married life, one's profession and one's family, would always represent an obstacle to the fullness of Christian life, except in extraordinary cases.

In this context it is easy to appreciate what Monsignor Escrivá, who was at the same time a great defender and promoter of the merits of apostolic celibacy in its different forms, had written in 1939. Realizing that he was going against what was considered to be the normal view, he wrote: "You laugh because I tell you that you have 'a vocation for marriage'? Well, you have just that: a vocation." This is something we have no trouble understanding now, but again I repeat that this was not the case at the time. There was no shortage of false teachers who were able to find in these words of such transparent meaning, a starting point for heresy, a position unfaithful to the teaching of the Church. Later, in one of his homilies, Monsignor Escrivá made a summary of what he had taught since the twenties. "Husband and wife are called to sanctify their married life and to sanctify themselves in it. It would be a serious mistake if they were to exclude family life from their spiritual development. The marriage union, the care and education of the children, the effort to provide for the needs of the family as well as for its security and development, the relationships with other persons who make up the community: all these are among the ordinary human situations which Christian couples are called upon to sanctify."

In the fifty years of his priesthood, the Founder of Opus Dei brought into thousands of homes this truth which the Church has also proclaimed in one of the Council's documents: "Authentic married love is raised up by divine love and is directed and enriched by the redemptive power of Christ." With immense joy, I myself have been able to see how a multitude of families throughout the world have received this clarifying light of the Council as a confirmation of what they were already practising, moved by those warmly supernatural affirmations of Monsignor Escrivá. Many years before the Council, he had presented to them a Christian style of life, identical with that of the first followers of Christ: "Families no different from other families of those times, but living with a new spirit, which spread to all those who were in contact with them. This is what the first Christians were, and this is

what we have to be: sowers of peace and joy, the peace and joy that Jesus has brought to us."

The Priesthood and Sanctity

The spirituality which the Founder of Opus Dei spread throughout the Church addresses itself to all the Christian faithful who live in the midst of the world. It is also, therefore, directed towards diocesan priests, members of the faithful who, having received a specific sacrament, that of Holy Orders, can "offer the Holy Sacrifice and forgive sins" and "exercise publicly the priestly office on behalf of men and in the name of Christ."

It is clear, then, that the priest cannot be a bureaucrat someone who preaches sanctity but does not himself strive for it. In a text of Monsignor Escrivá, written in 1945, we read: "As demanded by their common Christian vocation, both priests and laymen, by reason of the one baptism which they have received, must equally aspire to sanctity, which is a participation in the divine life (cf. Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechesis, 21,2). The sanctity to which they are called is not greater in the priest than in the layman, since the latter is not called to be a second-class Christian. Holiness, both in the priest and in the layman, is nothing other than the perfection of Christian life, the fullness of divine filiation."

I can vouch for the fact that, when these expressions made their entry into those quarters where the documents of the Second Vatican Council were being prepared and studied, they at first caused considerable surprise. Later, they found total acceptance. They were a decisive factor in doing away with a statist view of the life and ministry of the diocesan priest, in which his call to sanctity was only seen in terms of his state, i.e., as superior to that of the laity and inferior to that of the religious priest. The decree *Presbyterorum ordinis* manifestly proclaimed what Monsignor Escrivá had taught: "Like all Christians, they (the priests) have already received in the consecration of Baptism the sign and the gift of their great calling and grace. So they are enabled and obliged, even in the midst of human weakness, to seek perfection, according to the words of Our Lord: You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matt 5:48)."

"The priests will be able to contribute effectively to each one's knowing how to discover in the events of life, whether great or small, the proper way to act and the Will of God."

I was moved by the parallel between these lines which I have just quoted and a homily which Monsignor Escrivá preached in 1960: "If my own personal experience is of any help, I can say that I have always seen my work as a priest and shepherd of souls as being aimed at helping each person to face up to all the demands of his life and to discover what God wants of him in particular." This is not the place for a detailed study, but such parallelisms with the Council arise in many other aspects of Monsignor Escrivá's teaching on the priestly life and ministry: the need, for instance, to develop human virtues also in order to have a sacerdotal spirituality; the importance of being an instrument of unity among the faithful, avoiding the temptation to belittle the faith by aligning oneself with ideologies and human

factions which divide men; the possibility and suitability of well-ordered associations that would assist priests to attain sanctity through the exercise of their own ministry; the unity and harmony between interior life and pastoral activity which a priest can achieve when he finds in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass "the center and root" of his existence; the need for personal prayer, frequent confession and the maintaining of traditional practices of piety recommended by the long experience of the Church; the importance of the priest's seeing clearly that the exercise of his ministry - his 'ordinary work' - is precisely the occasion and irreplaceable means for achieving sanctity, etc.

I would like to add here what is just one more among many vivid memories which bear upon this theme: namely, the authentic joy with which the Founder of Opus Dei an untiring preacher of the need to be "contemplatives in the middle of the world", read the following paragraph from the Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, which answers the objections that the cares and concerns of the priestly ministry could be obstacles for seeking personal sanctity: "Rather than be held back by perils and hardships in their apostolic labors they (priests) should rise to greater holiness, nourishing and fostering their action with an overflowing contemplation, for the nourishment of the entire Church of God."

Ecumenism

I have already mentioned the fact that many non-Catholics and also non-Christians benefited from Monsignor Escrivá's unlimited capacity for human friendship and from his priestly attention, two facets that were always inseparably united in his conduct. These persons had either come to speak with him in private, or they had addressed him in public, asking him questions or seeking advice during his numerous gatherings of catechesis with groups of men and women of all ages, social backgrounds and religious denominations. On all of these occasions, his loyalty to the one Church of Jesus Christ, together with his delicate respect for the "freedom of individual consciences" (which he carefully distinguished from the inadmissible "freedom of conscience") led him to carry out a direct and extremely fruitful ecumenical work or apostolate *ad plenitudinem fidei* (bringing them to the fullness of the faith) with thousands of souls. And all of this long before the word "ecumenism" itself had made its entry into common ecclesiastical parlance.

When, back in 1967, a journalist asked him how Opus Dei fitted into the overall picture of ecumenism, Monsignor Escrivá answered with his habitual good humor: "Last year I told a French journalist, and I know that the anecdote has been retold, even in publications of our separated brethren, that I once told the Holy Father John XXIII, moved by the affable and fatherly kindness of his manner: 'Holy Father, in our Work all men, Catholics or not, have always found a welcome. I have not learned ecumenism from your Holiness.' He laughed, for he knew that a way back in 1950, the Holy See had authorized Opus Dei to accept into the Association as Cooperators, people who are not Catholics or even Christians."

Monsignor Escrivá then went on to single out, in the area of ecumenism, numerous repercussions of the spirituality characteristic of the Institution which he had

founded: "In fact, there are many separated brethren who feel attracted by the spirit of Opus Dei and who cooperate in our apostolates, and they include ministers and even bishops of their respective confessions. As contacts increase, we receive more and more proofs of affection and cordial understanding. And it is because members of Opus Dei center their spirituality simply on trying to love responsibly the commitments and demands of Christian Baptism. A desire to seek Christian perfection and to do apostolate, endeavoring to sanctify their own professional work; the fact of their living immersed in secular reality and respecting its proper autonomy, but dealing with it with the spirit and love of contemplative souls; the primacy which we give in the organization of our apostolate to the individual, to the action of the Spirit upon souls, to the dignity and freedom which derive from the divine filiation of Christians; the defense of the legitimate freedom of initiative, within a necessary respect for the common good, against the monolithic and institutionalistic conception of the apostolate of the laity: these and other aspects of our way of being and acting are so many points of easy contact with our separated brethren. Here they find, put into living practice, a good many of the doctrinal presuppositions in which they, and we Catholics, have placed so many well-founded ecumenical expectations."

Testimony of love for the Church

The universal call to sanctity and apostolate: baptismal spirituality, love for the world, for all noble human realities and especially for human work, a participation in the creative work of God - together with the love of Christ; the enrichment, both doctrinally and ascetically, of the various demands of the ministerial priesthood; a deepening of the supernatural dimensions of human love and of the Christian family; an ecumenical spirit which reaffirms, with unlimited charity but without errors, the truth that the one Church of Christ is catholic, apostolic and roman. But above all, and encompassing all: unconditional dedication to the Church "which prays and works at the same time, so that the entire world be transformed into the people of God, the Body of the Lord and the Temple of the Holy Spirit, and so that in Christ, the Head of all things, honor and glory may be rendered to the Father and Creator of the universe."

These lines have presented only a rapid survey of that sense of the Church which filled the holy soul of Monsignor Escrivá, always at the service of the Church by means of the path of Opus Dei. Our Founder and father offered his whole life for the Spouse of Christ, for his Vicar on earth, for all men. His burning words, his heart overflowing with understanding and warmth, continue - and will continue more and more - to inflame the souls of millions of Christians throughout the whole world, leading them to sacrifice themselves joyfully so that the most loving will of God "that all men be saved and come to the full knowledge of the truth."

ALVARO DEL PORTILLO

LOYALTY TO THE CHURCH

A homily given on 4 June 1972

The Church is One

The Church is Holy

The Church is catholic

The Church is apostolic

The apostolic mission of all Catholics

1 The texts of this Sunday's liturgy form a chain of invocations to the Lord. We tell him that he is our support, our rock, our defense. The Collect also takes up the theme of the Introit: You never refuse your light to those who stand fast in the firmness of your love.

In the Gradual we continue to have recourse to him: In my distress I cry to the Lord... Deliver me O Lord from wicked lips, from a deceitful tongue. O Lord in thee do I take refuge. We are moved by the insistence of God our Father, who is determined to remind us that we ought to appeal to his mercy, always, no matter what happens. Now as well, at a time in which confused voices are rending the Church, many souls are going astray because they do not find good shepherds, other Christs, who would guide them to the Lord of Love. They find, instead, thieves and robbers who come to steal and kill and destroy.

Let us not be afraid. The Church, which is the Body of Christ, must indefectibly be the path and the sheepfold of the Good Shepherd, the strong foundation and the way open to all men. We have just read in the Gospel: Go out to the highways and hedges, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled.

2 But what is the Church? Where is the Church? Bewildered and disoriented, many Christians do not find sure answers to these questions. And they come to believe that perhaps the answers which the Magisterium has formulated for centuries - and which good catechisms have proposed with the necessary precision and simplicity - have now been superseded and must be replaced by new ones. A series of facts and difficulties seem to have come together to darken the bright countenance of the Church. Some maintain that the valid Church can be found only in their personal zeal to accommodate it to what they call modern times. Others cry out: the Church is nothing more than man's desire for solidarity. We ought to change it, they say, in accord with present circumstances.

They are wrong. The Church today is the same one Christ founded. It cannot be any other. The Apostles and their successors are the vicars of God with regard to the rule of the Church as instituted through faith and with regard to the sacraments of the faith. Hence, just as it is not lawful for them to constitute any other Church, so too it is not lawful for them either to hand down any other faith or to institute any other sacraments. Rather, the Church is said to have been built up with the 'sacraments, which flowed from the side of Christ hanging on the Cross'. The Church must be recognized by the four marks in the profession of faith of one of the first Councils, as we pray in the Creed of the Mass: One, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

These are the essential properties of the Church, which are derived from its nature as Christ intended it. And, being essential, they are also marks, signs, which distinguish it from any other human gathering, even though in the others the name of Christ may be pronounced.

A little more than a century ago, Pope Pius IX briefly summed up this traditional teaching: The true Church of Christ is constituted and recognized, by divine authority, in the four marks which in the creed we affirm as to be believed. And each of these marks is so united with the others that it cannot be separated from them. For this reason, that which truly is catholic and is called Catholic should at the same time shine forth by the prerogatives of unity, of holiness and of apostolic succession. It is, I emphasize, the traditional teaching of the Church, which the Second Vatican Council has repeated again, even though in recent years some may have forgotten it, led by a false ecumenism. This is the sole Church of Christ which in the Creed we profess to be one, holy, catholic and apostolic, which our Savior, after his resurrection, entrusted to Peter's pastoral care, commissioning him and the other apostles to extend and rule it, and which he raised up for all ages as the pillar and mainstay of the truth.

The Church is One

3 That they may be one, even as we are one, Christ cries out to his Father; that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee; that they also may be in us. This exhortation to unity flows in a constant stream from the lips of Jesus, for every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. It is a teaching which is converted into a vehement desire: And I have other sheep that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd.

What beautiful tones Our Lord uses to express this doctrine! He multiplies words and images so that we may understand it, so that this passion for unity may remain engraved on our souls. I am the true vine and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes that it may bear more fruit... Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Do you not see how those who separate themselves from the Church, even though they are full of foliage, quickly dry up, and their very fruits are converted into a living bed of worms? Love the holy, roman, apostolic Church. One! For as Saint Cyprian writes: He who reaps elsewhere, outside the Church, dissipates the Church of Christ. And Saint John Chrysostom insists: Do not separate yourself from the Church Nothing is stronger than the Church. Your hope is the Church; your salvation is the Church; your refuge is the Church. It is higher than the heavens, and broader than the earth; it never grows old, its vigor is eternal.

To defend the unity of the Church is to live very united to Jesus Christ who is our vine. How? By growing in fidelity to the perennial Magisterium of the Church: For the Holy Spirit was promised to the successors of Peter not that they should manifest a new doctrine by his revelation, but rather that with his assistance, they should religiously safeguard and faithfully teach the revelation that was handed down through the Apostles - the deposit of faith. By venerating this Mother of ours without stain, and loving the Roman Pontiff, we will preserve unity.

4 Some say that few men are left in the Church. I would say that if all of us loyally safeguarded Christ's doctrine, our numbers would grow considerably, since God wants his house to be filled. In the Church we discover Christ, who is the Love of our loves. And we should desire for all men our vocation, this intimate joy which intoxicates the soul, the limpid sweetness of the merciful heart of Jesus.

One hears it said that we must be ecumenical. So be it. Nevertheless I fear that behind some self-styled ecumenical activities there is a hidden fraud: for they are activities which do not lead to the love of Christ, to the true vine. For that reason they lack fruit. I ask Our Lord each day to expand my heart, that he may continue to supernaturalize the love he has put in my soul for all men, without distinction of race, nationality, cultural condition or wealth. I sincerely esteem all men, Catholics or not, those who do believe in something and those who do not. I feel sorry for these unbelievers. But Christ founded only one Church: he has only one Spouse.

The union of all Christians? Yes. Even more: the union of all those who believe in God. But there exists only one true Church. There is no need to rebuild it out of pieces dispersed throughout the world, and it does not need to go through any sort of purification in order to be finally cleansed. The spouse of Christ cannot be adulterous, for she is incorruptible and pure. Only one house knows and safeguards the inviolability of only one bridal bed with chaste modesty. She preserves us for God, she destines for the kingdom the children she has begotten. Anyone who separates himself from the Church unites himself with an adulterer; he leaves behind the promises of the Church and he who abandons the Church of Christ will not achieve the rewards of Christ.

The Church is Holy

5 Now we can understand better how the unity of the Church leads to her holiness, and how one of the principal aspects of her holiness is that unity centered on the mystery of the one and triune God. There is one body and one spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all.

Holiness means none other than union with God; a greater intimacy with the Lord, more sanctity. The Church has been willed and founded by Christ, who carries out in this way the will of the Father; the Spouse of the Son is assisted by the Holy Spirit. The Church is the work of the Blessed Trinity; she is holy and our mother, our Holy Mother the Church. We can admire in the Church one perfection which we could call original, and another final, eschatological. Saint Paul refers to both of them in his letter to the Ephesians. Christ loved the church and gave himself up for

her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

The original and constitutive holiness of the Church can be hidden - but never destroyed since it is indefectible: The powers of death shall not prevail against it. It can be veiled from human eyes, as I was saying, in certain moments of obscurity, which can become almost universal. But Saint Peter applies to Christians the title of *gens sancta*, a holy nation. And being members of a holy nation, all the faithful have received a call to holiness, and they must strive to correspond to grace and to be personally holy. Throughout history and now as well, there have been so many Catholics who have truly sanctified themselves: young and old, single and married, priests and lay people, men and women.

But it happens that the personal sanctity of so many faithful - then and now - is not something externally apparent. Frequently we do not recognize the ordinary people, common and holy, who work and live alongside us. From an earthly viewpoint, what stands out most is sin and unfaithfulness: these are more conspicuous.

6 *Gens sancta*, a holy nation, composed of creatures with infirmities. This apparent contradiction marks an aspect of the mystery of the Church. The Church, which is divine, is also human, for it is made up of men, and men have their defects: *Omnes homines terra et cinis*, we men are dust and ashes.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, who founded the holy Church, expects the members of this people to strive continually to acquire sanctity. Not all respond loyally to his call. And in the spouse of Christ, at one and the same time, both the marvel of the way of salvation and the miseries of those who take up that way are visible.

It was one and the same purpose - namely, that of perpetuating on this earth the salutary work of the redemption which caused the divine Redeemer to give the community of human beings, founded by him, the constitution of a society perfect in its own order, provided with all the juridical and social elements... If something is perceived in the Church which points to the infirmity of our human condition, this is not to be attributed to her juridical constitution, but to the lamentable tendency of individuals toward evil, a tendency which her divine Founder suffers to exist even in the higher members of his Mystical Body, for the testing of the virtue of both flock and pastors, and for the greater merit of Christian faith in all.

This is the reality of the Church here and now. For this reason the holiness of the spouse of Christ is compatible with the existence in her bosom of individuals with defects. Christ did not will sinners to be excluded from the society he had founded; if therefore some members are spiritually infirm, this is no reason for lessening our love toward the Church, but rather for increasing our compassion toward her members.

7 It would be a sign of very little maturity if, in view of the defects and miseries in any of those who belong to the Church (no matter how high they may be placed by

virtue of their function), anyone should feel his faith in the Church and in Christ lessened. The Church is not governed by Peter, nor by John, nor by Paul; she is governed by the Holy Spirit, and the Lord has promised that he will remain at her side always, to the close of the age.

Listen to what Saint Thomas Aquinas says, elaborating on this point. He is speaking about receiving the sacraments, which are the cause and sign of sanctifying grace: He who approaches the sacraments receives the sacrament concerned from the minister of the Church not as such-and-such an individual, but precisely as a minister of the Church. Hence so long as the Church suffers him to remain in his ministry, one receiving a sacrament from him does not share in his sin, but shares in the life of the Church who publicly recognizes him as minister. When the Lord permits human weakness to appear, our reaction ought to be the same as if we were to see our mother ill or treated with disdain: to love her all the more, to bestow on her a greater manifestation of affection, both external and internal.

If we love the Church, there will never arise in us a morbid interest in airing, as the faults of the Mother, the weaknesses of some of her children. The Church, the spouse of Christ, does not have to intone any *mea culpa*. But we do: *mea culpa*, *mea culpa*, *mea maxima culpa*. The only true *mea culpa* is a personal one, not the one which attacks the Church, pointing out and exaggerating the human defects which, in this holy mother, result from the presence in her of men whose actions can go far astray, but which can never destroy - nor even touch - that which we call the original and constitutive holiness of the Church.

God our Lord has indeed compared the Church to the threshing floor where the straw is piled together with the wheat from which will come bread for the table and bread for the altar; he has compared the Church to a dragnet *ex omni genere piscium congreganti*, which catches both good and bad fish, the bad ones of which are later thrown away.

8 The mystery of the holiness of the Church - that pristine light which can become obscured by the shadows of human baseness - rejects even the slightest thought of suspicion, of doubt about the beauty of our mother. Nor can we tolerate, without protesting, that others should insult her. We cannot seek out in the Church vulnerable points in order to criticize them, as some do who show thereby neither their faith nor their love. I cannot conceive of anyone having true affection for his mother who speaks of her with disdain.

Our Mother is holy, because she was born pure and will continue without blemish for all eternity. If at times we are not able to perceive her fair face, let us wipe clean our own eyes. If we are aware that her voice does not please us, let us remove from our ears any hardness which prevents us from hearing in her tone of voice the whistled beckoning of the loving Shepherd. Our Mother is holy, with the holiness of Christ, to whom she is united in body - which is all of us - and in spirit, which is the Holy Spirit, dwelling also in the hearts of each one of us, if we remain in the grace of God.

Holy, holy, holy, we dare sing to the Church, evoking a hymn in honor of the Blessed Trinity. You are holy, O Church, my mother, because the Son of God, who is holy, founded you. You are holy, because the Father, source of all holiness, so ordained it. You are holy, because the Holy Spirit, who dwells in the souls of the faithful, assists you, in order to gather together the children of the Father, who will dwell in the Church of heaven, the eternal Jerusalem.

The Church is catholic

9 God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony to which was borne at the proper time. Jesus Christ instituted only one Church. For this reason the spouse of Christ is one and catholic: universal, for all men.

For many centuries now the Church has been spread throughout the world, and it numbers persons of all races and walks of life. But the universality of the Church does not depend on its geographical distribution, even though this is a visible sign and a motive of credibility. The Church was catholic already at Pentecost. It was born catholic from the wounded heart of Jesus, as a fire which the Holy Spirit enkindled.

In the second century the Christians called the Church catholic in order to distinguish it from the sects which, using the name of Christ, were betraying his doctrine in one way or another. We call it catholic, writes Saint Cyril, not because it is spread throughout the world, from one extreme to the other, but because in a universal way and without defect it teaches all the dogmas which men ought to know, of both the visible and the invisible, the celestial and the earthly. Likewise, because it draws to true worship all types of men, those who govern and those who are ruled, the learned and the ignorant. And finally, because it cures and makes healthy all kinds of sins, whether of the soul or of the body, possessing in addition - by whatever name it may be called - all the forms of virtue, in deeds and in words and in every kind of spiritual gift.

The catholicity of the Church does not depend either on whether or not non-Catholics acclaim and acknowledge it. Nor does it have anything to do with the fact that, in non-spiritual matters the opinions of some persons in positions of authority in the Church are taken up - and at times exploited - by those who fashion public opinion, when these churchmen have views similar to theirs. It will often happen that the aspect of truth which will be defended in any human ideology will find an echo or foundation in the perennial teaching of the Church. This is, in a certain sense, a sign of the divinity of the revelation which the Magisterium safeguards. But the spouse of Christ is catholic, even when it is deliberately ignored by many, and even abused and persecuted, as unfortunately happens in so many places.

10 The Church is not a political party, nor a social ideology, nor a worldwide organization for harmony or material progress, even though we recognize the nobility of these and other activities. The Church has always undertaken and

undertakes today an immense work on behalf of the needy, of those who suffer, of all those who bear in any way the consequences of the only true evil, which is sin. And to all - to those who are in any way deprived and to those who claim to enjoy the fullness of earthly goods - the Church comes to confirm only one, essential, definitive truth: that our destiny is eternal and supernatural, that only in Jesus Christ are we saved for all time, and that only in him will we achieve in some way already in this life true peace and happiness.

Ask God our Lord now, along with me, that we Catholics may never forget these truths, and that we may resolve to put them into practice. The Catholic Church does not need the approval of men, for it is the work of God.

We will show ourselves to be Catholics by the fruits of sanctity which we produce, for sanctity does not admit of any frontiers, nor is it the patrimony of any particular group. We will show ourselves to be Catholics if we pray, if we strive to direct ourselves to God at all times, if we make an effort always and in all things to be just - in the broadest sense of the term justice, which is used frequently in these times with a materialistic and erroneous connotation - if we love and defend the personal freedom of other men.

I remind you also of another sign of the catholicity of the Church: the faithful preservation and administration of the sacraments as they were instituted by Jesus Christ, without human deformations or evil attempts to interpret them psychologically or sociologically. For it is not for one man to decide how another shall use what is under the latter's power and authority. All he can decide is what is under his own power. Since, therefore, human sanctification lies under the power of God who sanctifies, it is not for man to decide of his own judgment which materials are to be chosen for him to be sanctified by. This, rather, is something which should be determined by divine institution.

The attempt to take universality away from the essence of the sacraments would perhaps be justified if it were only a matter of signs, of symbols, which are subject to the natural laws of comprehension and understanding. But the sacraments of the New Law are causes and signs at the same time. Hence too it is that, as the usual formula puts it, they effect what they figuratively express. And from this it is also clear that in them the essential characteristics of a sacrament are perfectly fulfilled, inasmuch as they are designed for something sacred in the sense not merely of being signs of it but of being causes of it as well.

11 The Catholic Church is roman. I savor that word, roman! I feel completely roman, since roman means universal, catholic. For it leads me to love tenderly the Pope, il dolce Cristo in terra, as Saint Catherine of Siena, whom I count as a most beloved friend, liked to repeat.

From this catholic roman center, Paul VI emphasized in the closing stages of the Second Vatican Council, no one is, in theory, beyond reach; all can and should be reached. For the Catholic Church, no one is a stranger, no one is excluded, no one is to consider himself far away. I venerate with all my strength the Rome of Peter and Paul, bathed in the blood of martyrs, the center from which so many have set

out to propagate throughout the world the saving word of Christ. To be roman does not entail any manifestation of provincialism, but rather of authentic ecumenism. It presupposes the desire to enlarge the heart, to open it to all men with the redemptive zeal of Christ, who seeks all men and takes in all men, for he has loved all men first.

Saint Ambrose wrote a few words which comprise, as it were, a song of joy: Where Peter is, there is the Church; and where the Church is, not death, but eternal life reigns. For where Peter and the Church are, there Christ is; and he is salvation, the only way.

The Church is apostolic

12 Our Lord founded the Church on the weakness - but also on the fidelity - of a few men, the Apostles, to whom he promised the constant assistance of the Holy Spirit. Let us read again the well-known text, which is ever new and up-to-date. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the close of the age.

The preaching of the Gospel does not arise in Palestine through the personal initiative of a few fervent individuals. What could the Apostles do? They were nothing in their time. From a human point of view they were neither rich nor learned, nor heroes. Jesus places on the shoulders of a handful of disciples an immense, divine task: You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.

Through two thousand years of history, the apostolic succession has been preserved in the Church. The bishops, declares the Council of Trent, have succeeded in the place of the Apostles and are placed, as the Apostle (Paul) himself says, by the Holy Spirit to rule the Church of God (Acts 20:28). And, among the Apostles, Christ himself made Simon the object of special attention. You are Peter and on this rock I will build my church! I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren.

Peter moves to Rome and there establishes the see of primacy of the Vicar of Christ. For this reason it is in Rome that the apostolic succession is seen most clearly. And for this reason Rome is called the apostolic see by antonomasia. The First Vatican Council proclaimed, with the words of a prior council, that of Florence: All the faithful of Christ must believe that the Holy Apostolic See and the Roman Pontiff possess primacy over the whole world, and that the same Roman Pontiff is the successor of blessed Peter, prince of the Apostles, and true vicar of Jesus Christ, and head of all the Church, and father and teacher of all Christians; and that to him was given by Our Lord Jesus Christ, in the person of blessed Peter, full power to feed, rule and govern the universal Church.

13 The supreme power of the Roman Pontiff and his infallibility, when he speaks *ex cathedra*, are not human inventions. They are based on the explicit foundational will of Christ. How foolish it is, then, to confront the government of the Pope with that of the bishops, or to reduce the validity of the pontifical Magisterium to the consent of the faithful! Nothing is more foreign to it than a balance of powers; human moulds of thought do not help us, no matter how attractive or functional they may be. No one in the Church enjoys absolute power by himself, as man. In the Church there is no leader other than Christ. And Christ constituted a vicar of his - the Roman Pontiff - for his wayfaring spouse on earth.

The Church is apostolic by constitution. That which truly is and is called catholic, should stand out at one and the same time by the prerogatives of unity, holiness and apostolic succession. In that way, the Church is one, with a clear and perfect unity of the whole world and all nations, with that unity of which the principle, root and indefectible origin is the supreme authority and most excellent primacy of blessed Peter, prince of the Apostles, and his successors in the Roman See. And there is no other Catholic Church, but that one which, built on the one Peter, rises up on the unity of the faith and on charity in one unique body, joined together and compact.

We help to make that apostolic continuity more evident in the eyes of all men by demonstrating with exquisite fidelity our union with the Pope, which is union with Peter. Love for the Roman Pontiff must be in us a delightful passion, for in him we see Christ. If we deal with the Lord in prayer, we will go forward with a clear gaze that will permit us to perceive the action of the Holy Spirit, even in the face of events we do not understand or which produce sighs or sorrow.

The apostolic mission of all Catholics

14 The Church sanctifies us after we enter into her bosom through baptism. Newly born into natural life, we can already take refuge in sanctifying grace. The faith of one person, even more, the faith of the whole Church, benefits the child through the action of the Holy Spirit, which gives unity to the Church and communicates the goods of one another. This supernatural maternity of the Church, which the Holy Spirit confers, is truly marvelous. Spiritual rebirth which is brought about by baptism is in some way similar to bodily birth. Just as children in the womb of their mothers do not feed themselves, but rather are nourished from the sustenance of the mother, so also the little ones who do not have the use of reason and are like children in the womb of their mother the Church, receive salvation through the action of the Church and not by themselves.

The priestly power of the Church, which proceeds directly from Christ, stands out in all its greatness. Christ is the source of every priesthood: for the priesthood of the Old Law was as its figure: but the priesthood of the New Law acts in the person of Christ, as is written in 2 Cor (2:10): What I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the person of Christ.

The saving mediation between God and man is perpetuated in the Church through the sacrament of Holy Orders, which gives to men the power - through sacramental

character and consequent graces - to act as ministers of Jesus Christ on behalf of all souls. That one person can carry out an act that another cannot does not stem from a difference of goodness or malice, but from an acquired power, which one possesses and the other does not. Therefore, since the layman does not receive the power to consecrate, he cannot bring about the consecration, no matter what his personal goodness may be.

15 In the Church there is a diversity of ministries, but there is only one aim: the sanctification of men. And in this task all Christians participate in some way, through the character imprinted by the sacraments of baptism and confirmation. We must all feel responsible for the mission of the Church, which is the mission of Christ. He who does not have zeal for the salvation of souls, he who does not strive with all his strength to make the name and doctrine of Christ known and loved, will not understand the apostolicity of the Church.

A passive Christian has failed to understand what Christ wants from all of us. A Christian who goes his own way, unconcerned about the salvation of others, does not love with the heart of Jesus. Apostolate is not a mission reserved for the hierarchy, priests and religious. The Lord calls all of us to be, with our example and word, instruments of the stream of grace which springs up to eternal life.

Whenever we read the Acts of the Apostles, we are moved by the audacity, the confidence in their mission, and the sacrificing joy of the disciples of Christ. They do not ask for multitudes. Even though the multitudes come, they address themselves to each particular soul, to each man, one by one. Philip, to the Ethiopian; Peter, to the centurion; Paul, to Sergius Paulus.

They have learned from the Master. Remember the parable of the laborers who awaited work in the middle of the marketplace of the village? When the owner of the vineyard went out, already late in the day, he found that there were still laborers standing idle. Why do you stand here idle all day? Because no one has hired us, they answered. This should not happen in the life of a Christian. No one should be found around him who can assert that he has not heard of Christ because no one has bothered to tell him.

Men often think that nothing prevents them from leaving God out of their lives. They deceive themselves. Though they may not know it, they are stretched out like the paralytic at the pool of Bethsaida - unable to move towards the waters which save, towards the doctrine which puts joy into the soul. So often the blame lies with Christians. The lame and sick of soul could repeat: *hominem non habeo*, I do not have even one person to help me. Every Christian should be an apostle, because God, who does not need anyone, nevertheless needs us. He counts on us to dedicate ourselves to propagating his saving doctrine.

16 We are contemplating the mystery of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. It is time to ask ourselves: Do I share with Christ his zeal for souls? Do I

pray for the Church of which I form part, in which I must carry out a specific mission which no one else can do for me? To be in the Church is already much, but it is not enough. We must be the Church, because our Mother must never be a stranger to us, something external, foreign to our deepest thoughts.

Let us conclude our consideration of the marks of the Church. With the help of the Lord they will become engraved on our souls, and we will be confirmed by this clear, sure, divine criterion in order to love more this holy mother, who has brought us to the life of grace and who nourishes us, day by day, with inexhaustible care.

If by chance you hear offensive words or shouts hurled against the Church, show their loveless authors, with humanity and charity, that they cannot mistreat a mother in that way. They attack her now with impunity, because her kingdom which is that of her Master and Founder, is not of this world. As long as the wheat groans among the straw, as long as the spikes of wheat sigh among the cockle, as long as the vessels of mercy lament among those of ire, as long as the lily sobs among the thorns, there will always be enemies who say: when will she die and her name perish? They think: there will come a time in which the Church will disappear and there will be no more Christians... But, when they say this, they of necessity die. And the Church remains.

No matter what happens, Christ will not abandon his spouse. The Church triumphant is already with him at the right hand of the Father. And our Christian brothers beckon us to join them there, they who glorify God for this reality which we still see in the clear shadow of faith: the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

THE SUPERNATURAL AIM OF THE CHURCH

A homily given on 28 May 1972, Solemnity of the Blessed Trinity

Difficult moments

The Church's aim

Salvation in the Church

A time of trial

Loving the Church

The Depths of God's wisdom

17 Let me begin by reminding you of something Saint Cyprian tells us: The universal Church is a people which derives its unity from the unity of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. It is not out of place therefore to preach about the Church on this feast of the most Blessed Trinity. The Church is rooted in this fundamental mystery of our catholic faith: the mystery of God who is one in essence and three in persons.

The Fathers all see the Church as centered in the Trinity. Look how clearly Saint Augustine puts it: God then dwells in his temple. Not only the Holy Spirit but also the Father and the Son... Therefore, the holy Church is the temple of God, the temple of the entire Trinity.

Next Sunday when we gather again, we will consider another marvelous aspect of the Church. We will fix our attention on the marks of the Church that we will recite in a few moments in the Creed after singing our belief in the Father, in the Son, and in the Holy Spirit: *Et in Spiritum Sanctum*, we say, and in *unam, sanctam, catholicam et apostolicam Ecclesiam*. We confess that there is only one Church which is holy, catholic and apostolic.

All those who have truly loved the Church have known how to relate these four marks to the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity, which is the most ineffable mystery of our faith. We believe in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of God, in which we receive the faith. In her we know the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and are baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Difficult moments

18 We need to meditate frequently on the fact that the Church is a deep, great mystery, so that we never forget it. We cannot fully understand the Church on this earth. If men, using only their reason, were to analyze it, they would see only a group of people who abide by certain precepts and think in a similar way. But that would not be the Church.

In the Church we Catholics find our faith, our norms of conduct, our prayer, our sense of fraternity. Through it we are united with all our brothers who have already left this life and are being cleansed in Purgatory - the Church suffering - and with those who already enjoy the beatific vision and love forever the thrice holy God - the Church triumphant. The Church is in our midst and at the same time transcends history. It was born under the mantle of our Lady and continues to praise her on earth and in heaven as its mother.

Let us strengthen our faith in the supernatural character of the Church. Let us profess it with shouts, if necessary, for there are many, physically within the Church and even in high places, who have forgotten these capital truths. They try to propose an image of the Church which is neither holy nor one. Neither would it be apostolic since it is not founded on the rock of Peter. Their substitute is not catholic, because it is riddled with unwarranted irregularities which are mere human caprices.

This is nothing new. Since Jesus Christ Our Lord founded the Church, this Mother of ours has suffered constant persecution. In times past the attacks were delivered openly. Now, in many cases, persecution is disguised. But today, as yesterday, the Church continues to be buffeted from many sides.

Let me say once again that I am not a pessimist by habit or by temperament. How can we be pessimistic if Our Lord has promised that he will be with us until the end of the world?

The effusion of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles gathered together in the Cenacle provided the first public manifestation of the Church.

Our Father God is a loving Father. To help us understand this, Scripture graphically tells us that he takes care of us like the apple of his eye. He never ceases to sanctify, through the Holy Spirit, the Church founded by his beloved Son. But the Church is going through difficult moments. Confused shouting is heard on all sides, and all the errors which have occurred in the course of the centuries are reappearing with great fanfare.

19 Faith. We need faith. If we look with the eyes of faith, we will see that the Church carries within herself the explanation for her existence and purpose. Anyone who contemplates her with eyes filled with love for the truth, must recognize that, quite independently of those who are her members and the ways in which the reality that is the Church is expressed in the material world, she carries within herself a unique and universal message of light, which is liberating, necessary and divine.

We cannot but help feel sadness invade our soul when we hear heretical voices around us. And that is what they are, for I have never liked euphemisms. We see that the sanctity of marriage and of the priesthood is attacked without fear of rebuke. We see people deny the immaculate conception and the perpetual virginity of our holy mother Mary, along with all the other privileges and gifts with which God adorned her. We see the perpetual miracle of the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist, the primacy of Peter and even the resurrection of Our Lord put in doubt. How can anyone not feel tempted to sadness? Have confidence, for the Church is incorruptible. The Church will shake if her foundation shifts; but can Christ be moved? As long as Christ remains her immovable base, the Church will remain strong until the end of time.

Human and divine elements in the Church

20 Just as in Christ there are two natures, both a human and a divine one, so by analogy we can refer to the presence in the Church of human and divine elements. No one can fail to see the human part. The Church, in this world, is for men, who are its raw material. And when we speak of men we speak of freedom, which permits the co-existence of grandeur and meanness, of heroism and failure.

If we were to focus only on the human side of the Church, we would never understand her. We would still be distant from the threshold of her central mystery. Sacred Scripture uses many terms derived from everyday life to describe God's kingdom and its presence among us in the Church. It compares her to a sheepfold, to a flock, to a house, to a seed, to a vine, to a field in which God plants or builds. But one expression stands out and sums up all the rest: the Church is Christ's body.

And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the equipment of the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ. Saint Paul also writes that all of us, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. How luminous is our faith! We are all in Christ, for He is the head of the body, the Church.

21 This is the faith which Christians have always professed. Listen with me to what Saint Augustine tells us: The whole Christ is made up of head and body, a truth which I am sure you know well. The head is our Savior himself who suffered under Pontius Pilate and now, after his resurrection from among the dead, is seated at the right hand of the Father. And his body is the Church Not this or that church but the Church that is spread throughout the world. Not only the one which exists among the men now living, for those who went before us and those who are to come to the end of the world also belong to it. The entire Church, formed by the assembly of all the faithful since all of them are members of Christ, has Christ as its head. He governs his body from heaven. And although the head is not visible to the body, it is united to it by love.

22 You should understand now why the visible Church cannot be severed from the invisible. The Church is, at one and the same time, a mystical body and a juridical body. Pope Leo XIII tells us: By the very fact that it is a body, the Church is visible to the eyes. In the visible body of the Church, in the behavior of men who make it up here on earth, we find weaknesses, vacillations and acts of treason. But that is not the whole Church, nor is it to be confused with this unworthy behavior. On the other hand, here and now, there is no shortage of generosity, of heroism, of holy lives that make no noise, that are spent with joy in the service of their brothers in the faith and of all souls.

I would also like you to consider that even if human failings were to outnumber acts of valor, the clear undeniable mystical reality of the Church, though unperceived by the senses, would still remain. The Church would still be the Body of Christ, Our Lord himself, the action of the Holy Spirit and the loving presence of the Father.

The Church is, therefore, inseparably human and divine. It is a divine society in origin, and supernatural in its aim and in the means that are directly ordered to this end. But in so far as it is made up of men, it is a human community. It lives and acts in the world, but its goal and strength are not here but in heaven.

It would be a serious mistake to attempt to separate the charismatic Church, supposedly the sole follower of Christ's spirit, from the juridical or institutional Church, the handiwork of men, subject to historical vicissitudes. There is only one Church. Christ founded only one Church which is visible and invisible. It has a hierarchical and organized body and a fundamental structure by divine law, with an intimate supernatural life that animates, sustains and vivifies it.

We cannot fail to recall that when Christ instituted his Church, he did not conceive it or form it in such a way that it would contain a number of generically similar but

distinct communities without the bonds that make the Church indivisible and singular... And thus when Jesus spoke of this mystical edifice, he mentions only one Church which he calls his own: 'I will build my Church' (Matt 16:18). Any other one you can imagine outside of this cannot be his true Church since it was not founded by him.

Faith, I repeat. Let us believe more, asking the Blessed Trinity, whose feast we celebrate today, for greater faith. Anything can happen, except for the thrice-holy God to abandon his spouse.

The Church's aim

23 In the first chapter of his letter to the Ephesians, Saint Paul affirms that the mystery of God, announced by Christ, is carried out in the Church. God the Father has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. The mystery of God is to set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

It is an inscrutable mystery, of pure gratuitous love. For he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. God's love is limitless. Saint Paul also tells us that our Savior desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

This, and no other, is the aim of the Church: the salvation of souls, one by one. For this reason the Father sent his Son, and now I am sending you out in my turn. This is the origin of the command to teach his doctrine and to baptise, so that the most Blessed Trinity may live in men's souls in grace. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the close of the age.

In those simple and sublime words that conclude Saint Matthew's gospel we find the obligation to preach the truths of faith, the need for sacramental life, the promise of Christ's continual assistance to his Church. You cannot be faithful to Our Lord if you neglect these supernatural demands: to instruct in Christian faith and morality and to frequent the sacraments. It is with this mandate that Christ founded his Church. Everything else is secondary.

Salvation in the Church

24 We cannot forget that the Church is not merely a way of salvation; it is the only way. This is not a human opinion, but the express will of Christ: he who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. This is why we assert that the Church is a necessary means of salvation. No later than the second century, Origen wrote: If anyone wants to be saved, let him come to this house so that he can obtain salvation... Let no one deceive himself: outside of this house, that is outside of the Church, no one will be saved. Of the deluge, Saint

Cyprian says: If someone had escaped outside of Noah's ark then we would admit that someone who abandoned the Church might escape condemnation.

Extra Ecclesiam, nulla salus. That is the continual warning of the Fathers. Outside the Catholic Church you can find everything except salvation, Saint Augustine admits. You can have honor and sacraments: you can sing 'alleluia' and respond 'amen' You can uphold the gospel, have faith in the Father, in the Son, and in the Holy Spirit, and preach that faith. But never, except in the Catholic Church, can you find salvation.

Nonetheless, as Pius XII lamented little more than twenty years ago, some reduce to an empty formula the need to pertain to the true Church in order to obtain eternal salvation. This dogma of faith is at the root of the Church's co-redemptive activity. It spells out the Christian's grave apostolic responsibility. Among Christ's express commandments is the categorical one to incorporate ourselves in his Mystical Body by Baptism. And our Savior not only commanded that everyone enter the Church, but also established that the Church be the means of salvation, without which no one can reach the kingdom of celestial glory.

It is a matter of faith that anyone who does not belong to the Church will not be saved; and anyone who is not baptized does not enter the Church. Justification cannot take place after the promulgation of the gospel, without Baptism or its desire, the Council of Trent established.

25 This is a continual demand of the Church which on the one hand stimulates us to greater apostolic zeal, and on the other manifests clearly the infinite mercy of God with his creatures.

This is how Saint Thomas explained it: The sacrament of Baptism may be wanting to someone in two ways. First, in reality and desire, as is the case of those who are neither baptized nor wish to be baptized: which clearly indicates contempt of the sacrament for those who have the use of reason. Consequently those to whom Baptism is wanting thus, cannot obtain salvation: since neither sacramentally nor spiritually are they incorporated in Christ, through whom alone can salvation be obtained. Secondly, the sacrament of Baptism may be wanting to someone in reality but not in desire: for instance, when a man wishes to be baptized, but by some misfortune he is forestalled by death before receiving Baptism. Such a man can obtain salvation without actually being baptized, on account of desire for Baptism, a desire which is the outcome of faith that works by charity, whereby God, whose power is not tied to visible sacraments, sanctifies man inwardly.

God Our Lord denies no one supernatural and eternal happiness, although it is a completely free gift to which no one has a right, especially after sin. His generosity is infinite. It is a matter of common knowledge that those who suffer invincible ignorance of our most holy religion but carefully observe all the precepts of the Natural Law which are engraved by God in the hearts of all men, and want to obey God and lead an upright life, can obtain eternal life through the efficacious action of divine light and grace.

God alone knows what goes on in the heart of each man, and he does not deal with souls en masse, but one by one. No one on this earth can make a judgment about the eternal salvation or condemnation of any individual.

26 Let us not forget that conscience can be culpably deformed and harden itself in sin, resisting the saving action of God. That is why it is necessary to spread Christ's doctrine, the truths of faith and the norms of Christian morality. That is also why we need the sacraments, all of which were instituted by Jesus Christ as instrumental causes of his grace and remedies for the weaknesses that ensue from our fallen nature. Finally, that is why we need to receive frequently the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist.

The awesome responsibility of all the Church's members and especially of its shepherds is made clear in Saint Paul's advice: I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead, and in the name of his coming and of his kingdom: Preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths.

A time of trial

27 I cannot say how often the prophetic words of the Apostle have been fulfilled, but you would have to be blind not to see how they are being carried out almost to the letter in our own time. People reject the doctrine contained in the law of God and of the Church. They twist the content of the beatitudes, translating them into a socio-political doctrine. They attack those who try to be humble, meek and pure of heart as ignorant or outdated partisans of things long ago consigned to the past. They refuse to bear the yoke of chastity and invent a thousand excuses to evade Christ's divine precepts.

There is one symptom that sums up this whole situation: the attempt to change the supernatural aims of the Church. When they speak of justice, some people no longer understand by it a life of sanctity, but a particular political struggle, more or less influenced by Marxism, which is incompatible with the Christian faith. For them, liberation does not imply a personal battle to flee from sin, but merely a human task which may be noble and just in itself, but which is meaningless for a Christian, if it implies losing sight of the one thing necessary - the eternal salvation of souls, one by one.

28 With a blindness that comes from separating themselves from God - this people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me - some fabricate an image of the Church that has nothing to do with what Christ founded. Even the holy sacrament of the altar, the renewal of the sacrifice of Calvary, is profaned or reduced to a mere symbol of what they call the 'communion of men with each other'. What would have become of souls if Our Lord had not sacrificed himself for us, to the last drop of his precious Blood? How can they despise this perpetual miracle of the real presence of Christ in the tabernacle? He has stayed with us so

that we can talk to him and adore him. He has stayed with us as a foretaste of our future glory, so that we decide once and for all to follow in his footsteps.

These are times of trial, and we have to ask the Lord with an unceasing clamor to shorten them, to look mercifully on his Church and to grant once again his supernatural light to the souls of her shepherds and of all the faithful. The Church has no reason to try to pander to men, since they, individually or in community, cannot save themselves. The only one who saves is God.

Loving the Church

29 We need to shout out loudly today - time and again those bold words of Saint Peter to a group of important people in Jerusalem: This is the stone which was rejected by you builders, but which has become the head of the corner. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

Thus spoke the first Pope, the rock on which Christ built his Church. He was moved to do so by his filial devotion to the Lord and by his solicitude for the little flock entrusted to him. From him and from the rest of the Apostles, the first Christians learned to love the Church tenderly.

Have you seen, in contrast, how people talk heartlessly about our Holy Mother the Church nowadays? What a great consolation it is to read the ancient Fathers' ardent and loving phrases about the Church! Let us love the Lord our God; let us love his Church, Saint Augustine writes. Let us love Him as our Father, and her as our Mother. Let no one say: 'It is true that I still go to the idols and consult the possessed and the sorcerers, but I have not abandoned the Church, I am a Catholic.' You may still be united to your Mother, but you offend your Father. Someone else might say: 'God forbid. I do not consult sorcerers or the possessed. I do not practice sacrilegious prophecies nor go to adore demons nor serve gods of stone. But I belong to the Donatist party. ' What use will it be to him not to offend his Father if his Father will avenge his Mother whom he offends? And Saint Cyprian puts it more briefly: No one can have God as his Father who does not have the Church as his Mother.

In our days many refuse to listen to the true doctrine about our Mother the Church. Some want to redesign the institution, trying to introduce foolishly into the mystical body of Christ a democracy modeled on that of some civil societies. Or worse yet, they clamor for an ecclesiastical body whose members would be equal in every respect. They refuse to believe that by divine institution the Church is made up of the Pope, with the bishops, priests, deacons and lay people. That is how Christ wanted it to be.

30 The Church is by divine will a hierarchical institution. The Second Vatican Council describes it as a society structured with hierarchical organs in which the ministers are invested with a sacred power. The hierarchy is not only compatible with freedom; it is at the service of the freedom of the children of God.

The term democracy is meaningless in the Church which, let me insist, is hierarchical by divine will. But hierarchy means holy government and sacred order. In no way does it imply a merely human arbitrary order or a subhuman despotism. Our Lord established in the Church a hierarchical order which should not degenerate into tyranny, because authority is as much a call to serve as is obedience.

In the Church there is equality, because once baptized we are all equal, all children of the same God, our Father. There is no difference as Christians between the Pope and someone who has just joined the Church. But this radical equality does not mean that we can change the constitution of the Church in those things that were established by Christ. By expressed divine will there are different functions which imply different capacities, an indelible character conferred on the sacred ministers by the Sacrament of Orders. At the summit of this order is Peter's successor and, with him, and under him, all the bishops with the triple mission of sanctifying, governing and teaching.

31 Forgive me for being so insistent, but I must remind you again that the truths of the faith are not determined by majority vote. They make up the *depositum fidei*: the body of truths left by Christ to all of the faithful and entrusted to the Magisterium of the Church to be authentically taught and set forth.

It would be an error to think that since men seem to have become more aware of the bonds of mutual solidarity that unite them, we ought to change the constitution of the Church as if it needed updating. The times do not belong to men whether ecclesiastics or not. The times are God's, who is the Lord of history. And the Church can bring salvation to souls only if she remains faithful to Christ in her constitution and teaching, both dogmatic and moral.

Let us reject, therefore, the suggestion that the Church, ignoring the Sermon on the Mount, seeks a purely human happiness on earth, since we know that her only task is to bring men to eternal glory in heaven. Let us reject any purely naturalistic view that fails to value the supernatural role of divine grace. Let us reject materialistic opinions that exclude spiritual values from human life. Let us equally reject any secularizing theory which aims to equate the aims of the Church with those of earthly states, distorting its essence, institutions and activities into something similar to those of temporal society.

The Depths of God's wisdom

32 Remember what Saint Paul told us in the epistle we read today: O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! 'For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?' For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. In the light of God's words, how petty seem human designs when they are used to undermine what Our Lord has established!

But I do not want you to ignore the fact that on all sides we find evidence of man's warped behavior. Not being able to get around God, he turns and takes revenge on other men. Contemporaries of ours become terrible instruments of evil when they serve as occasion and inducement to sin, sowing confusion which leads people to commit intrinsically evil actions and flaunt them as good.

There has always been ignorance. But nowadays the most abysmal ignorance in matters of faith and morals is disguised at times with high-sounding terms which appear theological. That is why Christ's commandment to his apostles which we have just heard in the Gospel, Go and teach all nations takes on, if possible, an even more pressing urgency. We cannot be indifferent. We cannot fold our arms and go into seclusion within ourselves. Let us step forward to fight, for God, a great battle of peace, serenity and doctrine.

33 We must be understanding, covering everything over with the kind mantle of charity. But charity must strengthen us in the faith, increase our hope and make us strong to say loud and clear that the Church is not what some people pretend. The Church belongs to God and has only one aim, the salvation of souls. Let us draw near to Our Lord and speak to him face to face in our prayer. Let us ask him forgiveness for our personal weaknesses and let us make reparation for our sins and for those of other men who may not realize in this climate of confusion, how gravely they are offending God.

In the Holy Mass this Sunday, in the unbloody renewal of the sacrifice of Calvary, Jesus Christ, priest and victim, will offer himself for the sins of men. Let us not leave him alone. Let there well up in our heart an ardent desire to be with him, next to the Cross. May our clamor rise to the Father, the merciful God, asking him to give back peace to the world, peace to the Church, peace to consciences.

If we do this, we will find next to the Cross Mary Most Holy, the Mother of God and our Mother. And guided by her blessed hand, we will come to Jesus, and through him to the Father and the Holy Spirit.

A PRIEST FOREVER

A homily given on 13 April 1973, Friday in the first week of Passiontide, formerly the Commemoration of the Seven Sorrows of Our Lady

Why be a priest?

Priests and lay people

The dignity of the priesthood

A priest to say Mass

A Priest forever

34 When saying Mass a few days ago I paused to reflect on a phrase from the psalms in the Communion Antiphon: The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. It reminded me of another psalm which was used in the rite of tonsure: The Lord is

my chosen portion and my cup. Christ Himself is placed in the hands of priests who thus become the stewards of the mysteries - of the wonders - of God.

Next summer some fifty members of Opus Dei will receive Holy Orders. Since 1944 small groups of members of the Work have been ordained, each ordination giving witness to the working of God's grace and to service to the Church. And yet each year some people are surprised. How is it, they ask, that thirty, forty or fifty men whose lives are so rich in achievement and so full of promise, are ready to become priests? I should like today to dwell on this subject - though I run the risk of adding to people's bewilderment.

Why be a priest?

35 The sacrament of Holy Orders is going to be conferred on this group of members of the Work who have had very substantial experience, perhaps over many years, in medicine, law, engineering, architecture and many other professional activities. They are men whose work would allow them to aspire to more or less prominent positions in society.

They are being ordained to serve. They are not being ordained to give orders or to attract attention, but rather to give themselves to the service of all souls in a divine and continuous silence. When they become priests, they will not allow themselves to yield to the temptation to imitate the occupations of lay people - even though they are well able to do that work because they have been at it until now, and have acquired a lay outlook which they will never lose.

Their competence in the various branches of human knowledge such as history, natural sciences, psychology, law and sociology is a necessary feature of this lay outlook. But it will not lead them to put themselves forward as priest-psychologists, priest-biologists or priest-sociologists: they receive the sacrament of Holy Orders to become nothing other than priest-priests, priests through and through.

36 They probably know more about a wide range of secular, human matters than many lay people. But the moment they are ordained they cheerfully silence this competence and concentrate on fortifying themselves through continuous prayer so as to speak only of God, to preach the Gospel and administer the sacraments. If I can put it this way, I would say that this is their new professional work. To it they will devote their whole day and find that they still have not enough time to do all that has to be done. They have constantly to study theology; they must give spiritual guidance to very many souls, hear many confessions, preach tirelessly and pray a great deal; their heart must always be focused on the tabernacle, where He who has chosen us to be his own is really present. Their life is a wonderful self-surrender, full of joy, though like everyone they will meet up with difficulties.

As I said, all this may serve to increase people's surprise. Perhaps some may still ask themselves: What is the point of this renunciation of so many good and noble things of the earth? These men could have had a successful professional career. Through their example they could have exerted a Christian influence on society, on cultural, educational, financial and many other aspects of civil life.

Others will remind you that in many places today the idea of the priesthood is very confused. They keep on saying that you must search for the identity of the priest and they question the value of giving oneself to God in the priesthood in present-day society. And then others will ask how it is that, at a time when vocations to the priesthood are in short supply, this very vocation should arise among Christians who, thanks to their own efforts, have already found their place in society.

Priests and lay people

37 I can understand this surprise, but it would be insincere of me to say that I share it. These men become priests of their own free will, because they want to, and this is a very supernatural reason. They know that they are not renouncing anything in the normal sense of the word. Through their vocation to Opus Dei they have been devoted to the service of the Church and of all souls. This full, divine vocation led them to sanctify their work to sanctify themselves in their work and to seek the sanctification of others in the context of their professional relationships.

The members of Opus Dei whether priests or lay people, are ordinary Christians, and like all Christians, they are addressed by Saint Peter in these words: You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy.

As Christian faithful, priests and lay people share one and the same condition, for God our Lord has called us to the fullness of charity which is holiness: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

There is no such thing as second-class holiness. Either we put up a constant fight to stay in the grace of God and imitate Christ, our Model, or we desert in that divine battle. God invites everyone; each person can become holy in his own state in life. In Opus Dei this passion for holiness, in spite of individual errors and failings, does not vary from priests to lay people; and besides, priests make up a very small part compared with the total number of members.

So if you look at things with the eyes of faith, there is no question of renunciation on entering the priesthood; nor does the priesthood imply a sort of summit of vocation to Opus Dei. Holiness does not depend on your state in life (married or single, widowed or ordained) but on the way you personally respond to the grace you receive. This grace teaches us to put away the works of darkness and put on the armour of light: which is serenity, peace and joyful service, full of sacrifice to all mankind.

The dignity of the priesthood

38 The priesthood leads one to serve God in a state which, in itself, is no better or worse than any other: it is simply different. But the priestly vocation is invested

with a dignity and greatness which has no equal on earth. Saint Catherine of Siena put these words on Jesus' lips: I do not wish the respect which priests should be given to be in any way diminished; for the reverence and respect which is shown them is not referred to them but to Me, by virtue of the Blood which I have given to them to administer. Were it not for this, you should render them the same reverence as lay people, and no more... You must not offend them; by offending them you offend Me and not them. Therefore I forbid it and I have laid it down that you shall not touch my Christs.

Some people keep searching for what they call the identity of the priest. How clearly Saint Catherine expresses it! What is the identity of the priest? That of Christ. All of us Christians can and should be not just other Christs, alter Christus, but Christ himself: ipse Christus! But in the priest this happens in a direct way, by virtue of the sacrament.

39 To accomplish so great a work - the work of redemption - Christ is always present in his Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. He is present in the Sacrifice of the Mass, not only in the person of his minister, 'the same now offering through the ministry of priests, who formerly offered himself on the Cross, but especially under the Eucharistic species. The sacrament of Orders, in effect, equips the priest to lend Our Lord his voice, his hands, his whole being. It is Jesus Christ who, in the Holy Mass, through the words of the consecration, changes the substance of the bread and wine into his Body, Soul, Blood and Divinity.

This is the source of the priest's incomparable dignity. It is a greatness which is on loan: it is completely compatible with my own littleness. I pray to God our Lord to give all of us priests the grace to perform holy things in a holy way, to reflect in every aspect of our lives the wonders of the greatness of God. Those of us who celebrate the mysteries of the Passion of Our Lord must imitate what we perform. And then the host will take our place before God because we render ourselves hosts.

If you ever come across a priest who apparently does not seem to be following the teaching of the Gospel - do not judge him, let God judge him - bear in mind that if he celebrates Mass validly, with the intention of consecrating, Our Lord will still come down into his hands, however unworthy they are. Where could you find greater self-surrender and annihilation? Here it is greater than in Bethlehem or on Calvary. Why? Because Jesus' heart, filled with a desire to redeem, does not want anyone to be able to say that he has not been called. He goes out to meet those who do not seek Him.

That is Love! There is no other explanation for it. When it comes to speaking of Christ's Love, we are lost for words. He has so abased Himself that He accepts everything; He exposes Himself to everything - to sacrilege, to blasphemy and to the cold indifference of so many people - in order to offer even one man the chance of hearing the beating of his Heart in his wounded side.

Here we have the priest's identity: he is a direct and daily instrument of the saving grace which Christ has won for us. If you grasp this, if you meditate on it in the

active silence of prayer, how could you ever think of the priesthood in terms of renunciation? It is a gain, an incalculable gain. Our mother Mary, the holiest of creatures - only God is holier - brought Jesus Christ into the world just once; priests bring him on earth, to our soul and body, every day: Christ comes to be our food, to give us life, to be, even now, a pledge of future life.

The common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood

40 A priest is no more a man or a Christian than any ordinary lay person. That is why it is so important for a priest to be deeply humble. He must understand that these words of Saint Paul also apply to him in a special way: What have you that you did not receive? What he has received... is God! He has received the power to celebrate the Holy Eucharist, the Holy Mass (the principal purpose of priestly ordination), to forgive sins, to administer the other sacraments and to preach with authority the Word of God, governing the rest of the faithful in those matters which refer to the Kingdom of Heaven.

41 While it indeed presupposes the sacraments of Christian initiation, the priesthood of priests is nevertheless conferred by its own special sacrament. Through that sacrament priests, by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are marked with a special character and are so configured to Christ the Priest that they can act in the person of Christ the Head. That is the way the Church is. It does not depend on man's whim but on the express will of Jesus Christ its founder. Sacrifice and priesthood are so united by God's ordination, that in both laws - the old and the new covenant - both have existed. Since therefore the Catholic Church in the New Testament has received, through the Lord's institution, the visible sacrifice of the Eucharist, we must also hold that she has a new priesthood, visible and external, which has taken the place of the old priesthood.

In those who have been ordained, the ministerial priesthood is added to the common priesthood of all of the faithful. Therefore, although it would be a serious error to argue that a priest is more a member of the faithful than an unordained Christian is, it can, on the other hand, be said that he is more a priest: like all Christians he belongs to the priestly people redeemed by Christ, and in addition to this he is marked with a character of the priestly ministry which differentiates him essentially and not only in degree from the common priesthood of the faithful.

42 I cannot understand why some priests are so eager to be indistinguishable from other Christians, forgetting or neglecting their specific mission in the Church, that for which they have been ordained. They seem to think that Christians want to see the priest as just another man. That is not so. They want to find in the priest those virtues proper to every Christian and, indeed, every honorable man: understanding, justice, a life of work - priestly work, in this instance - and good manners.

But the faithful also want to be able to recognize clearly the priestly character: they expect the priest to pray, not to refuse to administer the sacraments; they expect him to be open to everyone and not set himself up to take charge of people or become an aggressive leader of human factions, of whatever shade. They expect him to bring love and devotion to the celebration of the Holy Mass, to sit in the

confessional, to console the sick and the troubled; to teach sound doctrine to children and adults, to preach the Word of God and no mere human science which - no matter how well he may know it - is not the knowledge that saves and brings eternal life; they expect him to give counsel and be charitable to those in need.

43 In a word: they ask the priest to learn how not to hamper the presence of Christ in him, especially in those moments when he is offering the Sacrifice of the Body and Blood and when, in God's name, he forgives sins in secret, private sacramental confession. The administration of these two sacraments has so important a part in the priest's mission that everything should hinge on it. Other priestly tasks, such as preaching and giving instruction in the faith, would lack solid foundation if they were not aimed at teaching people to relate to Christ, to meet Him in the loving tribunal of penance and in the unbloody renewal of the Sacrifice of Calvary, the Mass.

Let me dwell just a little longer on the Holy Sacrifice: for if the Mass is, for us, the center and root of our lives as Christians, it must be so in a special way in the priest's life. A priest who, for no good reason, does not celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the altar every day, would show little love of God. It would be as though he wanted to reproach Christ by stating that he did not share Christ's desire for redemption, that he did not understand his impatience to give Himself, defenseless, as food for the soul.

A priest to say Mass

44 We must remember that all of us priests, saints or sinners, are not ourselves when we celebrate Holy Mass. We are Christ, who renews on the altar his divine sacrifice of Calvary. In the mystery of the Eucharistic sacrifice, in which priests fulfill their principal function, the work of our redemption is continually carried out. For this reason its daily celebration is earnestly recommended. This celebration is an act of Christ and the Church even if it is impossible for the faithful to be present.

The Council of Trent teaches that in the Mass is performed, contained and sacrificed, in an unbloody manner, that same Christ who once and for all offered Himself in a bloody manner on the altar of the Cross... thus the Victim is one and the same; and He who is now offered through the ministry of priests is the same as He who offered Himself on the Cross; only the manner of offering is different.

The fact that the faithful attend or do not attend Holy Mass in no way changes this truth of faith. When I celebrate Mass surrounded by people I am very happy; I don't need to think of myself as president of any kind of assembly. I am, on the one hand, a member of the faithful like the others; but, above all, I am Christ at the Altar! I am renewing in an unbloody manner the divine Sacrifice of Calvary and I am consecrating, in persona Christi, in the person of Christ. I really represent Jesus Christ, for I am lending him my body, my voice, my hands and my poor heart, so often stained, which I want Him to purify.

When I celebrate Mass with just one person to serve it, the people are present also. I feel that there, with me, are all Catholics, all believers, and also all those who do not believe. All God's creatures are there - the earth and the sea and the sky, and the animals and plants - the whole of creation giving glory to the Lord.

45 And especially I will say, using the words of the Second Vatican Council, that we are most closely united to the worshipping church in heaven as we join with and venerate first of all the memory of the glorious ever Virgin Mary, of Saint Joseph and the blessed apostles and martyrs, and of all the saints.

I ask all Christians to pray earnestly for us priests that we learn to perform the Holy Sacrifice in a holy way. I ask you to show a deep love for the Holy Mass and in this way to encourage us priests to celebrate it respectfully, with divine and human dignity: looking after the cleanliness of the vestments and other things used for worship, devoutly, without rushing.

Why the hurry? Do people in love hurry when they are saying goodbye? They seem to be going and then they don't go; they turn back once and again; they repeat quite ordinary words as if they had just discovered their meaning... please don't take exception to my applying to the things of God the example of noble and fine human love. If we love God with our heart of flesh - and we have no other - we will not be in a hurry to finish this meeting, this loving appointment with Him.

Some priests take it all very coolly. They don't mind stringing out the readings, announcements and notices until we are tired of them. But when the main part of the Mass arrives, the Sacrifice proper, they actually rush. This means that the rest of the faithful do not devoutly adore Christ, Priest and Victim; nor do they learn to thank Him, calmly and respectfully, after Mass for his having come among us once again.

In the Holy Mass, all the affections and needs of a Christian's heart find their best channel: through Christ the Mass leads to the Father in the Holy Spirit. The priest should make a special effort to ensure that people know this and put it into practice. No other activity should, normally, take precedence over this task of teaching people to love and venerate the Holy Eucharist.

46 The priest carries out two acts: the principal one is an action on the true Body of Christ; the secondary one affects the Mystical Body of Christ. The second act or ministry depends on the first, but the reverse is not the case.

Therefore the most important part of the priestly ministry consists in trying to get Catholics to approach the Holy Sacrifice with growing purity, humility and devotion. If a priest strives to do this, he will not be cheated, nor will he defraud the consciences of his fellow Christians.

In the Holy Mass what we do is adore: we fulfill lovingly the first duty of a creature to his Creator: You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve. Not the cold, external adoration of a servant, but an intimate esteem and attachment that befits the tender love of a son.

In the Holy Mass we find the perfect opportunity to atone for our sins and the sins of all men, so as to be able to say with Saint Paul that we are completing in our flesh what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ. No one is an isolated individual in this world; no one can consider himself completely free from blame for the evil that is done on earth, which is the result of original sin and the sum total of many Personal sins. Let us love sacrifice; let us seek atonement. How? By uniting ourselves in the Mass to Christ, who is Priest and Victim. He is always the one who bears the tremendous weight of the infidelities of men - your infidelities and mine.

47 The Sacrifice of Calvary is an infinite expression of Christ's generosity. It is true that each of us is very much out for himself; but God our Lord does not mind if we lay all our needs before Him at Mass. Who doesn't have things to ask for? Lord, this illness... Lord, this sorrow... Lord, that humiliation which I don't seem to be able to bear out of love for You... We desire the welfare, joy and happiness of the people in our own home; we are saddened by the condition of those who hunger and thirst for bread and for justice, of those who experience the bitterness of loneliness and of those who end their days without an affectionate smile or a helping hand.

But what really makes us suffer, the greatest human failure we want to remedy, is sin, separation from God, the danger that souls may be lost for all eternity. Our overriding desire when we celebrate Mass is the same as Christ's when he offered Himself on Calvary: to bring men to eternal glory in the Love of God.

Let us get used to speaking sincerely to our Lord when he comes down to the altar, an innocent Victim in the hands of the priest. Confidence in the help of God will give us a sensitivity of soul which is expressed in good works: charity, understanding, tender sympathy for those who suffer and for those who pretend to be happy enjoying false and empty joys, which soon turn to sadness.

48 Finally, we give thanks to God our Lord for the wonderful way He has given Himself up for us. Imagine, the Word made flesh has come to us as our food!... Inside us, inside our littleness, lies the Creator of heaven and earth!... The Virgin Mary was conceived without sin to prepare her to receive Christ in her womb. If our thanksgiving were in proportion to the difference between the gift and our desserts, should we not turn the whole day into a continuous Eucharist, a continuous thanksgiving? Do not leave the church almost immediately after receiving the Sacrament. Surely you have nothing so important on that you cannot give Our Lord ten minutes to say thanks. Let's not be mean. Love is repaid with love.

A Priest forever

49 A priest who says the Mass in this way - adoring, atoning, pleading, giving thanks, identifying himself with Christ and who teaches others to make the Sacrifice of the altar the center and root of the Christian life really will show the incomparable value of his vocation, the value of that character with which he has been stamped and which he will never lose.

I know that you will understand what I mean when I say that, compared with a priest like that, those who behave as if they wanted to apologies for being ministers

of God are nothing less than a failure - a human and Christian failure. It is most unfortunate because it leads them to give up the ministry, to ape lay people and to look for a second job which gradually takes over from the task which is proper to their vocation and their mission. Often when they flee from giving spiritual attention to souls, they tend to replace this with another occupation (moving into those areas which belong to lay people - social action and politics) and we get the phenomenon of clericalism, the true priestly mission gone wrong.

50 I do not wish to conclude on a somber note which might sound pessimistic. The genuine Christian priesthood has not disappeared from God's Church. The teaching which we have received from the divine lips of Jesus has not changed. There are many thousands of priests throughout the world who really do respond to their vocation, quietly, undramatically. They have not fallen into the temptation to throw overboard a treasure of holiness and grace which has existed in the Church from the very beginning.

It warms my heart to think of the quiet human and supernatural dignity of those brothers of mine, scattered throughout the world. It is only right that they should now feel themselves surrounded by the friendship, help and affection of many Christians. And when the moment comes for them to enter God's presence, Jesus will go out to meet them. He will glorify forever those who have acted on earth in his Person and in his name. He will shower them with that grace of which they have been ministers.

Let us return again to those members of Opus Dei who are being ordained next summer. Do please pray for them, so that they will always be faithful, devout, learned, committed and happy priests. Commend them especially to our Lady. Ask her to take special care of those who will spend their lives serving her Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Priest.

PASSIONATELY LOVING THE WORLD

A homily given on 8 October 1967, at a Mass on the campus of the University of Navarre, Spain; it has previously been published in *Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá*

51 You have just been listening to the solemn reading of the two texts of Sacred Scripture for the Mass of the twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost. Having heard the Word of God you are already in the right atmosphere for the words I want to address to you: words of a priest, spoken to a large family of the children of God in his Holy Church. Words, therefore, which are intended to be supernatural, proclaiming the greatness of God and his mercies towards men; words to prepare you for today's great celebration of the Eucharist on the campus of the University of Navarre.

Consider for a moment the event I have just described. We are celebrating the holy Eucharist, the sacramental sacrifice of the Body and Blood of our Lord, that mystery of faith which binds together all the mysteries of Christianity. We are celebrating, therefore, the most sacred and transcendent act which we, men and

women, with God's grace can carry out in this life: receiving the Body and Blood of our Lord is, in a certain sense, like loosening our ties with earth and time, so as to be already with God in heaven, where Christ himself will wipe the tears from our eyes and where there will be no more death, nor mourning, nor cries of distress, because the old world will have passed away.

This profound and consoling truth, which theologians usually call the eschatological meaning of the Eucharist, could, however, be misunderstood. Indeed, this has happened whenever people have tried to present the Christian way of life as something exclusively spiritual - or better, spiritualistic something reserved for pure, extraordinary people who remain aloof from the contemptible things of this world, or at most tolerate them as something that the spirit just has to live alongside, while we are on this earth.

When people take this approach, churches become the setting par excellence of the Christian way of life. And being a Christian means going to church, taking part in sacred ceremonies, getting into an ecclesiastical mentality, in a special kind of world, considered the ante-chamber to heaven, while the ordinary world follows its own separate course. In this case, Christian teaching and the life of grace would pass by, brushing very lightly against the turbulent advance of human history but never coming into proper contact with it.

On this October morning, as we prepare to enter upon the memorial of our Lord's Pasch, we flatly reject this deformed vision of Christianity. Reflect for a moment on the setting of our Eucharist, of our Act of Thanksgiving. We find ourselves in a unique temple; we might say that the nave is the University campus; the altarpiece, the University library; over there, the machinery for constructing new buildings; above us, the sky of Navarre...

52 Surely this confirms in your minds, in a tangible and unforgettable way, the fact that everyday life is the true setting for your lives as Christians. Your daily encounter with Christ takes place where your fellow men, your yearnings, your work and your affections are. It is in the midst of the most material things of the earth that we must sanctify ourselves, serving God and all mankind.

This I have been teaching all the time, using words from holy Scripture: the world is not evil, because it comes from the hands of God, because it is his creation, because Yahweh looked upon it and saw that it was good. It is we ourselves, men and women, who make it evil and ugly with our sins and unfaithfulness. Don't doubt it, my children: any attempt to escape from the noble reality of daily life is, for you men and women of the world, something opposed to the will of God.

On the contrary, you must realize now, more clearly than ever, that God is calling you to serve him in and from the ordinary, secular and civil activities of human life. He waits for us everyday, in the laboratory, in the operating theatre, in the army barracks, in the university chair, in the factory, in the workshop, in the fields, in the home and in all the immense panorama of work. Understand this well: there is something holy, something divine hidden in the most ordinary situations, and it is up to each one of you to discover it.

I often said to the university students and workers who were with me in the 'thirties that they had to know how to materialize their spiritual lives. I wanted to warn them of the temptation, so common then and now, to lead a kind of double life: on the one hand, an inner life, a life related to God; and on the other, as something separate and distinct, their professional, social and family lives, made up of small earthly realities.

No, my children! We cannot lead a double life. We cannot be like schizophrenics, if we want to be Christians. There is only one life, made of flesh and spirit. And it is that life which has to become, in both body and soul, holy and filled with God: we discover the invisible God in the most visible and material things.

There is no other way, my daughters and sons: either we learn to find our Lord in ordinary, everyday life, or we shall never find him. That is why I tell you that our age needs to give back to matter and to the apparently trivial events of life their noble, original meaning. It needs to place them at the service of the Kingdom of God; it needs to spiritualize them, turning them into a means and an occasion for a continuous meeting with Jesus Christ.

53 The genuine Christian approach - which professes the resurrection of all flesh - has always quite logically opposed 'dis-incarnation' without fear of being judged materialistic. We can, therefore, rightly speak of a Christian materialism, which is boldly opposed to those materialisms which are blind to the spirit.

What are the sacraments, which people in early times described as the footprints of the Incarnate Word, if not the clearest expression of this way which God has chosen in order to sanctify us and to lead us to heaven? Don't you see that each sacrament is the love of God, with all its creative and redemptive power, given to us through the medium of material things? What is this Eucharist which we are about to celebrate if not the Adorable Body and Blood of our Redeemer, which is offered to us through the lowly matter of this world (wine and bread), through the elements of nature, cultivated by man as the recent Ecumenical Council has reminded us.

It is understandable, my children, that the Apostle should write: All things are yours, you are Christ's and Christ is God's. We have here an ascending movement which the Holy Spirit, poured into our hearts, wants to call forth in this world: upwards from the earth to the glory of the Lord. And to make it clear that in such a movement everything is included, even what seems most commonplace, St Paul also wrote: in eating, in drinking, do everything for God's glory.

54 This doctrine of Sacred Scripture, as you know, is to be found in the very core of the spirit of Opus Dei. It should lead you to do your work perfectly, to love God and your fellowmen by putting love in the little things of everyday life, and discovering that divine something which is hidden in small details. The lines of a Castilian poet are especially appropriate here: Write slowly and with a careful hand, for doing things well is more important than doing them.

I assure you, my children, that when a Christian carries out with love the most insignificant everyday action, that action overflows with the transcendence of God.

That is why I have told you so often, and hammered away at it, that the Christian vocation consists in making heroic verse out of the prose of each day. Heaven and earth seem to merge, my children, on the horizon. But where they really meet is in your hearts, when you sanctify your everyday lives...

I have just said, sanctify your everyday lives. And with these words I refer to the whole programme of your task as Christians. Stop dreaming. Leave behind false idealisms, fantasies, and what I usually call mystical wishful thinking: If only I hadn't married; if only I had a different job or qualification; if only I were in better health; if only I were younger; if only I were older.* Instead, turn to the most material and immediate reality, which is where our Lord is: Look at my hands and my feet, said the risen Jesus, be assured that it is myself; touch me and see; a spirit has not flesh and bones, as you see that I have.

Light is shed upon many aspects of the world in which you live, when you start from these truths. Take your activity as citizens, for instance. A man who knows that the world - and not just the church - is the place where he finds Christ, loves that world. He endeavors to become properly trained, intellectually and professionally. He makes up his own mind, in full freedom, about the problems of the environment in which he moves, and he takes his own decisions in consequence. As the decisions of a Christian, they derive from personal reflection, which strives in all humility to grasp the will of God in both the unimportant and the important events of his life.

55 But it never occurs to such a Christian to think or say that he was stepping down from the temple into the world to represent the Church, or that his solutions are the Catholic solutions to the problems. That would be completely inadmissible! That would be clericalism, official Catholicism, or whatever you want to call it. In any case, it means doing violence to the very nature of things. What you must do is foster a real lay mentality, which will lead to three conclusions:

- be honorable enough to shoulder your own personal responsibility;
- be Christian enough to respect those brothers in the faith who, in matters of free discussion, propose solutions which differ from yours; and,
- be Catholic enough not to make a tool of our Mother the Church, involving her in human factions.

It is obvious that, in this field as in all others, you would not be able to carry out this programme of sanctifying your everyday life if you did not enjoy all the freedom which proceeds from your dignity as men and women created in the image of God, and which the Church freely recognizes. Personal freedom is essential for the Christian life. But do not forget, my sons, that I always speak of a responsible freedom.

Interpret, then, my words as what they are: a call to exercise your rights every day, and not just in times of emergency. A call to fulfill honorably your commitments as citizens in all fields - in politics and in financial affairs, in university life and in

your job - accepting with courage all the consequences of your free decisions and shouldering the personal independence which is yours. A Christian lay outlook of this sort will enable you to flee from all intolerance, from all fanaticism. To put it positively way, it will help you live in peace with all your fellow citizens, and to promote understanding and harmony in the various spheres of social life.

56 I know I have no need to remind you of something which I have been saying for so many years. This doctrine of civic freedom, of understanding, of living in harmony with other people, forms a very important part of the message spread by Opus Dei. Must I affirm once again that the men and women who want to serve Jesus Christ in the Work of God, are simply citizens the same as everyone else, who strive to live their Christian vocation to its ultimate consequences with a deep sense of responsibility?

Nothing distinguishes my children from their fellow citizens. On the other hand, apart from the faith they share, they have nothing in common with the members of religious congregations. I love the religious, and I venerate and admire their apostolates, their cloister, their separation from the world, their contemptus mundi, which are other signs of holiness in the Church. But the Lord has not given me a religious vocation, and for me to desire it would not be in order. No authority on earth can force me to be a religious, just as no authority can make me marry. I am a secular priest: a priest of Jesus Christ who is passionately in love with the world.

57 These are the men and women who have followed Jesus Christ in the company of this poor sinner: a small percentage of priests, who have previously exercised a secular profession or trade; a large number of secular priests from many dioceses throughout the world, who in this way confirm their obedience to their respective bishops, their love for their diocesan work and the effectiveness of it. Their arms are always wide open, in the form of a cross, to make room in their hearts for all souls; and like myself they live in the hustle and bustle of the workaday world which they love. And finally, a great multitude made up of men and women of different nations, and tongues, and races, who earn their living with their work. Most of them are married, many others single; they share with their fellow citizens in the important task of making temporal society more human and more just. And they work as I have said, shoulder to shoulder with their fellow men, experiencing with them successes and failures in the noble struggle of daily endeavor, as they strive to fulfill their duties and to exercise their social and civic rights. And all this with naturalness, like any other conscientious Christian, without considering themselves special. Blended into the mass of their companions, they try at the same time to detect the flashes of divine splendor which shine through the commonest everyday realities.

Similarly the activities which are promoted by Opus Dei as an association have these eminently secular characteristics: they are not ecclesiastical activities - they do not in any way represent the hierarchy of the Church. They are the fruit of human, cultural and social initiatives of ordinary citizens who try to make them reflect the light of the Gospel and to bring them the warmth of Christ's love. An

example which will help to make this clear is that Opus Dei does not, and never will, undertake the task of directing diocesan seminaries, in which bishops instituted by the Holy Spirit train their future priests.

58 Opus Dei on the other hand, does foster technical training centers for industrial workers, agricultural training schools for farm laborers, centers for primary, secondary and university education, and many other varied activities all over the world, because its apostolic zeal, as I wrote many years ago, is like a sea without shores.

But what need have I to speak at length on this topic, when your very presence here is more eloquent than a long address? You, Friends of the University of Navarre, are part of a body of people who know it is committed to the progress of the broader society to which it belongs. Your sincere encouragement, your prayers, sacrifices and contributions are not offered on the basis of Catholic confessionalism. Your cooperation is a clear testimony of a well-formed social conscience, which is concerned with the temporal common good. You are witnesses to the fact that a university can be born of the energies of the people and be sustained by the people.

On this occasion, I want to offer my thanks once again for the cooperation lent to our University, by my noble city of Pamplona, by the region of Navarre, by the Friends of the University from every part of Spain and - I say this with particular feeling - by people who are not Spaniards, even by people who are not Catholics or Christians, who have understood the purpose and spirit of this enterprise and have shown it with their active help.

Thanks to all of them this University has grown ever more effective as a focus of civic freedom, of intellectual training, of professional endeavor, and a stimulus for university education generally. Your generous sacrifice is part of the foundation of this whole undertaking which seeks to promote the human sciences, social welfare and the teaching of the faith.

What I have just pointed out has been clearly understood by the people of Navarre, who also recognize that their University is a factor in the economic development and, especially, in the social advancement of the region; a factor which has given so many of their children an opportunity to enter the intellectual professions which, otherwise, would have been difficult and, in some cases, impossible to obtain. This awareness of the role which the University would play in their lives is surely what inspired the support which Navarre has lent it from the beginning - support which will undoubtedly keep on growing in enthusiasm and extent.

I continue to harbor the hope - because it accords both with the requirements of justice and with the practice which obtains in so many countries - that the time will come when the Spanish government will contribute its share to lighten the burden of an undertaking which seeks no private profit, but on the contrary is totally dedicated to the service of society, and tries to work efficiently for the present and future prosperity of the nation.

59 And now, my sons and daughters, let me consider another aspect of everyday life which is particularly dear to me. I refer to human love, to the noble love between a man and a woman, to courtship and marriage. I want to say once again that this holy human love is not something to be merely permitted or tolerated alongside the true activities of the spirit, as might be insinuated by those false spiritualisms which I referred to earlier. I have been preaching and writing just the very opposite for forty years, and now those who did not understand are beginning to grasp the point.

Love, which leads to marriage and family, can also be a marvelous divine way, a vocation, a path for a complete dedication to our God. Do things perfectly, I have reminded you. Put love into the little duties of each day; discover that divine something contained in these details. All this teaching has a special place in that area of life where human love has its setting.

All of you who are lecturers or students or who work in any capacity in the University of Navarre know that I have entrusted your love to Mary, Mother of Fair Love. And here, on the university campus, you have the shrine which we built so devoutly, as a place to receive your prayers and the offering of that wonderful and pure love on which she bestows her blessing.

Surely you know that your bodies are the shrines of the Holy Spirit, who is God's gift to you, so that you are no longer your own masters? How often, before the statue of the Blessed Virgin, of the Mother of Fair Love, will you not reply to the Apostle's question with a joyful affirmation: Yes, we know that this is so and we want to live it with your powerful help, O Virgin Mother of God.

Contemplative prayer will rise within you whenever you meditate on this impressive truth: something as material as my body has been chosen by the Holy Sprit as his dwelling place... I no longer belong to myself... My body and soul, my whole being, belong to God... And this prayer will be rich in practical results arising from the great consequence which the Apostle himself suggests: glorify God in your bodies.

60 Besides, you cannot fail to realize that only among those who understand and value in all its depth what we have just considered about human love, can there arise another ineffable insight of which Jesus speaks: an insight which is a pure gift of God, moving a person to surrender body and soul to the Lord, to offer him an undivided heart, without the mediation of earthly love.

61 I must finish now, my children. I said at the beginning that I wanted to tell you something of the greatness and mercy of God. I think I have done so in speaking to you about sanctifying your everyday life. A holy life in the midst of secular affairs, lived without fuss, with simplicity, with truthfulness: is this not today the most moving manifestation of the magnalia Dei, of those prodigious mercies which God has always worked and still works, in order to save the world?

Now, with the Psalmist I ask you to join in my prayer and in my praise: Magnificate Dominum mecum, et extollamus nomen eius simul - praise the Lord with me, let us extol his name together. In other words, my children, let us live by faith.

Let us take up the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is God's Word. That is what St Paul encourages us to do in the epistle to the Ephesians, which was read in the liturgy a few moments ago.

Faith is a virtue which we Christians greatly need, and in a special way in this 'Year of Faith' which our beloved Holy Father Pope Paul VI has decreed. For, without faith, we lack the very foundation for the sanctification of ordinary life.

A living faith in these moments, because we are drawing near to the *mysterium fidei*, to the Holy Eucharist: because we are about to participate in our Lord's Pasch, which sums up and effects the mercies of God towards men.

Faith, my children, in order to acknowledge that within a few moments the work of our Redemption is going to be renewed on this altar. Faith, to savor the Creed and to experience, around this altar and in this Assembly, the presence of Christ, who makes us *cor unum et anima una*, one heart and one soul and transforms us into a family, a Church which is one, holy, catholic, apostolic and Roman, which for us is the same as saying universal.

Faith, finally, my beloved daughters and sons, to show the world that all this is not just ceremonies and words, but a divine reality, as we present to mankind the testimony of an ordinary life made holy, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and of Holy Mary.

EPILOGUE: GETTING TO THE ROOTS

The so called 'practical' people are not really the most useful in the service of Christ's Church, nor are those who merely expound theories. Rather it is the true contemplatives who best serve her: those with the steady, generous and passionate desire of transfiguring and divinizing all creation with Christ and in Christ. It may sound paradoxical, but in the Church of Jesus Christ, the mystic is the only truly practical person.

"To serve the Church without using the Church to serve yourself "; "to serve the Church as the Church wants to be served": this was the driving passion of the Servant of God, Josemaría Escrivá. The tenth anniversary of his death has evoked thoughts which I would like to express as a heartfelt token of gratitude and at the same time as a reminder of a lesson which I apply in the first place to myself For his faithfulness in service to the Church has borne results that have been apparent to all, and they testify to the fact that only someone who seeks ecstasies - literally going out of himself, spending himself fully and exclusively in the service of God and of souls - achieves authentic spiritual fruitfulness.

What the founder of Opus Dei was so consumed with, he expressed in a phrase which sounds like one of those heraldic mottoes: *Para servir, servir* (in order to serve, serve) - that is, to be useful, you ought to have a spirit of service and show it with deeds. The only honor he ever sought was to serve the Church. The only right was to renounce all rights except that of offering himself in a constant and total sacrifice of prayer and work.

An instrument, no matter how ordinary it may be, is only really effective if it is ordered to its true purpose: "First, prayer; then, atonement; in the third place - very much 'in the third place' - action." What makes the spirituality of Opus Dei so pragmatic is precisely that its principal characteristic, which the Servant of God wrote in blazing letters, is to immerse contemplation directly into everyday life, in a constant search for intimacy with God in the midst of the dense fabric of secular work.

For this pioneer of lay spirituality, the first effect of living the presence of God in one's work is the improvement of the quality of that work even in its technical aspects. If work is to be of specific and vital service to the living Body of Christ, it must first of all be well done. All sloppiness, carelessness, frivolity and superficiality have to be totally rejected, since they detract from the dignity of that service which any work implies.

The supernatural purpose, therefore, is not a stamp that is put on man's work without affecting its intrinsic quality. It is not a label, which may take the merchandise to its destination, but without really touching it and regardless of whether it is sound or faulty. Contemplation has a corrective effect on an action whenever that action does not achieve a standard proper to the dignity of a human being or the even higher standard proper to children of God, or when it fails to build up the People of God.

This becomes the fountain from which the daily life of a Christian flows. It is a stream in whose waters his love is constantly refreshed, as it seeks the Beloved through city streets and squares, across seas, through sown fields and on craggy peaks. This fountain and this stream expand the mind and enlarge the heart, leading them to breathe with new fervor the free air of that *sentire cum Ecclesia*. Few things the founder of Opus Dei detested so much as the nearsightedness of those who never see anything beyond their own selfish interests, the meanness of the individualist and of a bourgeois outlook and the rickets of an *esprit de corps*. "May I never see 'cliques' developing in your work. It would make a mockery of the apostolate: for if, in the end, the 'clique' got control of a universal undertaking, how quickly that universal undertaking would be reduced to a clique itself!"

Only the contemplative soul knows how to beat continuously in unison with the whole Church. It alone can sustain fidelity to its own vocation as it responds correctly and precisely to each service it is asked to give. Only such a soul realizes, from its own experience, that the Spirit "blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes." It also knows that in this world of confusion and relativism - there is only one place of which it can always and with absolute certainty be said: "Here is the spirit of Jesus": it is in the Church. *Ubi ecclesia, ibi spiritus Domini; ubi Spiritus Domini ibi ecclesia et omnis gratia* (St Irenaeus) - where the Church is, there is the Spirit of the Lord; where the spirit of the Lord is, there is the Church and all grace.

That is why those who are inspired by the Holy Spirit to carry out a divine enterprise *currunt ad Ecclesiam* - to use another expression of St Irenaeus - go

running to the Church. The individual's inner conviction of the details contained in the call he has received has the seal of an authentic charism only if he is convinced that it is by working in the Church, and with the Church, that one is living and acting with the Spirit of God.

Ever since 2 October 1928 Monsignor Escrivá was absolutely sure that Opus Dei was truly from God, that it was "an imperative command of Christ." Those intimate graces which ascetical and mystical theology deal with - divine touches, interior locutions and the like - are of a kind that cannot be shaken by anyone or anything. But even after seeing God's will for Opus Dei a mission entrusted exclusively to him, Monsignor Escrivá sought from the very beginning to be fully united to the hierarchy of the Church. He did not want to take a single step without its approval and blessing. He established specific norms for the Work so that always and everywhere it would proceed in close union with the aims of the local Churches. With disarming simplicity he affirmed that he loved Opus Dei to the extent that it served the Church. How often have I heard him say: "If Opus Dei does not serve the Church, I am not interested in it!"

God sometimes asks founders to make the sacrifice of Abraham. Abraham's whole life was focused on his only son in whom the promise was to be fulfilled. He was to become the father of a great people, more numerous than the stars in the sky or the sands of the desert... And then suddenly God demands the offering, the total sacrifice. There were two moments in the life of the founder of Opus Dei which put his supernatural spirit to the test of pure faith. Both had to do with this service to the Church; for love of the Church is the touchstone of the truly Christian soul, which, according to St Ambrose, is always an "ecclesiastical soul."

The first of these harsh trials took place in Madrid on Thursday, 22 June 1933, on the eve of the Feast of the Sacred Heart. The note in which he himself tells of it has all the chilling sensation of truth, written, as it was, in his own hand and so soon after the event: "Alone, on a balcony of this church of Perpetual Succour, I was trying to pray before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament exposed in the monstrance, when, for an instant and without formulating any reasons - there are none - there came to my mind this most bitter thought: 'And what if it's all a lie, an illusion of yours... and you are wasting your time... and, what is worse, you are making others waste theirs?'

It was a matter of seconds, but how much suffering it caused! Then I spoke to Jesus, and I told him: 'Lord, if the Work is not yours, destroy it. If it is yours, confirm me.'

Immediately, I not only felt confirmed in the truth of his will regarding the Work, but I saw clearly a point of its organization, which until then I did not know at all how to resolve."

The second trial was similar to the first, and its context was a storm that had been unleashed against the founder and against Opus Dei in the early 'forties. The Work had just been canonically born, so to speak. The bishop had granted the first written approval on 19 March 1941, precisely to stop the painful campaign aimed

at discrediting Opus Dei even in Rome. On 25 September 1941, the Servant of God was in the Spanish town of La Granja de San Ildefonso, not far from Segovia. He was exhausted. In addition to the suffering occasioned by these sad events, there was the fatigue caused by the apostolate he was carrying on throughout the length and breadth of Spain - preaching retreats to priests and sowing the seed of the Work in every kind of milieu. That day he wrote me a letter. I quote some of its more significant lines:

"Alvaro, may Jesus watch over you for me... Yesterday I celebrated Mass for the local Ordinary, and today I have offered the Holy Sacrifice and everything during the day for the Supreme Pontiff, for the person of the Pope and for his intentions. After the consecration, I certainly felt an interior impulse compelling me to do something, which cost me tears. Completely convinced at the same time that the Pope has to love the Work very much, and while looking at Jesus in the Eucharist, there on the corporal, with tears burning in my eyes, with my heart I told him truly: 'Lord, if you want, I accept the injustice.' You can figure out what the injustice is - the destruction of all of God's work. I know that I pleased him. How could I refuse making this act of union with His Will, if he was asking it of me? Once before, in 1933 or 1934, at a price he alone knows, I did the same thing.

My son, what a beautiful harvest the Lord is preparing for us once our Holy Father gets to know us truly and not through calumnies, and learns about us as we really are, his most faithful children, and blesses us! I feel like shouting out - and without worrying what others may say - that cry which has sometimes come to my lips while preaching to you: O Jesus! What a harvest!"

His love for the Church and the Pope sustained him and impressed on his soul an unshakeable confidence at the most difficult moments. He offered his life daily for the whole Holy Church and for the Holy Father - frequently adding, "and a thousand lives if I had them." Following his example, in the course of these ten years since his death, many souls from all sorts of countries and cultures have sought the strength to put no limits on their self-sacrifice. They have tried to carry out their daily work with a smile on their lips in the desire of spending their lives in unconditional service to Christ's Spouse. The words for private devotion to the Servant of God effectively express that aspiration: "Grant that I also may learn to turn all the circumstances and events of my life into opportunities to love you and to serve the Church, the Pope, and all souls, with joy and simplicity, lighting up the paths of the earth with faith and love."

ALVARO DEL PORTILLO

The Holy Rosary

By Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer

INTRODUCTION

JOYFUL MYSTERIES

SORROWFUL MYSTERIES

GLORIOUS MYSTERIES

LITANY

APPENDED MYSTERIES

LUMINOUS MYSTERIES

INTRODUCTION

These lines are not written for little women. They are written for full-grown men, and very... manly men who, at times, no doubt, have raised their hearts to God, crying out to Him with the Psalmist: *Notam fac mihi viam, in qua ambulem; quia ad te levavi animam meam*. Make the way known to me, wherein I should walk; for I have lifted up my soul to thee (Ps 142:8).

I must tell these men a secret that may very well be the beginning of the way that Christ wants them to follow.

My friend, if you want to be great, become little.

To be little you have to believe as children believe, to love as children love, to abandon yourself as children do..., to pray as children pray.

You have to do all these if you are to achieve what I am going to tell you in these lines:

The beginning of the way, at the end of which you will find yourself completely carried away with love for Jesus, is a trusting love for Mary.

Do you want to love our Lady? Well, then, get to know her. How? By praying her Rosary well.

But, in the Rosary... we always say the same things! Always the same?

And don't people in love always say the same things to each other?... Might it not be that you find the Rosary monotonous because, instead of pronouncing words like a man, you mumble noises while your mind is very far from God? Moreover, listen: before each decade we are told the mystery to be contemplated. Have you... ever contemplated these mysteries?

Become little. Come with me and — this is the essence of what I have to tell you — we will live the life of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

Each day we will do something new for them. We will hear their family conversation. We will see the Messiah grow up. We'll admire his thirty years of hidden life... We'll be present at his Passion and Death... We will be amazed by the

glory of his Resurrection... In a word: carried away by Love (the only real love is Love), we will contemplate each and every instant of Jesus Christ's life.

JOYFUL MYSTERIES

1. The Annunciation
2. The Visitation
3. The Birth of Jesus
4. The Presentation
5. Finding of Jesus in the Temple

1. The Annunciation

Don't forget, my friend, that we are children. The Lady of the sweet name, Mary, is absorbed in prayer.

You, in that house, are whatever you wish: a friend, a servant, an onlooker, a neighbor... For the moment I don't dare to be anything. I hide behind you and, full of awe, I watch what's happening:

The Archangel delivers his message... *Quomodo fiet istud, quoniam virum non cognosco?* "But how can this come about, since I am a virgin?" (Luke 1:34)

Our Mother's voice reminds me — by contrast — all the impurities of men... mine too.

And then how I hate those low, mean things of the earth... What resolutions!

Fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum. "Let it be done to me according to your word." (Luke 1:38). At the enchantment of this virginal phrase, the Word became flesh.

The first decade is about to end... I still have time to tell my God, before anyone else does, "Jesus, I love you."

2. The Visitation

By now, my little friend, you have no doubt learned to manage on your own. Joyfully keep Joseph and Mary company... and you will hear the traditions of the House of David.

You will hear about Elizabeth and Zachary, you will be moved by Joseph's pure love, and your heart will pound whenever they mention the Child who will be born in Bethlehem...

We walk in haste towards the mountains, to a town of the tribe of Judah (Luke 1:39).

We arrive. It is the house where John the Baptist is to be born. Elizabeth gratefully hails the Mother of her Redeemer: "Blessed are you amongst women and blessed is the fruit of your womb! Why should I be honored with a visit from the mother of my Lord?" (Luke 1:42-43)

The unborn Baptist quivers... (Luke 1:41) Mary's humility pours forth in the Magnificat... And you and I, who are proud — who were proud — promise to be humble.

3. The Birth of Jesus

Caesar Augustus has issued a decree for a census to be taken of the whole world. For this purpose, everyone must go to the city of his ancestors. And since Joseph belongs to the house and line of David, he goes with the Virgin Mary from Nazareth to the town of David called Bethlehem in Judea (Luke 2:1-5).

And in Bethlehem is born our God: Jesus Christ! There is no room at the inn; he is born in a stable. And his Mother wraps Him in swaddling clothes and lays him in a manger.

Cold. Poverty... I am Joseph's little servant. How good Joseph is! He treats me like a son. He even forgives me if I take the Child in my arms and spend hour after hour saying sweet and loving things to Him!

And I kiss him — you kiss him too! — and I rock him in my arms, and I sing to him and call him King, Love, my God, my Only One, my All...! How beautiful is the Child... and how short the decade!

4. The Presentation

When the time has come for the Mother's purification, in accordance with the Law of Moses, the Child must be taken to Jerusalem to be presented to the Lord (Luke 2:22).

And this time it will be you, my friend, who carries the cage with the doves (Luke 2:24). Just think: she — Mary Immaculate! — submits to the Law as if she were defiled.

Through this example, foolish child, won't you learn to fulfill the holy Law of God, regardless of any personal sacrifice?

Purification! You and I certainly do need purification! Atonement and, more than atonement, Love. Love as a searing iron to cauterize our souls' uncleanness, and as a fire to kindle with divine flames the wretchedness of our hearts.

An upright and devout man has come to the temple led by the Holy Spirit (it had been revealed to him that he would not die until he had set eyes on the Christ); he takes the Messiah in his arms and says to Him: "Now, my Lord, you can let your servant go from this world in peace, just as you promised; because my eyes have seen the Savior (Luke 2:25-30).

5. Finding of Jesus in the Temple

Where is Jesus? The Child, my Lady! Where is he?

Mary is crying. In vain you and I have run from group to group, from caravan to caravan: no one has seen him. Joseph, after fruitless attempts to keep from crying, cries too... And you... And I.

Being a rough little fellow, I cry my eyes out and wail to heaven and earth..., to make up for the times when I lost him through my own fault and did not cry.

Jesus: may I never lose you again... Then you and I are united in misfortune and grief, as we were united in sin. And from the depth of our being come sighs of heartfelt sorrow and burning phrases that the pen cannot and should not record.

And, as we are consoled by the joy of finding Jesus — three days he was gone! — debating with the teachers of Israel (Luke 2:46), you and I will be left will be left deeply impressed by the duty to leave our home and family to serve our heavenly Father.

SORROWFUL MYSTERIES

1. The Agony in the Garden
2. The Scourging at the Pillar
3. The Crowning with Thorns
4. Jesus Carries His Cross
5. The Crucifixion

1. The Agony in the Garden

"Pray that you may not enter into temptation." And Peter fell asleep. And the other apostles. And you, little friend, fell asleep..., and I too was another sleepy-headed Peter.

Jesus, alone and sad, suffers and soaks the earth with His blood.

Kneeling on the hard ground, He perseveres in prayer... He weeps for you... and for me. The weight of the sins of men overwhelms Him.

Pater, si vis, transfer calicem istum a me. "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me... Yet, not my will, but yours be done (Luke 22:42).

An angel from Heaven comforts Him. Jesus is in agony. He continues prolixius, praying more intensely... He approaches us, who are asleep: "Rise," he says again, "and pray that you may not enter into temptation" (Luke 22:46).

Judas the traitor: a kiss. Peter's sword gleams in the night. Jesus speaks: "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me?" (Mark 14:48).

We are cowards: we follow Him from afar, but awake and praying. Prayer... Prayer...

2. The Scourging at the Pillar

Pilate speaks: "It is your custom that I release one prisoner to you on the Passover. Whom shall I set free, Barabbas — a thief jailed with others for a murder — or Jesus? (Matt 27:17) The crowd, spurred on by their rulers, cry: "Put this man to death and release us Barabbas!" (Luke 23:18).

Pilate speaks again: "What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?" (Matt 27:22). Crucifige eum! Crucify Him!

Pilate, for the third time, says to them: "Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no crime deserving death" (Luke 23:22).

The clamor of the mob grows louder: "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" (Mark 15:14).

And Pilate, wanting to please the crowd, releases Barabbas to them and orders Jesus to be scourged.

Bound to the pillar. Covered with wounds.

The blows of the lash sound upon his torn flesh, upon his undefiled flesh, which suffers for your sinful flesh. More blows. More fury. Still more... It is the last extreme of human cruelty.

Finally, exhausted, they untie Jesus. And the body of Christ yields to pain and falls limp, broken and half dead.

You and I cannot speak. Words are not needed. Look at him, look at him... slowly. After this... can you ever fear penance?

3. The Crowning with Thorns

Our King's eagerness for suffering has been fully satisfied! They lead my Lord to the courtyard of the palace, and there they call together the whole troop (Mark 15:16). The brutal soldiers strip His most pure body. They drape a dirty purple rag about Jesus. A reed, as a scepter, in His right hand.

The crown of thorns, driven in by blows, makes him a mock king... Ave Rex Judeorum! "Hail, King of the Jews" (Mark 15:18). And with their blows they wound his head. And they strike him... and spit on him.

Crowned with thorns and clothed in rags of purple, Jesus is shown to the Jewish mob: Ecce Homo! "Here is the man!" And again the chief priests and their attendants raise the cry, saying: "Crucify Him, crucify him!" (John 19:5-6).

You and I..., haven't we crowned him anew with thorns, and struck him and spit on him?

Never again, Jesus, never again... And a firm and practical resolution marks the end of these ten Hail Marys.

4. Jesus Carries His Cross

Carrying his Cross, Jesus goes out of the city to the place of the skull — called Golgotha in Hebrew (John 19:17). And they lay hold of a certain Simon from Cyrene, who is coming in from the country; and they make him take the Cross and carry it behind Jesus (Luke 23:26).

The prophesy of Isaiah (53:12) has been fulfilled: *cum sceleratis reputatus est*, "He was counted among the wicked," for two others, who were robbers, were led out with him to be put to death (Luke 23:32).

If anyone would follow me... Little friend: we are sad, living the Passion of our Lord Jesus. See how lovingly He embraces the Cross. Learn from Him. Jesus carries the Cross for you: you... carry it for Jesus.

But don't drag the Cross... carry it squarely on your shoulder, because your Cross, if you carry it so, will not be just any Cross... It will be... the Holy Cross. Don't bear your Cross with resignation: resignation is not a generous word. Love the Cross. When you really love it, your Cross will be... a Cross, without a Cross.

And surely you will find Mary on the way, just as Jesus did.

5. The Crucifixion

For Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews, the throne of triumph is ready. You and I do not see him writhe on being nailed. Suffering all that can be suffered, he spreads His arms in the gesture of an eternal Priest...

The soldiers take his holy garments and divide them into four parts. In order not to tear the tunic, they cast lots to decide whose it shall be. And so, once more, the words of Scripture are fulfilled: "They have parted my garments among them, and for my clothes they cast lots" (John 19:23-24).

Now he is on high... And close to her Son, at the foot of the Cross, stand Mary... and Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalen. And John, the disciple Jesus loved. *Ecce mater tua!* "Behold thy mother!" He gives us his Mother to be ours.

Earlier they had offered him wine mixed with vinegar, and when he had tasted it, he would not drink it (Matt 27:34).

Now he thirsts... for love... for souls.

Consummatum est. "It is accomplished" (John 19:30).

Foolish child, look: all this... He has suffered it all for you... And for me. Can you keep from crying?

GLORIOUS MYSTERIES

1. The Resurrection
2. The Ascension
3. The Descent of the Holy Spirit
4. The Assumption
5. The Crowning of the Blessed Virgin

1. The Resurrection

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalen and Mary, the mother of James, and Salome bought spices with which to go and anoint the dead body of Jesus. Very early on the following day, just as the sun is rising, they come to the tomb (Mark 16:1-2). And upon entering they are dismayed, for they cannot find the body of our Lord. A youth, clothed in white, says to them: "Do not be afraid. I know you seek Jesus of Nazareth: non est hic, surrexit enim sicut dixit, he is not here, for he has risen, as he said" (Matt 28:5).

He has risen! Jesus has risen: he is not in the tomb. Life has overcome death.

He appeared to his most Holy Mother. He appeared to Mary Magdalen, who is carried away by love. And to Peter and the rest of the Apostles. And to you and me, who are his disciples and more in love than Mary Magdalen: the things we say to Him!

May we never die through sin; may our spiritual resurrection be eternal. And before the decade is over, you have kissed the wounds on His feet..., and I, more daring — because I am more a child — have placed my lips upon His open side.

2. The Ascension

Now the Master is teaching his disciples: he has opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and he appoints them witnesses of his life and his miracles, of his Passion and Death, and of the glory of his resurrection (Luke 24:45 and 48).

Then he brings them out as far as the outskirts of Bethany and blesses them. And as he does so, he withdraws from them and is carried up to heaven (Luke 24:51) until a cloud takes him out of their sight (Acts 1:9).

Jesus has gone to the Father. Two Angels in white garments approach us and say, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up to heaven?" (Acts 1:11).

Peter and the others go back to Jerusalem — cum gaudio magno — "with great joy" (Luke 24:52). It is fitting that the sacred humanity of Christ should receive the homage, the praise and adoration of all the hierarchies of the Angels and of all the legions of the Blessed in Heaven.

But you and I feel like orphans: we are sad, and we go to Mary for consolation.

3. The Descent of the Holy Spirit

Our Lord had said: "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Advocate, another Consoler, to be with you forever" (John 14:16). The disciples were gathered together in one room when suddenly they heard what sounded like a powerful wind from heaven, the noise of which filled the entire house where they were assembled. At the same time something appeared that seemed like tongues of fire; these separated and came to rest on the head of each of them (Acts 2:1-2).

The Apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit that they seemed to be drunk (Acts 2:13).

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven and addressed the people in a loud voice. We, people from a hundred nations, hear him. Each of us hears him in his own language — you and I in ours. He speaks to us of Christ Jesus and of the Holy Spirit and of the Father.

He is not stoned nor thrown in prison; of those who have heard him, three thousand are converted and baptized.

You and I, after helping the Apostles administer baptism, bless God the Father, for His Son Jesus, and we too feel drunk with the Holy Ghost.

4. The Assumption

Assumpta est Maria in coelum: gaudent angeli! God has taken Mary, body and soul, to Heaven; and the Angels rejoice!

So sings the Church. And so, with that same cry of joy, we begin our contemplation in this decade of the Holy Rosary.

The Mother of God has fallen asleep. Around her bed are the twelve Apostles — Matthias in the place of Judas.

And we, through a grace respected by all, are also at her side.

But Jesus wants to have his Mother, body and soul, in heaven. And the heavenly court, arrayed in all its splendor, greets our Lady. You and I — children after all — take the train of Mary's magnificent blue cloak, and so we can watch the marvelous scene.

The most blessed Trinity receives and showers honors on the Daughter, Mother, and Spouse of God... And so great is the Lady's majesty that the angels exclaim: Who is she?

5. The Crowning of the Blessed Virgin

"You are all fair, and without blemish. You are a garden enclosed, my sister, my Bride, an enclosed garden, a sealed fountain. Veni: coronaberis. Come: you shall be crowned" (Song of Songs 4:7, 12 and 8).

If you and I had had been able, we too would have made her Queen and Lady of all creation.

A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman with a crown of twelve stars upon her head, adorned with the sun and the moon at her feet (Apoc 12:1). Mary, Virgin without stain, has made up for the fall of Eve: and she has crushed the head of hell's serpent with her immaculate heel. Daughter of God, Mother of God, Spouse of God.

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit crown her as the rightful Empress of the Universe.

And the Angels pay her homage as her subjects... and the patriarchs and prophets and apostles... and the martyrs and confessors and virgins and all the saints... and all sinners and you and I.

LITANY

Now the chorus of praise bursts forth in all its splendor of new light and variety of color and meaning.

We call upon the Lord, upon Christ; we petition each of the divine Persons, and the most holy Trinity; we speak words of ardent love to Mary: Mother of Christ, Mother most pure, Mother of good counsel, Mother of our Creator, Mother of our Savior... Virgin most prudent... Seat of Wisdom, Mystical Rose, Tower of David, Ark of the Covenant, Morning Star... Refuge of sinners, Comforter of the afflicted, Help of Christians...

And the recognition of her reign — Regina: Queen! — and of her mediation: Sub tuum præsidium confugimus: we fly to your protection, O holy Mother of God... deliver us from all dangers, O ever glorious and blessed Virgin.

Pray for us, Queen of the Most Holy Rosary, that we may be made worthy of the promises of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Appended Mysteries

My friend: I have disclosed to you just a part of my secret. It is up to you, with God's help, to discover the rest. Take courage. Be faithful.

Become little. Our Lord hides from the proud and reveals the treasures of his grace to the humble.

Don't worry if, when thinking on your own, daring and childish words and affections arise in your heart. This is what Jesus wants, and Mary is encouraging you. If you say the Rosary in this way, you will learn to pray well.

LUMINOUS MYSTERIES

Introductory note

1. The Baptism of our Lord
2. The Self-Manifestation at the Wedding at Cana
3. The Proclamation of the Kingdom of God
4. The Transfiguration
5. The Institution of the Eucharist

Introductory note

In his Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariæ*, the Holy Father Pope John Paul II has indicated that, in order to highlight the Christological content of this Marian devotion, five new mysteries, the “mysteries of light,” should be added to the fifteen traditional mysteries.

Holy Rosary, written in 1931, naturally contains no reference to these new mysteries. But throughout his life Saint Josemaría lovingly contemplated and preached on these scenes, just as he did with every chapter of the Gospels. Therefore, we have included some excerpts from the writings of the Founder of Opus Dei that make reference to the mysteries of light, to help readers meditate on the complete Rosary.

We can show our fidelity to the spirit of the author of Holy Rosary when we pray the joyful, luminous, sorrowful and glorious mysteries by uniting ourselves to the intentions of the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome. *Omnes cum Petro ad Iesum per Mariam!*

Javier Echevarría

Prelate of Opus Dei

Rome, 14 February 2003

1. The Baptism of our Lord

“Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him... and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased’” (Matt 3:13,17)

In Baptism, God our Father has taken possession of our lives. He has made us sharers in Christ’s life and sent us the Holy Spirit.

The strength and power of God light up the face of the earth.

We will set the world ablaze, with the flames of fire that you came to enkindle on earth! And the light of your truth, our Jesus, will enlighten men's minds in an endless day.

I can hear you crying out, my King, in your strong and ardent voice: *ignem veni mittere in terram, et quid volo nisi ut accendatur?* I have come to bring fire to the earth, and would that it were already enkindled! And I answer, with my entire being, with all my senses and faculties: *ecce ego: quia vocasti me!* Here I am, because you have called me!

God has placed an indelible mark on your soul through Baptism: you are a child of God.

Child, are you not aflame with the desire to bring all men to love Him?

2. The Self-Manifestation at the Wedding at Cana

Our Lady was a guest at one of those noisy country weddings attended by people from many different villages. Mary was the only one who noticed the wine was running out. Don't these scenes from Christ's life seem familiar to us? The greatness of God lives at the level of ordinary things. It is natural for a woman, a homemaker, to notice an oversight, to look after the little things that make life pleasant. And that is how Mary acted.

"Do whatever he tells you."

Implete hydrias (John 2:7), fill the jars. And the miracle takes place. Everything is so simple and ordinary. The servants carry out their job. The water is easy to find. And this is the first manifestation of our Lord's divinity. What is commonplace becomes something extraordinary, something supernatural, when we have the good will to heed what God is asking of us.

Lord, I want to abandon all my concerns into your generous hands. Our Mother — your Mother — will by now have said to you, as at Cana: "They have no wine...!"

If our faith is weak, we should turn to Mary. Because of the miracle at the marriage feast at Cana, which Christ performed at his mother's request, "his disciples learned to believe in him" (John 2:11). Our Mother is always interceding with her Son so that he may attend to our needs and show himself to us, so that we can cry out: "You are the Son of God."

Grant me, dear Jesus, the faith I truly desire. My Mother, sweet Lady, Mary most holy, make me truly believe!

3. The Proclamation of the Kingdom of God

"The kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the Gospel" (Mark 1:15).

"And all the crowd gathered about him, and he taught them" (Mark 2:13).

Jesus sees the boats on the shore and gets into one of them. How naturally Jesus steps into the boat of each and every one of us!

When you seek to draw close to our Lord, remember that he is always very close to you, that he is in you: *regnum Dei intra vos est* (Luke 17:21). The Kingdom of God is within you. You will find him in your heart.

Christ should reign first and foremost in our soul. But in order for him to reign in me, I need his abundant grace. Only in that way can my every heartbeat and breath, my least intense look, my most ordinary word, my most basic feeling be transformed into a hosanna to Christ my King.

Duc in altum. Put out into deep water! Throw aside the pessimism that makes a coward of you. *Et laxate retia vestra in capturam*. And pay out your nets for a catch!

We have to place our trust in our Lord's words: get into the boat, take the oars, hoist the sails and launch out into this sea of the world which Christ gives us as an inheritance.

Et regni eius non erit finis. His kingdom will have no end.

Doesn't it fill you with joy to work for such a kingdom?

4. The Transfiguration

"And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light" (Matt 17:2).

Jesus, we want to see you, to speak to you! We want to contemplate you, immersed in the immensity of your beauty, in a contemplation that will never cease! It must be wonderful to see you, Jesus! It must be wonderful to see you and be wounded by your love!

"And a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him'" (Matt 17:5).

Lord, we are ready to heed whatever you want to tell us. Speak to us: we are attentive to your voice. May your words enkindle our will so that we launch out fervently to obey you.

Vultum tuum, Domine, requiram (Ps 26:8). Lord, I long to see your face. I like to close my eyes and think that, when God wills, the moment will come when I will be able to see him, not as "in a mirror dimly, but... face to face" (1 Cor 13:12). Yes, "my heart yearns for God, the living God When shall I go and behold the face of God?" (Ps 41:3)

5. The Institution of the Eucharist

“Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end” (John 13:1)

When our Lord instituted the Eucharist during the Last Supper, night had already fallen. The world had fallen into darkness, for the old rites, the old signs of God’s infinite mercy to mankind, were going to be brought to fulfillment. The way was opening to a new dawn — the new Passover. The Eucharist was instituted during that night, preparing in advance for the morning of the resurrection.

Jesus has remained in the Eucharist for love... for you.

He has remained, knowing how men would treat him... and how you would treat him.

He has remained so that you could eat him, and visit him and tell him your concerns; and so that, by your prayer beside the tabernacle and by receiving him sacramentally, you could fall more in love each day, and help other souls, many souls, to follow the same path.

Good child: see how lovers on earth kiss the flowers, the letters, the mementos of those they love...

Then you, how could you ever forget that you have him always at your side — yes, Him? How could you forget... that you can eat him?

Lord, may I never again flutter along close to the ground. Illumined by rays of the divine Sun — Christ — in the Eucharist, may my flight never be interrupted until I find repose in your Heart.

The Way of the Cross

By Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer

Foreword

Opening Prayer

First Station

Second Station

Third Station

Fourth Station

Fifth Station

Sixth Station

Seventh Station

Eighth Station

Ninth Station

Tenth Station

Eleventh Station

Twelfth Station

Thirteenth Station

Fourteenth Station

Acceptance of Death

Foreword

"Enter into the wounds of Christ Crucified."

When Monsignor Josemaria Escriva de Balaguer proposed this way, to those who asked him for advice on how to deepen their interior life, he was doing no more than pass on his own experience, pointing out the short cut he had been using throughout his life, and which led him to the highest peaks of spiritual life. His love for Jesus was always something real, tangible and strong; it was tender, filial and very moving.

The Founder of Opus Dei used to say, with such encouraging persuasiveness, that being a Christian comes down to "following Christ: that is the secret." And he would add: "We must accompany him so closely that we come to live with Him, like the first Twelve did; so closely, that we become identified with Him."

That is why he advised people to meditate constantly on the passages of the Gospel, and those who have had the good fortune to hear him comment on some of the scenes of the life of Christ, have felt themselves reliving those scenes, actually there, and they have learned to take part in those passages "as just one more person there."

Among all the Gospel narratives, Msgr. Escriva used to dwell with special attention and love on those which tell of the Death and Resurrection of Jesus. There, among many other considerations he made, he would contemplate the Sacred Humanity of Christ, who -in his great yearning to come close to each one of us -reveals himself to us with all the weakness of men and with all the magnificence of God. "That is why", he would say, "I have always advised people to read books on Our Lord's Passion. Such works, full of true piety, bring to our minds the Son of God, a Man like ourselves and also true God, who in his flesh loves and suffers to redeem the world."

Truly, a Christian matures and becomes strong beside the Cross, where he also finds Mary, his Mother.

The Founder of Opus Dei prepared this Way of the Cross as a result of his contemplation on the scenes of Calvary. His desire was that it should serve to help people meditate on the Passion of Jesus, but he never wished to impose it on anyone as a text with which to carry out this very Christian devotion. This was because of his great love for the freedom of people's consciences and the deep respect he felt towards the interior life of each soul, so much so that he never obliged even his own children to adopt specific ways of piety, except, naturally, those which form an essential part of the spirituality that God has wanted for Opus Dei.

This new posthumous work of Msgr. Escriva, like the previous ones, has been prepared to help people to pray and, with the grace of God, to grow in a spirit of reparation -of "love-sorrow" - and of gratitude to Our Lord, who has rescued us at the cost of his Blood.

For this same reason, there have been included, as points for meditation, some words of Msgr. Escriva, taken from his preaching and his conversation which reflected his zeal to speak only about God and about nothing but God.

The Way of the Cross is not a sad devotion. Msgr. Escriva taught many times that Christian joy has its roots in the shape of a cross. If the Passion of Christ is a way of pain, it is also a path of hope leading to certain victory. As he explained in one of his homilies: "You should realise that God wants you to be glad and that, if you do all you can, you will be happy, very, very happy, although you will never for a moment be without the Cross. But that Cross is no longer a gallows. It is the throne from which Christ reigns. And at his side, his Mother, our Mother too. The Blessed Virgin will obtain for you the strength that you need to walk decisively in the footsteps of her Son."

ALVARO DEL PORTILLO

Rome, 14 September 1980

Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross

Opening Prayer

My Lord and my God, under the loving eyes of our Mother, we are making ready to accompany you along this path of sorrow, which was the price for our redemption. We wish to suffer all that You suffered, to offer you our poor, contrite hearts, because you are innocent, and yet you are going to die for us, who are the only really guilty ones. My Mother, Virgin of sorrows, help me to relive those bitter hours which your Son wished to spend on earth, so that we, who were made from a handful of clay, may finally live in libertatem gloriae filiorum Dei, in the freedom and glory of the children of God. •

First Station

JESUS IS CONDEMNED TO DEATH

- It is after ten in the morning. The trial is moving to its close. There has been no conclusive evidence. The judge knows that his enemies have handed Jesus over to him out of envy, and he tries an absurd move: a choice between Barabbas, a criminal accused of robbery and murder, and Jesus, who says he is Christ. The people choose Barabbas, and Pilate exclaims: "What am I to do then, with Jesus?" (Mt 27:22). They all reply: "Crucify him!" The judge insists: "Why, what evil has he done?" Once again they respond, shouting: "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Pilate is frightened by the growing uproar. So he sends for water, and washes his hands in the sight of the people, saying as he does so: "I am innocent of the blood of this just man; it is your affair" (Mt 27:24). And having had Jesus scourged, he hands him over to them to be crucified. Their frenzied and possessed throats fall silent. As if God had already been vanquished.

- Jesus is all alone. Far off now are the days when the words of the Man-God brought light and hope to men's hearts, those long processions of sick people whom he healed, the triumphant acclaim of Jerusalem when the Lord arrived, riding on a gentle donkey. If only men had wanted to give a different outlet to God's love! If only you and I had recognized the day of the Lord!

Points for meditation

1. Jesus prays in the garden. "Pater mi" (Matt 26:39), "Abba Pater!" (Mark 14:36). God is my Father, even though he may send me suffering. He loves me tenderly, even while wounding me. Jesus suffers, to fulfil the Will of the Father... And I, who also wish to fulfil the most holy Will of God, following in the footsteps of the Master, can I complain if I too meet suffering as my travelling companion?

It will be a sure sign of my sonship, because God is treating me as he treated his own Divine Son. Then I, just as He did, will be able to groan and weep alone in my Gethsemani; but, as I lie prostrate on the ground, acknowledging my nothingness, there will rise up to the Lord a cry from the depths of my soul: "Pater mi, Abba, Pater,... fiat!"

2. The Arrest:... "venit hora: ecce Filius hominis tradetur in manus peccatorum"; the hour has come: behold the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners (Mark 14:41). So, the sinful man has his hour? Yes, and God his eternity!...

Chains binding Jesus! Chains, which He voluntarily allowed to be put on him, I ask you to bind me, to make me suffer with my Lord, so that this body of death may be humbled. For -there can be no half measures here - either I reduce it to nothing, or it will degrade me. Better to be a slave of my God than a slave of my flesh.

3. Throughout the mockery of his trial, Our Lord is silent. "Jesus autem tacebat" (Matt 26:63). Later, he answers the questions put to him by Caiphas and Pilate... But, to the fickle-minded and impure Herod, not a word (cf. Luke 23:9): so depraving is the sin of lust that not even the voice of Our Saviour is heard by him.

If there is so much resistance to the truth in so many places, keep silent and pray, mortify yourself... and wait. Even those souls that seem most lost retain, to the end, the capacity to return to the love of God.

4. Sentence is about to be passed. Mockingly, Pilate says: Ecce rex vester! Behold your king! (John 19:14). Infuriated, the chief priests reply: We have no king but Caesar (John 19:15).

Lord, where are your friends? Your subjects, where are they? They have left you. This running away has been going on for twenty centuries... We, all of us, flee from the Cross, from your Holy Cross.

Blood, anguish, loneliness and an insatiable hunger for souls... these are the courtiers around your royal throne.

5. Ecce homo! Behold the man! (John 19:5). Our heart shudders when it contemplates the Sacred Humanity of Our Lord become an open wound.

And they will ask him: what are those wounds that you bear in your hands? And he will reply: I received them in the house of those who love me (Zach 13:6).

Look at Jesus. Each laceration is a reproach; each lash of the whip, a reason for sorrow for your offences and mine.

Second Station

JESUS TAKES UP HIS CROSS

- Outside the city, to the north-west of Jerusalem, there is a little hill: Golgotha is its name in Aramaic; locus Calvariae, in Latin: the place of skulls or Calvary. Offering no resistance, Jesus gives himself up to the execution of the sentence. He is to be spared nothing, and upon his shoulders falls the weight of the ignominious cross. But, through love, the Cross is to become the throne from which he reigns. The people of Jerusalem and those from abroad who have come for the Passover push their way through the city streets, to catch a passing glimpse of Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. There is a tumult of voices, and, now and then, short silences: perhaps when Jesus fixes his eyes on someone: "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him take up his cross daily and follow me" (Mt 16:24). How lovingly Jesus embraces the wood which is to bring him to death!

- Is it not true that as soon as you cease to be afraid of the Cross, of what people call the cross, when you set your will to accept the Will of God, then you find happiness, and all your worries, all your sufferings, physical or moral, pass away? Truly the Cross of Jesus is gentle and lovable. There, sorrows cease to count; there is only the joy of knowing that we are co-redeemers with Him.

Points for meditation

1. The guards that are to accompany him make ready... Jesus, scorned and ridiculed, is a target of mockery for all those around him. He!, who passed through the world doing good and healing all of their afflictions (cf. Acts 10:38).

He, the good Master, Jesus, who came out to meet us who were so far away, is to be brought to the gallows.

2. As if it were a festival, they have prepared an escort, a long procession. The judges want to savour their victory with a slow and pitiless torture.

Jesus is not to meet a quick death... He is given time in which to prolong the identification of his pain and love with the most lovable Will of the Father. *Ut facerem voluntatem tuam, Deus meus, volui, et legem tuam in medio cordis mei* (Ps 39:9): I find my pleasure in doing thy Will, my God, and thy law dwells deep within my heart.

3. The more you belong to Christ, the more grace you will obtain to be effective in this world and to be happy in eternity.

But you must make up your mind to follow the way of self-surrender: the Cross on your shoulders, with a smile on your lips, and a light in your soul. .PP 4. That voice you hear within you: 'What a heavy yoke you have freely taken upon yourself! ' ... is the voice of the devil; the heavy burden... of your pride.

Ask Our Lord for humility, and you too will understand those words of Jesus: *iugum enim meum suave est, et onus meum leve* (Matt 11:30), which I like to translate freely, as follows: My yoke is freedom, my yoke is love, my yoke is unity, my yoke is life, my yoke is fruitfulness.

5. There is a kind of fear around, a fear of the Cross, of Our Lord 's Cross. What has happened is that people have begun to regard as crosses all the unpleasant things that crop up in life, and they do not know how to take them as God 's children should, with supernatural outlook. So much so, that they are even removing the roadside crosses set up by our forefathers...

In the Passion, the Cross ceased to be a symbol of punishment and became instead a sign of victory. The Cross is the emblem of the Redeemer: *in quo est salus, vita et resurrectio nostra*: there lies our salvation our life and our resurrection.

Third Station

JESUS FALLS THE FIRST TIME

- The heavy Cross cuts and tears into Our Lord 's shoulders. The crowd has swollen into a multitude, and the legionaries can scarcely contain the angry, surging mob which, like a river that has burst its banks, flows through the streets and alleyways of Jerusalem. The worn out body of Jesus staggers now beneath the huge Cross. His most loving Heart can barely summon up another breath of life for his poor wounded limbs. To right and left, Our Lord sees the multitude moving around like sheep without a shepherd. He could call them one by one by their names, by our names. There they are, those who were fed at the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, those who were cured of their ailments, those he taught by

the lakeside, on the mountain and in the porticoes of the Temple. A sharp pain pierces the soul of Jesus; Our Lord falls to the ground exhausted.

- You and I can say nothing: now we know why the Cross of Jesus weighs so much. We weep over our wretched failings and also for the terrible ingratitude of the human heart. From the depths of our soul there comes an act of real contrition, that lifts us up from the prostration of sin. Jesus has fallen that we might get up: once and for all.

Points for meditation

1. Sad? ... Because you have fallen in that little battle?

No! Be cheerful! Because in the next one, thanks to God 's grace and to your humiliation now, you will conquer!

2. As long as there is struggle, ascetical struggle, there is interior life. That is what Our Lord is asking of us: the will to want to love him with deeds, in the little things of every day.

If you have conquered in little things, you will conquer in big ones.

3. 'This man is dying. There is nothing more to be done... '

It happened years ago in a hospital in Madrid.

After his confession, when the priest gave him his crucifix to kiss, that gypsy started to shout, and no one could stop him:

'I can 't kiss Our Lord with this filthy mouth of mine! '

'But listen, very soon you are going to embrace him and give him a big kiss, in heaven! '

Have you ever seen a more startlingly beautiful way of expressing contrition?

4. You speak and no one listens. And if they do listen, they don 't understand. You are always misunderstood!... Agreed. But in any case, in order that your cross may take on the full meaning of Christ 's Cross, that is how you have to work now, with nobody taking any notice of you. Others will understand you.

5. How many through their pride and imagination, enter upon calvaries that have nothing to do with Christ 's!

The Cross you must shoulder is divine. Do not allow yourself to carry any human cross. If you ever get caught in this snare, rectify your intention immediately: it will be enough for you to consider that He has suffered infinitely more for love of us.

Fourth Station

JESUS IS MET BY HIS BLESSED MOTHER

- No sooner has Jesus risen from his first fall than he meets his Blessed Mother, standing by the wayside where He is passing. With immense love Mary looks at Jesus, and Jesus at his Mother. Their eyes meet, and each heart pours into the other its own deep sorrow. Mary's soul is steeped in bitter grief, the grief of Jesus Christ. "O all you that pass by the way, look and see, was there ever a sorrow to compare with my sorrow!" (Lm 1:12). But no one notices, no one pays attention; only Jesus. Simeon's prophecy has been fulfilled: "thy own soul a sword shall pierce" (Lk 2:35). In the dark loneliness of the Passion, Our Lady offers her Son a comforting balm of tenderness, of union, of faithfulness; a 'yes' to the divine will.
- Hand in hand with Mary, you and I also want to console Jesus, by accepting always and in everything the Will of his Father, of our Father. Only thus will we taste the sweetness of Christ's Cross, and come to embrace it with all the strength of Love, carrying it in triumph along the ways of the earth.

Points for meditation

1. What man would not weep seeing the Mother of Christ in such cruel torment?

Her Son so stricken... and we, cowards, keep our distance, not wanting to accept the Will of God.

My Mother and Lady, teach me how to pronounce a 'yes' which, like yours, will identify with the cry Jesus made before his Father: *non mea voluntas...* (Luke 22:42): not my will but God's be done.

2. So much wretchedness! So many offences! Mine, yours, those of all mankind...

Et in peccatis concepit me mater mea! In sins did my mother conceive me! (Ps 50:7). I, like all men, came into the world stained with the guilt of our first parents. And then... my own sins: rebellions, thought about, desired, committed...

To purify us of this rottenness, Jesus willed to humble himself and take on the form of a slave (cf. Phil 2:7), becoming incarnate in the spotless womb of Our Lady, his Mother, who is also your Mother and mine. He spent thirty years in obscurity, working as any other man, at Joseph's side. He preached. He worked miracles... and we repaid him with the Cross.

Do you need more motives for contrition?

3. Jesus had been waiting for this meeting with his Mother. How many childhood memories! Bethlehem, the flight into distant Egypt, the village of Nazareth. Now again he wants her by his side, on Calvary.

We need her!... In the darkness of the night, when a little child is afraid, it cries out: 'Mummy!'

That is what I have to do, to cry out many times with my heart: 'Mother! Mummy! Don't leave me.'

4. There is still a little way to go before reaching true abandonment. If you have not attained it yet, do not worry: keep up the effort. A day will come when you won't see any way other than Him -Jesus -, his Blessed Mother, and the supernatural means that the Master has left us.

5. If we are souls of faith, we will give to earthly happenings a very relative importance, just as the saints did... Our Lord and his Mother will not abandon us and, whenever it is necessary, they will make their presence felt to fill the hearts of their loved ones with security and peace.

Fifth Station

SIMON OF CYRENE HELPS JESUS TO CARRY THE CROSS

- Jesus is exhausted. His footsteps become more and more unsteady, and the soldiers are in a hurry to be finished. So, when they are going out of the city through the Judgement Gate, they take hold of a man who was coming in from a farm, a man called Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus, and they force him to carry the Cross of Jesus (cf. Mk 15:21). In the whole context of the Passion, this help does not add up to very much. But for Jesus, a smile, a word, a gesture, a little bit of love is enough for him to pour out his grace bountifully on the soul of his friend. Years later, Simon's sons, Christians by then, will be known and held in high esteem among their brothers in the faith. And it all started with this unexpected meeting with the Cross. "I went to those who were not looking for me; I was found by those that sought me not" (Is 65:1).

- At times the Cross appears without our looking for it: it is Christ who is seeking us out. And if by chance, before this unexpected Cross which, perhaps, is therefore more difficult to understand, your heart were to show repugnance... don't give it consolations. And, filled with a noble compassion, when it asks for them, say to it slowly, as one speaking in confidence: "Heart: heart on the Cross! Heart on the Cross!"

Points for meditation

1. Do you know how to thank Our Lord for all he has done for us?... With love! There is no other way.

Love is with love repaid. But the real proof of affection is given by sacrifice. So, take courage!: deny yourself and take up his Cross. Then you will be sure you are returning him love for Love.

2. It is not too late, nor is everything lost...

Even though to you it may seem so. Even though a thousand foreboding voices keep saying so. Even though you are besieged by mocking and sceptical onlookers... You have come at a good time to take up the Cross: the Redemption is taking place -now! - and Jesus needs many Simons of Cyrene.

3. To bring happiness to its loved one, a noble heart will not hesitate before sacrifice. To bring comfort to a suffering face, a great soul will overcome all repugnance and give itself unstintingly...And God, does he deserve less than a piece of flesh, than a handful of clay?

Learn to mortify your whims. Accept setbacks without exaggerating them, without throwing up your arms, without... hysterics. In that way you will lighten the Cross for Jesus.

4. This day has salvation come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man has come to seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19:9-10).

Zacchaeus, Simon of Cyrene, Dismas, the centurion. . .

Now you know why Our Lord has sought you out. Thank him!... But opere et veritate, with deeds and in truth.

5. How can I really love the Holy Cross of Jesus?... Long for it!... Ask Our Lord for the strength to implant it in every heart throughout the length and breadth of this world. And then... make atonement with joy; and try also to love him with the beating of all those hearts that as yet do not love him.

Sixth Station

THE FACE OF JESUS IS WIPED BY VERONICA

- "There is no beauty in him, nor comeliness: and we have seen him, and there was no sightliness, that we should be attracted to him. Despised and the most abject of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with infirmity; and his look was as it were hidden and despised. Whereupon we esteemed him not" (Is 53:2-3). And it is the Son of God who is passing by, a madman... madly in Love! A woman, Veronica by name, makes her way through the crowd, with a white linen cloth folded in her hands, and with this she reverently wipes the face of Jesus. Our Lord leaves the impression of his Holy Face on the three parts of that veil. The beloved face of Jesus, that had smiled upon children and was transfigured with glory on Mount Thabor, is now, as it were, concealed by suffering. But this suffering is our purification; the sweat and the blood, which disfigure and tarnish his features, serve to cleanse us.

- Lord, help me decide to tear off, through penance, this pitiful mask I have fashioned with my wretched doings... Then, and only then, by following the path of contemplation and atonement, will my life begin to copy faithfully the features of your life. We will find ourselves becoming more and more like You. We will be other Christs, Christ himself, ipse Christus.

Points for meditation

1. Our sins were the cause of the Passion: of that torture which disfigured the most lovable countenance of Jesus, perfectus Deus, perfectus homo. And again it is our

wretchedness that impedes us now from contemplating Our Lord, and makes his figure appear dark and distorted.

When our sight is blurred, when our eyes are clouded, we need to go to the light. And Christ has said: Ego sum lux mundi! (John 8:12), I am the light of the world. And he adds: He that follows me walks not in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

2. Get to know the Sacred Humanity of Jesus... And He will place in your soul an insatiable hunger an 'uncontrollable ' yearning to contemplate his Face.

In this longing, which it is impossible to satisfy on earth, you will often find your consolation.

3. St Peter writes: through Jesus Christ, God has given us high and treasured promises, to make you sharers in the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4).

This divinisation of ours does not mean that we cease to be human... Men, yes, but with a horror of grave sin. Men who loathe venial faults and who, while having daily experience of their weakness, are aware too of the power of God.

This way nothing can stop us: neither human respect, nor our passions, nor this flesh of ours which rebels because of our baseness, nor pride, nor... loneliness.

A Christian is never alone... If you feel abandoned, it is because you do not want to look at that Christ who is passing so close to you... perhaps with the Cross.

4. Ut in gratiarum semper actione maneamus!, may we be always giving thanks. Dear God, thank you, thank you for everything: for what goes against me, for what I don 't understand, for the things that make me suffer.

The blows are necessary to hack away what is superfluous from the huge block of marble. That is how God sculptures the image of his Son in souls. Be grateful to God for those caresses!

5. When we Christians have a hard time of it, it is because we are not giving to this life all its divine meaning.

Where the hand feels the prick of thorns, the eyes discover a bunch of splendid, fragrant roses.

Seventh Station

JESUS FALLS A SECOND TIME

- Outside the walls of the city, the body of Jesus again gives way through weakness, and he falls a second time, amid the shouts of the crowd and the rough handling of the soldiers. Infirmary of body and bitterness of soul have caused Jesus to fall again. All the sins of men -mine too - weigh down on his Sacred Humanity. "He has borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows, and we have taken him for a leper, and as one struck by God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our

iniquities and bruised for our sins. On him fell the punishment that brought us salvation, and by his wounds we have been healed" (Is 53:4-5). Jesus stumbles, but his fall lifts us up, his death brings us back to life. To our falling again and again into evil, Jesus responds with his determination to redeem us, with an abundance of forgiveness. And, so that no one may despair, again he wearily raises himself, embracing the Cross.

- May our stumbles and defeats separate us from Him no more. Just as a feeble child throws itself contritely into the strong arms of its father, you and I will hold tightly to the yoke of Jesus. Only a contrition and humility like this can transform our human weakness into the fortitude of God.

Points for meditation

1. Jesus is brought down by the weight of the Cross... We, by the attraction of the things of this world.

He prefers to fall rather than let go of the Cross. That is how Christ heals the lack of love that casts us down.

2. You are discouraged, why? Is it your sins and miseries? Is it your defeats, at times coming one after the other? A really big fall, which you didn't expect?

Be simple. Open your heart. Look: as yet nothing has been lost. You can still go forward, and with more love, with more affection, with more strength.

Take refuge in your divine sonship: God is your most loving Father. In this lies your security, a haven where you can drop anchor no matter what is happening on the surface of the sea of life. And you will find joy, strength, optimism: victory!

3. You said to me: Father, I am having a very rough time.

In answer I whispered in your ear: Take upon your shoulders a small part of that cross, just a tiny part. And if you can't manage that then... leave it entirely on the strong shoulders of Christ. And from this moment on, repeat with me: My Lord and my God: into your hands I abandon the past and the present and the future, what is small and what is great, what amounts to a little and what amounts to a lot, things temporal and things eternal.

Then, don't worry any more.

4. From time to time I have wondered which kind of martyrdom is the greater: that of the person who receives death for the faith, at the hands of God's enemies; or the martyrdom of someone who spends his years working with no other purpose than that of serving the Church and souls, and who grows old smiling, all the while passing unnoticed...

For me, the unspectacular martyrdom is more heroic... That is your way.

5. In order to follow Our Lord, to get close to him, we have to trample our own selves underfoot, by means of humility, just as grapes are trodden in the winepress.

If we trample on our wretchedness -for wretched we certainly are - He gladly makes himself at home in our soul. And, as he did in Bethany, he speaks to us and we to him, in a trusting conversation between friends.

Eighth Station

JESUS CONSOLES THE WOMEN OF JERUSALEM

- Among the people watching Our Lord as he passes by are a number of women who are unable to restrain their compassion and break into tears, perhaps recalling those glorious days spent with Jesus, when everyone exclaimed in amazement: *bene omnia fecit* (Mk 7:37), he has done all things well. But Our Lord wishes to channel their weeping towards a more supernatural motive, and he invites them to weep for sins, which are the cause of the Passion and which will draw down the rigor of divine justice: "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children... For if they do these things to the green wood, what shall be done to the dry?" (Lk 23:28,31).

- Your sins, my sins, the sins of all men, rise up. All the evil we have done and the good that we have neglected to do. The desolate panorama of the countless crimes and iniquities which we would have committed, if He, Jesus, had not strengthened us with the light of his most loving glance. How little a life is for making atonement!

Points for meditation

1. The saints, you tell me, would burst into tears of sorrow at the thought of the Passion of Our Lord. Whereas I...

Perhaps that is because you and I witness the scenes, but do not 'live ' them.

2. He came unto his own, and his own received him not (John 1:11). Not only that: they drag him out of the city to crucify him.

Jesus replies with an invitation to repentance, now, while the soul is a wayfarer and there is still time.

Contrition, profound contrition for our sins. Sorrow for the inexhaustible malice of men, which is hastening to put Our Lord to death. Atonement for those who still stubbornly seek to make the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross sterile.

3. We must bring people together, we must understand others, we must make allowances.

Never put up a cross just to keep alive the memory that some people have killed others. Such a cross would betoken the devil.

Christ 's Cross is to keep silent, to forgive and to pray for those on both sides, so that all may attain peace.

4. The Master passes very close to us, again and again. He looks at us... And if you look at him, if you listen to him, if you don 't reject him, He will teach you how to give a supernatural meaning to everything you do... Then you too, wherever you may be, will sow consolation and peace and joy.

5. No matter how much you may love, you will never love enough.

The human heart is endowed with an enormous coefficient of expansion. When it loves, it opens out in a crescendo of affection that overcomes all barriers.

If you love Our Lord, there will not be a single creature that does not find a place in your heart.

Ninth Station

JESUS FALLS THE THIRD TIME

- Our Lord falls for the third time, on the slope leading up to Calvary, with only forty or fifty paces between him and the summit. Jesus can no longer stay on his feet: his strength has failed him, and he lies on the ground in utter exhaustion. "He offered himself up because it was his will; abused and ill-treated, he opened not his mouth, as a sheep led to the slaughter, dumb as a lamb before its shearers" (Is 53:7). Everyone against Him... the people of the city and those from abroad, and the Pharisees and the soldiers and the chief priests... All of them executioners. His Mother -my Mother - weeps. Jesus fulfils the will of his Father! Poor: naked. Generous: what is there left for him to surrender? Dilexit me, et tradidit semetipsum pro me (Gal 2:20), he loved me and delivered himself up unto death for me.

- My God! may I hate sin, and unite myself to You, taking the Holy Cross into my arms, so that I, in my turn, may fulfil your most lovable Will..., stripped of every earthly attachment, with no other goal but your glory..., generously, not keeping anything back, offering myself with you in a perfect holocaust.

Points for meditation

1. By this stage Our Lord is unable to lift himself up: so burdensome is the weight of our wretchedness. Like a lifeless sack he is carried to the scaffold. Silent, he lets them have their way.

The humility of Jesus. God abasing himself so that we may be raised and exalted. Now do you understand why I advised you to lay your heart on the ground so that others may tread softly?

2. How hard it is to get as far as Calvary!

You too must conquer yourself so as not to abandon the way... This struggle is something marvellous, a real proof of the love of God, who wants us to be strong,

because virtus in infirmitate perficitur (2 Cor 12:9), virtue is made strong in weakness.

Our Lord knows that, when we feel feeble, we come closer to Him, we pray better, we mortify ourselves more, we intensify our love for our neighbour. That way we grow in sanctity.

Thank God very much because he allows temptations... and because you keep fighting.

3. Do you want to accompany Jesus closely, very closely?... Open the Holy Gospel and read the Passion of Our Lord. But don't just read it: live it. There is a big difference. To read is to recall something that happened in the past; to live is to find oneself present at an event that is happening here and now, to be someone taking part in those scenes.

Then, allow your heart to open wide; let it place itself next to Our Lord. And when you notice it trying to slip away -when you see that you are a coward, like the others - ask forgiveness for your cowardice and mine.

4. It looks as if the whole world is coming down on top of you. Whichever way you turn you find no way out. This time, it is impossible to overcome the difficulties.

But, have you again forgotten that God is your Father? -all-powerful, infinitely wise, full of mercy. He would never send you anything that is evil. That thing that is worrying you, it 's good for you, even though those earthbound eyes of yours may not be able to see it now.

Omnia in bonum! Lord, once again and always, may your most wise Will be done!

5. Now you realize how much you have made Jesus suffer, and you are filled with sorrow. How easy it is to ask his pardon and weep for your past betrayals! Such is your longing for atonement that you cannot contain it in your breast!

Fine. But don't forget that the spirit of penance consists mainly in the fulfilment of the duty of each moment, however costly it may be.

Tenth Station

JESUS IS STRIPPED OF HIS GARMENTS

- When Our Lord arrives at Calvary, he is given some wine to drink mixed with gall, as a narcotic to lessen in some way the pain of the crucifixion. But Jesus, after tasting it to show his gratitude for that kind service, has not wanted to drink (cf. Mt 27:34). He gives himself up to death with the full freedom of Love. Then, the soldiers strip Christ of his garments. "From the soles of his feet to the top of his head, there is nothing healthy in him: wounds and bruises and swelling sores. They are not bound up, nor dressed, nor anointed with oil" (Is 1:6). The executioners take his garments and divide them into four parts. But the cloak is without seam, so they say: "It would be better not to tear it, but let us cast lots for

it to see whose it shall be" (Jn 19:24). Thus, Scripture is again fulfilled: "They divided my garments among them, and upon my vesture they cast lots" (Ps 21:19).

- Despoiled, stripped, left in the most absolute poverty. Our Lord is left with nothing, save the wood of the Cross. For us to reach God, Christ is the way; but Christ is on the Cross, and to climb up to the Cross we must have our heart free, not tied to earthly things.

Points for meditation

1. From the praetorium to Calvary, the insults of the maddened crowd, the harshness of the soldiers, the mockery of the Sanhedrin, have rained down upon Jesus. . . Scorn and blasphemy . . . Not a single complaint, no word of protest. Not even when, without any consideration, they tear the garments from his skin.

Here I see how foolish I have been to make excuses, and to utter so many empty words. A firm resolution: to work and to suffer for my Lord, in silence.

2. The body of Jesus covered in wounds is truly a portrait of sorrows...

In contrast, I now remember so much comfort-seeking, so many whims, so much apathy, and meanness... And that false compassion with which I treat my body.

Lord, by your Passion and Cross, give me the strength to practise mortification of my senses and to uproot everything that can separate me from you.

3. You who tend to lose heart, I will tell you something that is very consoling: when a person does what he can, God will not deny his grace. Our Lord is a Father, and if, in the silence of his heart, one of his sons says to him: 'My Father in Heaven, here am I, help me...' If he goes to the Mother of God, who is our Mother, he will get through.

But God is demanding. He asks us to love him truly; he does not want traitors. We must be faithful in this supernatural struggle, which makes us happy on earth by dint of sacrifice.

4. The real obstacles that separate you from Christ -pride, sensuality... - are overcome through prayer and penance. And to pray and to mortify oneself is also to take care of others and to forget oneself. If you live like this you will see how most of the setbacks you meet will disappear.

5. When we strive to be really ipse Christus, Christ himself, then in our own lives the human side intermingles with the divine. All our efforts, even the most insignificant, take on an eternal dimension, because they are united to the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross.

Eleventh Station

JESUS IS NAILED TO THE CROSS

- Now they are crucifying Our Lord, and with him two thieves, one on his right and one on his left. Meanwhile, Jesus says: "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34). It is Love that has brought Jesus to Calvary. And once on the Cross, all his gestures and all his words are of love, a love both calm and strong. With a gesture befitting an Eternal Priest, without father or mother, without lineage (cf. Hb 7:3), he opens his arms to the whole human race. With the hammerblows with which Jesus is being nailed, there resound the prophetic words of Holy Scripture: "They have pierced my hands and feet. I can count all my bones, and they stare and gloat over me" (Ps 21:17-18). "My people, what have I done to thee, or in what have I saddened thee? Answer me!" (Mi 6:3).

- And we, our soul rent with sorrow, say to Jesus in all sincerity: I am yours and I give my whole self to You; gladly do I nail myself to your Cross, ready to be in the cross-roads of this world a soul dedicated to You, to your glory, to the work of Redemption, the co-redemption of the whole human race.

Points for meditation

1. By now they have fastened Jesus to the wooden cross. The executioners have ruthlessly carried out the sentence. Our Lord, with infinite meekness, has let them have their way.

It was not necessary for him to undergo so much torment. He could have avoided those trials, those humiliations, that ill-usage, that iniquitous judgement, and the shame of the gallows, and the nails and the lance... But he wanted to suffer all this for you and for me. And we, are we not going to respond?

Very likely there will be times, when alone in front of a crucifix, you find tears coming to your eyes. Don't try to hold them back... But try to ensure that those tears give rise to a resolution.

2. So much do I love Christ on the Cross that every crucifix is like a loving reproach from my God: '... I suffering, and you... a coward. I loving you, and you forgetting me. I begging you, and you... denying me. I, here, with arms wide open as an Eternal Priest, suffering all that can be suffered for love of you... and you complain at the slightest misunderstanding, over the tiniest humiliation... '

3. How beautiful are those crosses on the summits of high mountains, and crowning great monuments, and on the pinnacles of cathedrals...! But the Cross must also be inserted in the very heart of the world.

Jesus wants to be raised on high, there: in the noise of the factories and workshops, in the silence of libraries, in the loud clamour of the streets, in the stillness of the fields, in the intimacy of the family, in crowded gatherings, in stadiums... Wherever there is a Christian striving to lead an honourable life, he should, with his love, set up the Cross of Christ, who attracts all things to Himself.

4. After so many years, that priest made a marvellous discovery: he came to understand that the Holy Mass is real work: operatio Dei, God's work. That day,

when he celebrated Mass, he experienced pain, joy and tiredness. He felt in his flesh the exhaustion of a divine task.

For Christ too it cost a great effort to carry out the first Mass: the Cross.

5. Before you start working, place a crucifix on your desk or beside the tools you work with. From time to time glance at it... When tiredness creeps in, your eyes will go towards Jesus, and you will find new strength to continue with your task.

For that crucifix is more than a picture of someone you love -parents, children, wife, sweetheart... He is everything: your Father, your Brother, your Friend, your God, the very Love of your loves.

Twelfth Station

JESUS DIES ON THE CROSS

- On the uppermost part of the Cross the reason for the sentence is written: "Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews" (Jn 19:19). And all who pass by insult him and jeer at him. "If he is the king of Israel, let him come down here and now from the cross" (Mt 27:42). One of the thieves comes to his defence: "This man has done no evil..." (Lk 23:41). Then, turning to Jesus, he makes a humble request, full of faith: "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom" (Lk 23:42). "Truly, I say to thee: This day thou shalt be with me in Paradise" (Lk 23:43). At the foot of the Cross stands his Mother, Mary, with other holy women. Jesus looks at her; then he looks at the disciple whom he loves, and he says to his Mother: "Woman, behold thy son." Then he says to the disciple: "Behold thy mother" (Jn 19:26-27). The sun's light is extinguished and the earth is left in darkness. It is close on three o'clock, when Jesus cries out: "Eli, Eli, lamma sabacthani? That is: My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mt 27:46). Then, knowing that all things are about to be accomplished, that the Scriptures may be fulfilled, he says: "I am thirsty" (Jn 19:28). The soldiers soak a sponge in vinegar and, placing it on a reed of hyssop, they put it to his mouth. Jesus sips the vinegar, and exclaims: "It is accomplished" (Jn 19:30). The veil of the temple is rent, and the earth trembles, when the Lord cries out in a loud voice: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Lk 23:46). And he expires.

- Love sacrifice; it is a fountain of interior life. Love the Cross, which is an altar of sacrifice. Love pain, until you drink, as Christ did, the very dregs of the chalice.

Points for meditation

1. Et inclinato capite, tradidit spiritum, and bowing his head, he gave up his spirit (John 19:30).

Jesus has breathed his last. His disciples had so often heard him say: *meus cibus est...*, my food is to do the will of him that sent me and to bring his work to fulfilment (John 4:34). He has done so to the end, patiently, humbly, and without holding anything back... *Oboediens usque ad mortem* (Phil 2:8); he was obedient unto death, even death on a Cross!

2. A Cross. A body fastened with nails to the wood. His side pierced... Only his Mother, a few women and a young man remain with Jesus.

The apostles? Where are they? And the people who were healed of their infirmities: the lame, the blind, the lepers?... And those who had acclaimed him? Not a single one acknowledges him! Christ is surrounded by silence.

You too some day may feel the loneliness of Our Lord on the Cross. If so, seek the support of him who died and rose again. Find yourself a shelter in the wounds in his hands, in his feet, in his side. And your willingness to start again will revive, and you will take up your journey again with greater determination and effectiveness.

3. There is a false asceticism which presents the Lord on the Cross as furious and rebellious. A contorted body apparently threatening mankind: 'You have broken me, but I will hurl down on you my nails, my cross and my thorns. '

Such people do not know the spirit of Christ. He suffered all that he could -and, being God, how much he could suffer! But he was loving even more than he was suffering... And, after dying, he consented to let the lance open another wound, so that you and I might find refuge next to his most loving Heart.

4. Many times have I repeated that verse of the Eucharistic hymn: *Peto quod petivit latro poenitens*, and it always fills me with emotion: to ask like the penitent thief did!

He recognised that he himself deserved that awful punishment... And with a word he stole Christ 's heart and opened up for himself the gates of heaven.

5. From the Cross hangs Our Lord 's -now lifeless - body. The people, seeing what had been done, went home beating their breasts (Luke 23:48).

Now that you have repented, promise Jesus that, with his help, you will not crucify him again. Say it with faith. Repeat, over and over again: I will love you, my God, because ever since you were born, ever since you were a child, you abandoned yourself in my arms, defenceless, trusting in my loyalty.

Thirteenth Station

JESUS IS LAID IN THE ARMS OF HIS BLESSED MOTHER

- Mary stands by the Cross, engulfed in grief. And John is beside her. But it is getting late, and the Jews press for Our Lord to be removed from there. Having obtained from Pilate the permission required by Roman law for the burial of condemned prisoners, there comes to Calvary "a councillor named Joseph, a good and upright man, a native of Arimathea. He has not consented to their counsel and their doings, but is himself one of those waiting for the kingdom of God" (Lk 23:50-51). With him too comes Nicodemus, "the same who earlier visited Jesus by night; he brings with him a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds weight" (Jn 19:39). These men were not known publicly as disciples of the Master. They

had not been present at the great miracles, nor did they accompany him on his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. But now, when things have turned bad, when the others have fled, they are not afraid to stand up for their Lord. Between the two of them they take down the body of Jesus and place it in the arms of his most holy Mother. Mary 's grief is renewed.

- "Where has thy Beloved gone, o fairest of women? Where has he whom thou lovest gone, and we will seek him with thee?" (Cant 5:17). The Blessed Virgin is our Mother, and we do not wish to, we cannot, leave her alone.

Points for meditation

1. He came to save the world, and his own denied him before Pilate.

He showed us the path to goodness, and they drag him along the way to Calvary.

He gave example in everything he did, and they prefer a thief convicted of murder.

He was born to forgive, and -without cause - they condemn him to the gallows.

He came along the paths of peace, and they declare war on him.

He was the Light, and they hand him over to the powers of darkness.

He brought Love, and they repay him with hatred.

He came to be King, and they crown him with thorns.

He became a slave to free us from sin, and they nail him to the Cross.

He took flesh to give us Life, and we reward him with death.

2. I can 't understand your idea of being a Christian.

Do you think it right that Our Lord should have died crucified and that you can be content with just 'getting by '?

Is your 'getting by ' the strait, narrow path that Jesus spoke of?

3. Don 't let discouragement enter into your apostolate. You haven 't failed, just as Christ didn 't fail on the Cross. Take courage!... Keep going, against the tide, protected by Mary 's Immaculate and Motherly Heart: Sancta Maria, refugium nostrum et virtus!, you are my refuge and my strength.

Hold your peace. Be calm... God has very few friends on earth. Don 't yearn to leave this world. Don 't shy away from the burden of the days, even though at times we find them very long.

4. If you want to be faithful, be very Marian.

Our Mother, from the time of the Angel 's message, until her agony at the foot of the Cross, had no other heart, no other life, but that of Jesus.

Go to Mary with the tender devotion of a son, and She will obtain for you the loyalty and self-denial that you desire.

5. 'I am worth nothing, I can do nothing, I have nothing, I am nothing... '

But You have ascended the Cross so that I may make your infinite merits my own. There I also take on -they are mine, because I am their child - the merits of the Mother of God, and those of St Joseph. And I make my own the virtues of the saints and of so many dedicated souls...

Then, I steal a glance at my own life, and I say: Alas, my God, it is all night and full of darkness! Only now and then can one see a few points of light sparkling, due to your great mercy and to my inadequate response... All this I offer to you, Lord; I have nothing else.

Fourteenth Station

JESUS IS LAID IN THE TOMB

- Very near Calvary, in an orchard, Joseph of Arimathea had had a new tomb made, cut out of the rock. Since it is the eve of the solemn Pasch of the Jews, Jesus is laid there. Then Joseph, "rolling a great stone, closes the grave door and goes away" (Mt 27:60). Jesus came into the world with nothing; so too, with nothing -not even the place where he rests - he has left us. The Mother of Our Lord -my Mother - and the women who have followed the Master from Galilee, after taking careful note of every thing, also take their leave. Night falls. Now it is all over. The work of our Redemption has been accomplished. We are now children of God, because Jesus has died for us and his death has ransomed us. *Empti enim estis pretio magno!* (1 Cor 6:20), you and I have been bought at a great price.

- We must bring into our life, to make them our own, the life and death of Christ. We must die through mortification and penance, so that Christ may live in us through Love. And then follow in the footsteps of Christ, with a zeal to co-redeem all mankind. We must give our life for others. That is the only way to live the life of Jesus Christ and to become one and the same thing with Him.

Points for meditation

1. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, who are hidden disciples of Christ, intercede for Him making use of the high positions they hold. In the hour of loneliness, of total abandonment and of scorn..., it is then that they stand up for him audacter, boldly (Mark 15:43)...: heroic courage!

With them I too will go up to the foot of the Cross; I will press my arms tightly round the cold Body, the corpse of Christ, with the fire of my love...; I will unnailed it, with my reparation and mortifications. . .

I will wrap it in the new winding-sheet of my clean life, and I will bury it in the living rock of my breast, where no one can tear it away from me, and there, Lord, take your rest!

Were the whole world to abandon you and to scorn you... serviam!, I will serve you, Lord.

2. You know that you were ransomed from your vain observances..., not with silver or gold, which are perishable things, but with the precious blood of Christ (1 Pet 1:18-19).

We do not belong to ourselves. Jesus Christ has bought us with his Passion and with his Death. We are his life. From now on there is only one way of living on earth: to die with Christ so as to rise again with Him, to the point that we can say with the Apostle: It is not I that live, it is Christ that lives in me (Gal 2:20).

3. An inexhaustible source of life is the Passion of Jesus.

Sometimes we renew the joyous impulse that took Our Lord to Jerusalem. Other times, the pain of the agony which ended on Calvary... Or the glory of his triumph over death and sin. But always!, the love -joyful, sorrowful, glorious - of the Heart of Jesus Christ.

4. Think first about others. That way you will pass your life on this earth, making mistakes certainly, for they are inevitable, but leaving behind you a trail of good.

And when the hour of death comes, as it must inexorably, you will welcome it gladly, like Christ, because like Him we too will rise again to receive the reward of his Love.

5. When I feel capable of all the horrors and all the errors committed by the most wretched people, I understand well that I myself can be unfaithful... But this uncertainty is one of the bounties of God 's Love, which leads me to hold tightly, like a child, to the arms of my Father, fighting every day a little so as not to separate myself from Him.

Then I am sure that God will not let me out of his hand. Can a woman forget her baby at the breast, not have compassion on the child of her womb? Yet even if she were to forget, I will not forget thee (Isaiah 49:15).

Acceptance of Death

We too, O God, will descend into the grave, whenever it shall please you, as it shall please you, and wheresoever it shall please you. Let your just decrees be fulfilled; let our sinful bodies return to their parent soil. But, in your great mercy, receive our immortal souls, and when our bodies have risen again, place them likewise in your kingdom, that we may love and bless you forever and ever.